



Critical Appraisal of Hazara in Hossenei's novel, The Kite Runner

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Abstract- There reside more than fifty ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The major ethnicities include: Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara. The Durrani-Pashtun dynasty founded and ruled Afghanistan throughout its history. The Pashtun are the largest plurality followed by Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek. The Pashtun and Hazara, sunni and shia, constitute around 42% and 09 % of the total population respectively. The Hazara are considered marginalized ethnic group due to heterogeneous ethnicity as well as sect. The Kite Runner, Khaled Hossenei's debut novel, written in English, published in 2003, portrays the power relationships between the Hazara and Pashtun in Afghanistan. Edward Said's seminal work Orientalism has blurred the frontiers of orientalism. For him, the West is superior, civilized, and humane, while, the East, inferior, uncivilized, and aberrant. Orientalism is a political vision of reality that promoted difference of familiar 'Us' and strange 'Them'. Hossenei, ensuing USA's political vision of War of terror, portrays through the lens of fiction the power relationships of ethnic dominance between the Hazara and Pashtun in Afghanistan. Deviating from Said's Orientalism, this paper constructs the orientalist theoretical model: the Hazara as inferior but loyal; imaginative, humane, and protector in relation to the Pashtun depicted in the novel as superior but treacherous; unimaginative, brutal, and aberrant. The paper argues that the motivation in the novel is of power, of dominance, of a complex hegemony: to highlight the marginalize but civilized position of Hazaras in relation to the dominant but uncivilized Pashtun. Foucault's notion of exclusion is highly applicable in The Kite Runner: to fence the discourse of Hazara off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation. The methodology is qualitative and interpretive. Thus, the paper attempts to examine critically the appraisal of Hazara in the novel, The Kite Runner.

Key Words: Orientalism, Discourse Analysis, the Hazara, the Pashtun, The Kite Runner

I. INTRODUCTION

SAID'S 'ORIENTALISM'

Edward Said (1935-2003) expressed binary oppositions; West/East, *Us/Them*, Occident/Orient in his work '*Orientalism*'. His academic discourse, describes a critical approach to representations of the 'Orient' in the Eastern culture by the Western orientalists. For him, Orientalism existed, ultimately, as a political vision of reality that promoted the difference between familiar '*Us*' and strange '*Them*'. It makes statements about it, authorizes views to it, describes it, teaches it, settles it, rules over it. The relationship between 'Occident' and 'Orient' is of power, of dominance, of a complex hegemony. 'Orientalism' has been ethno-centrism, racism, imperialism, and colonialism, promoted 'Otherness', assuming that the West is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the 'Orient', irrational, undeveloped, aberrant, and inferior.

FOUCAULT'S DISCOURSE ON POWER RELATIONSHIP

Discourse, according to Michel Foucault, is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in a predictable way, regulated by a set of rules. It leads to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. The notion of exclusion is very important in Foucault's thinking about discourse. It is important to see a discourse as a set of coherent statements. It should be viewed rather existing because of a complex set of practices to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation. Foucault was more interested in the process of exclusion that engender discourse. His interest lies in the same process of exclusion in relation to knowledge. His exploration lies in the way something to be established as a fact or as true, other equally valid statements have to be discredited and denied. Foucault idea concentrate on abstract institutional processes at work to establish something as a fact or as knowledge. In other words, he is interested in the anonymous, institutionalized and rule-governed model of knowledge-

production. This institutional type anonymous and rule-governed model of knowledge has been depicted in the textual treatment of *The Kite Runner*.

WHO ARE THE HAZARA?

The Hazara reside in the central range of the Hindu Kush, in Afghanistan, a region known as Hazarajat. They are *Shia* Muslims, engaged in alpine subsistence agriculture and livestock breeding. The Hazara converted to Twelver (Imami) Shiism in the 1500s when Iran converted to the same belief by the Safavids. The conversion made them enemy of Pashtun and Uzbek (themselves Sunni) in the neighbourhood. The Hazara, descended from the Mongol armies (13th century), speak Hazargi, a dialect of Dari. There seems difficult to establish direct linguistic connections between Hazara and Mongols. A large Mongolian element exists in the Hazara dialect. It suggests fundamental cultural contact with the Mongols in history. Mousavi considers their ancestor belong to Turkic inhabitants of Central and Eastern Asia. They migrated to present Hazarajat from Southern and Northern Hindu Kush more than 2300 years ago. Besides, the Hazara had a reputation of brave and hardy race, though, among the Afghans (Pashtun) were considered faithful, industrious and intelligent as servants. Hazara formed agriculture and animal husbandry until the second half of 19th century, however, money economy had been unknown to them. Resultantly, we can conclude Hazara as descendants of Chingiz Khan's army who invaded this region in the 13th century.

THE KITE RUNNER?

The Kite Runner, Hossenei's debut novel, reflects ethnic disparity between the Pashtun and Hazara in Afghanistan, and how the political turbulence (1973-2001) affected them and the country. The first novel, written in English, by an Afghan-American (Khaled Hossenei) focusses on three significant periods in Amir's life: the life in Kabul before Soviet invasion (1973-79), the immigrant life in the United States in the 1980s, and the Taliban's regime (1996-2001). The plot of the novel revolves around two characters: Amir (an ethnic-Pashtun) and Hassan (an ethnic-Hazara). Both boys grow up as good friends in the city of Kabul. The thread of ethnic: disparity; polarity; and division spreads throughout the novel. Molestation of Hassan by three Pashtun boys during a Kite-fighting tournament in Kabul in 1975, is the climax (main event) of the story, when Amir betrays his friend, Hassan, when he does not intervene and/or stand by him. This event changes the whole course of the story. The guilt or betrayal of Amir follows him throughout. In 2001, Rahim Khan, falls sick in Peshawar and calls Amir to see him before he dies. He reminds Amir his past guilt and urges him for redemption by saving Sohrab from the barbarity of Taliban. Amir follows his advice, goes to Kabul to save Sohrab. Amir fights the Taliban's leader, gets severe physical wounds, rescues Sohrab from the clutches of Taliban, takes him to the United States. The sacrifice gives Amir a feeling of redemption. *The Kite Runner* has been published in 38 countries, translated into 62 languages including, Chinese, French, German etc., and sold worldwide into 12 million copies. Thus, keeping in view the model mentioned above, the paper highlights the depiction of Hazaras in the novel, *The Kite Runner*.

HAZARA AS IMAGINATIVE

Story-writing is a creative art. It is linked with imaginative power. In *The Kite Runner*, both Amir and Hassan loved stories in childhood. Amir has been depicted unimaginative in the novel, while, Hassan is portrayed imaginative in comparison with Amir. Once Amir narrates his own written (created) story to Hassan. The narration depicts that though Amir was creative, however, Hassan was more creative than Amir. The story thus goes there was a poor man who led a happy life, found a magic cup, learnt if he wept into the cup, his tears turned into pearls. Shedding tears tantamounted to a very difficult job for such a happy man, however, he found ways to make himself sad, hence rich, while, piling up of pearls grew his greed, the story ended, the man, sitting on a mountain of pearls, knife in hand, wept helplessly into the cup with his beloved wife's slain body in his arms. At the end of the story, Hassan questioned why the man killed his wife. Hassan again asked why he did not smell an onion? Amir astonished to see intelligence of Hassan and told him the simple way how to become a rich man. This portrays imaginative quality of Hassan as depicted in the novel. Thus, Hassan tells Amir:

“Couldn't he have just smelled an onion?”

As Foucault says, the discourse is anonymous, institutionalized and rule-governed model of knowledge-production. Here, the character of Hazara is established as imaginative in comparison with the character of Pashtun in *The Kite Runner*. Besides, Amir makes fun of Hassan while reading excerpts from *Shahnama* and considers him illiterate. Hassan is found more creative than Amir in the novel. Amir would read to him poems, stories, and riddles. When Amir would stop reading or understanding a point in the poem,

story, and riddle, Hassan would tell him that particular point immediately to solve the problem. This would surprise Amir. Amir thus informs,

Amir would tell Hassan some funny stories of Mullah Nasiruddin and his donkey. They would sit for long, during day time, under the pomegranate tree, to read and listen to the stories. When the dark would approach, Hassan would wish for more stories. It depicts his love for knowledge and curiosity.

In the novel, not only, Amir betrays Hassan, but the latter also becomes the victim of Assef, the antagonist. Assef had raped Hassan when he was a child, when Assef becomes the leader of Taliban, he rapes Hassan's son, Sohrab too. Thus, Assef is highlighted in the novel raping both the generations of Hazara, the father (Hassan) and the son (Sohrab). In other words, the Pashtun characters have raped the Hazara. The Taliban too, like Pashtun characters, in the novel, look down upon the Hazara. The Hazara are depicted inferior in *The Kite Runner* and the Pashtun mistreated them.

Hassan loved his famous story, *Rustam and Sohrab* from *Shahnama*, Amir used to read it to Hassan, though, Hassan could not understand the text. Amir, while knowing Hassan's illiteracy, would play upon the words in the story. Amir was curious to find a big or ambiguous term in his story to tease Hassan with. By this method, he would expose his ignorance. Once, Amir reads to him the story of Mullah Nasiruddin, but Hassan stops him and asks about the word '*imbecile*'. Amir grins and exposes his ignorance. After making fool of Hassan, Amir would give him his old shirts or his broken toys as amends. Amir informs in the novel,

Amir wonders by the intelligence of Hassan when he tells him the story of a greedy man, who wept into the magic cup and his tears turned into pearls. Though, the man was happy, he tries to find ways to make himself sad. He kills even his beautiful wife too. During this time, Hassan interrupts Amir why the man kills his wife, could not he smell the onion? This question stunned Amir and becomes prejudiced about Hassan's intelligence. Thus, he whispers;

"What does he know, that illiterate Hazara? He'll never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?"

When the Taliban come to power in Afghanistan in 1996, Rahim Khan hail them and rejoice their emergence. However, as he informs Hassan about Taliban's emergence, Hassan grumbles,

"God help the Hazara now."

HAZARA AS INFERIOR

Hassan is depicted inferior in the novel. The daily routine of the two boys (Amir and Hassan) was varied. When Amir would have left for school, Hassan worked inside the house; did domestic job, while Amir learned to read and write. It symbolizes inferiority of Hazaras as expressed in the lines below by Amir;

"Hassan made my breakfast..... made my bed, polished my shoes, ironed my outfit for the day, packed my books and pencils.....then Baba and I drove off in his black Ford Mustang."

Inferiority is also expressed in the kite-fighting tournament, when Hassan runs after the last kite Amir cut. In the alley, Assef and his companions catches him in the evening. As the dark approaches, Amir follows Hassan in the bazaar, eventually meets an old Pashtun man who was about to close his shop for *namaz* (evening prayer). Amir asked him about Hassan. The old man knew Amir, his wealthy Baba, and their status. He passes discriminatory words on Hassan,

"Lucky Hazara, having such a concerned master. His father should get on his knees, sweep the dust at your feet with his eyelashes."

Assef, the antagonist, embodies evil incarnation in *The Kite Runner*. Hossenei has eliminated from his character every positive trait of a human being. As child, Assef confronts Hassan and Amir in the street. He exposes to Hassan his status, and compares it with a pet of Amir. He even tells him that when Amir has guests, why not he includes him in games.

Hassan's rape by Assef symbolizes Pashtun's extreme injustice, abuse and hate for the Hazara. It also symbolizes subordinate and degrading position of Hazara in Afghanistan. The dialogue of the below scene is pitiful, low, and derogatory. Assef asks Kamal and Wali (his Pashtun friend) to rape Hassan, but, they refused. Assef asks them again why do you hesitate to act, and forcibly tells them; '*it's just a Hazara*'. Thus, Assef

begins to molest Hassan, while the other two boys hold him. Amir watched this event helplessly and passively

Amir showed irresolution during the molestation of Hassan. He did not intervene and kept away. He feared of the three older Pashtun boys. He wanted to make only Baba happy by sacrificing Hassan. Hassan never had been his priority than the kite. Amir's inaction during the molestation event, verified that he yielded to the domination of the powerful (Pashtun) for the powerless (Hazara). Thus, Amir betrays Hassan, and says;

"I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative..... was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?"

Baba arranged a grand birthday party for Amir, many guests were invited. Assef, his father, and his friends were also invited. When Hassan served Assef and Wali with drinks, but they look down upon him. This scene also implies inferior status of Hazara in the novel.

According to Mousavi, insults, humiliation, and the general brutal treatment of the Hazara in Afghanistan was the accepted norm. Besides, Amir's mother was a teacher, taught Persian and history at a girls high school in Kabul. She died while giving birth to Amir. Once, Amir came across her history book. There he found a chapter about the Hazara. He read the various negative stereotypes associated with the Hazara, such as,

"mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys."

The expressions of mice-eating and load-carrying donkeys are pungent and overpowering. Mousavi has articulated in his work, *The Hazara of Afghanistan* that insults aimed at the Hazara abound, and are still current in Afghanistan. Insulting remarks against Hazara were promoted by Pashtun nationalism such as, *Hazara-e moosh khor* (mouse eating Hazara), *Hazara wo chaklet* (Hazara and chocolate), *Hazara-e Khar-e Barkash* (load-carrying Hazara). Besides, another current expression is, "if there were no Hazara, the price of donkeys would be very high." Furthermore, Mousavi has described elaborately about the plight of Hazara in Afghanistan. He has touched upon the fundamental questions of identity crisis in Afghanistan, such as, the word "Afghan", "Afghanistan", and "Afghan (Pashtun) nationalism". According to him, the word "Afghanistan" has no mention in the history prior to the mutual agreement signed between the British and Iran in 1801. The country known today Afghanistan was called Khorasan 150 years ago; the new name was gradually formalized over the last 100 years or so. Mousavi furthers that Afghanistan means the land of Afghans, and Afghan is the synonym for Pashtun. Afghan nationalism or Pashtunism is a taboo in Afghanistan which can't be discussed or touched upon. It symbolized Pashtun racial superiority over other ethnic groups. These beliefs of the Pashtuns made them rightful to rule over Afghanistan. Afghan nationalism or Pashtunism as an instrument has been imposed upon society and the people for around a century. Mousavi asks fundamental question that "why an issue as significant as tribal and ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan has never been seriously addressed? But, Mousavi also recognizes that when King Amanullah (r.1919-1928) abolished slavery in Afghanistan, the Hazara were given equal rights, their confiscated land was restored to them, and they were allowed to serve in the army in Afghanistan receiving almost the same pay and rights as the other ethnic groups. Except Mousavi, no writer has dealt with the ethnic disparity so deep in Afghanistan.

When the Taliban come to know that a Hazara family reside in a big house (of Baba) in Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, then a pair of Taliban approach the house for investigation. Hassan tells them that he lives in the house along with his family and Rahim Khan. But the Taliban calls him thief as well as liar and tells him that all Hazara are liars. This implies Taliban's (Pashtun) distrust of Hazara. Amir articulates,

"The Taliban said he was a liar and a thief like all Hazara".

Mousavi points out that humiliation and intimidation of Hazara in Afghanistan were openly practiced. They were regarded as second-class citizens. This treatment was in practice even if not officially and constitutionally.

In the novel, Pashtun characters (Assef, General Tahiri) do not call the Hazara characters by their names but calling with ethnic connotation. This implies Pashtun ethnocentric views about other ethnic groups,

particularly those of Hazara in Afghanistan. The various ethnic inferior-connotation of Hazara in the novel are evident from the lines quoted below,

“Where is your slingshot, Hazara?”A loyal Hazara. Loyal as dog,.....Last chance Hazara,.....Today is your lucky day Hazara,.....,Lucky Hazara! Having such a concern master.

During the molestation scene of Hassan, Assef asks his two Pashtun friends to molest him. But they refused, even one of the boys said, that his father considered molestation sinful. Assef used the metaphor of donkey for Hassan, a derogatory connotation, and asked the boys there is nothing sinful to disgrace Hazaras.

HAZARA AS HUMANE

Though the depiction of Hazara in *The Kite Runner* is of lesser being, but they are portrayed as humane. Religion preaches pioussness and humanity. The actions of the three major Pashtun characters (Baba, Amir, Assef) in the novel deviate from the Islamic norm; Baba detested religious people, Amir preferred secular life, while Assef, though Taliban leader, acted against the norms of religion. Amir reports,

Baba mocked everything religious.

However, Ali and Hassan (Hazaras) are depicted spiritually pious and religiously righteous in the novel praying five times a day and they never miss praying prayers.

Hassan never tells a lie in the novel. He is portrayed as pious and truthful. Like him, his father, Ali too, is portrayed truthful. Amir informs,

“Like Hassan, Ali was incapable of lying.”

But, Baba (Pashtun) proved to be a liar and thief in the novel. Amir considered Baba as worst thief. He stole the sacred things: from Amir his brother (Hassan); from Hassan his identity, and from Ali, his honour, *nang*, and *namoos*, resultantly, Amir astonishes to hear when Rahim Khan told him words of lies and betrayals about Baba.

HAZARA AS LOYAL AND PROTECTOR

Foucault’s interest lies in the process of exclusion. That leads to the production of certain discourses rather than others. The discourse of ethnic disparity and exclusion of one ethnic group (i.e. Pashtun) is evident in the treatment of text and characterization in *The Kite Runner*. Hassan is depicted protector and bold than Amir in the novel. He confronts foes of Amir and protects him against them. Baba considered Hassan as protector. He tells Rahim Khan that when Amir is confronted by bully in the street, Hassan intervenes and saves Amir. He considered Hassan bold than Amir.

When Assef as young boy, along with his two friends, Wali and Kamal, confronts Amir and Hassan in the street, the former begins to fight them. But before the fight begins, Hassan holds his slingshot and points it out directly at Assef’s face. This is how Hassan boldly defends Amir always. Here Hassan is depicted as a protector of Amir, and bold than Amir. This protection implies his loyalty to Amir.

Towards the resolution of the novel, fight occurs between Amir and Assef. Amir is seriously wounded but, Sohrab comes forward to defend and save him as protector. Sohrab points his slingshot at Assef’s face, once Hassan (his father) protected Amir. This implies that both the Hazaras (Hassan and Sohrab) protected Amir when he was in crisis, and remained loyal to him. During fight, Assef is shot in the eye with the slingshot, and Amir is saved.

When Amir and Farid travel by road from Peshawar to Kabul in 2001, they had an expressive dialogue, particularly about the Taliban. It depicted the brutal and alarming situations under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Rather, it mirrored that Farid longed for a humane and peaceful government in the country. Farid asks Amir what does he do in America? Amir replies that he is a writer. Choked by Taliban’s brutality, he asks Amir to write about the inhumanity of Taliban;

“Tell the rest of the world what the Taliban are doing to our country.”

A reference exists in the above line towards the theme of the novel. It implies not only ethnic disparity in Afghanistan pointed out by Hossenei, but also, that the world, at large, should know about the barbarity of

the Taliban. Besides, Amir reads the two-page long letter that he receives from Hassan. In it, Hassan describes the wild conditions in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Hassan refers to Taliban as savages in the letter.

II. CONCLUSION:

The motivation behind the novel is of power, of dominance, of a complex hegemony: to highlight the marginalize position of Hazara in relation to the dominant Pashtun in Afghanistan. The schism between Pashtun and Hazara ethnicities is expressed through the application of orientalist knowledge and power. Power has been intrinsically employed at the backdrop of the plot. Hossenei has skillfully highlighted subaltern *Us* (Hazara) and dominant *Them* (Pashtun) relationship through the orientalist lens to highlight ethnic oppression and suppression. For Hossenei the Hazara are inferior but loyal; imaginative, humane, and protector in Afghanistan in relation to the dominant Pashtun who are portrayed superior but treacherous; unimaginative, brutal, and aberrant. Foucault's notion of institutionalized exclusion is highly pertinent to *The Kite Runner*: to fence the discourse of Hazara off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation. The writer of the novel is a non-Pashtun. The depiction of familiar *Us* (Hazara) in relation to strange *Them* (Pashtun) is tantamount to discredit the valid statements about the culture of Pashtun in the novel. The Pashtun as dominant ethnic group with an institutional history, politics, culture, and civilization are portrayed as vilifying: their culture has been discredited.

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