

## **Historicity in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: Encountering History in Contemporary Afghanistan**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper is an investigation of Khaled Hosseini's seminal fiction *The Kite Runner* from the perspective of New Historicist approach of reading a literary work. The concepts of history and discourse, recurrently employed by Foucault, Montrose, and Greenblatt, provide the theoretical background of the present research. The plot of the novel is devoted to presenting a vivid picture of the socio-cultural conditions of Afghanistan at the period of war and crisis. During the time, many wars and conflicts were imposed upon Afghanistan for the interests of foreign powers. Russia invaded Afghanistan, and it ended up in Taliban war, hunger, uncertainty in the subjects' lives, and refugee questions. Russian army had destroyed the village, school, and natural resources of Afghanistan while America indirectly dominated there to support the Taliban against Russia in the cold war period. *The Kite Runner* including historical facts about Afghanistan's multi-layered conditions, let the readers face the true nature of war, terrorism, and Taliban in the country. Exploring the cultural crisis and ethnic conflict represented in the novel is conducted in a close association with the New Historicist's concept of "textuality of history and historicity of text".

### **Keywords**

History; Historicity; Discourse; Power; New Historicism.

### **1. Introduction:**

#### ***The Kite Runner* as a Critical Picture of Afghan History**

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* represents contemporary Afghan history and crisis due to wars. The novel is crafted on the modern history of Afghanistan and its people. It also goes back to the time of the constitutional monarchy in Afghanistan in the 1960s. The plot is mediated through the perspective of an Afghan who was born and lived in Kabul, his until adolescence. Amir, the narrator and the protagonist, is an Afghan-American, because he immigrates after the Soviet invasion as an adolescent and is fortunate enough to be granted asylum in the United States where he has been living since his departure from Afghanistan.

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*The Kite Runner* offers the present ethnic and religious conflicts in today's Afghanistan revolves around the recognition as equal of an oppressed Shi'a Hazara by a member of the ruling Shunni Pashtun. Linguistic and class issues as the source of conflict are eliminated from the mix. This desirable outcome is justified in the novel at the level of blood relationship: Amir, a Pashtun (the Pashtuns have been in destruction of the culture, the possession of the political power in Afghanistan for nearly two and half centuries by now), transcends existing ethnic and religious taboos only when he learns that Hassan, officially known as the son of their Hazara servants Ali and his wife, is his half-brother.

Hosseini describes the suffering under the tyranny of the Taliban, whom Amir encounters when he finally returns home, hoping to help Hassan and his family. The final or the third of the book is full of haunting images: a man, desperate to feed his children, trying to sell his artificial leg in the market; an adulterous couple stoned to death in a stadium during the halftime of a football match; a rouged young boy forced into prostitution, dancing the sort of steps once performed by an organ grinder's monkey. When Amir meets his old nemesis, now a powerful Taliban official, the book descends into some plot twists better suited to a folk tale than a modern novel. But in the end we are won over by Amir's compassion and his determination to atone for his youthful cowardice.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini gives us a vivid and engaging story that reminds us how long his people have been struggling to triumph over the forces of violence - forces that continue to threaten them even today. *The Kite Runner* addresses Afghanistan from the 1970s to the year 2002. Like all places, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history but it came to international attention only after the coup of 1973. From 1933-1973, Afghanistan was a monarchy ruled by King Zahir Shah. On July 17, 1973, when the king was on vacation, Mohammad Daoud Khan seized power. Mohammad Daoud Khan was Zahir Shah's cousin and a former prime minister of Afghanistan. The military coup was nearly bloodless, but as we see through Amir's story, it was still a frightening time for the people of Kabul who heard rioting and shooting in the streets. For six years, Mohammad Daoud Khan was the president and prime minister of Afghanistan. Then, on April 27, 1978, he was violently overthrown by the PDPA, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Daoud was killed in the coup along with most of his family. Even though Afghanistan had long insisted on maintaining its independence from Russia, the PDPA was a Communist party and therefore held close ties to the Soviet Union.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. The end of *The Kite Runner* occurs in 2002, when a provisional government was in place. It was not until 2004 that the

current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, was elected. Today, there are countless Afghan refugees living in other parts of the world, just like Amir and his family. For those Afghans living in Afghanistan, life is still dangerous. In the South, conflict continues to rage on and the Taliban have managed to reemerge. According to Amnesty International's 2007 report, violence and human rights abuses are still a common reality in Afghanistan due to weak governance.

## 2. Literature Review

*The Kite Runner* had drawn the attention of all academia. Since its publication in 2003, the novel *The Kite Runner* received many critical eyes from its different perspectives. They have focused on different issues like trauma of the protagonist, Afghan Diaspora, migration, family relation, hypocrisy of those hiding their sins under the cloak of religious righteousness and the betrayal of friendship. Such perspectives and approaches are mostly reader oriented and the author oriented but they have talked less about the issue that this dissertation is going to explore. This dissertation primarily focuses on the representation of contemporary Afghan history- cultural disaster, ethnic and minorities' domination and hegemony. The critic Ronny Noor sees the novel by focusing the sin and redemption:

A novel of sin and redemption, a son trying to redeem his father's sins. This lucidity written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of not the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. As far as the Afghan conflict is concerned, we got a selective, simplistic, even simple-minded picture. (148)

Interpreting the text from the perspective of the betrayal of friendship *The Kite Runner* offers a moving portrait of modern Afghanistan, from its pre-Russian-invasion glory days through the terrible reign of the Taliban.

Geraldine S. Pearson responds to the text from the perspective of psychiatric and mental trauma:

From a psychiatric nursing perspective, this novel illustrates numerous clinically pertinent themes. Amir's exposure to the traumatic assault on his friend, Amir, haunts him for most of his life and this childhood event has a powerful impact on his adult decisions and feelings. (66)

Pearson contends that symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are mediated by the event, exposure, and a subjective reaction. For *Loyal Miles*, the novel is about the national identity:

The tensions in this relationship mirror Afghanistan's struggle in the 1970s to maintain a traditional sense of national identity in the face of government instability and invasions by a foreign power. [...] The gradual unraveling of both relationships and Amir's eventual attempts to reconcile with his father and with Hassan provide a structure through which Hosseini compellingly examines Afghanistan's recent cultural and national history. (207)

Interpreting the text from the perspective of the betrayal of friendship, Bob Corbett remarks, "This is a beautiful and informative story of Amir, an Afghan boy who betrays his closet friend, Hassan, when they are just 12 years old. (371). Monika Mehta argues that "The Kite Runner offers a moving portrait of modern Afghanistan, from its pre-Russian-invasion glory days through the terrible reign of the Taliban. Hosseini smoothly adds Farsi words to his clear, plot-driven prose; at one point, Amir's enemy eerily foreshadows the slaughter of a persecuted ethnic minority" (82). Such criticism and reviews do not talk much about the contemporary history of Afghanistan.

Stella Algoo Baksh considers *The Kite Runner* as a haunting and quite extraordinary first novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan medical doctor now residing in the United States. As Baksh contends, the novel:

Launches readers into the realities of Afghan society, using the political events of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001 to foreground a touching and memorable story of the friendship between two boys of differing social class and ethnic backgrounds. It foregrounds the complexity and difficulty of the achievement of personal salvation and the recognition of self (143).

A touching and memorable story of friendship, *The Kite Runner* is a story of history and culture. It is the story of the friendship between two boys of differing social class and ethnic backgrounds. By reviewing the afro-mentioned critics, this researcher has focused on the research gap that it has remained untouched from New Historicist's perspectives. So, this research is based on the literary theory that talks about power, discourses, truth and the context in a new way.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: New Historicism**

The theoretical tool, New Historicism is used for the textual analysis of the text. New Historicism is approached from the various perspectives of Foucauldian, Montrose, and Greenblatt.

New Historicist approach includes a large scope of evidence, gathers them like pieces of a puzzle in order to come up with a thorough judgment. Through reading literature, New Historicists attempt to achieve less subjective history and unbiased history. However, according to New Historicism, there is no objective history, but the New Historicist never stops trying to achieve at least partial objective facts concerning history. (Poorghorban and Weisi 412)

New Historicism highlights the historical nature of literary text, and textual nature of history. Instead of reading a text as "self-sufficient entity" and "autonomous body," and viewing it in isolation from its socio-cultural historical context as formalists and new critics did, New Historicists primarily emphasize the historical and cultural conditions of its production and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. New Historicism turns towards history, culture,

society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context and so on. Being above the practice of interdisciplinary approach and ultimately emphasizing the “transdisciplinary” approach, it seeks to blur the generic boundaries between different disciplines such as history and fiction. Therefore, for New Historicists literary texts and non-literary texts bear equal importance. It also considers the cultural system and its context for fiction and sees fiction even in history. It is thus the textuality of history and historicity of text that is highlighted. It discards the concept of formalism and New Criticism as text is everything.

New Historicism discards the autonomy and individual genius of the authors and the autonomy of the literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context. The role of the author is not completely negated, but it is a role that the author is at best only partially in command of. The author’s role is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances. As New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt has put it, “[T]he work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class or creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society”(12). The literary text, then, is always part of a much wider cultural, political, social and economic dispensation. The literary text is a time and place bound verbal construction that is always in one way or another political.

The concept of ‘historicity of the text’ came because of the thinking that sought to connect a text to the social, cultural and economic circumstances of its production. The text, now, was not to be read with the motto of ‘art for art’s sake’. It was but to be read in connection with all discursive practices and power relations expressed in it by the language that is , as argued by New Historicists, necessarily dialogical and materially determined. Similarly, the idea of ‘textuality of history’ came as a jolt to the age-old search for metaphysical spirit that was said to be all pervasive throughout the historical movement.

The New Historicists’ reciprocal concern with ‘historicity of text and textuality of history’ seems to have emerged from M. H. Abrams’ clarification of Foucault’s notion, which calls text “a discourse which , although, it may seem to present, or reflect an external reality, in fact consists of what are called representations” (183). The Foucauldian notion that views a text as verbal formation in the form of ideological products or cultural constructs of a certain historical era assists the concept of historicization of the text. The text, to Foucault, never represents or reflects pre-existing entities and orders of a historical situation, rather it speaks of the power structures, oppositions and hierarchies which are after all the products and propagators of power. A text, in

Foucault's view, speaks of 'history' but not as it is described by traditional treatment.

New Historicists posit the view that history is neither linear nor progressive, neither factual nor authentic. Instead, like any piece of literature, it is a constructed body to fit some ideological purposes, embedded in complex web of socio-political networks. History itself is a text, an interpretation, and that there is no single history. Lois Tyson in her book *Critical Theory Today* opines that "history is a matter of interpretation, not facts, and that interpretations always occur within a framework of social conventions" (286).

New Historicism views historical accounts as narratives, as stories that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, or historical accounts as narrative, as stories that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, of those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases, that is, the more 'objective' they think they are, the more those biases are able to control their narratives. The historian operates within the horizon of her/his own worldview, a certain broad set of assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, it is impossible to overcome these beliefs to achieve objective history.

New Historicism attempts to eradicate the distinction between literature and history, arguing that each partakes of the other and that both participates in social networks and deploy cultural codes that cannot be fully articulated. In this sense, New Historicism deconstructs the traditional opposition between history (traditionally thought of as factual) and literature (traditionally thought of as fictional). The mutual relationship between history and literature is further highlighted by the often-quoted phrase " historicity of text and textuality of history" (Montrose 781).

New Historicists argue that since works of literature are based on particular socio-political and historical realities, they both influence and are influenced by historical reality. Like any other discourses, a work of art is a discourse, and also is the negotiated product of a private creator and the public practices of a given society. In this respect, viewing a work of art as a discourse, Habib points out: "It [New Historicism] saw the literary text not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses- religious, political economic, aesthetic- which both shaped it and , in their turn, were shaped by it" (761).

New Historicism was much influenced by Foucault, whose 'discursive practices' are frequently a reinforcement of dominant ideology whereas Cultural materialism owes much to Raymond Williams, whose 'structures of feeling' contain the seeds from which grows resistance to the dominant ideology. Peter

Berry gives the difference between New Historicism and cultural materialism. New Historicists situate the literary text in the political situation where as cultural materialists situate it within that of theirs. This is clear through these lines:

Where the former's co-texts are documents contemporary with Shakespeare, the latter's may be programme notes for a current Royal Shakespeare Company production, quotations of Shakespeare by a Gulf war pilot, or pronouncements on education by a government minister. To put this another way: the New Historicist situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the cultural materialist situates it within that of ours. This is really to restate the difference in political emphasis between the two approaches. (185-86)

In the present investigation of New Historicism "discourse" and "power" bear important positions. "Discourse" and "power" give a certain stance to the critical practice of new historicism. Indeed, New Historicism owes much to Foucault for the concept of "discourse" and "power" by which it has strengthened its own critical stance.

Foucault's main interest was in studying different discourses, which make a society but are themselves contradictory. Since discourses themselves are not absolutely true, there always lies gap between practice and statements of discourse. Commenting on this Foucauldian idea McHoul and Wendy Grace write that "[d]iscourse is not just a form of representation; it is a material condition (or set of conditions) which enables and constrains the socially productive 'imagination'. These conditions can therefore be referred to as 'discourses' or 'discursive formations of possibility'" (34). In "Truth and Power," Michel Foucault describes the concept of power and truth. Regarding power and truth Foucault opines:

Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientific truth and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truths are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false (qtd. in Adams 1139)

Foucault focuses on the idea how truth is changed under the discourses. It is apparently clear that when discourse changes the truth will be due to change, too. For Foucault, truth is not outside power, or lacking in power. It is a thing of this world which is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints in a society. Each society has its own regime of truth. Furthermore, the power diffuses itself in the system of authority and the effects of truth are produced within discourses. But the discourses in themselves are neither true nor false. Foucault sees truth as a product of relations of power and it changes as system changes. Both literature and history are narratives and are in the form of

discourses. They are entangled in the power relations of their time. Literary works are not secondary reflections of any coherent worldview but the active participants in the continual remaking of meanings. All the texts, including history and literature, are simply the discourses which seek the power or ruling class – the power to govern and control. Hence, the dividing line between history and literature is effaced. Power circulates through discourses.

#### **4. *The Kite Runner* in Terms of New Historicist Treatment**

*The Kite Runner* describes how the combination of war can devastate a country and people. This novel also illuminates the fact that most Afghan refugees are just that peace loving, law abiding people who are in America in that their beloved homeland has been rendered uninhabitable. Furthermore, the religious and ethnic consciousness shapes the individual mind resulting heart aching domination.

It is concerned to a great extent with the Russian invasion in Afghanistan and Taliban era in which study of Afghanistan would be incomplete without study of hunger, war, landmines, refugees, and so on. Hosseini left Afghanistan in 1976 at the age of 11 when his father was posted to Afghan Embassy in Paris. Following the 1978 coup and subsequent Russian invasion the Hosseinis immigrated to the United States receiving political asylum in 1980. The beginning lines of the novel show Afghanistan of the 1970s:

I became what I am today at the age of twelve , on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975[...] That was long time ago , but it wrong what they say about the past , I've learned, about how you can burry it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.

(1)

This description of the picture mirrors the life of the Pashtuns who are considered to be the royal clan in Afghanistan, superior to other ethnic groups like Hazara, Uzbeks, and Kuchis, Hosseini engages in nostalgic childhood recreation of a lost Afghanistan during the last days of the monarchy Zahir Shah and the regime that overthrew him in the first part of the novel.

Khaled Hosseini presents the existing social evils and shocking inhuman behavior by human on the basis of religious and ethnic consciousness. Particularly, it presents the heart breaking picture of marginalized Hazara and the devastating thinking of the so- called upper class Pashtuns which has been prevailing in Afghanistan for ages. The religious tussle between Shi'a and Sunni is further clarified in the novel: “[H]istory isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that” (22).



Hosseini is the first Afghan novelist to fictionalize his culture for western reader, melding the personal struggle of ordinary people into the terrible historical sweep of a devastated country in a rich and soul-searching narrative. Afghanistan had gone overnight from a monarchy to a republic. Tired of listening to the radio news, Amir and Hassan went to climb their favourite tree. On the way, a young "sociopath" named Assef and his friends confronted them. He taunts Hassan for being a Hazara; Assef also has a habit of taunting Ali, whom he called Babalu. He praises Hitler and then says that he wants to finish what Hitler started and rid Afghanistan of Hazaras:

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." He made a sweeping, grandiose gesture with his hands. "Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision. (35)

The novel explores the activities of the Russian Coup in Afghanistan and how they patrolling their soldier in the street of the Afghanistan: "[...] Russian soldiers patrolling the sidewalks, no tanks rolling up and down the streets of my city, their turrets swiveling like accusing fingers, no rubble, no curfews, no Russian Army Personnel Carriers weaving through the bazaars" (99). He also clarifies the sexual exploitation of Afghan women by the Russian soldiers at the time of war:

"I want you to ask this man something ", Baba said. He said it to Karim, but looked directly at the Russian officer. "Ask him where his shame is." They spoke. "He says this is war. There is no shame in war." "Tell him he's wrong. War doesn't negate decency. It demands it, even more than in times of peace." (100)

Due to the Russian invasion many Afghan people were compelled to leave their homeland and their property and seek for help in other country as refugees. Likewise, Amir and his father are also destined to leave their country. Amir and his father and other refugees escape from their homeland by sitting in the tank. In the tank they face the so many difficulties. Here Khaled Hosseini presents the reality of the refugees in the other country and what sort of job they do for survival;

Baba found a job off Washington Boulevard as an assistant at a gas station owned by an Afghan acquaintance – he'd started looking for work the same week we arrived. Six days a week, Baba pulled twelve-hour shifts pumping gas running the register, changing oil, and washing windshields. [...] The electronic bell over the door would ding-dong when I walked in and Baba would look over his shoulder, wave, and smile, his eyes watering from fatigue. (113)

Hosseini describes how the Taliban is terrorizing Afghanistan and creating a discourse of hegemony. Through the help of his fictional character Rahim Khan who considers these points to the protagonist Amir in this way though they had

been received initially as heroes. Rahim Khan is further involved in this issue. People in Kabul are afraid of leaving their houses because of frequent shootings and bombings. Moreover, these lines give detailed about the reality of Afghanistan during the period of 1992 to 1996 through this extract;

[...] [W]hen the Northern Alliance took over Kabul between 1992 and 1996 different factions claimed different parts of Kabul. "If you went from the Shar-e-Nau section to Kerteh-Parwan to buy a carpet, you risked getting shot by a sniper or getting blown up by a rocket [...]. He told me how people knocked holes in the walls of their homes so they could bypass the dangerous streets and would move down the block from hole to hole. In other parts, people moved about in underground tunnels. (174)

Even the Taliban destroy the orphanage, with many children inside it. He further clarifies the destruction of the Afghanistan. Rahim Khan further explains the rule of Taliban and their power exercise in Afghanistan:

The fictional character Rahim Khan narrates the story of Afghanistan by describing the daily activities and fighting which had happened in the street of Kabul and other cities. He describes accordingly: "[...] [O]ur ears became accustomed to the whistle of falling shells, to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days [...] proverbial hell on earth" (185-186).

He critically addresses the prohibited culture of Afghanistan that is kite flying rituals. Every winter the people of Afghanistan enjoy flying kite but when the Taliban ruled upon the Afghanistan they prohibited Kite Flying and massacred the Hazara ethnic groups in Mazar-i-Sharif. He states "the Taliban banned kite fighting. And two years later, in 1998, they massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif (187)." It gives the real picture of Afghanistan during that time. Hosseini furthermore describes the situation of Afghanistan with the help of Hassan. Hassan mentions the details about the condition of the women and men in streets of Afghanistan and he further highlights the victimization of the minorities by saying:

Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killing. Always the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets; it is a part of our lives here, Amir Agha. The savages who rule our watan don't care about human decency. [...] I do expect stand and watch my wife get beaten? If I fought, that dog would happen to my Sohrab? The streets are full enough already of hungry orphans and every day I thank Allah that I am alive, not because I fear death, but because my wife has a husband and my son is not an orphan. (189-90)

He is concerned with the painful situation of the ethnic group the Hazaras, how the Taliban create discourse by destroying the Hazara ethnicity, Hazaras are not the true Afghan. Amir has become a foreigner in his own homeland. At the same time, he is very much like the person he was. It is true that in America, Amir

experiences suffering and hardship, from having to learn English to not having money to seeing Baba degraded to watching him get sick and die. He says, "I feel like a tourist in my own country" (203).

The war between the Russians and the Taliban creates poverty, economic crisis, fear and uncertainty of life in Afghanistan. This kind of war destroyed the public's villages, streets, and other physical structures of Afghanistan. These things are presented very clearly in this novel. The reader can conveniently visualize what Khaled Hosseini presents as the real history of the country. The Taliban have destroyed not only the village, natural resources, innocent people but also the cultural heritage which are built hundreds of years ago. They destroy the giant Buddhas in the Bamiyan: "'What heritage?' I said. 'The Taliban have destroyed what heritage Afghan had. You saw what they did to the giant Buddhas in Bamiyan'" (294).

Due to the war many children are compelled to leave their house and live in the street as beggars. They are seemed grim-faces and thin due to the lack of food. They sat in the lap of their burqua-clad mother alongside the busy street and chanted for money. Khaled Hosseini attempts to demonstrate the destructive infrastructure which were damaged. It is symbolic representation of the war. It is easily demonstrated that what kind of destruction happens in Afghanistan and how the people suffer from the war and displace from their country and being refugee in another country.

In incorporating the stoning at Ghazi Stadium into his story, Hosseini brings to life something about which most non-Afghans have only heard. The event is all the more significant because we experience it through Amir's eyes, American eyes, and eyes that are unaccustomed to this type of unchecked violence and injustice. Beyond their sheer violence, the deaths of the accused adulterers in Ghazi Stadium embody what is happening to the Afghan people under the Taliban. The victims are accused of being adulterers, but from what we know about the Taliban from Rahim Khan, Hassan, and Farid's accounts, they may just have looked at a Talib the wrong way. They are killed in public, supposedly to make an example for others; in truth, their public murders are meant to intimidate the masses and bring them under even closer control.

The political landscape had changed when the Twin Towers had fallen in New York City and the United States bombed Afghanistan and captured the government of Taliban and ruled over the country. In this act the Taliban are compelled to escape from the American's eye because America claimed that the Taliban protected Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. To take the revenge of the destruction of the twin towers, America suddenly attacked in Afghanistan which is ruled by Taliban. America blames that Taliban give shelter to Osama Bin

laden. Due to the American invasion in Afghanistan Taliban's compelled to hide them with the fear of America. It is clear that America creates the discourse of hegemony by using the power. After the American invasion in Afghanistan, America forms the new government with the leadership of the Hamid Karzai.

The title refers to a traditional tournament for Afghan Children in which kite flyers compete slicing through the strings of their opponents with their own razor-sharp, grass-encrusted strings. To be the child who wins the tournament by drowning all the other kites and to be the "runner" who chases down the last losing kite as it flutters to earth, is the greatest honor of all. Hosseini's novel soars in that metaphor of flyer and runner:

Every winter, districts in Kabul held a kite-fighting tournament. If you were a boy living in Kabul, the day of the tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season. [...] I felt like a soldier trying to sleep in the trenches the night before a major battle. And that wasn't so far off. In Kabul, fighting kites was little like going to war. (43)

Similar to Afghanistan's tumultuous history, Afghan kite flying involves mid-air duels between the rivals. Kite flyers attempt to down their adversary's kites analogous to the fighting between the Afghan government and mujahidin guerrilla factions whose hands are cut and bloodied, as is the hand of the kite flyer when the ground grass coating of the kite string sears through the hands. In most cases, kite flyer is encouraged to kite duel aggressively at high altitudes by the 'string giver' who usually holds the string reel. His role is not much different than the foreign power that instigated all Afghan sides into battle to fight their proxy war by providing arms, training, and intelligence.

When the opponent's kite has been drowned, then the real battle turns into a race, the kite run, to see who retrieves the fallen kite. This is symbolic to the 1992 event in Afghanistan when ethno-religious warlords looted and pillaged Kabul and other cities in a race to see who can amass the most booty. Interestingly enough, in 1994 the emerging Taliban regime banned kite fighting and an assortment of other activities. The title *The Kite Runner* is thus symbolically employed by Hosseini in his novel.

## **5. Conclusion**

*The Kite Runner* is profoundly concerned with the tough situation and hard times of Afghanistan under the tyranny of Taliban. The exploration of power relations represented in the novel provides the reader with an illuminating picture of the real condition of life in contemporary Afghanistan often neglected in the journalistic portrayal of this country. The Russian and American

hegemonic forces over Afghan people and the destruction of culture, natural resources and old heritage of Afghanistan are vividly represented throughout the course of the novel. Poverty, cultural disasters, refugee problems, and domination upon the minority ethnicity, ethnic cleansing, hunger, landmine and several other anti-humanitarian conditions, as some of the consequences of the wars in Afghanistan, are critically treated in the novel. Hosseini delivers an authentic Afghan experience, both in that period in Kabul and in the immigrant community in America. The novel includes and represents the ideological misbehavior of both the invading forces and the oppressed subjects in contemporary Afghanistan.

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