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Kailas N. Bodke

Head Dept. of English

SSR College of ACS, Savitribai Phule Pune University

Silvassa, UT of D&NH, India

kbodkeinc@gmail.com

### The Construct of Subaltern Consciousness in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

#### Abstract

*The Kite Runner* is Afghanistan-American novelist, Khaled Hosseini's best-selling debut novel. It's an enduring story of betrayal and redemption that presents uprising agitation in modern Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* brings to the fore many different issues throughout the novel; one such issue is the representation of Subalterns. According to Gayatri Spivak the Subalterns can't speak for themselves; they are always spoken for by others. Here an attempt is made by the writer to represent the Subalterns i.e. the Hazaras and the women characters (both Hazaras and ethnic Pashtuns). The consciousness of Subalterns is constructed thorough the story of Amir, which brings forth the stark face of modern Afghanistan. The discrimination against the Hazaras (a marginalized class) is the most obvious form of social marginalization in *The Kite Runner*. They are treated badly by many of the dominant Pashtuns before the Russian takeover, and the Taliban gain control. The Hazaras are threatened to ethnic cleansing. Afghan women face a second-class stature in both their homeland and in America. The Taliban force all women to cover themselves in the traditional Burkha and impose strict laws that restrict their right to travel or appear in public places. This paper is an attempt to investigate the narrative through the insights provided by the characters through their mute sufferings and conformity to the culture they are part of

Key Words: turbulence, representation, subalterns, consciousness, Pashtuns, Taliban, Hazaras, ethnic, burkha, etc.

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is a novel published in 2003 which tells the story of Amir who is a privileged Afghani child living alone with Baba, his father, in a large house in the prosperous Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul in the early 1970's. There is a servant's hut on the property in which lives Ali, Baba's servant, and his son, Hassan. Hassan is a Hazara, a marginalized ethnic minority in Kabul, treated poorly by Pashtuns like Amir and other boys of his age. He is best friend and servant of Amir. Hassan's mother is ethnic Hazara. Hassan's supposed father is Ali, an ethnic Hazara, who could not have kids because of Polio, which Amir learns later. Rahim Khan an ethnic Pashtun, is a business associate and close friend of Baba. He has a close relationship with Amir. Amir treatment of Hassan keeps changing as he considers him a friend or a slave according to his whims, basically to have fun without any regard for his feelings. Amir often feels jealous of the attention that Hassan receives from his father, Baba. People who are in the lower class are forced to work hard for what they have because they haven't been blessed with the luxury of being born into a wealthy family. This is true for Hassan, Ali's friend and servant, who must stay with his father and work at Ali's home to earn a living. He isn't able to educate himself by going to school, however He learns to appreciate life and everything that is given to him. Through the description we come to know that Hasan has to toil very hard in order to earn his living. He has to prepare Ali's breakfast while Ali enjoys his breakfast or complains about it without slightest concern for his friend cum slave. Hassan prepares Ali's bed, polishes his shoes, irons his cloths every day, and packs his books and pencils. The chores of Hasan's daily life shows how Hassan is a hard working young boy, in the lower class, who appreciates things and makes the best of his situation. He is a conscious, responsible, and full of energy boy, who sings and enjoys every

day before him without any grudge for the kind of life he has got. It also shows the fact that people in the lower class are able to enjoy the little things in life much more than that of the upper class, because they have to work hard and appreciate the things they work hard for. Fellow-feelings feature almost all the subaltern characters in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Amir, who constantly tries to win the favour of his father, asks Hassan to fly his kite for him? He replies him as usual "for you a thousand times is over" (1)

Every year in Kabul many kite-fighting tournaments take place, during which many of the children fly kites. The game of kite-fighting is to cut the strings of your opponents' kites with your own and be the last kite in the air. Amir was an excellent kite-fighter. After Amir winning a competition of kitting, Hassan runs to bring a kite to Amir, but he is beaten and raped by the brutal Assef, an ethnic Pashtun, in an empty street to protect Amir's kite; the coward Amir witness the assault but does not help the loyal Hassan. He even justifies his stand by saying that "He was just a Hazara, was not he?" (73) On the day after his birthday party, Amir hides his new watch in Hassan's bed to frame the boy as a thief and force his father to fire Ali, releasing his conscience from recalling his cowardice and betrayal. As Baba later tells Amir, sometimes the events of a single day changes the course of an entire life. Amir's betrayal of Hassan is one such event. It changes the course of life for both Amir and Hassan, especially putting Hassan into worst condition. This clearly shows that Ethnic Pashtuns, who are majority and dominant class treats the Hazaras, a marginalized, class very badly. Baba, Amir's father also recalls an event which tells us how the King Zaher Shah and himself, both Pashtuns "got behind the wheel of their father's Ford roadster. High on Hashish and mast on French wine, they struck and killed a Hazara husband and wife on the road." (24)

The character Assef is Pashtun and a cruel one, who raped Hassan. Assef, who became leader of Taleban, took Sohrab (son of Hassan) from orphanage in Kabul

and forced him to prostitution. He feels hatred for the Hazaras in general and for Hassan in particular: he feels that Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns and Hazara's have no right over their land. Hence he wishes to kick out them from the land of pure Afgans. The minority class was literally threatened, the women brutally raped, anyone who tries to raise voice against the Pashtun establishment is stoned to death.

Hassan and his family are the representatives of the marginalized class in Afghanistan, who are insulted, threatened, abused and used every other day. Hassan mother is seduced by Amir's father Baba. In result Hassan is an illegitimate child and half brother to Amir. Hassan's father Ali is also insulted so many times by the children and old alike due to his Hazara status. Hassan is abused by the neighborhood children for his mother being unfaithful to his father and a Hazara.

The women characters in the novel are also marginalized. Women in both the communities i.e. Pashtuns as well as Hazaras are given inferior status. They are seen as an object which complies with the desires of men. Females can be seen as material goods, and are often shown as marginalized, weak, demeaned, and subject to many double standards in today's society, and throughout earlier history. The Kite Runner shows the idea of female representation through the development and construction of female characters, combined with the setting and culture in the novel. The Kite Runner portrays the idea of females as being marginalized in many different cases. There are two females that have any back-story or focus in the book The Kite Runner, Amir's wife Soraya, and Soraya's mother. Hassan's wife is also mentioned briefly. Afghan women face a second-class stature in both their homeland and in America. The Taliban force all women to cover themselves in the traditional burka and impose strict laws that restrict their right to travel or appear in public places. When they fail to obey the rules they are publicly tortured and killed. In California, General Taheri refuses to allow his wife to sing and considers his own daughter tainted because of her

previous sexual indiscretion. Soraya General Taheri's daughter is not allowed to speak to any stranger without a female mediator, who's always her mother.

Khaled Hosseini is successful in constructing the subaltern consciousness in the novel through the characters of Hasan, his mother, his father and numerous characters who are either Hazaras or women or rebellious. The thrust of the novel is to travel into the heart of the land which is unstable and through a lot of turbulence in human history. The tale of Amir and Hasan is the tale of the unending hatred, selfish actions and sore wounds. The wounds that never heals and put us an uneasy stead for an unending series of stark questions.

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