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PORTRAYAL OF ETHNIC CLASH IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

Dr. SURESH KUMAR

Associate Prof of English

Govt College, Hisar, Haryana, India

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ABSTRACT

Discrimination is a universal phenomenon which vicissitudes its form from place to place. It is psychological reaction well known for generating conflict, injustice, oppression and exclusion. Human history has witnessed widespread predisposition on the name of caste, colour, race, language and ethnicity. People do construct and nourish a sense of superiority over the others pushing them towards margins. Racism and ethnicity are generally taken identical however, ethnicity is a sub-category of racism. Racism includes biological or physical dissimilarity while ethnicity focuses on cultural disparity. On this disproportion one group dominates and victimize the other. The post -world war scenario shattered the whole humanity and reshaped it in the shackles of colonialism. It proved a strong foundation for globalised world and the rigid walls of nationality greatly vacillated. Thus, deformed nationality brought with it the essence of hatred, conflict and gap between man and man. However, simultaneously every nation gave place to various ethnic groups to grow consciously or unconsciously.

The paper aims to evaluate *The Kite Runner* under the scanner of ethnical discord between the Hazaras and Pashtuns. The novel also gives a glimpse of Afghan history with all socio-political tremors including Afghan-Russian clash. It plunges the nation into ever-growing conflict between the two ethnic groups. Not only people struggle for their livelihood, they also grapple for their identity and self-esteem. Consequently, a mutual discord emerged in the Afghan society where Pashtun guerrilla leaders captured the social make up. They maliciously treated the Hazaras- a minority group in the country by physical as well as sexual assaults. Like Hitler, they wanted to wipe out and cleanse them ethnically.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Hazaras, Pashtuns, Sexual abuse, oppression, injustice.

Discrimination is a universal phenomenon which vicissitudes its form from place to place. It is psychological reaction well known for generating conflict, injustice, oppression and exclusion. Human history has witnessed widespread predisposition on the name of caste, colour, race, language and ethnicity. People do construct and nourish a sense of superiority over the others pushing them towards margins. Racism and ethnicity are generally taken identical however, ethnicity is a sub-category of racism. Racism includes biological or physical dissimilarity while ethnicity focuses on cultural disparity. On this disproportion one group dominates and victimize the other. The post -world war scenario shattered the whole humanity and reshaped it in the shackles

of colonialism. It proved a strong foundation for globalised world and the rigid walls of nationality greatly vacillated. Thus, deformed nationality brought with it the essence of hatred, conflict and gap between man and man. However, simultaneously every nation gave place to various ethnic groups to grow consciously or unconsciously. J.M. Yinger states:

A segment of the larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients (4)

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) presents a direct clash between two ethnic groups of Afghanistan- Pashtun and Hazara. The novel also gives a glimpse of Afghan history with all socio-political tremors including Afghan-Russian clash. It plunges the nation into ever-growing conflict between the two ethnic groups. Not only people struggle for their livelihood, they also grapple for their identity and self-esteem. Consequently, a mutual discord emerged in the Afghan society where Pashtun guerrilla leaders captured the social make up. They maliciously treated the Hazaras- a minority group in the country by physical as well as sexual assaults. Like Hitler, they wanted to wipe out and cleanse them ethnically. Ironically, Hassan, represents both the ethnic groups socially and biologically because his mother is Hazara while father comes from a Pashtun family where Hassan lives. Hassan has never been aware about his biological father- Baba-*Toophan agha*. He is a man of clout, ever conscious about winning. Baba's legitimate son Amir lives in the company of Hassan and his father Ali. Once the children mocked Ali's Mongoloid "flat nosed" features. They followed him in the streets and humiliated. This inculcated a kind of curiosity in the mind of young Amir though he himself never discriminated. The children shared the same nursing women after their respective mothers. He was unable to comprehend why Hazaras are inferior to them. In pursuit of inquiring more, he gets through one of his mother's history books in the family library. His mind blasts when he finds a complete chapter narrating Hassan' people:

... the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that the Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a" ... people called Hazaras *mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys* (Hosseini, 8).

The Hazara people never retaliated against the brutal injustice as if they were habitual and immune to all the insults. Hassan as well as his father Ali always live under the shadow of insecurity. People like Assef were almost lethal beasts who hardly needed any excuse to gulp the Hazaras. The boys truly nicknamed him as "*Goshkhor*" whom Amir adjusted as "sociopath." He was the most inexorable and originated Babalu taunt for Ali. Moreover, he was a staunch follower of Hitler and believed, "...if they had let Hitler finish what he had started, the world be a better place now" (35). Amir and Hassan could not understand who actually were 'they' in this statement. Like Hitler Amir too wanted to sanitize Afghanistan from the Hazaras. He glares at Hassan and pronounces:

"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).

Assef never liked to play, mingle and even touch a Hazara. He got furious seeing Amir and Hassan together and found people like Amir accountable for the problem. Feeling the brass knuckles, he declared, "You're part of the problem, Amir. If idiots like you and your didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them now. They'd all just go rot in Hazarajat where they belong. You're a disgrace to Afghanistan" (36). Image the hatred Assef nurtured against Amir for befriending Hassan- a Hazara boy. This explicitly displays his inborn abhorrence for the marginalized Hazara ethnicity.

When Assef along with his friends Kamal and Wali intimidated Amir and were at the verge of physical assault, Hassan charged up to strike back with his slingshot. It was Hassan's love for Amir and his loyalty towards his friend that he risked his own life in danger, other he was a submissive boy. Moreover, he retreated Amir to leave him alone. Newly gained determination of Hassan dwindled Assef and company and they retreated but before leaving a threatening warning to Amir as well as Hassan, "You should know something about me, Hazara... I am a very patient person. This isn't the end for you either, Amir... Your Hazara made a big mistake today, Amir" (37). Amir was well conscious about Assef's animosity towards Hazaras as well as his forfeited ego.

Inwardly, Assef avowed to avenge and teach a lifelong-lesson to Hassan. Something severe was going to happen with Hassan, that was confirmed. Soon Assef got the opportunity when Amir won the kite tournament and the same kite was to be restored as a symbol of victory. For Amir, his agha, Hassan ran to seize the prized possession. Enthusiastically Hassan took hold of the kite but Assef and his friends trapped him in an alley. Assef let him keep the kite as a memory of what he was going to do with that "disrespectful donkey":

Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb (66).

The barbaric incident quivered Amir's soul. He was feeling acute spinelessness inside his body and mind. He too wished to stand up for Hassan as the latter had done for him but he stooped. He became insomniac.

The Kite Runner gives a powerful picture of sexual abuse and assault against the Hazara children. The poor Afghanistan families lost many male children every year. They were either raped or sexually exploited by the guerrilla leaders. The rape of 'powerless' by those in 'power' was very common. Such political upheaval of Afghanistan compelled Amir to move to America. During his interaction with Rahim Khan, he comes to know about Hassan's son-Sohrab. Sohrab is reported to live in an orphanage in Karteh-Seh which is the most war-ravaged place in Kabul.

Amir's inner guilt compels him to visit Afghanistan to ensure a safe and respectable life. He comes to know that Hassan and his wife Farzana have been killed and Sohrab is taken away by the Talibs. Following Sohrab Amir finds that he has been attired in feministic costume and the Talib officials enjoy his dance. However, the act was not confined to dance:

The Talib spun the boy around so he faced me. He locked his arms around Sohrab's belly, rested his chin on the boy's shoulder. Sohrab looked down at his feet, but kept stealing shy, furtive glances at me. The man's hand slid up and down the boy's belly. Up and down, slowly, gently (245).

Talib's fondling of Sohrab's body displays his sexual perversity. Hosseini portrays how Hazaras have been sexually exploited due to the existing rivalry between the two ethnic groups. The novel uncovers the unflinching desire of the Pashtuns to remove every speck of Hazaras' existence from Afghanistan. Assef, the Talib, expounds the reason behind the decision of Pashtuns to cleanse Afghanistan, "Like pride in your people, your customs, your language. Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage" (261). The statement explicitly reflects the unbending hatred of Pashtuns for Hazaras and other ethnic groups that led to blood-baths, massacres, savagery and ruthlessness in Afghanistan. This very act of ethnic cleansing, land confiscation, slavery and persecution has been carried out against Hazaras. Ethnic hatred subjected children to sexual assault and violence. Amir questions Assef, "What mission is that?" I heard myself say. "Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam?" (248).

Amir brings Sohrab to US where he continues to live a secluded life. However, Amir gives in his full to revive the lost respect to Sohrab. Amir persuades Sohrab to participate in The Kite Flying tournament and becomes his kite runner though in his old age. The act brings consolation to his mind however, consolation to the minds of the Hazaras like Sohrab is still unanswerable. Amir asserts, "It was only a smile, nothing more. I

didn't make everything all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight" (324).

Thus, the novel can be termed as a fresh and powerful story of ethnic clash between two groups Pashtuns and Hazaras. Hosseini has been successful in portraying insecurity, insults and humiliation of the minorities in a poignant manner.

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