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THE PLIGHT OF AFGHANISTAN: RE-READING KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER

Sheeba*

ABSTRACT

The land and people of Afghanistan have been continuously exploited by power structures which continue with the onset of the Taliban autonomy after the last troop of the United States of America returns after ending their longest war. The idea of peace in Afghanistan has been trashed with constant wars and conflicts that took many lives for decades. This research paper re-reads The Kite Runner (2003) by Khaled Hosseini for its representation of human life in Afghanistan, migration, and the present scenario of becoming refugees in one's own land. With reference to the textual content and the secondary sources that project the situation of the present scenario of the Taliban led government rule in the land of Afghanistan, the study explores the psychological existence of the people who are either forced to leave their country or stay within the boundaries being in the state similar to refugees. The conclusive findings of the paper highlight migration as shift from the idea of freedom and rights to a condition of suppressed identity.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Civil War, Hosseini, Identity Crisis, Kite Runner.

1. Introduction

Recently, the political and social situation in Afghanistan has been overturned with the return of Taliban rule when the United States ended their twenty-year long by withdrawing their troops from the land that witnessed continuous conflicts and bloodsheds. The new government led by the ideology and presence of forefront leaders of the Taliban proclaimed complete independence and claimed it to be their success. According to the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, "The last American soldier left Kabul airport at 9 pm

* St. Thomas' College (Autonomous), Thrissur

Afghan time and our country gained full independence" (Kumar *Hindustan Times*). Starting from 2001, the Afghan war records to be the longest war in the history of America. Criticisms to America's intervention on Afghan politics through their interim government under President Hamid Karzai have also to be considered while dealing with the discussion on the US-Afghan war. The criticism states that the US played its power politics to invade the cultural, social and economic stability of the country (Butt 344).

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) outlines the suffering of Afghanistan under the tyranny of the Taliban during the events caused by the clash between the Soviet invasion, Afghan's monarch, and the Taliban rule. Whether it was the US or the invasion of the Soviet, Hosseini remarks the attack over the land of Afghanistan has devastated it. The political conflict, economic instability and social issues has made it to project the country as terrifying and hopeless place to survive. The execution in the Ghazi stadium referred to in the novel makes it clear as to how the political crisis has led the country to reach such devastated condition at the end of 20th century. The uncertainties of the land do not confine to just political situations but to the gender politics and the general rights of people in the country.

2. Review of Literature

Analyzing the previous literature related to the research based on Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* gives an idea on the various connected perspectives related to the struggle of the land and people to survive the several attacks. Based on the contemporary humanitarian conceptions, Jefferess (2009) examines the ethical demand arguing a shift from the supremacy of race and nation as primary makers of identity offered by political and modern frameworks. The researcher utilizes Butler's theory of human interdependence, Appiah's concept of cosmopolitanism and Mamdani's distinction between the good and bad Muslim to explore the thoughts shared in the novel. Noor (2004) mentions about the lucidly written novel that explores the vivid picture of the Russian, Northern Alliance, and the Taliban atrocities to the inhabitants of the Afghan land. Hosseini situated the condition of Afghan people through the transitions that happen in the life of Amir and other characters in the novel who were forced to move to Pakistan and then to America when the soviet-invasion was at its peak. The inferior-superior categorization in society is well portrayed by Hosseini and Zohdi (2016) where they explore the social, cultural, and scientific investigations on people's races and ethnical characteristics. The ethnical populations, Pashtun and Hazara, are studied through Feagin's denial of human difference. The study states that the

biological differences are excuses for the powerful sections to gain their egoistic goals.

Apart from the political and situational existence of the people in Afghanistan, the novel also draws attention to the psychological states of people who go through such situations. O'Brien (2018) traces how the author presents assault as an allegory and experience of the collapse of the monarchy and the invasion of Soviet forces. The traumatic states of the characters including Amir is well depicted by the author. She states that Hosseini translates the trauma of the conflict for a Western audience.

"Hosseini's decision to have the narrative remain in the West is arguably an effort to acknowledge as the novel closes the disparity inherent to world literary systems and to demonstrate the ways in which such systems can be, if not changed, manipulated effectively to facilitate the peripheral witnessing and cross-cultural understanding so desperately needed in this post-9/11 era" (O'Brien 11).

While referring to the identity of people in Afghanistan, it has similar connotations with the present situation. Farlina (2008) focuses on the character and cultural identity through descriptive method. Whether it is Amir as a Pushtun ethic, Hassan as a Hazara ethnic, the ethnic and inter-religions differences leads to the dominance of majority over the minority group. The divergence within the identity of a nation is depicted here. In Kai-fu (2019), we find the changes in the psychological standpoints of Amir's character. From mistrust to doubt, guilt to inferiority and then to jealousy, self-accusation to role confusion, and willing to love to devotion, the gradual and sudden shifts are visible throughout the novel. As conclusion, the researcher states that

"A person's development involves different stages, and these stages are closely related one after another. Indifferent stages, the tasks people face is also not fixed. Only when the necessary quality involved in each stage developed in accordance with our growth, can people complete their growth journey" (Kai-fu 192).

3. Migration: Issue of the Past and the Present

Hosseini's novel outlines the theme of migration through its characters Amir, the narrator, and his father, Baba. For them, it was a forceful migration – an escape from Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan war. Being in the state of refugees, they have experienced being in an "unhomely world" (Bhabha 18). The situation of being a

migrant, having the status of a refugee, occurs when the homeland provides no safety to their existence. Having the status of a country, Afghanistan has long been tortured by the instable political and social system that gave rise to invasions, collaboration and the thus formed rebel groups having extreme thoughts based on culture and religious beliefs. Even though they conduct migration from their homeland to a foreign host land, the freedom that they expect there won't be received as they wish. The diasporic identity that is backgrounded from being a refugee provides them instabilities and uncertainties. *The Kite Runner*'s theme of migration provides such a notion through the characters Amir and Baba. Other than viewing the novel from the perspective of "the friendship of two Afghan boys, the brutal interruption of that relationship, and the eventual redemption of the protagonist" (Edwards 1), we can also read it from the angle of migration that affected the well-being of the characters. The struggle to continue their cultural identity in a foreign land like America makes discomfort to their existence there.

Hosseini's migration to America during Russian invasion to Afghanistan is well reflected in the form of semi-autobiography in the novel. The traumatized memories of Amir and Baba can be equated to the situation of the migrants, especially the political refugees from Afghanistan to other countries. Hosseini has tried to highlight the essence of identity, culture, and innate existence of people in Afghanistan. The shared experiences and memories of the refugees reflect in the work of Hosseini by focusing on the unfortunate condition of getting adapted with a foreign culture. The psychological trauma of a person as refugee is emphasized through the cultural trauma that the person experiences when being shifted from the homeland to another place. This can lead to a situation of an anti-structural deviation from normality causing in-between existence (Mathew and Pandya 2) of people who experience diasporic identity due to their refugee status. The crisis that occurs to the identity of Amir while being in America is reflected through his behavior and actions. Amir says, "America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins." (Hosseini 126)

His eagerness to return to his homeland showcases the extend of the loss that exists in people who are forced to leave the country due to political, social, religious or economic issues. Though migration can be regarded as forceful or voluntary, the situation of Amir and Baba was forceful. "The process of globalization include massive migrations and relocations, thus challenges the traditional concept of

nation-state and opening up borders and boundaries" (Adhikary 182). Hosseini's description of the plot makes it clear that he rejects the anti-humanistic act of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Through the words of Baba, "God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands" (Hosseini 15), the reader is able to interpret that the social discrimination and injustices by the Taliban has made the place hopeless which extended to the migration of many people including Amir and Baba. The character of Assef and his cruelty denotes the reason why people who migrated dislikes the Taliban ideology and actions. The massacre of Hazaras done by Assef through the Taliban points at the intolerance that they maintain towards cultural diversity in their land. The criticism made by Amir on the Taliban is interesting to quote from the novel. He says, "I guessed music wasn't sinful as long as it played to Taliban ears" (Hosseini 280). It showcases the hypocrisy that is maintained by the Taliban group that ultimately wishes to make many in the country as refugees to other countries. The rape of Hassan and Sohrab resembles the destruction of Afghanistan and the freedom enjoyed by people in the country.

"The author's affiliation and inclination for the host nation after his migration is inevitable is the fact that he endeavors to ascertain the notion of the United States as flight from all of the problems. As the narrator mentions that the United States is like an exit from unfairness, brutality and traditions. The forced migrations of Amir and Baba to America, is a symbol of transformation and a direction to liberation." (Murshida 91) The quest for identity is evident from the novel that highlights the urge of Amir to retrace his memories about the homeland by saving Sohrab. A postcolonial reading provides the analysis of the lost identity of the people of Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and their struggle to survive by migrating to other countries. Similar situation is repeated when the troops of the US return in the middle-way, giving all opportunity for the Taliban to rule as per their wish. The present government by the Taliban has clearly mentioned about the requirement for strict rules that carry out executions and amputations that they had been following during the 1990s (Vohra, *Foreign Policy*). Regarding migration due to the changed scenarios, it has seen more than five lakh displacements internally and almost the same have been forced to move out of the country. Pakistan and Iran have hosted more than 2.2 – 3 million refugees from Afghanistan (Sayed et al., *Migration Policy*).

Re-reading Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* allows us to view the recent incidents in connection with the descriptions provided by the author who experienced similar migration during the 1990s. The

situation of General Taheri who was forced to flee from his country with his wife and daughter to America, is mentioned in the novel through the words of Amir saying, "I learned that he had kept his family on welfare and had never held a job in the US preferring to cash government issued checks than degrading himself with work unsuitable for a man of his stature…" (Hosseini 176). Similar is the condition of many Afghan citizens who had to migrate from their homeland due to the changed situations. The unfortunate political shift taken by America affected many Afghan citizens who had extended their support for them.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of *The Kite Runner* through the angle of migration of the past and the present provides us a conclusive finding that the experience of people who are forced to be refugees to foreign countries experience identity crisis culturally and psychologically. The sudden displacement gives them a traumatic shock to get adapted to the new situations in the host country. The urge to come back to Afghanistan, seen in Amir, is collective evidence of people who wish to embrace their lost culture and existence in their homeland. Therefore, *The Kite Runner*, as a novel, has surpassed time in its relevance. The thematic idea of migration has been relevant for the past two-three decades for many Afghan citizens who fled from their country to many other host lands.

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