

# In Pursuit of Me

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**Abstract**—The largest continent on Earth holds in its center the country of Afghanistan with its rich, unique and proud culture. A land that almost got crushed of its original form due to Taliban militia and civil war followed by insurgency after a decade of its rise. An honorable man in the Afghan - Pashtun society and his legitimate son are forced to move out of their homeland for survival. The western nation also emerged 'World Super Power', accepts them as refugees provides them shelter and food but did it really satisfy the 'Afghan' in them is the question in its wake. This paper aims to analyze the rich culture of the native folk and also their anguish and bewilderment in a foreign land meanwhile discussing the struggles of two people; one suffering in cross cultural conflict and the other in search of his own identity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“There is a joy in the pursuit of anything”-Robert Herni.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American writer. Among the diaspora writers Khaled Hosseini could be considered as one of the most influential writers. Khaled Hosseini was born on March 4, 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. He grew up in Kabul the oldest of the five children born to his father, Nasser, who worked as a diplomat in Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His mother worked in girls' high school teaching the Persian language. With their careers, his parents afforded the boy a life of privilege, living in the middle class neighbourhood of Wazir Akbar Khan – one of the wealthiest parts of Kabul and where the American embassy is located. Nasser moved Khaled and his family to Paris in 1976 after securing a job in the city. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1980, the Hosseini family secured political asylum in the United States and moved to San Jose, California.

Hosseini studied biology at 'Santa Clara University' and he had received his bachelor's degree eight years later. In 1999, he attended the 'School Of Medicine' at the University of California in San Diego. There he pursued his M. D. for four years. It was at the 'Cedars-Sinai Medical Center' where Hosseini began and completed his residency in internal medicine, continuing on to practice for over ten years. Khaled Hosseini is married to Roya and has two children, Farah and Haris. The family lives together in Northern California.

While practicing medicine, Hosseini wrote short stories for publication. When the Taliban banned kite fighting in Afghanistan, it hit him hard because of his personal love for kite fighting. He wrote one short story reminiscing his childhood days, started in 1997 and called it *The Kite Runner*. The story was rejected by *The Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Esquire*. Four years later, heeding to the advice of a friend Hosseini expanded the short story into a novel. In 2003, Hosseini released his first novel *The Kite Runner*, the story of a young boy, Amir, struggling to establish a closer rapport with his father and coping with memories of a haunting childhood event. The novel is set in Afghanistan, from the fall of the monarchy until the collapse of the Taliban regime, and in the San Francisco Bay Area, specifically in Fremont, California. *The Kite Runner* was awarded the Exclusive Books Boeke Prize in 2004.

Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, published in 2007, and set in Afghanistan. The story takes a strong more feminine perspective. It follows the story of two women, Mariam and Laila, whose lives become entwined. The novel was released by Riverhead Books on May 22, 2007. This novel was awarded Best Read of the Year at British Book Awards in 2008 and Best Adult Fiction at Book Sense: Book of the Year Awards in 2008. His third novel, *And the Mountain Echoed*, released on May 21, 2013. It won the Goodreads Choice Award in 2013.

Khaled Hosseini as a physician, novelist and a humanitarian provides an imaginative perspective on social political and cultural social realities. He used fiction as a medium to reflect the Afghan realities in his novels during pre-Soviet invasion, Mujahedeen, Taliban and post-Taliban period. *The Kite Runner* reveals the life of Afghanistan under Taliban rule and post – Taliban Afghanistan.

After four decades of war, women and children have suffered more than other people in Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini is a Humanitarian activist launched The Khaled Hosseini Foundation (TKHF) in 2008. TKHF funds grantees provide humanitarian relief and shelter to families, economic opportunity for women, and healthcare and education for children in Afghanistan. The aim of this foundation is to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people

in Afghanistan. This is a separate endeavor from his involvement with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The Afghan Diaspora in the United States has made significant contribution to the educational sector in Afghanistan. In 2006, Khaled Hosseini was honored by the UN Refugee Agency and named as U. S envoy to UNHCR. In his role, he traveled to war torn villages in the northern region to his native Afghanistan in 2007.

Hosseini through his works seems to be well aware of his journey back home. He seems to seek satisfaction in a more humanistic way through his activism and social responsibility and rehabilitation. Being away from homeland for many decades of war, he feels a sense of guilt. Later he wants to reconnect and be part of the reconstruction of Afghanistan through his novels.

Few years before publishing *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini worked as a medical internist at Kaiser Hospital in Mountain View, California. In 1999, Hosseini learned through a news report that the Taliban had banned kite flying in Afghanistan, a restriction he found particularly cruel. The news affected him greatly as he had grown up with the sport while living in Afghanistan. He was motivated to write twenty five pages short story about two boys who fly kites in Kabul. His submitted copies to *Esquire* and *The New Yorker* were rejected. He rediscovered the manuscript in his garage in March 2001 and begun to expand it into a novel with the suggestion of his friend.

Originally the author had no idea of much darkness for the novel. Hosseini admitted that the plot grew much darker than he planned it to be. The editor Cindy Spiegel described that, by helping, Hosseini's rework would become a debut book in common. *The Kite Runner* covers a multigenerational period and focuses on the relationship between parents and their children. The latter was unintentional; Hosseini developed an interest in the theme while in the process of writing. He later divulged that he frequently came up with pieces of the plot by drawing pictures of it.

Riverhead Books published *The Kite Runner*, ordering an initial printing of 50, 000 copies in hardback. It was released on May 29, 2003, and the paperback edition was released a year later. Hosseini took a year long absence from practicing medicine to promote the book, singing copies, speaking at various events, and raising funds for Afghan causes. Originally, the novel was published in English and was later translated into forty two languages in 38 countries. In 2013, Riverhead released the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition with a new gold-rimmed cover and a foreword by Hosseini. In the first two years following the publication, over 70, 000 hardback copies of the novel were sold along with 1, 25, 000 paperback copies. It started appearing in the best seller lists in September 2004 and became a number one *New York Times* best seller in March 2005. *The Kite Runner* easily divides into three main sections; Amir's childhood in Kabul; Amir and Baba's years in Fremont, California; and offers the possibility of

redemption though by no means is redemption assured. The early years in Kabul are charmed. The rest of *The Kite Runner's* universe take shape around the early events of the novel.

## 2. THE PURSUIT

"Stop hating yourself for what you are not. Start loving yourself for what you are". Personal identity is found from our birth and for some till we are adults. Forming a personal identity is extremely important, because the question 'who am I' is one of those big questions that we all crave to find an answer to. In the novel, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, the main characters Amir and Baba seek their identity. One struggles to create and other mourns the loss of it in a foreign land. The book is unquestionably intense, but it is well worth the read.

*The Kite Runner* is narrated by Amir, the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman, who immigrates to America with his father after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In America, Amir becomes part of the Afghan subculture in California, meets his wife Soraya, and becomes a successful author. His past haunts him, as in childhood he had witnessed and failed to prevent the assault and rape of his servant and friend Hassan, who was left behind in Afghanistan when Amir and his father emigrated. Amir eventually returns to Afghanistan after he receives a letter from one of his father's friends named Rahim Khan, and he discovers that Hassan had fathered a son, Sohrab, who was kidnapped by a member of the Taliban. Amir undertakes to rescue Sohrab as an act of redemption for not preventing or speaking about the rape of Hassan when they were children. [3, 2]

The customs and practices of Afghan society are really palpable in the story and Amir also takes part of it. For instance, as an Afghan, Amir celebrated *Eid*, played kites, sacrificed a lamb, and had a habit of greeting every guest in an event, eaten together from a large plate with family, and so on. Amir is included in the upper class society of Afghanistan. He is the son of a very wealthy and influential man in Kabul. "So Baba proved them all wrong by not only running his own business but by becoming one of the richest merchants in Kabul. Baba and Rahim Khan built a successful carpeting business, two pharmacies, and a restaurant" [1, 16]. Amir is financially secure in his childhood life in Afghanistan. He has access to better education, better books, better food, better recreational activities, and better treatment in society. The ethnic cultural background is also considered superior in the society. Amir is a Pashtun. His childhood life is considerably more fortunate because he is a Pashtun. In Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul, Pashtun society is seen as a more civilized and educated ethnic group. To conclude in a nutshell, Amir comes from a culture where he is a privileged individual who get superior advantages through the construction of class and ethnic hierarchy. [2, 43]

However, the superiority and privilege Amir attains based on his cultural background are exactly the reasons of his sufferings. Amir, as a boy, always feel that he is out of place – the standard and hierarchy that on the surface favor him become the means to bring pain into his life. The excess of material things in Amir’s life causes him to suffer from the indifference and distance between him and his father, Baba. Baba is disappointed because Amir does not seem strong and masculine. Throughout the first part of the novel, Amir is described as a meek, introverted, not masculine child, a coward compared to Baba who is strong, masculine, brave and hard-headed. “Of course, marrying a poet was one thing, but fathering a son who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting. Well, that wasn’t how Baba had envisioned it, I suppose. Real men – real boys – played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young” [1, 21]

Amir internalizes a perception that he is an unwanted and a disappointing child to his Baba since Amir builds the perception of himself by mirroring Baba’s opinions of him. Thus, Amir becomes a child who is too hard on himself, constantly trying to win Baba’s love and affection, however, most of the times falls short on Baba’s expectation. Even in one time, Baba blatantly feels dissatisfied with Amir is a very different person than Baba. Taking point to the extreme, Amir eavesdrops how Baba sometimes thinks that Amir is not his son. The conversation between Baba and Rahim Khan below justifies that.

“‘Now who’s oversimplifying?’ Baba said. ‘Look, I know there’s a fondness between you and him and I am happy about that. Envious, but happy. I mean that. He needs someone who understands him, because God knows I don’t. But something about Amir troubles me in a way I can’t express. It’s like, if I hadn’t seen the doctor pull him out out of my wife with my own eyes, I’d never believe he’s my son’”. [1, 25]

In order to win Baba’s love, Amir lies that Hassan steals his money and his watch resulting in Hassan and his father, Ali, to move out from Amir’s house. In consequence, Amir also internalizes the identity of a betrayer and a sinner. He does it because he wants to gain Baba’s affection. Amir feels sad and bitter even when Baba holds an extravagant birthday party for him. All the material things he gets never amount to Baba’s love Amir so years for. [2, 48]

Although Amir views America as a place of redemption, there are hints of a barrier to full inclusion into American society. Even before Amir lives in America, many aspects in his life are influenced by American culture. Amir grows up with liberal values taught by his father in his childhood life. Baba lives by his own rules not bound by the conservative values. Such exposure also influences Amir to be more open minded and prefer secularized western way of thinking. American influences are not only recognized through the life style and habits that Amir does. It also happens when Amir learnt literature and western perspectives when he was a child. He reads Victor Hugo, Jules Verne, Mark Twain, Ian Fleming as

well as the authors from Afghanistan. Amir’s reading materials also play a part in influencing him to be more American. [2, 48]

“The proof of his American culture is not only materialized on something apparent such as books and recreational activities. Amir’s inherent values and ideologies are also westernized. For example, he accepts Soraya as his wife, even though in the past Soraya has run away and slept with another man. America in itself is a chance for Amir to start a new life – to be happy again. Amir suffers in Afghanistan but America understands him. “America was different, America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far...If nothing else, for that I embraced America” [1, 148].

Life in America also gives Amir a chance to pursue his education based on his passion. In Afghanistan, his dream to be a writer is ridiculed. His traits of being an introverted child who likes poetry are rejected. However, in America, all of those things are accepted. Amir grows to be an adult who is in line with his true calling. America accepts Amir as who he is. America supports Amir to be a writer.

Baba lives and develops most of his life in Afghanistan. The cultures of Afghan and Pashtun are interwoven strongly in his personality and behaviors. Baba comes from an Islamic culture that upholds patriarchal values strongly. Baba was brought up within this construction of patriarchal values. Thus, Baba manifests this value in his ways of handling his family. People also respects Baba because of his power and his masculinity. Baba is seen as a strong powerful man and he puts importance into a man-oriented strength and habit. This view affects Amir’s childhood greatly since Baba’s expects Amir to be like him. Baba shows disgust and dislike when Amir cries over a death of a horse man. Afghan culture is also clearly embedded in Baba’s habits. Baba is a very generous individual who helps others a lot and yet very reluctant to be paid back.

Afghan people value brotherhood and unconditional favor with their own community and people. Baba is no exception. This is exactly why when Baba moves to the US, he is bewildered by the individualistic values there.

Afghan people value honor and pride as their utmost priorities as well, particularly for the men. Baba reaches America as a prideful individual. He rejects food stamps or any kind of social welfare given by the US government. Baba hates pity and Baba believes that every honorable Afghan man should work and stand on his own feet. Baba also upholds highly of his political pride and standpoint. Baba hates the Russian. He takes it to the extreme when he refuses to be treated by a Russian doctor even though the doctor is born in the US. “I do not care where he was born, he’s *Roussi*” [1, 168]. Baba also follows several Afghanistan traditions that are mostly derived from Islamic culture. [2, 54]

Afghanistan is Baba's kingdom where all the social and financial privileges work for Baba's favor and interest. Baba's relationship with other people in Afghanistan are also strong. The brotherhood and respect are shared mutually. Baba tends to set his own moral values, personal thoughts, and principles rather than following what is inside the religion or any other religious scriptures. Baba's perspective when he arrives in the US is completely different with his perspective when he is still in Afghanistan. Baba loves the idea of America but he can't bear to live in America. Baba hates the condition when he moves to America. Everything seems to dissatisfy him. Not only that, the job Baba has also is physically draining. He works as a gas station attendant. Baba does not like to learn English, as well. He likes the culture of America when he is still in Afghanistan, but Baba hates American language when it is necessary for him to use it. While Amir grows, Baba mourns in identity. [2, 57]

### 3. CONCLUSION

In regards of identity, Amir's and Baba's are dynamic and keep changing throughout the novel since identity is something that is not fixed. The first phase is the identity Amir and Baba acquire in Afghanistan before they move to America. Their identities in Afghanistan are closely affected by their background and environment. Amir's identity is built and manifested around the character of Baba and the social system of Afghanistan are closely affected by their background and environment. Amir's identity is built and manifested around the character of Baba and the social system of Afghanistan. Amir's identity transforms from a privileged unloved boy into a poor loved son. Whereas Baba's identity transforms from a superior member of ethnic group into a marginalized member of the society. The identity disposition in *The Kite Runner* goes as follows. Baba's identity disposition was that of a powerful wealthy man into a poor working class society, a stubborn and strict father into a more compassionate one. Despite the disposition, Baba's identity was resistant while Amir's was hybrid.

### References

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