

The Unification of Family through Food in Afghan Culture in the Select Novels of Khaled Hosseini

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The richness of every culture is determined by their art, architecture, and traditions. Every occasion is fulfilled by the feast. Food plays a very important role in every culture. The level of hospitality determines the level of honour and pride over their country or ethnicity. Due to this reason, food and hospitality are considered as the prime factor in a society. Generally, food is seen as one of the basic needs of a citizen. In particular, food classifies and points out their status of living.

Traditionally, the values of human being, customs, traditions, and culture are passed on to the next generation through women. In the same way, the art cooking are taken over to the next generation through women. Basically, food is considered as one of the factors of the material world. The material world is surrounded by men and women, yet men are seen as the breadwinner of the family.

In every culture, family is seen as a single entity. Family is the basis for every behavior and practices. Every single attitude of a child is the result of their family members' behavior. In the current era, there are numerous deficiencies and disorders with regards to the food habits. Many people focus on healthy diet rather than spending time with their family members' in order to be a healthy family. From ancient times, food was served by women and everyone in the family sat together to have their meal. Either rich or poor, they had the habit of dining with their family which strengthened the love and sharing between them. Family is the nest which is built up by good values and binded together with love and care. Food plays an important role in binding the family.

Food has an important role in culture. Many anthropologists consider culture within the sense of beliefs, values, and customs. Nancy Dupree, a historian, defines culture as:

Culture embraces those shared ideas, beliefs, emotions and customs that mould behavior and place value on creative artistic expressions, such as art, music, literature, architecture and relationship with the environment.... It encompasses all members of society- men, women and children, old and young. It embodies individual and community aspirations. It influences in decision-making. Having a strong sense of one's own culture permits

individuals to develop an inner strength that inspires them to reach out for more fulfilling lives for themselves, to their families and their communities. (Tapper 5)

Every culture is maintained and nourished by families. This paper highlights the importance of food and how the food becomes a medium of unification in Afghan family and society.

Afghanistan is a multiethnic country. Each community adhere their set of rules and beliefs. In spite of their differences in ethnicities, they have strong belief in Islam. In particular, every ethnic community has their way of living and in preparing food dishes. The preparation of food is seen in two folds: at first, it is prepared to fulfill the appetite, and second, it is prepared with the shades of particular ethnicity. Afghan food is steeped in tradition and plays very important role in defining its culture.

The history of Afghanistan records massive attacks and invasions of different countries. In spite of these issues, they followed their rituals and traditional values. Nancy Dupree in Afghan National Human Development Report states that:

Afghans are noticeably distinct from their neighbours and take pride in their uniqueness. It was their determination to remain true to the essence of their cultural ethos that enabled the Afghans to endure years of economic and social hardships with forbearance and courage. The nation was utterly traumatized, but the culture survived. (Dupree 232)

Food is seen as the heartbeat of the culture and family. Even though Afghanistan was defeated by developed countries, it tried to sustain in the richness of their tradition. Food is one of the key factors that help to connect within the family:

Eating is also a mode through which we exceed our individuality and join with others: forms of commensality and communion join despite individuals both to each other and to the realm of the spiritual. Food rules and covenants are thus often way of joining the self and the community to God, either by following law or through sacrifice. (Tompkins 246)

The pride of one's culture starts with the notion of hospitality. Afghans give more importance to culture and hospitality, either by following religious rules or through their sacrifice. One of the ways to determine the richness of a culture is by knowing the country's literary contributions. In Afghanistan, most of the literary contributions are related to religious and oral story telling.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan born American novelist, celebrates the richness and tradition of Afghanistan through his works. He has written three novels and a short story namely: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), and *Sea Prayer* (2018). His

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novels reflect the realities in the society. The settings of *The Kite Runner*, *Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* are alike. Basically, these novels give more importance to Afghanistan's culture and traditions. As Nancy Dupree says Afghan culture is unique in its nature. Hosseini narrates the pride and richness of Afghanistan's culture by describing the dishes and the festive in Afghanistan.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini, mentions many of the delicacies eaten by the typical Afghan people. Moreover, Afghan food is influenced by the Persian, Indian, Chinese, and Mediterranean foods. Afghanistan mainly harvests wheat, corn, barley, and rice, which is displayed in their choice of food. In this novel, the protagonist, Amir marries Soraya and after a month, she cooked, "sabzichallow- white rice with spinach and lamb" (Hosseini 173). Afghan dishes also contain yogurt, nuts, coriander, garlic, onions, tomatoes; and dried and fresh fruit. Lamb and chicken are preferred kind of meats that are used in Afghan dishes. In this novel, the choice of meat by Afghan people are displayed when Amir and Baba visit Kaka Homayoun's house in Jalalabad, Amir described, "had lamb kabob with freshly baked naan from the tandoor" (85). Lamb is one of the main ingredients in food that mentioned in *The Kite Runner*.

In Afghanistan, majority of the people belongs to the religion, Islam and they have Halal foods:

The word "Halal" comes originally from Arabic language meaning: allowable, acceptable, permitted, and/ or permissible. The concept of Halal is not only related to food or food products (as most people will expect or think), but it goes beyond food to cover all the aspects of a Muslim person's life (male or female). (Khan 33)

Generally, Halal foods are allowed depending on what the food is and how the food is prepared. Foods specified are mostly types of meat and animal tissues. Amir and his friend Hassan are Muslim, and their religion supports following the Halal rules. Amir's teacher told in his class that, "Islam considered drinking a terrible sin; those who drank would answer for their sin on the day of *Qiyamat*, Judgement Day" (Hosseini 16). Halal foods very much determine the type and content of the Afghan cuisine. Moreover, it is considered as the way of being pure in this world.

When Amir and Baba visit Kaka Homayoun in Jalalabad, Amir explains as, "The wives and daughters served dinner-rice, kofta, and chicken qurma-at sundown. We dined the traditional way, sitting on cushions around the room, tablecloth spread on the floor, eating with our hands in groups of four or five from common platters" (85).

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the central characters are Mariam and Laila, who are born and brought up in different families and environment, but they are married to Rasheed. The friendship and familial bond between Mariam and Laila starts in their kitchen. Though these women undergo the

struggle and beatings from Rasheed and Taliban, they share their love and care which is started from the kitchen and they spend their time together with eatables and little gossips. Food and cookery are seen as a means of communication to express care and familial love.

In society, food plays an essential role in determining the status of living. The scarcity of food makes an individual to know their worth of living. In Afghanistan, children are sent to orphanages because they can have their meal at least once for a day. Parents send their children to orphanages as orphans by breaking down the physical attachment within the family and more binded (or) bounded by emotional attachments. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila forces her little girl, Aziza to be in an orphanage for the guarantee of food.

In the modern era, people are more interested in connecting with the materialistic world and fail to recognize their attachments in the family. Many youngsters and adults, all of a sudden, they are emotionally driven by their desires and they tend to lose their life. Loss of communication within the family members leads to breaking up of unification in relationships and misunderstandings. The unification of family starts from the point of dining with the family. In Afghanistan, this unification is questioned because of the result in the search of food. Sometimes, the unification of the family becomes an irony because it is considered as the unification of the family with happiness or the unification of loss of the family with sadness. In order to satisfy their basic needs Afghan people flee to other country. Due to many wars in Afghanistan, the death rate is increased and they are scattered to many places within and outside the country. As a result, there is separation and sadness in the families. Children become orphan as Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Later, only the memories of togetherness are unified than the physical existence of the family.

In this era, the young generation should get to know the importance of being together, spending time, and dining with the family. Hosseini through his novels described the food items in Afghanistan. In addition, through his writings, he depicts the incidents and situations regarding the celebration of food and the deterioration of food within the family and the society.

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