

# The Kite Runner: My Passion of Literature

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**Abstract--**This article aims to describe the brotherhood reality in *The Kite Runner*, a novel by Khaled Hosseini. The reality of the close feelings as brother covers the theme of the story in three aspects, i. E. (a) a relation pattern between a brother and his step-brother, and (b) the tight bound between an uncle and his step-nephew. Besides, there is finding that the social identity of different ethnic between upper and lower class influence Afghan's society in many aspects of life. The data were collected through intensive reading and data research were analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique. The findings show that the brotherhood reality is apparent in the relation of Amir – Hassan, and Amir - Sohrab is a reflection of brotherhood in Afghan's society in the era of conflict. Amir's life is much influenced by Hassan when he was still young, teenagers in Afghanistan till became adult and lives as immigrant in America. The construction of identity of different ethnic strengthen the discriminative treatment among the people.

**Keywords:** brotherhood, discriminative, identity construction, upper and lower class

## I. INTRODUCTION

SOME of the great quotes arise when *The Kite Runner* published by Riverhead Books, New York on June 2003.

One of them is from Isabel Allende: "*This is one of those unforgettable stories that stays with you for years. All the great themes of literature and of life are the fabric of this extraordinary novel: love, honor, guilt, fear, redemption.*" (Hosseini, 2003: books cover). And the other is from The Washington Post Book World: "*A powerful book ... no frills, no nonsense, just hard spare prose ... An intimate account of family and friendship, betrayal and salvation that requires no atlas or translation to engage and enlighten us. Part of The Kite Runner are raw and excruciating to read, yet the book in its entirety is lovingly written. Hosseini clearly loves his country as much as he hates what has become of it ... A tale told in simple brush strokes, closer to Kawabata's Thousand Cranes than Mahfouz's Trilogy. Hosseini is at his best describing moments of slow, silent agony.*" (Hosseini, 2003: introduction). And the most statement that really attracts me at the first moment is the introduction sentences in the novel from the author, Khaled Hosseini: "*I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975.*" (Hosseini, 2003: 1). All those things become the trigger to attract me in reading all these chapters in one night. I have impressed with all the things in this novel, totally in debt with this book and also I put myself to learn all of the events

in life based on the story inside. *The Kite Runner* was first released on May 29, 2003. *The Kite Runner* was later translated into 42 languages for publication in 38 countries. In 2013, Riverhead released the 10th anniversary edition with a new gold-rimmed cover and a foreword by Hosseini.

Another appreciation for Khaled Hosseini is his bestselling story of a boy growing up in 1970s Kabul, *The Kite Runner*, has been voted this year's (in 2006) reading group book of the year. Hosseini's first novel headed a list of 60 titles submitted by entrants to the Penguin/Orange Reading Group prize, whose shortlist is also announced today.<sup>1</sup> As the new author with his first novel, *The Kite Runner*<sup>2</sup> become *best-seller* in many countries, Khaled Hosseini is really brilliant.<sup>3</sup> With the background of Afghanistan and then move to French for four years because of his father's duty as a diplomat and then become the immigrant in America when the invasion of Soviet in Afghanistan started. All the rough time happened in Afghanistan started by the power of the monarchy was overthrown by Mohammad Daud who later formed the Republic of Afghanistan where he became president. Coup put the Communist Second Republic, with Noor Mohammad Taraqi as president and the Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin. Reforms imposed on Afghan society - which is still largely traditional, triggering a popular uprising. Many of them are Islamic and tribal character, which destabilize the regime.

Then upheaval happened continuously, ranging from the Soviet invasion in 1978, the impact of the guerrilla war against the Soviet Mujahideen fighters with Afghan forces under its control. The war lasted for 10 years. Twice the leadership of the Presidents changed, also affected the political and social conflict in Afghanistan. Upheaval for the sake of upheaval exacerbated by inter-ethnic conflict in view of Afghanistan is also composed of several ethnic groups such as Tajiks,

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<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/07/news.awardsandprizes>

<sup>2</sup>*The Kite Runner* became a *bestseller* after being printed in paperback and was popularized in book clubs. It was a number one *New York Times* bestseller for over two years, with over seven million copies sold in the United States. Reviews were generally positive, though parts of the plot drew significant controversy in Afghanistan. A number of adaptations were created following publication, including a 2007 film of the same name, several stage performances, and a graphic novel.

<sup>3</sup>Hosseini grew up in Kabul; his father was a diplomat and his mother a secondary-school teacher. In 1976 he and his parents moved to Paris, where his father worked at the Afghan embassy. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, they found returning to their home impossible, and they moved to California, having been granted political asylum by the United States. Hosseini attended Santa Clara University, where he studied biology, and in 1989 he began attending medical school at the University of California, San Diego. He entered private practice as an internist in 1996, three years after receiving his medical degree.

Pashtuns, Hazaras. The series of ethnic clashes inspire Hosseini put it in his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. Complexity of the conflict became one of the hallmarks of *The Kite Runner* (Agustina, Thesis: 2007). In this writing, I will put another theme as the discussion since there are many aspects can be discussed.

## II. THE BOUNDING OF BROTHERHOOD: REFLECTION OF NEGLECTED REALITY

Literary works sometimes express the goodness and badness of man. In this matter, Laurenson and Swingewood (1971: 11-22) describes the relationship of sociology and literature. Literary texts can be used to interpret the social structures that are taking place in society. Aspects of sociology literature contained in a literary work can be attributed to several things: (a) the concept of social stability, (b) the concept of sustainability of different communities, (c) how an individual receives another individual in the collective, (d) how the community can be changed in stages, (e) how the major changes occur in a public place.

The bounding of feeling between some people showed by the characters in this novel reflected the situation that often happened in a country fullfilled with conflict. There is a reciprocal relationship between social elements that also affect the condition of literature. Various aspects still has a variety of social reflection of literature, among others: (a) the human social world and its ropes, (b) individual adjustment to the other world, (c) how the aspiration to change the social world, (d) the relationship literature and politics, (e) the conflicts and tensions in society. That is to say the relationship between the two will complement human life. The conflict and tensions in society applies in this story. And the reflection itself tried to be described as the theme. One of them is the boundings which is tried to show through some characters.

The bounding feeling among the characters appears in the novel. First, the bounding feeling between Amir and Hassan. Amir becomes the main narrator in this novel. He is a son of wealthy merchant man in Kabul and lives in one of the big districts, Wazir Akbar Khan. "Everyone agreed that my father, my Baba, had built the most beautiful house in the Wazir Akbar Khan district, a new and affluent neighborhood in the northern part of Kabul" (p. 4). His father called by *Baba*, is a rich man and has many business. He has a loyal servant, Ali who also lives in one small hunt at the back of their big house. "On the south end of the garden, in the shadows of a loquat tree, was the servants' home, a modest little mud hut where Hassan lived with his father" (p. 6). *Baba*, loves both boys, but is often critical of Amir, considering him weak and lacking in courage. Amir finds a kinder fatherly figure in Rahim Khan, Baba's closest friend, who understands him and supports his interest in writing.

There is another antagonist character in the novel, named Assef. Assef, an older boy with a sadistic taste for violence, mocks Amir for socializing with a Hazara, which is, according to Assef, an inferior race whose members belong only in Hazarajat. One day, he prepares to attack Amir with brass knuckles, but Hassan defends Amir, threatening to shoot out Assef's eye with his slingshot. Assef backs off but swears to

get revenge. "You are right, Agha. But perhaps you didn't notice that I'm the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move, they'll have to change your nickname from Assef 'the Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef,' because I have this rock pointed at your left eye." He said this so flatly that even I had to strain to hear the fear that I knew hid under that calm voice." (p. 42). The bravery of Hassan to protect Amir and himself made Assef fulfilled with anger and revenge.

One triumphant day, Amir wins the local kite fighting tournament and finally earns Baba's praise. Hassan runs for the last cut kite, a great trophy, saying to Amir, "For you, a thousand times over." (p.67). However, after finding the kite, Hassan encounters Assef in an alleyway. Hassan refuses to give up the kite, and Assef beats him severely and rapes him. Amir witnesses the act but is too scared to intervene. He knows that if he fails to bring home the kite, Baba would be less proud of him. He feels incredibly guilty but knows his cowardice would destroy any hopes for Baba's affections, so he keeps quiet about the incident. Afterwards, Amir keeps distant from Hassan; his feelings of guilt prevent him from interacting with the boy. "I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan – the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past – and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. (p. 77)

As a child, Amir fails to save Hassan in an act of cowardice and afterwards suffers from an all-consuming guilt. Even after leaving the country, moving to America, marrying, and becoming a successful writer, he is unable to forget the incident. Hassan is "the all-sacrificing Christ-figure, the one who, even in death, calls Amir to redemption". One big secret he knew from his father's best friend, Rahim Khan that Hassan is actually his half-brother cause Ali was being sterile and wasn't Hassan's biological father.

Hassan kindness and sacrifices that makes Amir always haunted by guilt throughout his life. Amir himself felt very coward, not a real man and never be a male figure that Baba wanted. Bond of brotherhood becomes stronger when Amir knows that Hassan are siblings who never told by Baba. Baba himself is also a coward father who hid the fact. He doesn't have enough bravery to show and admit that he has another son of the mother of a Hazara beside Amir in the upper classes, the Pashtun.

The brotherhood is really tight Amir's feeling. The fact that they are actually brothers made Amir shocked. He just knew it after many years passed through the rough time. Hassan died because he tried to keep Amir's house in Wazir Akbar Khan from Taliban. Rahim Khan told the story of Hassan to Amir when they met in the first time in Peshawar, Pakistan after Amir became the immigrant in America for many years. "They told Hassan they would be moving in to supposedly keep it safe until I return. Hassan protested again. So they took him to street \_- ". "No," I breathed. "- and order him to kneel \_- ". "No. God, no." "- and shot him in the back of the head." (p. 219). The bounding of kinship have become a strong theme in the story.

The second brotherhood is the relationship between Amir and Sohrab. Sohrab is the son of Hassan and Amir's nephew. Amir saw Sohrab for the first time and his memory came to Hassan directly. There are similarities between Sohrab and

Hassan, the gesture, the physics, and his favourite. Both Hassan and Sohrab is really pioneer in playing the slingshot. Amir saw Hassan's figure in Sohrab, like twins. "The resemblance was breathtaking. Disorienting. Rahim Khan's Polaroid hadn't done justice to it" (p. 279). The boy had his father's round moon face, his pointy stub of a chin, his twisted, seashell ears, and the same slight frame. It was the Chinese doll face of my childhood, the face peering above fanned-out playing cards all those winter days, the face behind the mosquito net when we slept on the roof my father's house in the summer" (p.279). All memories reflected when they were playing together in Kabul and spending some times arise in Amir's mind. Memories always kept in a longer time for everyone who has reached the time. It can't be stopped, it will fly and stay in every human's mind. There will be no limitation for Amir even he never know Sohrab before. Both fraternities color the theme in this novel apart from other themes which are also raised. The strength of brotherhood makes this novel deserves appreciation from many readers around the world. How Amir struggled to regain Sohrab from Assef accompanied by a fight with Assef that cause many injuries become the most efficacious drug to redeem any guilt against Hassan, his best friend and his brother.

The novel is also a tool from the author to reflect the state of Afghan society that will be a witness of the times. Hosseini tried to document the tumultuous era, sectarian and ethnic strife and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The novel is interpreted as a message to be conveyed to the world even though he himself did not stay in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion, there is a sense of longing that he wants to convey in writing.

### III. DISCRIMINATIVE VS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Discriminative attitude towards low class or ethnic often happened in one society. There is conflict between upper and lower class in the story. What is described in the novel is reflected the discriminative attitude from Pashtun as the upper class toward Hazara as the lower class. Amir represented the Pashtun and Hassan represented the Hazara.<sup>4</sup> Amir's friends which have the same ethnic tend to mock him because Amir always spend his time playing and going anywhere with Hassan. They think that Amir has done the embarrassing actions, by having close relationship with a Hazara boy.

Afghanistan is a mosaic of ethnicities. Pashtuns comprise the largest group and have traditionally commanded the most power. They're followed by Tajiks, and then Hazaras. Other groups include Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Baluchs. Although Hazaras are the country's third largest ethnicity, comprising about 20 percent of the population, they have faced centuries of persecution from both Pashtuns and other groups. It is also done by Taliban who really massacre Hazara's ethnic. "A few

weeks later, the Taliban banned kite fighting. And two years later, in 1998, they massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif (p. 213). The Hazara people have always been near the bottom of the class system in Afghanistan. They have been forced to go out and live in the mountains by the Taliban. Even though the Hazara people have been exiled, the Taliban does not let up on them. Around 4,000-6,000 Hazara people have been killed. The Taliban mainly targets the men and leaves the rest of the family. It's also reflected by the antagonist character in the story, Assef who did some abuse and tormented actions toward Hassan and Sohrab.

Today, most Hazaras live in the mountainous central highlands, called Hazarajat, an undeveloped rural area that includes four provinces. The most famous is Bamian province, home to the Bamian Buddha statues, which the Taliban destroyed in 2001.<sup>5</sup> Historically Hazaras settled deeper into the valleys, but decades of conflict drove them up into the rugged mountains. Hoping for a better life, many have also moved to Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, where, today, they make up nearly half of the city's population. In the story, some characters reflected Hazara ethnics always get repression, mocking, and abuse are Hassan, Ali (Hassan's father) and Sohrab. Those people represented Hazara's ethnics who always got repression from the Pashtun. These are the examples the mockings purposed to Hazara's characters in the story: 1) Of all the neighborhood boys who tortured Ali, Assef was by far the most relentless. He was, in fact, the originator of the Babalu jeer, Hey, Babalu, who did you eat today? Huh? Come on, Babalu, give us smile a smile! And on days when he felt particularly, inspired, he spiced up his badgering a little, Hey, you flat-nosed Babalu, who did you eat today? Tell us, you slant-eyed donkey! (p.38); 2) "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood." (p. 40), 3) "We left the bodies in the streets, and if their families tried to sneak out to drag them back into their homes, we'd shoot them too. We left them in the streets for days. We left them for the dogs. Dog meat for dogs." (p. 277). Those quotations in the story show how Assef really hate Hazara's people. The way Pashtun people threat the Hazara's people seem irrational. Their action is based on their hatred, full of anger without any possible reason. Hosseini wants to describe the social reality that happened among the Afghans, there were conflicts that also grew and arose there.

The construction of identity showed that Hazara is identical with the poor, illiterate and working in the low job, moreover Pashtun described as the rich, literate, has the opportunity to go to school. What Hosseini described in the story is like a mirror telling the truth about the situation which ever happened in Afghan even the situation has changed a lot nowadays.

Hazara women join to participate in the government now: In March 2005 Habiba Sarobi was the first Afghan woman to become a governor, appointed by President Hamid Karzai to head the province of Bamiyan. Additionally, women in the Fuladi province began farming in 2004 in an effort to support themselves, a program initiated by social welfare worker

<sup>4</sup> The conflict between the Hazara and the Pashtun started when Abdur Rahman Khan became the ruler of Afghanistan. Abdur Rahman Khan favored the Pashtun people and despised the Hazara people. The Hazara people are nomads that were forced to live in the Kazarasjat Mountains by the government. A reason that the government loathed the Hazara people is they are Shiite Muslims. This war is mostly over ethnicity. The Pashtun people are Sunni Muslims and are willing to do anything to wipe out the Hazara people. Retrieved from: <http://sprecherkrper1gr2.weebly.com/hazara-and-pashtun-conflict.html> March 16, 2015

<sup>5</sup> [http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/geopedia/Hazara\\_People](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/geopedia/Hazara_People)

Sabera Sakhi. They quickly advanced to the top level of wage earners in the area (Larson: 2008). The situation has changed in facing the differences among the ethnics in Afghan now comparing the rough situation when the conflict still happened some years ago. At national level Hazaras tend to be more progressive concerning women's rights to education and public activities. Educated Hazara women, in particular ones who returned from exile in Iran are as active as men in civic and political arenas. Hazara families are eager to educate their daughters. U.N. officials in Bamian, 20 miles to the east, said that since the collapse of Taliban rule in late 2001, aid agencies have scrambled to build schools and have succeeded in attracting qualified female teachers to meet the demand. Since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 the situation of Hazaras in Afghanistan has improved considerably. Hazaras are one of the national ethnic minorities recognized in the new Afghan constitution and have been given full right to Afghan citizenship. Only two Hazaras gained seats in President Hamid Karzai's initial cabinet, and the only representative of their main political party, Hizb-e Wahdat gained the position of vice president. But in the most recent parliamentary election Hazaras (who make up around 9 per cent of the population) gained 25 per cent of seats.<sup>6</sup> However, Hazaras still face persistent discrimination in many areas of the country.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the novel, there are some findings that is the real boundings are between Amir and Hassan and Amir and Sohrab as the characters. The bounding feeling of brotherhood gives us lesson that the real feeling of humans is being meaningful. People can be good or bad cause something that we have done in the past. Wise lesson can be shared and other can take the moral value. One great comment to close this conclusion is from Said Tayeb Jawad, the 19th Afghan ambassador to the United States, publicly endorsed *The Kite Runner*, saying that the book would help the American public to better understand Afghan society and culture. Besides, the findings also found the conflict between two ethnics in Afghan, Pashtun and Hazara reflected upon the characters in the story. It is also influenced the characters's life when they are still living in Afghanistan, becoming the immigrants in America till came back to do the redemption of the guilty feeling.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.minorityrights.org/5440/afghanistan/hazaras.html> March 16, 2015