

## Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* as a Cultural and Hybridity Study

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### Abstract

Literature foreshadows human lives and their changes through the ages. Through the art of writing, literature expresses culture, tradition of one's country and their people. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* portrays Afghanistan's Taliban rule and their native cultural collapse. Hosseini learns kite flying which was banned by the Taliban who found it a cruel act. Kite flying was a traditional game in Afghanistan and Hosseini had grown up with the sport during his childhood days in Afghanistan. As an Afghan-American writer he tries to bring out his hybridity through his writing. During the encounter of the Taliban, people try to escape to Pakistan and the United States because the country is being destroyed by inhuman activity. Hosseini brings out many different cultures and classes, such as Pashtun and Hazara, Sunni and Shiite. The fall of Afghanistan's monarchy and the rise of the Taliban regime are expertly visualized through his narration. This paper tries to project the cultural collapse of Afghanistan and Afghans' search for their hybridity.

**Keywords:** Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* Kite flying, Culture collapse, Afghanistan, Taliban regime, Soviet invasion

*The Kite Runner* was published in 2003 by Riverhead books. It is the first novel of Khaled Hosseini who is an Afghan-American writer. The novel is divided into three parts. The novel was narrated by Amir and later Rahim Khan narrates few stories about Amir's past. The narrator is revealed at page eleven. The first-person narration presents many images to the readers about the broken-down culture of the Afghans. The novel is a multi-thematic work which talks about friendship, father and son relationship, story of Soviet invasion, Taliban rule, Afghan immigrants and sufferings of the natives.

Amir opens the narration in the present day, while he lives in the United States; he goes back to his past and recalls his childhood life in Afghanistan where the past is filled with guilt for Amir. As a matured man Amir realizes his falsehood and the impact it had on the others. When Amir was eighteen they flee to America following the soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The story goes back to twenty-six years before, to Amir's life in Afghanistan with his father Baba and their two servants Ali and his son Hassan who are Hazaras, an ethnic minority, whereas Amir is a Sunni Muslim, a dominant community. Amir and Hassan had a good friendship, but their friendship unfolds the class restrictions of their society. Hassan was a loyal friend to Amir and he

knew where Amir's kite will fall. Amir's mother died giving birth to him. He was interested in story writing and he was encouraged by Rahim Khan, a friend of Baba.

Cultural study is an interdisciplinary research that grew out in the early 1960s and extended its investigations of culture, language, and social meanings into neighboring realms of cinema, television, print journalism, advertising, and fashion as well as popular literature and drama. (Baldrick, 75) Cultural study analyses how culture is constructed and organized and changes of the culture over time.

Cultural studies first became visible with the foundation by Richard Hogarth of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, at first within the department of English and then from 1972, as an independent unit. Cultural study emerged from the Birmingham Center for contemporary cultural studies in the UK began in 1968 headed by Stuart Hall.

Hegemony is an important term in cultural study which is used to describe the dominance or authority that one group or culture has over others. How the dominant culture influences other groups, particularly in the construction of identity or conforming to social norms. In the novel Hassan is the victim of racism throughout the novel. As a Hazara he was dominated by the elite of the society. Assef is a Pashtun who believes they are superior to Hazaras, but he was not a full Pashtun because his mother was a German. He acts as the antagonist of the novel. He is a racist and does violence against the Hazaras. He also set Hitler as his role model. When Hassan moves closely with Amir, he threatens to beat up Amir for hanging around with a Hazara, but Hassan uses his slingshot to stop Assef. During the kite flying tournament Amir wins the tournament, Hassan sets off to run after the losing kite. Amir looks for him and he finds Assef raping Hassan; while Hassan was trapped by Wali and Kamal and while they hold him, Assef rapes him. He also rapes Sohrab in part III of the novel. Hassan is also an ethnic Hazara and good at slingshot like his father Ali. In the end of the novel Assef beats Amir for betrayal of Muslim culture. Assef plays the symbolic role of the dominant class oppression equal to the dominance of the Taliban regime over the Afghan society.

Class system plays a vital role in every society. As a Sunni Muslim Amir faces socio-economic culture hierarchy, while growing up in Afghanistan as a member of the privileged class. Baba his father fails to clarify their cultural norms to Amir. At the end of the novel, Amir stands up for Sohrab when his father-in-law, General Taheri points to Sohrab as "that Hazara boy". The General plays the role of a stereotypical Afghan male.

The impact of the war in Afghanistan is also pictured in the novel. Farid an Afghan driver to Amir helped Amir to go back to Kabul and adopt Sohrab. He is missing toes and fingers from a landmine explosion and represents the difficulties that many Afghans faced in the warfare that ravaged the country.

Afghan culture includes traditional competitions like Buzkashi and kite fight. Buzkashi is a dangerous game in which men on horseback fight to try to put a goat or cattle carcass in a scoring circle. When Amir and Baba go to the tournament, he is traumatized when one of the horsemen fell off his saddle and was trampled under a score of hooves. Another traditional

competition is the kite fighting contest. Boys cut their hands as they steer kites tied to glass string to try to cut others' kites out of the air. The last flyer kite is the winner. Amir was a good kite flyer and Hassan was a good kite runner.

Eid-e-Qorban is a tradition where they celebrate the sacrifice of his son that Ibrahim made for God. In the novel Baba makes fun of this story, whereas he accepts the custom of sacrificing a sheep. Amir says the custom of dividing the meat in three parts, one for the poor, one for the family, and one for the friend is a good gone. But Baba gives the whole meat to the poor. Baba gives a cube of sugar to the sheep before sacrificing it.

Marriage was another traditional custom where they have to hide their conversations from father. When Amir and Soraya first talk, General Taheri her father catches him and tells him there is a proper way to talk. Baba who had relationship with a Hazara woman feels ashamed and he cannot reveal Hassan as his son, so Ali his servant act as Hassan's father in the novel. The secret was revealed by Rahim khan to Amir. Hassan was unaware of his relationship with Baba who was his biological father and Amir's half-brother. Sanaubar's immoral relationship in her youth made her to abandon Hassan after his birth. Even though Amir could not please Baba, he goes back to Kabul to rescue Sohrab, Hassan's son from an orphanage. With lots of difficulties he brings him back to California. Soraya Amir's wife also gives a hand for Amir to adopt Sohrab. She is a strong-willed woman and deprecates the way women are treated in Afghan culture.

Hybridity is an important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the integration of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures. Many incidents in the novel show how hybridity is clearly seen in the novel. Like Amir the protagonist of the novel, Hosseini was born in Afghanistan and left the country as a youth. Through the novel Hosseini recalls his childhood and traditional culture of his native land.

In part III the traditional game of Afghan kite flying is brought out to show the hybridity of Afghans in California. One day Amir takes Sohrab to a park with other Afghans. People were flying kites. Amir buys one and gets one for Sohrab to fly it with him. They spot another kite and battle it. Using one of Hassan's tricks, they win. Sohrab smiles, and as the losing kite files loose, Amir Sets off to run it for Sohrab. Hosseini ends the novel with the hope, while culture always hides in the human heart, wherever people may go, the hybridity will always show up.

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