

# Exploitation of Existentialism in Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner"

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Existentialism is a movement within continental philosophy that developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Existentialism is believed to be organised with Soren Kierkegaard. He said that each individual- not society or religion is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately, sincerely and authentically. Existentialism defines as the act of living based on beliefs and experiences. Soren Kierkegaard formulated the existentialism, but he never used the existentialism theory in any of his works. It is developed by Friedrich Nietzsche. The other existentialism philosophers are Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simon de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel and Franz Kafka.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 1980, when the soviet War in Afghanistan began, Hosseini's family sought political asylum in the United States and they become the residence of San Jose, California. He practised medicine for over ten years. After the success of his debut novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), he retired from medicine to write full time. His novels are set in Afghanistan and feature an Afghan as the protagonist. He wrote three famous novels *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *Mountains Echoed* (2013).

Khaled Hosseini adores a unique place in the literature about Afghanistan. Various non-Afghan writers have made attempts to portray the war ridden society through their fictional and non-fictional works. An expatriate living in the U.S Hosseini is the first Afghan writer to respect the conflicts and crises of his country through literature. He has brought in the tradition and customs of Afghanistan in *The Kite Runner*; he has set the novel with the background of the war of Afghanistan, kite flying one of the Afghanistan's national outdoor sports and about the Taliban who trampled, Hazaras the Ethnic group and the aborigines of Afghans.

In the novel *The Kite Runner*, Hassan was deprived of his identity. He was discriminated and insulted because of his cleft lip and his identity as Hazara; later he undergoes plastic surgery to correct his lip. Hassan found hard to live as a Hazara in his own land and was bullied by his own community. Older boys like Assef

and his friends mocked him, Amir was not able to talk on behalf of Hassan, because, Amir himself ignored Hassan before his other friends and relatives. Since the people around Hassan knew that his mother left him shortly after his birth, they laughed at him. Hassan was an intelligent and courageous boy but all his talents were stifled by the powerful high caste society.

Hassan believed that Amir was his true friend, but Amir accused Hassan for stealing his watch under Hassan's mat by himself and named him thief. As a result Hassan and Ali left the home. They didn't have anyone to defend for them. Years later, Amir learns that Hassan was his step-brother. During war Amir and his father took political asylum in the United States. Amir struggles to establish his identity in the foreign land. The story line of this novel traces the lives of Amir in the U.S and Hassan in Afghanistan. Both are determined to live their lives.

Discrimination is the cruel treatment a group or an individual is subjected on their race, religion, sex or caste. It kills people's ability and talent. It is an emotional sati, because it traumatises them emotionally and psychologically. It also includes a wide range of acts, ranging of acts, ranging from social exclusion, unfair, verbal insult and physical assaults. People are also discriminated for their illegitimacy.

Discriminatory traditions, policies, ideas and law exist in many countries of this world. Afghanistan too had this crucial practice. The two ethnic groups of Afghanistan are the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. The conflict between Hazaras and the Pashtuns has been going from 16<sup>th</sup> century. The root cause of the conflict cannot be directly traced back, but the historians tell that after the fall of the Mongolian Genghis Khan, many Mongolians migrated to Afghanistan. Since the Pashtuns belongs to the Islamic subset of Sunnis, they persecuted the Hazaras who belongs to the Shia, a significantly minor group.

*The Kite Runner* describes Hassan is treated cruelly by their people, though he is born to a high caste father and a low caste mother illegally. Pashtuns are said to be a high class people, who persecute and oppress the Hazaras, ethnic minorities. They do all evil to suppress the people in the name of God. In the beginning of the novel Hassan is being bullied for his appearance by Assef.

For he has a thin -boned frame, shaved head and low-set ears, a boy with a Chinese doll face perpetually a hair lipped smile, an exclusive face of the Hazara.

Hassan is not sent to school since he is a boy. Amir mocks at him for not knowing the meaning for simple words. Though he doesn't go to school Hassan is brighter than Amir. Hassan could run kite better than Amir, at the kite running tournament Hassan runs the kite for Amir and wins for him, but Amir gets the appreciation. Hassan's talent are buried within and life unidentified and unexplored.

Assef, another Pashtun wants to beat up Amir for treating Hassan the Hazara like a friend and providing him and his father a shelter. He thinks he can degrade Hassan because he is a Pashtun and of a higher state. Assef and his other friends rape Hassan in an alley after Hassan caught the last kite in the tournament. Assef's friends realise that it is a wrong thing to do, but Assef convinces his friends that it is acceptable because he is only a Hazara.

Though Baba and Ali are Pashtuns, they don't treat Hassan and his father Ali as slaves. Amir doesn't show them love, but never treats Hassan indifferently; until he stood helpless unable to help when Assef raped him. The guilt for not standing up for Hassan drives him mad. Guilt makes Amir to put the question to his father "*Baba, have you ever thought about getting new servants?*" Amir Plots against Hassan in order to get rid of his guilt. He blames Hazara as a thief. Amir hides his birthday gift, the watch and covers with money under Hassan's mat and puts the blame on him. Hassan accepts the blame humbly. Hassan has no one to talk for him; he has no one to protect him when he is raped. If it has been brought to Baba's knowledge, he might have defended for Hassan but Amir might have got into trouble. The self-fish and guilty Amir makes Ali and Hassan to leave their home to Hazarajat.

The truth of Hassan being an illegitimate child comes to light in the middle of the novel. Rahim Khan tells the whole story of Hassan to Amir. Amir learns the truth only on his return Pakistan from California. The entire life of Hassan becomes the life of Hazara because of Baba. Hassan was victimized by Baba.

Baba is very selfish and worried about his honour. He never gave a thought to the miserable state of the young Hassan. Baba gave comfort and protection to Hassan and Ali but in the eyes of the society they were outcasts. Though he loves Hassan, he didn't give him the right to know his true identity. Hassan dies as Hazara ignorant of his true identity. It is not just Hassan but also Ali who caught in the deceptive web of lies. Ali is also deprived of honour and acceptance in the society. Furthermore he is forced to adopt Hassan. With the

disappearance of Sanaubar soon after Hassan's birth, Ali is believed of runaway Hazara.

The impact of the violent events of unexpected rape by local bullies, war, loss of homeland, death of beloved ones, brutal reign of the foreigners, discrimination, and abandonment triggers innocent individuals. The traumatic memory of being coward and betrayal haunts Amir. He suffers from the trauma of guilt and shame. Amir asks Baba to take him to Jalalabad to Homayoun, his uncle. All through journey Baba keeps talking about the tournament. When they reached the two-story house of Homayoun in Jalalabad, Baba tells everyone of Amir's success in the Kite Running. Everyone congratulates him and Kaka Faruq pats on his back but to Amir, appreciation is like sticking a knife in his eye.

Amir becomes "insomniac" because of the guilt. Everyone sleeps at night but, he stays awake and thinks of Hassan. "There is no monster" Hassan has said but Amir compares himself with the monster that has grabbed Hassan's ankle and dragged him to the murky bottom. He tells *I am the monster*.

Hassan tries to rekindle the relationship between them. He asks Amir, why is he not playing with him anymore. Amir tells him *I want you to stop harassing me. I want you to go away*. Amir expects that Hassan would retaliate but Hassan just goes away.

Guilt affects the relationship between Amir and Hassan. Amir becomes violent. One day Amir takes Hassan to a hill at the pretext of reading a story. They sit against the low cemetery under the shade of a pomegranate tree. To Hassan's surprise, Amir picks up an over ripe pomegranate and throws at him. Amir tries to get rid of the guilt, by instigating Hassan. He expects Hassan to beat him back, there by attain nemesis. Amir says "*I wished he'd give me the punishment I craved, so maybe I'd finally sleep at night*"

Psychological distresses in afghan refugees are equal to the other studies with the populations. Afghans used to settle in America and in other western countries, at an unprecedented rate with continued exposure to war. Many have not got any mental support in Afghanistan. People have lost their rich culture and historical heritage. These things have become a trauma to the Afghans in other countries. When they migrate, they don't have a safe journey. Women have to face terrible harassments. In spite of all the danger people dare to cross borders for their life.

The refugees are forced to live a congested and a poor life, no matter how rich and luxurious they were. The small alleyways on the outskirts of the afghan are filled with trash and dirt winding between mud and brick compounds. The bomb shelters of the people are not very

safe for their health; they have more chances of getting disease due to the unhygienic surroundings.

The majority of Afghan refugees in United States didn't leave their country by choice, but because of necessity. Those refugees find it hard to get adapted to the new land and its culture especially they had difficulties with the language. The refugees couldn't find work; they had lack of social support. The sense of being aliens in an unwelcomed land is a barrier for all their efforts. Among the educated refugees there were also illiterate refugees who are not literate in their own language.

United States was not their first country of refuge. Many of them escaped the violence of their own country by moving to Pakistan. For instance Amir and Baba moved from Kabul to Jalalabad and from there they moved to America.

Like many other immigrants, Afghans tend to settle in areas where there are already a large number of their own ethnic group lived. They earned to support their family, maintained their culture and traditional beliefs. They find it hard to adopt with other people in the country. Hence they happen to buy and sell products such as toys, old clothes etc. Few people like General Taheri hope to return to their country one day. The pain and agony of the refugees were like, a parents who have lost their child and have adopted the other. The trauma they carried from their homeland haunted them even in America.

They didn't have a luxurious life as in their homeland. They lived in apartments, had second-hand cars, sold old products and they had to adjust with the American foods. They didn't have a Mosque or a Mullah to tell prayers for them. Their living was based on the charitable funds offered by the American Government. Baba being a prestigious man refused the funds and chose to live on his earnings.

The life in America is just like a foster house for Amir and his father. Baba is like a widower who remarries but unable to let go of his dead wife. He misses his home very badly. Though away from their country, Afghans stick to their traditions. Love marriages are not allowed, Pashtun and Hazara difference is maintained, Polygamy and illegitimacy is accepted. The central feature of such religious theocracies is the subjugation of women and absolute violence.

Amir's shame and guilt follows him even after he and his father escape to the United States. At the US he attends college, gets married, becomes a successful novelist but could not escape from the gripping guilt. Hosseini overlooks another category of people like Rahim Khan. They refuse to leave Kabul. Rahim says "*Kabul is my home. It is still is*". Though there is no assurance for his life Rahim Khan continues to live there. Even the fear

of being bombed at any time doesn't move them out of Kabul.

When Amir plans to visit Afghanistan, Rahim Khan warns him not to expect a warm welcome from his people. The taxi driver Farid is very unwelcoming to Amir. Farid sarcastically tells Amir that he lives a happy and comfortable life in America and now he has come to have a piteous look at the people of Afghanistan. Amir and Farid start to go in search of Shorab. On the way, they met an old beggar man, who used to work in the University as a guest lecturer in Tehran. It is heart rending to see a renowned professor pushed. They didn't mind of their tragic state in the country, they didn't worry or didn't feel bad for their pathetic and poor life. They accepted all the hardship for the sake of their country.

Parents who are not able to afford food put their children in orphanages. Zaman one of the orphanage keepers, gives Amir and Farid the details of the orphanage, and explains the pathetic condition of the children who live in there. Children die due to the cold. When their ration runs out, they survive on tea and bread for breakfast and dinner. But the plight of children outside the orphanages is worse. The cruel Taliban has spoiled the future of children in Afghanistan, by killing children and childhood.

The wound of trauma is not healed, until, Amir returns to Afghanistan during the Taliban reign he rescues Shorab from sexual abuse and torture. Amir who could not save Hassan when Assef raped him in the street, now risks his life to save Shorab from the evil hands of Assef.

Amir goes to rescue Shorab from the hands of a Taliban without knowing that he is Assef. As they meet Amir tells he will pay to take Shorab, but Assef demands a fight. Assef brutally beats up Amir. "*My body was broken- but I felt healed, healed at last. I laughed*". Eventually Amir attains the long awaited redemption.

After redeeming Shorab, Amir promises Shorab that, he will never put him to an orphanage again. But procuring a visa for Shorab becomes difficult for Amir. On the advice given by Omar Faisal, the lawyer gives him the idea of sending Shorab to an orphanage to make the process easier. Amir hesitates and doesn't want to break the promise he had made to Shorab. Unwillingly he plans to send Shorab make the process quick and risk free.

Shorab is shocked when Amir informs him that he has to go to a children's home for a while. Shorab pleads Amir not to send him to an orphanage. The trauma of fear over takes him. The pain Shorab has undergone haunts him. The past memory makes him fear a lot. He doesn't want to risk his life again, in hunger, cold and abuse. He describes the plight of all the orphanages in a line, they always say they won't hurt but they lie. It is the usual statements of all the homes for children. Shorab also loses

the trust he has on Amir. He doesn't talk to anyone neither Amir nor to his wife Shoraya after he goes to America. More than the experience in the orphanage, Shorab fears his life with Amir, because he has lost the belief in him. Shorab lives with the constant fear of rejection and betrayal.

Amir tries his best to bring the child out of his trauma. At the end of the novel everyone enjoys the party but Shorab stands alone looking at the kites up in the sky. Amir joins him to fly the kite after a very long time in his life. An adult copes with trauma with the help of counselling therapy, but it is a long road for a child to be healed.

Shorab is one of the luckiest boys to escape the brutality of the Taliban. Though Shorab is rescued the scar that has sheathed in the child's heart is indelible. The pain he has undergone is incurable. There are many other kids who are trapped by the evil hands of the Taliban. Amir finally breaks the cycle of lies, deception and betrayal when he crosses the international borders to rescue Shorab.

Hosseini has depicted the existence of the characters in a chaotic and irrational world. The characters strive to escape alienation and loneliness, find meaning in the absurdity, and get hope in despair and liability in dilemma. Life is paradoxical; with its short span we learn the pain of desertion and joy of acceptance; the sting of betrayal and the comfort of acceptance; the joys of conjugal love and the agony of domestic rape; the horrors of war and the fruits of reconciliation, comforts of native and challenges in a foreign land.

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