

**TREATMENT OF HISTORICAL SOURCES: A STUDY OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S  
*THE KITE RUNNER AND A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS***

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**Abstract**

Khaled Hosseini left his native land, Afghanistan soon after the disruption and conflict that ravaged the life of common Afghan masses. He had to leave his native land to survive the ensuing catastrophic circumstances that were witnessed after the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy and Soviet Military intervention. Although, educated in medicine Khaled Hosseini felt interest and urge in writing Fiction. He authored novels- *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) portraying the life, culture, custom, tradition of his native land, Afghanistan. These novels are deeply concerned with the hard life and hard times of Afghanistan under the tyranny of various regimes. Afghanistan, its people and its surroundings became the background of his fiction. He used the historical sources as a tool to tell his stories that revolved around the characters who presented to his readers the society of his time and when he left his native land to settle in America. The novels, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, form the historical sources as the background to his fiction writing. The present study is devoted to place Khaled Hosseini's select novels in the historical and social context of Afghanistan and its impact on his characters and fiction writing.

**Keywords-** History, Literature, Fiction, Culture, Conflict, Coup, Monarchy, Taliban.

**Introduction**

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. He was the eldest of the five children to his parents. He is an Afghan-American novelist, physician, activist, humanitarian, and UNHCR goodwill ambassador. His father worked as a diplomat for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul and his mother taught as a teacher of Persian language at high school level. Khaled Hosseini and his family moved to Iran in 1970. There his father worked for the Embassy of Afghanistan. In 1976 his father got a job in France and moved the family there. They could not return to Afghanistan because of the 1978 Saur Revolution. In this revolution the Peoples Democratic Party Afghanistan (PDPA) captured the power. In

1980, soon after the beginning of the Soviet Afghan War, the family of Khaled Hosseini sought Political Asylum in the United States. They started living in San Jose California. Khaled Hosseini describes the experience of living outside his native land as "a culture shock" and "very alienating".

Despite their distance from the country's turmoil, the family was aware of the situations faced by a number of their friends and relatives in Afghanistan.

Khaled Hosseini gained attention after the publication of his first novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003). After the success of his first novel, Khaled Hosseini retired from Medicine to write full time. He authored two more novels that include *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) and a short fiction on the refugee crisis of Syria, *The Sea Prayer* (2018).

Khaled Hosseini is currently a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). He has been working to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan through the Khaled Hosseini Foundation raising funds to build homes for refugees returning to Afghanistan.

Khaled Hosseini's native land, Afghanistan were all of his novels are set has a tumultuous history. Afghanistan has witnessed violence and bloodshed. Even today there is civil war, religious extremism, conflict and strife.

### **Historical Background**

Since History is the study of the events that occurred in past as described in written documents. And there being close relation between History and Literature in discovering history of a race, feelings, aspirations, customs, and traditions of a people. Since it is the responsibility of a historian to accurately record events that produce important changes in the lives of people who live in a community, nation or the whole world. Literary artist's on the other hand also record events, however, their focus is on communicating intellectual and emotional interpretation of these events to reader. Literature is creative part of history and literary writings being creative index of history as lived experience of the past possesses significant relation with the present.

Among various themes, history is one of the important one in fictional narratives. A literary artist may portray the manners, customs, traditions, and racial conditions of the people of a particular historical background. Historical fiction can present a historical event to complement with the narratives in which characters possess all the features of that era. In order to understand the fiction of Khaled Hosseini, the historical background of Afghanistan post World War II need to be analyzed.

### **The Reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah**

Zahir Shah ruled Afghanistan during the period 1933 to 1973. Until 1946 Zahir Shah ruled with the help of his uncle Sardar Mohammad Hashim Khan. He held the post of Prime Minister and continued the policies of Nadir Khan. In 1946, Zahir Shah's uncles, Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan, became the Prime Minister. He started an experiment allowing greater political freedom. However, he reversed the policy when it went further than he expected. In 1953, he was replaced as Prime Minister by Mohammed Daoud Khan, who was the Zahir Shah's cousin and brother-in-law. Daoud Khan looked for a closer relationship with the Soviet Union and a more distant one towards Pakistan. But disputes with Pakistan resulted to an economic crisis. Daoud Khan thus was asked to resign in 1963. From 1963 to 1973, Zahir Shah involved actively in his administrative affairs.

In 1964, King Zahir Shah adopted a liberal constitution. It provided for a bicameral legislature to which the king appointed one-third of the deputies. The people elected rest of the third. The remaining was selected indirectly by provincial assemblies. Zahir Shah's experiments in democracy produced a string of reforms. However, it let the growth of unofficial extremist parties. It included the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan that had close ideological ties with the Soviet Union.

### **The Reign of Mohammed Sardar Daoud Khan**

Amid charges of corruption and weak economic conditions created by the severe drought of 1971, former Prime Minister Mohammad Sardar Daoud Khan captured the power in a non-violent coup on July 17, 1973. Daoud Khan abolished the monarchy and 1964 constitution. He also declared Afghanistan a republic making himself as its first President and Prime Minister. His attempts to bring about much needed economic and social reforms met with little success. The new constitution adopted in February 1977 failed to heal the severe political instability.

### **The People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan**

It was 28 April 1978, when PDPA, led by Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Amin Taha overthrew the government of Mohammad Daoud Khan. He was assassinated along with all his family members in a bloody military coup. This bloody military coup became famous as the Saur Revolution. Nur Mohammad Taraki was made President, Prime Minister and General Secretary of the PDPA. The country was also renamed as the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. While in power the PDPA adopted a liberal and Marxist-Leninist agenda. It started to replace religious and traditional laws with secular and Marxist-Leninist ones. Men were bound to cut their beards; women on the other hand could not wear a chador. Mosques too were placed off limits. The PDPA regime ushered a number of reforms on the rights of women. Forced marriages were banned and granting women state recognition of right to vote. However, the PDPA regime imprisoned, tortured and murdered

thousands of members of the traditional elite class, the members of religious establishment, and the intellectual class. The PDPA regime lasted, in some form or another, until April 1992.

### **The Presence of Soviet Union in Afghanistan**

The reforms made by People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan were deeply unpopular among the more traditional rural population of Afghanistan and established power structures in place. The oppressive nature of the "Democratic Republic" vigorously suppressed opposition and executed thousands of political prisoners. This led to the rise of anti-government armed groups. By April 1979, large parts of Afghanistan were against PDPA and in open rebellion. The PDPA itself witnessed deep internal rivalries between the Khalqists and Parchamites. In September 1979, People's Democratic Party General Secretary Nur Mohammad Taraki was assassinated under orders of the second-in-command, Hafizullah Amin. It worsened the relations with the Soviet Union. With the rising fears that Hafizullah Amin may be planning to build relations with the United States, the Soviet government, under leader Leonid Brezhnev, decided to deploy the 40th Army across the border on December 24, 1979. On their arrival they staged a coup. They killed General Secretary Hafizullah Amin and installed Soviet loyalist Babrak Karmal from the rival faction Parcham. The deployment had been variously called an "invasion" (by Western media and the rebels) or a legitimate supporting intervention (by the Soviet Union and the Afghan government) on the basis of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

### **The Soviet-Afghan War**

The Soviet–Afghan War was a bloody conflict wherein insurgent groups known as the Mujahideen collectively fought war for nine years against the Soviet Army and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan regime throughout the 1980s. The conflict was mostly witnessed in the Afghan countryside. The Mujahideen groups were supported and backed primarily by the United States, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, and the United Kingdom. Around 2,000,000 civilians were killed and millions of Afghans fled Afghanistan as refugees particularly to Pakistan and Iran. The war caused grave destruction in Afghanistan. The Afghan refugees who fled to Iran and Pakistan brought with them stories of murder, rape, torture and depopulation of civilians by the Soviet forces. The Soviet forces withdrew in 1989 given the mounting international pressure and great number of casualties on both sides.

### **The Afghan Civil War (1992-1996)**

The Afghan Civil War was yet another catastrophe on the Afghan masses. After Soviet withdrew, the control on Kabul and establishing the Islamic State of Afghanistan led to infighting among the Mujahideen rebel groups. The controversy among these groups escalated into another full blown conflict. Violent wars were fought among different occupying Mujahideen groups in Kabul. The country witnessed heavy bombardment from these groups resulting in great destruction. Each of these groups was supported by an outside

power, such as Pakistan, Iran, or Saudi Arabia. This bloody civil war lasted until 1996 after the Taliban, a new militia backed by Pakistan and enforced by several thousand al-Qaeda fighters from Arab countries, took control of Kabul, Afghanistan.

### **The Taliban Era (1996-2001)**

The Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. The Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. During their reign, they imposed on the parts of Afghanistan the political and judicial interpretation of Islam. They issued decrees forbidding women from working outside the home, attending schools or leaving their homes without being accompanied by a male relative. The Taliban's capture of Kabul involved a new military-political resistance force. The new resistance force was called Northern Alliance led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Masood & Abdul Rashid Dostum. They fought against the Taliban and their Islamic Emirate. Throughout this period the Taliban were in control of almost all of the country, as the Northern Alliance fought most of the time in defense.

In December 2001 the Taliban government was toppled. A new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai was formed. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established by the UN Security Council to help the Karzai administration and provide basic security to the Afghan people.

### **Understanding *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from Historical Perspective**

*The Kite Runner* published in 2003 presents the contemporary Afghan life, history and violence due to continued conflicts. The novel is authored portraying the modern history of Afghanistan, its people and its surroundings. The novels also take the reader back to the time of monarchy in Afghanistan in the 1960s. The plot of the novel is crafted around the life of an Afghan boy, Amir who was born in Kabul and lived there until adolescence. Amir is the narrator and the protagonist of the novel around whose life revolves the main events and incidents of the novel. He is an Afghan-American boy because he takes Asylum in America, after the Soviet invasion, where he has been living since his departure from Afghanistan.

*The Kite Runner* also offers the ethnic and religious conflicts in Afghanistan. The Hazara Shia Community is oppressed by the ruling Sunni Pashtu Community. Amir's half brother Hassan, officially known as the son of Hazara servant, Ali and his wife. Hassan is mistreated for being a member of Hazara Community. The final part of the novel presents haunting images during Taliban Era: a man, desperate to feed his children, tries to sell his artificial leg in the market, an adulterous couple are stoned to death in a stadium during the halftime of a football match; a rouged young boy is forced into prostitution, dancing the sort of steps once performed by an organ grinder's monkey.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini offers a vivid story that reminds us how long his people have been struggling to overcome the forces of violence and bloodshed, the forces that still continue to haunt them even today. *The Kite Runner* is a portrayal of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the year 2002. Afghanistan having a long and complicated history but came to international attention only after the coup of 1973. Afghanistan was a monarchy ruled by King Mohammad Zahir Shah from 1933-1973. In 1973, when Zahir Shah was on vacation to Italy, his cousin and former prime minister of Afghanistan, Mohammad Daoud Khan seized power. 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. However, Daud Khan was violently overthrown and killed along with his family by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The PDPA was a Communist party and therefore held close ties with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet-Afghan War, the Afghan Civil War and the Taliban rule and the consequent fall of the Taliban are all such events portrayed in the novel and their effects on the lives of his characters. The events of September 11, 2001, when the United States invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. All such events of history of modern day Afghanistan have been captured in *The Kite Runner*. The end of *The Kite Runner* occurs in 2002, when a provisional government under the presidency of Hamid Karzai was in place.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 2007. The novel revolves around the Afghanistan's political history where common masses face a lot of social, political, economic, and cultural upheavals. The plot of the novel is based on the lives of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila, during the last three decades of Afghanistan. The novel begins with the regime of Daoud Khan (1973-1978) and ends with the fall of the Taliban rule (1996-2001). During Daoud Khan's regime, the people of Afghanistan witnessed development in all sectors, though not on a broader scale. After Daoud Khan's assassination, the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan started ruling the country. However, their reign was met with revolt and opposition from all corners of Afghanistan. This led to the invasion of Soviet Union over Afghanistan in 1979. During the Soviet rule, Afghanistan underwent several changes. The people of Afghanistan witnessed new developments in many sectors including education and employment of women. During Soviet rule many progressive Afghan people supported them. However, the Soviet rule had to face the revolt by many militant groups collectively known as Mujahideen supported and backed primarily by the United States, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

Although, the Soviet rule ended in 1989, the factional infighting that took place from 1992 to 1994 among the Mujahideen groups due to their controversy over establishing of Islamic State of Afghanistan and its affairs. This conflict led to the violence in Afghanistan from all the corners killing and injuring thousands of Afghan civilians. The

infighting was fuelled by ethnic and sectarian animosity. The Afghanistan witnessed mass executions, rape, torture; looting and indiscriminate bombardment of residential areas. After the Civil war, the Taliban took hold of the power and control of Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban imposed the brutal rules in the name of Islam. They imposed inhuman rules bringing the country into extreme fundamentalism. They imposed new Sharia law and banning television and music. Referring to the Taliban flyers, Khaled Hosseini in this novel makes a travesty that religion is no more under the control of God, rather is controlled by the tyrants: "Our Watan is now known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. These are the laws that we will enforce and you will obey: All citizens must pray five times a day. If it is prayer time and you are caught doing something other, you will be beaten. All men will grow their beards...All boys will wear turbans ...Singing is forbidden. Dancing is forbidden. Playing cards, playing chess, gambling, and kite flying are forbidden. Writing books, watching films, and painting pictures are forbidden. If you keep parakeets, you will be beaten. Your birds will be killed. If you steal, your hand will be cut off at the wrist. If you steal again, your foot will be cut off." (Khaled Hosseini 270). The Taliban régime imposed many inhuman decrees and people were forced to follow them. Fearful of being punished for little cause, the common people preferred staying at home. Because of deplorable state of daily affairs and constant threat to life many left Afghanistan, but those who could not afford to leave had to endure their fate. They led a life of poverty, hunger, fear, torture, and punishment. In the novel the harsh laws of Taliban regime deeply affect the lives of Laila, Mariam and Tariq. Mariam is executed publicly by the Taliban after she kills her husband, Rasheed while saving Laila. Laila and Tariq too are forced to leave the country to seek refuge in Pakistan.

However, The United States of America declared war on the Taliban soon after the Taliban attacked United States in 2001. Afghanistan once again witnessed and experienced bombs, rockets, explosives that crushed the country further. Although ravaged from all corners the people of Afghanistan saw a new hope for a better future and worked for rebuilding the country with the Hamid Karzai as new president of Democratic Afghanistan. The novel captures all these historical events and incidents and the novel ends with a tone of positivity, that Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan. They rebuild the orphanage which symbolizes the hope of rebuilding of the country. In this novel, Hosseini captures the authentic picture of Afghan history by showing the impact of the political conflicts on the life of the characters.

### **Conclusion**

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reflect the history, culture and social conditions of modern day Afghanistan. The novels present the cultural, social and political conditions of Afghanistan. These novels are deeply concerned with the hard life and hard times of Afghanistan under the tyranny of various regimes. The novels present the reader with an illuminating picture of the real condition of life in

contemporary Afghanistan. The Russian and American hegemonic forces in Afghanistan and the destruction of culture, natural resources and heritage of Afghanistan are vividly represented throughout the course of the novels. Poverty, hunger, cultural disaster, violence, refugee crisis, and dominance of majority upon the minority ethnicity and anti-humanitarian conditions are some vivid consequences of the war torn Afghanistan.

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