



The Influence of Cultural Identity in Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner*

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Abstract: Over the centuries, literature has divulged human life and the development of culture. The contemporary literature of Afghanistan has its own origins with rich heritage of traditional writings. The novel, *The Kite Runner* reveals the experiences of cultural identity in Afghanistan. It is observed that diverse culture of Hazaras, an ethnic minority, which has been humiliated ethnically by Pashtuns another majority ethnic community. Various humiliations in the narrative indicate how the novel vividly shows the cultural identity. In addition, it also investigates the central characters Amir and Hassan's struggle based on the cultural identity. Further, it reveals the lives of the rich fashionable Afghans as well as the terrible life of the less privileged people. Therefore, the study concludes that in the modern cutting-edge technology, the identity of certain culture is still concealed in the human heart.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Identity, Community, Kite Runner

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is a renowned novel that depicts its devastating and embarrassingly authentic depiction of cultural identity of Afghanistan. The notion of cultural identity belongs to a group of people who understand themselves. It may be seen that it is a special component in identity formation. In addition, it is observed that people realize their identity more if they are in a different culture in their own society. Most importantly, one encounters the good or evil, when the two diverse groups are connected in a society. The cultural factors of the protagonist, Amir unconsciously lead him to the abrupt ill-treatment of the other characters, especially Hassan, his childhood friend, a servant in his house and his half-brother ultimately. America is a popular destination for immigrants for a variety of reasons, but they have their native culture with them. However, they encounter many issues from the locals due to differences in physical appearance, culture, ethnicity, and religion.

The Kite Runner (2003) is a debut novel by Khaled Hosseini who tries to picture the conflict of cultural identity. It is a multi-theme work about friendship, tie between father and son, immigration, and suffering due to cultural identity. The narrative goes back to 26 years when Amir lives in Afghanistan with his father Baba and his two servants, Ali and Hassan, sons of the ethnic minority Hazaras, while Amir belongs to ethnic of Sunni Muslim. Amir and Hassan have wonderful friendship; however, the class limitations of their society are unfolding their bond. It is noted that cultural identity influences the life of Amir and Hassan. The study is limit to the research in analyzing, the issues of cultural identity. The immigrants live in different countries in the world, with different cultures, religions, personalities even ethnicities. These differences become his or her identity and used to know the social status, such as races, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, etc. Cultural identity can be one of the problems particular ethnic group in a foreign land. In addition, based on the problem Amir tries to apply his original culture (Pashtun) in host nation (America) and wants his culture still exists although they are in America. Because of that the suitable theory will be Diaspora.

Cultural identity



Cultural identity is to understand social position, such as races, ethnicity, marital status, etc. The dilemma of self and culture is an issue of cultural identity. Bakhtin's argues: "Literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside the total cultural context. ...factors influence culture as a whole and only through it and in conjunction with it do, they affect literature." (140) Cultural identity fits to an actual group and how it influences the feeling, perception and behavior of that particular group. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996), Stuart Hall says: "Identity is becoming more dependent on what people are willing to subscribe and less dependent on objective criteria such as skin color or where they're born. Ways of identifying blackness are no longer black or white." (25) From the given statements, it is observed that how culture is built, structured and develops through time. People live in many places throughout the world with distinct cultures, faiths and even with racial characteristics. [Margaret Mead](#) say: "[Human beings seem to hold on more tenaciously to a cultural identity that is learned through suffering than to one that has been acquired through pleasure and delight.](#)" Cultural identity is a part of self-concept that comes from the knowledge and feelings about belonging to a particular cultural group. According to Rebecca Stuhr: "He (Hosseini) interweaves into the action of his stories the details of history, culture and daily life in Afghanistan." (P. 78). From the literary review, it can be observed that cultural identity is one's feeling belongs to particular ethnic group.

In cleaning up Afghanistan in great numbers, the Taliban performed a major contribution, with majority of crime. Hazaras are a minority community, hence, the Taliban perform a heinous crime against the ethnic minority in Afghanistan. In addition, music, dancing and liquor drinking in the country have even been forbidden. Women are their normal objectives, who lived there a frightening existence. The novel provides an example of mistreatment of minorities in Khaled's portrayal of the humiliation of ethnic minorities.

Reflects of Culture

Khaled Hossein's *Kite Runner* mainly examines the unfortunate status of an ethnic minority population. Afghanistan is a place of various ethnic groups, and it has various customs. Its culture reflects its historical roots and location as an intersection of ethnic groups and customs. The yearly Kite fighting contest is another event. Boys are cutting hands while steering kites connected to the glass thread to try to cut other kites from the air. The winner of the game is the person with the last kite in air. Amir, the protagonist is from a wealthy family and his father Baba is one of Kabul's biggest traders. Amir and Baba escape to America after the Russians invaded Afghanistan in the 1980s. Living in America, Amir still has remembrance of his recollections and guilt for Hassan. The feeling about his guilt constantly makes him adhere to whatever he ever did with his blunders in the past.

Afghanistan's culture reflects its historical roots and location as an intersection of ethnic groups and customs. The author depicts the cultural identities as the characters have conflicts in culture based on events. The personalities of Amir and Hassan's common portrayal as Afghan's, but they have diverse cultural identities. It is clear that Hassan always gets the harshness of higher ethnic groups, in particular Amir, and he cannot object to Amir's work, and admits it alone. As a Pashtun and as a Sunni Muslim, Amir understands his identity and makes Hassan to suffer. The minority Hazara was controlled by the lower class people. The Hazar's are doomed to be discriminated against and persecuted by Pashtuns in such an uneven ethnical ethical order. Nie Zhenzhao says: "the ethical factors that influence the fate of the characters should be analyzed in the social ethical position of the time. If it goes back to the context of Afghan ethics described in the novel, it is not difficult to interpret the ethical reasons for Hassan's tragedy." (145)

Hassan, the son of Amir's father and his servant's wife, born with a cleft lip, and abandoned by his mother, naturally becomes Amir's half-brother. Amir's father had to leave Hassan in order to defend his own image. Often, Hassan was bullied by Amir since he was considered as a person who



was born as the bottom of the society. As Hassan and Amir born to the same father, Amir never considered Hassan as his brother, because there is racist walls being in different ethnic groups. Amir frequently played with Hassan and even comforts Hassan sometimes. In addition, he placed Hassan at the bottom of his mind to satisfy his father, but sometimes he betrayed Hassan in front of him. Amir as Pashtun differs in his physical looks, religion, ethnicity and behavior with the other guys, notably his servant Hassan. Furthermore, the Pashtun ethnic group in Afghanistan constantly strikes against Hassan. It frightens his life and he is unable to live freely as he is constantly discriminated by Amir, Assef and the Taliban. In Assef's view, Pushtun's are true Afghans and the Hazara's are foreigners in which they had to be removed like a waste from the country. The Hazara become the Taliban's target that hates the ethnic Hazara.

In an incident of Kite competition, a traditional event in Afghanistan, when Hassan tries to take the final kite, he encounters Assef who manhandles him. He also abuses him, which was noticed by Amir. To make Hassan in a more embarrassing situation, Amir puts his new watch and some money in Hassan's bed to project him as a thief, this incident mad an effort to alleviate the weight of Hassan's culpability. Eventually, Hassan confesses the crime he had not done. Hassan did not protest against Amir's betrayal, because he was faced by the societal ethics to protect his narrow and selfish Amir. He had never been disappointed with this inequality and never attempted to change his destiny. When Assef raged at Hassan, he was ready to sacrifice himself to assist Amir obtain the approval of his father.

The Mental Trauma

The Hazaras are depicted as deprived people by the Pashtuns. After the Soviet military incursion, Amir and Baba escaped to California. The custodian of the home is Hassan and his wife. Although they are allowed to enter the home, Hassan chose to stay in a little home in the backyard, where he grew up. The Taliban massacred Hassan and his wife, as they protested against the takeover of the house. Until his last breath, Hassan remained a faithful servant and frequently discriminated by higher ethnic community. Hassan's life is one of the examples of Hazara's firsthand oppression.

The novel depicts many issues, but the most embarrassing issue related to sexual abuse issue which trauma and how it affects the mental health. The sexually abused event of Hassan and its traumatic impressions in lives of Hassan and Amir marked the severity of the novel. After the incident, Hassan soon collapses into depression and detached from his immediate surroundings and it affect the way he values and perceives himself. Through this incident, Amir suffers from the impact of shame and guilt finds a way to distant himself from Hassan. Amir's mental trauma begins in the point when he failed to help Hassan from the clutches of Assef and tried to hide it from others. Being a coward by nature and the long yearning of getting the attention and applaud from his father made him betray Hassan.

Awkward situations are the mainstay of many actions and it is not possible to avoid them completely. Intrusive memories might make unpleasant incidents to mankind such an incident really happened to Hassan. In a Kite tournament, to defeat Amir from winning the trophy, the three majority ethnic group aggressors particularly Assef surround Hassan in a lonely area to hurt Hassan. Assef holds Hassan on the ground and lowered Hassan's pants and his own pants. All taunted him and then Assef sexually abused Hassan, degrading him forever, which marked the severity of the novel. One of the boys says: "You're nothing but an ugly pet. You're just a communist's son. ...He's just a servant's son." (129) Soon, Hassan ruins into despair and detached from immediate surroundings. The whole incident is witnessed by Amir from outside, both Amir and Assef merely are from the same community. In addition, Amir mental failed to help Hassan from the clutches of Assef and tried to hide it from others. While Amir tells nobody about this occurrence, the guilt paralyses him from within. This theme is dominant in the narrative, reflects not just Hassan's difficulties, but an abuse to



an entire Hazara community. It is not only one person's rape but is the shame on the whole community and violation is *not one and only Hazaras'* concern, rather the central question is *Hazaras'* survival. It demonstrates how Pashtuns on the one side and the Taliban on the other have thrashed this ethnic group.

On Amir's Birthday Party with many of his rich friends and his father's affluent friends, Hassan fulfils his typical duty as a domestic servant and offers drinks and refreshment to Assef, who abused him. Amir noticed the personality changes in his old childhood friend. He observes that Hassan has strongly affected by the incident causing a strong feeling of dislike of himself. Seeing that awaked event, Amir's cowardice haunts him, and makes distance from Hassan when he needs him most. The author makes Amir's personal trauma more complicated by presenting him as a victim as well as a sinner. Even though the protagonist is unhurt, he tormented his subsequent life with the painful memories of his cowardice. The terrific impact of the sexual assault to his friend also impacts his daily life significantly.

Socio-Cultural Interests

The migrants encounter many issues of tradition, culture, and social values when they cross cultural borders. Controversial socio-cultural interests complicate the process of community creation in the foreign realm. The hybrid view of the migrant is beneficial in that it builds dynamic migrant knowledge via experience of diverse cultures and cultural mobility. America is an immigration destination for many nations. For various reasons, many immigrants move to the USA for studying, working, or escaping the economic or political crises, religious strife and war. The novel *The Kite Runner* also illustrates that migrants in the host community embrace a new culture, yet keep their own identity. After moving to the host country, the immigrants are sick with their cultural identification and accept the identity in the host company.

Amir and Baba still maintain their Pashtun traditions and culture in USA. It suits the Diaspora, defined as people who continually produce a new transition and diversity, by notion of cultural identity. It signifies that people still adhere to their culture while they are in the other country. Further, they seem to struggle to keep their cultural identities as Pashtuns in America, however they adapt to the new culture and habits. Once Baba confronts on difference payment between Afghanistan and America in a grocery store until he gets conflict with the storeowner in California.

It turned out that Baba had had no cash on him for the oranges. He'd written Mr. Nguyen a check and Mr. Nguyen had asked for an ID. He wants to see my license, Baba bellowed in Farsi. Almost two years we've bought his damn fruits and put money in his pocket and the son of a dog wants to see my license! (111)

Each country has a custom of its own. Similarly, in America they follow certain customs. When went to purchase groceries, he is requested by the owner of the store to show his ID card, because they do not believe Baba's check. This is a regular thing in America, but the owner of the shop offends Baba. Baba realizes that In Kabul, if the Afghans purchase something, they take the wooden stick to the shop like a credit card and the shopkeeper carves with his knife on his stick. They pay the number of notches on the stick at the end of the month, but in America, it is not like the same in Afghanistan. Baba has never experienced this scenario in Kabul, where everyone knows and acknowledges him. He can easily obtain anything, because the Pashtuns are Afghanistan's richest ethnic group.

When Amir moves to America to escape the war of Afghanistan with his father, the cultural identity of Baba is re-emerging. As the novel describe, Amir's father Baba, never succeeds in adapting the culture of America rather he is influenced by Afghanistan's culture. In his own cultural background, it remains buried and causes issues. For example, he rejected the treatment of a Russian-born American doctor when he is not well, but he direly needs medical attention, but he avoids,



because the doctor reminds him of his struggle in Afghanistan with the Russians.

The association of homeland cultural is still more practiced in America by the family members when Amir wishes to marry Soraya. In this marriage, the family will have a steady and unchangeable identity. Amir marries Soraya and seeks to increase his prestige as a Pashtun, since many Afghans have changed their identity in America, in particular from renowned households. Soraya, Amir's wife is from an ethnic Pashtun community, Baba tells Amir to marry her, because Soraya's dad is the Pashtun, who has tenets, nanges, namoos, dignity and pride, in particular when it comes to a daughter's virginity. He says:

Remember this, Baba said, pointing at me. The man is a Pashtun to the root. He has nang and namoos. Nang. Namooos. Honor and Pride. The tenets of Pashtun men. Especially when it came to the chastity of a wife. Or a daughter. (126-127)

In the past, when Soraya ran with another Afghan, but Amir forgives and accepts her error. However, he cannot reveal the truth about Hassan's error with Soraya. In this circumstance, after knowing Soraya's history, he fled like a stupefied bird.

Journey to Home Country

Amir's journey back to his native country made only to atone for his sin that he had carried for so many years in his heart. The first stunning news from Rahim Khan when he reaches Afghanistan, Hassan and his wife are killed. In addition, he says that Hassan's Son, Sohrab, is in an orphanage as refugee and supervised by Assef, the rapist, Amir decided to save him only by redemption of his former evil.

Sohrab seems to be surrounded with embarrassment and terror. As a youngster, he is damaged not just physically, but mentally. After the death of his father, he is moved to the orphanage in Kabul. An officer of the Taliban, Assef, takes him home from the orphanage, and he mistreats him sexually. Assef is the exactly the same man who sexually abused both the father, Hassan and son, Sohrab.

In an orphanage, when Amir meets Sohrab in Kabul, he faces Assef asking him to free Sohrab and he wants to adopt Sohrab. To his surprise, Assef beats Amir and mentions that Amir is an upper ethnic community and the boy belongs to minor ethnic community. The discrimination worried Sohrab causing him the terror of sexual attack as his father faced. It incident made him existential predicament. The Taliban's sensuous approaches to Sohrab are directly seen by Amir. However, Amir mentions Shorab as his son, and takes to America with lots of procedure for immigration. He says:

Bia, bia, my boy, calling Sohrab to him. Sohrab went to him, head down, stood between his thighs. The Talib wrapped his arms around the boy. "How talented he is, nay, my Hazara boy!" he said. His hands slid down the child's back, then up, felt under his armpits. One of the guards elbowed the other and snickered. (257-58)

The sense of atonement from sin motivates Amir to adopt Shorab as his son. It gives him a chance to look at his origin. When Amir thinks of adopting a child there, also arise cultural issues. In his childhood, Amir betrayed Hassan, so he wants to adopt his son. But, his father-in-law gives him opposition as the child is not his descendant. He also warns that in future, if you want to adopt a child with an unexperienced race plainly, in particular for the Pashtuns, is going to be a difficulty. Moreover, as a citizen of America, Amir's father in law contradicts American culture, and does not accept it. However, accordingly, Americans prefer love marriage; the family and ancestors are not at all considered. Amir still maintains and uses his Afghan customs in this circumstance. He is not able to integrate all American culture. He has no child, but wants to adopt Hassan's son. Sohrab is Amir's half nephew, because Baba used to sleep with Hassan's mother. He brought Sohrab back to California with many difficulties. Amir's wife Soraya is also giving Amir a hand to adopt Sohrab because she is a strong-willed woman.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* depicts the unresolved cultural identity between the Hazara



and the Pashtuns community. The study observed that Afghanistan the magnificent country is currently very much focused on politics and cultural conflicts. It is also found that after witnessing the conflict and devastation of their family, culture and community, the lives of the Afghan people is fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. Further, the characters have the consistent cultural identity.

Conclusion

In post-colonial philosophy, cultural identity is an essential notion, referring to the integration of cultural markers and practice from conquered civilizations. Various occurrences in the narrative indicate how the novel vividly shows the cultural identity. It is observed that Amir and Hassan have the steady and unchangeable cultural identity. Hassan, however, always accepts everything from the Pashtun, and then Amir stuck to his cultural identity even in America. He wishes to maintain his old level culture and integrity. The cultural identity impacts his life, causing tensions within and beyond. The conflict occurs in the novel is between the ethnic of Pashtun and Haraza's. Therefore, the cultural identity is a phenomenon often found in the multi ethnic society.

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