
A STUDY OF DISTORTION OF PASHTUN CULTURE IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S NOVEL "THE KITE RUNNER"

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to explore Pashtun culture and its distortion reflected in Khaled Hosseini's novel "The Kite Runner". The paper analyzes the Americanized characters and the native Afghan Pashtuns. The paper utilizes a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach. The method used in the study is content analysis. Thus, by analyzing the characters of the novel, the findings of the study indicate that Khaled Hosseini has mis portrayed and distorted the Pashtun culture in the novel. Pashtun culture is based on the fundamental Pashtun code called Pashtunwali which includes respect, love, passion and bravery. However, the American influence on some writers and their self-interest has distorted the image of Pashtuns.

Key words: Pashtun, distortion, culture, novel, content Analysis.

Introduction:

The writing style of Khaled Hosseini is popular in this time for modern literature since his works has set a guideline. His works are famous for compassionate in tone and arouse the feelings which directly touches human heart. Hosseini used various themes in his projects which are admissible in this time. He depicts the same themes which resound in his three novels. "The Kite Runner", "A Thousand Splendid Suns, and "And the Mountains Echoed". The themes which he shows are "love and relationships", "loss", "war and values of life", "gender oppression and patriarchy", "unfairness and injustices".

However, this study will analyze Pashtuns and their distortion in this novel. Most of the Pashtuns live in Afghanistan. The terrible incident of 9/11 has caused Pashtun subjugation and marginalization (Hamid, 2015). The entire Pashtun culture revolves around the major Pashtun code called "Pashtunwali". Bernt (1998) while commenting on Pashtunwali states,

"*Pashtunwali* is rooted in the features of *nang* and *namus*. *Nang* means honor and shame. *Nangialay* is the person who has *nang* and safeguards honor of his family. A

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person faces extreme humiliation in his society if he has lost his *nang*. In order to regain respect, the person has to take revenge (*badal*). In Pashtun society, there is a dichotomy between men and women. Both men and women are bound to keep their eyes down since staring at each other is considered indecent. A man is responsible for protection of women's honor and it is called *namus*" (p. 2).

"Ghani Khan" the famous poet in "*The Pathan*" (1995) says,

"When the Pathan [Pashtun] is a child his mother tells him, "the coward dies, his shrieks live long after," and so he learns not to shriek. He is shown dozens of things dearer than life so that he will not mind either dying or killing. He is forbidden colorful clothes or exotic music, for they weaken the arm and soften the eye. He is taught to look at the hawk and forget the nightingale" (p. 30).

Hence this study will investigate the novel "The Kite Runner" as misrepresenting the culture of Pashtuns.

Problem statement:

Some recent research on this novel include Marxist perspective to explore power and class conflict in the novel through characters and themes (Salah & Ahmed, 2021). While other research includes the theme of double colonization in the novel (Saman et.al, 2020). Although the novel has many positive aspects which are already explored by the researchers as asserted by a researcher " His novel definitely spurred conversation" (Brittany, 2021). However, this novel includes some major aspects of "cultural misrepresentation" and major influence of "Americanization" which have not been explored yet. This study fills in this research gap.

Research objectives:

1. To investigate the distortion of Pashtun culture in "The Kite Runner".
2. To analyze westernization as a reason to distort Pashtun culture in "The Kite Runner".

Research questions

1. How does "The Kite Runner" reflect distortion of Pashtun culture?
2. In what ways the affects of westernization distort Pashtun culture in "The Kite Runner"

Literature Review

The latest studies on the novel "The Kite Runner" include "Otherness as theme: Exploring Khalid Husseini's Masterpiece "The Kite Runner" through

Gayatri Spivak's "Double Colonization" in which Salah (2020) has analyzed different ways of double colonization in the novel. The researchers state, "Khalid Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" is a masterpiece written under the background of colonization. It depicts realistic issues faced by the ethnic groups living within Afghanistan. Since this novel was composed after the 9/11 incident some scholars are of the opinion that this novel was a sort of apology from Khalid Hosseini to the US. As stated by one of the critics, at a moment when U.S. citizens had to grapple with terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, such a tale suggested a division between good and evil that inevitably palliated the violent consequences of bombing Afghanistan and that made it easier to imagine the invasion was just a response. Besides, the issues of racism, betrayal and redemption are beautifully highlighted by Hosseini which marks the brilliance and splendor of this novel" (Saman et al, 2020, p. 279).

In another recent study, "The divisions of power and class conflict within a society: A Marxist Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner" the researchers have explored the themes of power in the novel. The researchers conclude their research by the following remarks,

"Content analysis of the novel using intrinsic and extrinsic technique shows that how the class status and the division of the power in the society affects the lives of people both on individual bases and on larger scales as well. It is clear how the Pashtuns, being the Bourgeoisie of the society exploit and oppress the Hazaras the proletariat. The analysis shows that no matter on what basis or reasons exploitation is done, either social, ethnic, religious or even national reasons, in the end everything comes down to Class struggle and conflict. The exploitation of Hassan by Amir and Assef is possible because he is from the lower class and they are both from the upper class. Similarly, the oppression that the Hazaras suffer on the basis of their ethnicity and religion is also possible because the Hazaras as a community are poor and they could not do anything against the rich Pashtuns. Even the Russian invasion of Afghanistan shows that the powerful and rich can do whatever they want to the poor and powerless. Hence based on this analysis we can conclude that in the novel The Kite Runner Khaled Hosseini has very craftily shown the class conflicts and depicted how power within a society are divided to the rich and wealthy" (Saman & Mahnaz, 2021, p. 12).

Discussion:

In "The Kite Runner" there is complete distortion of Pashtun culture. The major character of the novel is Amir who is an Americanized boy and is

portrayed very nice. “I am so lucky to have found you. You are so different from every Afghan guy I have met.” (The Kite Runner, p. 165). He is shown to follow the rules of Pashtunwali while he is walking with Merlot he does not ask Merlot to drink since he says, “I was fully aware of the Afghan double standard that favored my gender”(p.135). he also appreciates America’s bombing on Afghanistan by saying “Soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance moved in, and the Taliban scurried like rats into the caves” (p. 332). However, Assef who is a native boy of Afghanistan, a Pashtun who is not Americanized is portrayed cruel and uncivilized. He teaches people a lesson by harassing them. Hassan is warned by Amir about Assef,

“I am trying to tell you, Sohrab Jan. That there are bad people in this world, and sometimes bad people stay bad. Sometimes you have to stand up to them. What you did to that man is what I should have done to him all those years ago. You gave him what he deserved, and he deserved even more” (p. 292). In another place in the novel Assef is depicted a boy who believes in racism, “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, 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 ... Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That’s my vision” (p. 38).

Hence just because Assef is not westernized and Amir is westernized therefore Assef is portrayed as bad while Amir is portrayed as a civilized person. This indicates how Khaled Hussein has mis portrayed the Pashtuns and their culture.

For a customary being revealed as not an Afghan is not a real big issue artists, journalists and a couple of savvy people will contrast and attempt to demonstrate their way of life as Afghans. Likewise, s will be least pestered on the off chance that somebody pronounces them as not well deserving to be termed “Pathan, Sulemani or Rohi” (Strickland, 2007). However a pashtun may not tolerate to be termed as “baiPakhto — sans Pakhto, or one who doesn't rehearse Pashtunwali” — at that point we can expect him to battle, in light of the fact that a genuine Pashtun understands what social repercussions will follow in the event that one acknowledges he isn't doing Pakhto (Rzehak, 2011).The word 'Pashtun' as per researchers is a composition of five letters from five Pashto language: “paa”, “kheen”, “taa”, “wao” and “noon”. Hence these five letters have their wn particular meaning in Pashto language. For instance the first letter “paa” represents pat or unobtrusiveness; “kheen” indicates” khegara or the demonstration to act good and provide assistance; “taa” represents

“tura” which refers to “talwaar or sword”, representing courage; “wao” reflects “wafa”(unwaveringness) and the last one “noon” represents “nang” (honor) (Rokhan, 2021). A well-known Pashtun literary “Pareshan Khattak” in his commended book “*Pashtun Kon* (Who Is A Pashtun) says that "Pashtunwali is a way of thinking of life among individuals who have been acquiring thoughts from the methods of old archetypes, a few musings from their environmental factors and have drawn some motivation from exchange of different countries and religions living in their nearby region." Pashtuns according to his research were Buddhists and Zoroastrians. However, they found numerous Islamic conventions similar to Pashtunwali which is "an ethical framework that has confidence in social government assistance, equity, correspondence and humanism, profoundly established in social practices that request commitment, courage, accommodation and feeling of honor" (Pareshan, 1984).

Rokhan (cited in Dawn newspaper, 2020) explains that “melmastia (hospitality), panah (providing sanctuary to the unguarded), badal (a social convention in which great deeds are exchanged), jirga (system of consultation), nanawate (reconciliation), tega (ceasefire) and hujra (village visitor house) are the very establishments of Pashtunwali.”

A noteworthy Pashtun “Abaseen Yousafzai” asserts that Pashtunwali has always provided sound basis for women empowerment. Women have been playing a dynamic role in all the fields of life for instance “Malala Maiwand has been an image of political battle from the British time till today”. He further says "Three years back, a few ladies essayists moved toward me for counsel on establishing a different association of authors and artists. I energized them and even proposed a name — Khwendy Adabi Lakhkar [Sisters' Literary Army]. I am satisfied that they have been dynamic — more than men — as their numbers have expand from only a couple to hundreds. The vision of Bacha Khan and a considerable lot of our scholarly people empowered the job and cooperation of Pashtun ladies in the general public."

As to Pashtunwali, particularly the segment of jirga, he concurs that some obsolete, immaterial and barbaric practices, for example, “swara” (a girls marriage without her will); “ghag” (a persuasive marriage), requires to be finished. As per Abaseen, "Pashtunwali is available to present-day analysis, Ladies should be empowered and given their due rights — including the ability to decide, right to schooling and offer legacy — are squeezing issues”(cited in Dawn newspaper, 2020).

The above discussion clearly indicates Pashtuns as a nation of civilized and cultured people. However, some writers mis portray Pashtuns either because of their own self interest or due to extreme American influence.

Conclusion

Khaled Hussein has mis portrayed the Pashtun culture in his novel “The Kite Runner”. Since he himself was westernized therefore the affects of Americanization prevail in the novel. Pashtuns entire life run around the major code called “Pashtunwali” which contains elements of bravery, love, forgiveness and respect. Thus, the westernized literary writers might have self-interest to portray such misrepresentation which are baseless.

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