



Application of Maslow's Self-esteem Need in the Literary Context: A Case Study of the Characters of The Kite Runner

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Abstract- This paper aims to reflect upon the characters of Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* in the light of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs. In this paper, Maslow's understanding of the self-esteem need has been applied to bring out the psychological underpinnings of the characters to form a clearer understanding of the motivations for their actions. It attempts to demonstrate how these different characters define themselves concerning themselves and others and up to what extent they approve of Maslow's understanding of self-esteem need in the given context. The paper, therefore, in particular, explores Amir's identity crisis to comprehend what happens when the central character is torn between who he is and what others want him to be. It also comments in greater detail and depth on the situations that extenuate the characters to either fall below a certain threshold or rise above it.

Keywords: Self; Self-esteem need; *The Kite Runner*; Maslow; Amir

I. INTRODUCTION

"Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit."

– E.E. Cummings

Self-esteem is an honest evaluation of one's goodness or worthiness which provides a person with confidence in his/her abilities and motivates one to carry them further, reaching gratification as one navigates life with a healthy outlook (Rosenberg, 1965). It is a person's holistic sense of his or her understanding of his worth or value and has a direct relationship with a person's overall well-being. Believing in oneself and accepting oneself for who one is for building self-esteem is an important contributor that has a significant role in a prosperous life, in success, relationships, and happiness. Every person undergoes different experiences, but it becomes apparent that self-esteem needs not only take precedence over time but become predictable as well. "People develop and maintain their self-concepts through the process of taking action and then reflecting on what they have done and what others tell them about what they have done" (Brigham, 1986). It means that self-concept does not spring from within but predicated upon impressions one gets from the society and his reflections on that feedback. These reflections stem from an understanding of the possible and actual outcomes in the light of one's own views of oneself. James (1890) has developed a roadmap for nurturing one's self-esteem: according to his formulations, as one's behavior comes under scrutiny, one strives to adjust his needs according to people's expectations. It must be borne in mind that two persons, placed in the same situation, and with identical successes may have different versions of self-expectations because their social environment makes different expectations from them.

Morris Rosenberg, an expert on the studies of self-esteem, opines that “self-esteem is a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self” (1965:15) that refers to the active or sensitive side of self and has also been used as a surrogate for self-worth. It has been suggested by many authors that self-worth is a far more important concept, and is very important in the construction of one's own views. The most eloquent and influential voice, in the context of the self-concept theory, is Carl Roger's (1947). Rogers developed a total mechanism around the role of the self. According to Rogers, the self is the chief component in human personality development and personal modification. In Rogers' understanding, the self is a social construct, evolves through the mutuality of relationships that struggles for consistency. He regards the mutual relationship of positivity as a fundamental human need. He also believes that everyone has the potential for self-actualization and refinement provided it is given a fertile ground to prosper and bloom (Purkey & Schmidt 1987).

In this paper, Maslow's understanding of the self-esteem needs has been applied to bring out the psychological underpinnings of the characters of *The Kite Runner* and to form a clearer understanding of their motivations for their actions. It attempts to demonstrate how these different characters define themselves in relation to themselves and to others and up to what extent they approve of Maslow's understanding of self-esteem need in the given context.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Self-esteem needs are for a positive, high estimate of oneself. Maslow explains that for one to grow and achieve self-actualization, the need for esteem from others and inner respect must be met. Maslow writes as follows:

From Frommian theory about the self-perception of untruth to one's own nature, from Rogers' work with self, and from other sources as well, we have been learning more and more about the dangers of basing self-esteem on the opinions of others rather than on real individual's capacity, competence, and adequacy. The most stable and therefore most healthy self-esteem is based on deserved respect from others and from himself rather than on unwarranted external recognition and adulation” (Maslow 1970: 45-6).

Maslow contends that all humans naturally want to respect and be respected. People need to earn respect through engagement in practices that would give them some semblance of contribution. He believes that when one's baser needs and the elevated love and belongingness needs are satisfied, self-esteem comes to take control. This he calls a growth need. He suggests that “people need both esteem from other people as well as inner self-respect”, but Maslow also feels that “the esteem of others is more important for development and need fulfillment than inner self-respect”.

Maslow splits esteem needs further into two sets of desires: one is esteem derived from others' estimation and the other is esteem derived on one's own or self-derived esteem. The first involves self-respect, which includes the desire for the ability to stand up to the world and its challenges, strength, mastery, competence, adequacy, and achievements. The latter stems from a desire to be positively contributing to the world and seems a lot like Roger's concept of positive regard. The former stems appreciation from others involves the need of respect from others “which includes the desire for recognition, acceptance, reputation, attention, appreciation, status, dignity and prestige” (Maslow 1970:21). It can also be posited that in terms of the demand for respect and esteem from others it belongs to ‘love and belongingness needs’ rather than esteem needs. It can also be said that one is earned whereas the other one is conferred by society through its own internal logic. Both are influenced by the opinion of others. The psychological dimensions of the social and esteem categories may therefore be labeled unconditional versus conditional acceptance and on whether the source is oneself or others. Maslow writes,

All people in our society, (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others [...]. Even here it is helpful to distinguish the actual competence and achievement that is based on sheer will power, determination and responsibility, from that which comes naturally and easily out of one's own true inner

nature, one's constitution, one's biological fate or destiny, or as Horney puts it, out of one's RealSelf rather than out of the idealized pseudo-self (Maslow,1970:45).

This understanding of the human beings and their real selves is at the full display when it is applied to revealing the motivations of the characters of Hosseini's book *The Kite Runner*. It is to this analysis that we now turn.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Maslow, while defining the esteem-need in his book *Motivation and Personality* (1970), writes that this need is "relatively stressed by Alfred Adler and his followers, and [has] been ignored by Freud" (45) but he says that it is holding central importance among more and more clinical psychologists and psychoanalysts. He holds that "satisfaction of self-esteem need gives one self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world" (45) but in the case of Amir it does not hold true. All these aspects of self-esteem pale down when we look at Amir's behavior post-kite tournament. Rather than becoming self-confident and worthy, he degenerates to something else becoming insomniac and lethargic in his behavior. We know that the guilt of failing his friend Hassan, especially when he is putting his life at stake for him by facing up to the bullies, is telling on his conscience but the proud moment of his gaining the esteem of his father did not transform his character nor does the euphoria of the huge win does anything to transform Amir and help him break his mold. He remains, in his eyes, a disrespectful person and unworthy of the esteem and congratulations that are heaped upon him by his cousins and immediate family. Instead of rising up from a certain deep-set malaise, he slumped into quite a contradictory state of being. This puts Maslow's theory under some kind of erasure because, according to the theory, Amir should be able to break free, but he doesn't.

Amir buries himself deep in his books and does not exhibit any of the characteristics that Maslow outlines could be the result of a smooth transition of need gratification. Amir's belongingness, his need to be loved by his father is achieved at the cost of something more durable in his life: friendship. His shying away from Hassan, his trip to the hill, and seeing the names of "The Sultans of Kabul" etched on the pomegranate tree, his refusal to go out with Hassan are all signs and symptoms of regression rather than a progression in his personality. Perhaps, we should pay more heed to Maslow's caution that "the most stable and therefore most healthy self-esteem is based on deserved respect" (46). Maslow has emphasized the word "deserved" which makes it even more puzzling in the present case because Amir's praise is deserved not only because he has won the tournament but also because it was a hard-fought one. What it highlights is the fact that the transition from one need to another, the more higher need is not always smooth nor is it laid with roses. It would come much later in the novel when Amir is able to face up to the demons from his childhood and during the course of the most horrible beating from Assef. His breaking into a burst of laughter indicates how the threshold of self-esteem has been crossed. It also indicates that the transition is not linear but requires a tremendous amount of perseverance and fortitude before it can be achieved.

There is another downside to the movement of Amir's need for gratification as well. As with every kid born with a golden spoon in his mouth, Amir also thinks that he must get unhindered love and respect from those around him. When it dawns on Amir that there is something amiss in Baba's respect for him, he makes it an article of faith to correct the course of events. Maslow had been succinct in his warnings against such dangerous undertakings that Amir is faced with: "dangers of basing self-esteem on the opinions of others rather than on real capacity, competence, and adequacy to the task" (31). Anchoring his self-esteem on Baba's approval turns out to be his undoing. Instead of valuing the good in himself, Amir values the opinion of his father more. He even ignores the love and respect showered on him from elsewhere. He is fully determined to get his Baba's approval and in the process ignores other positive vibes from people around him. It is an agreed-upon fact that parents are the ones who have the strongest influence on their children because kids always admire their parents the most in their childhood. The tendency is most obvious in Amir, who lost his mother at the time of his birth, and bears a stronger dependency on his father. We can say that in *The Kite Runner* the characters who have low self-esteem have origins in traumatic/abusive childhood experiences such as the early death of the mother, prolonged emotional separation from a parent figure, a sense of lack of

control, and neglect. Amir's single-minded efforts to make amends for the death of his mother, who died at childbirth, are the result of feeling guilty.

The need to transcend his limitations is telling on Amir's mind because he lacks one thing above all: esteem. He has his physiological and safety needs taken care of yet the only gash in the scheme of his personality, or the fulfillment of it, is gaining the admiration and respect of his father. The thought has been nagging him for too long. Winning the Kite Tournament is a stage in the hierarchy of needs, that Amir aspires to. He wants to garner the respect of his father who doesn't think him manly enough. Having secured the first two levels of needs i.e. physiological and security needs, Amir is now inclined naturally to aspire for higher-level needs like, in the present instance, the need to get the esteem and admiration of his father who has been full of doubts about the true nature of his son.

I was going to win. There was no other viable option. I was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. Then maybe my life as a ghost in this house would finally be over. I let myself dream: I imagined conversations and laughter over dinner instead of silence broken only by the clinking of silverware and the occasional grunt" (Hosseini, 56).

Amir's need for gaining the esteem of his father has taken hold of his psychological being which has made him determined and which he thinks will break the silence between father and son. Maslow's theory highlights this aspect in the needs hierarchy, even more, when we consider this aspect of Amir's personality in comparison with that of Hassan's who, despite being one of the best kite runners in Kabul, doesn't need to gain anyone's esteem because his relationship with his father is not strained nor does it suffer from any kind of inhibitions. Amir, on the other hand, acutely feels the coldness of his father to him as a sign of low esteem and which he is determined to overturn by winning the tournament, and thus we find the existence of a nagging need within Amir's hierarchy of needs that we can associate with and identify as lacking in his personality that he thinks would supplement his present state of affairs with his father. "I had a mission now." Amir says, "And I wasn't going to fail Baba. Not this time"(Hosseini, 46). He has one last chance to redeem his esteem and respect once and for all: "...this was my one chance to become someone who was looked at, not seen, listened to, not heard. If there was a God, He'd guide the winds, let them blow for me so that, with a tug of my string, I'd cut loose my pain, my longing" (65).

He is now poised to move up the natural hierarchy of needs because it would "cut loose" his pain, his longing. Maslow's theory highlights this aspect of personality development brilliantly and sheds light on the viability and accuracy of his insights. Amir's need can be explained from several other psychological positions but no other perspective will capture the internal, deep-rooted desire within Amir than Maslow's perspective because it captures Amir's natural need, which he is otherwise unaware of, to move up the hierarchy of needs: "Then I saw Baba on our roof. He was standing on the edge, pumping both of his fists. Hollering and clapping. And that right there was the single greatest moment of my twelve years of life, seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last" (66).

With this achievement comes the most important break in the novel and the story takes a monumental shift. This shift ushers us into the next level on the hierarchy of needs in the life of the protagonist who from now on will attempt self-actualization because the third level has been reached/achieved with his Baba now proudly clapping for him. It means that dinner would no longer be a mere clinging of the silverware and that Baba would converse with him as Man to man. "Vindication. Salvation. Redemption" (67). This marks the end of a struggle in Amir's life and, as the story progresses, he would, right as Maslow has predicted man would do after reaching a certain level in the hierarchy of needs which remains visible to us through our theoretical framework, attempt to aspire to reach newer levels of self-actualization. As Francis Heylighen (1992) describes: "Satisfaction of belonging needs triggers the emergence of the esteem need. In this stage of need gratification, persons also want to be esteemed, by the people they are in contact with, as well as by themselves: they want to know that they are capable of achievement and success" (41). Amir's obsession to gain the respect of his Baba leads him to commit some of the most nightmarish acts and these acts continue to haunt him throughout his adult life. They are also partly responsible for keeping Amir from achieving high self-esteem because he is fully aware that it is built upon the ruins of his friendship and his betrayal of that friendship.

In his blind pursuit of winning the esteem of his father, he has lost the esteem of his friend who he now refers to as *a mere Hazara*. This remorse would turn him into an insomniac which would greatly hamper his move to the next level of self-actualization as well. This is something that Maslow's theory does not give clues for, which lends the theory a certain kind of one-dimensionality. The theory does not account for this opposition between the progress at one level and then regress on the other. According to the theory, the gratification of one need is the beginning of the yearning for the next. But here in the case of Amir, he wins the esteem and love of his Baba but loses the respect of his dear friend, Hassan, who has offered himself to be sacrificed, like Ibrahim's lamb, for his blue kite. The analogy of the Eid ulAzha that Amir uses is telling. He receives the blessing (respect) of his almost God-like father by sacrificing his friendship with Hassan. Maslow's theory does not account for this mean and selfish streak in pursuit of need gratification which brings us to another important point in Maslow's construction of his theory.

Maslow wants to stress the innate goodness of man as against the classical depiction of man as inherently evil in Freudian, positivistic, behaviouralist theories. Amir's selfishness in his naked pursuit of gaining the esteem of his father at the expense of his friend-cum-servant Hassan exposes him to be mean and selfish. Maslow has intended to show how a man can reach a higher state of being through a progressive utilization of his capacities. In the case of Amir, this progressive understanding of man is faced with a sort of contradiction that if not altogether overturns at least casts aspersions on Maslow's theory because it makes his theory not thought through. Just like ordinary people, the central characters nurture a wish for stability and self-estimation. In case they are denied these wishes, they lose their sheen, become weak, and are overwhelmed by self-worthlessness.

As the absence of a father figure gives way to a sense of rootlessness and alienation within his home, the presence of Hassan heightens it further. One of the reasons for Amir's low self-esteem is that he often compares himself with Hassan and thinks himself second best which irritated him very much. Not understanding the love and attention of his father for Hassan, who is his love-child, Amir develops a keen sense of jealousy from Hassan. Further, he has a faint doubt that Baba prefers Hassan to him. Amir fits this description of people with low self-esteem well. This also gives us his Maslowian tendency or motivation to overcome this situation and thus his desperate efforts lead to catastrophic consequences for him. "Two key things I emphasize are: to practice acceptance and stop comparing yourself to others," opines Kimberly Hershenson, "I emphasize that ...Comparisons only lead to negative self-talk, which leads to anxiety and stress". Low self-esteem can significantly affect all areas of one's life as well as leaving an impact on the mind. In the case of Amir, these assessments are right. His constant comparisons with Hassan and low self-esteem contribute to his anxiety and stress. Maslow would link these feelings to an extreme motivation within Amir for an elusive self-esteem need which can only be made visible by Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Hassan is manly in the way that Baba wishes Amir to be. He can skip stones on the water better than Amir and stands for Amir when he is cornered by his neighborhood bullies. It is these in departments in which Amir himself fails that Hassan surpasses him and earns Baba's respect, admiration, or love. Baba tells Rahim Khan. Even though he may get hurt, Hassan is never afraid of standing up for protecting the ones he loves. Baba's admiration for his servant's son leads to Amir's jealousy of Hassan and sparks a cruel act later on. These diverse causes come together to unhinge Amir, distorting his identity in complicated ways that eventually lead to his many betrayals.

Getting the approval of his Baba becomes Amir's obsession. Amir understands that in his current situation, to become "manly" is almost beyond him and it is difficult to get the attention of his father any other way. There is only one option for him that will ensure his father's approval for Amir and that is if he manages to win the kite tournament. This will not only redeem him but would also earn him a spot in his father's respect. After this, he could proudly proclaim himself to 'the son of Baba'.

But Amir's obsession with gaining his father's approval does not end there. He still considers that Hassan is more cared for by his father than him. He plots a devious thing after he is sure that "Either way, this much had become clear: One of us had to go" (Hosseini,86). How often does one reflect: "How will this affect everyone else in my life?" Amir could put himself in danger for his friend, but he did not do that. Instead, he ran away from the scene because it was according to his calculations the best thing to do in the given circumstances.

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan – the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past – and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. [...] the real reason I was running, 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 (Hosseini,77).

This is an important moment in Amir's life because it makes him face an identity crisis. Hassan wants to protect the kite for Amir's sake but, on the other hand, Amir struggles between his conscience and the desire to win; he being a selfish person runs away with the full sense of guilt; instead of saving Hassan he lets Hassan get raped by Assef. The justification that he comes up with for letting Hassan being raped is preposterous and attempts to hide his inability to stand up to the bullies. He thinks that only a mere lamb "a mere Hazara" has been sacrificed at the altar of his god-like father and it is worth it. Maslow can tell us that this is an attempt by a desperate man for self-esteem. This milestone has been achieved with the utmost sacrifice of his friendship.

Amir wins the tournament, but his loss is more than his gain. Hayes (2007) calls it the loss of innocence. She says that: "he [Amir] was just beginning to think about some real issues in life when the fateful day of both victory and defeat changed his life forever. Growing up was no longer gradual. He had suddenly been thrust into adulthood" (12). Amir loses his innocence and discovers evil. Unfortunately, he not only discovers that it is evil in the world around him (here presented by Assef who rapes Hassan) but also inside him, when he does not risk and avoids helping Hassan. How can one lose one's self? Amir's dormant traits come to life when he feels unloved and feels cut off from his spontaneous wishes.

It can be safely said that Amir's low self-estimation and his selfish ways the lack of fatherly love and affection early on. This lack of attention from someone that he idolizes forces him to commit the most unthinkable of crimes and then commit even more atrocious acts to bury the truth of the matter along with the raging shame that has been consuming him. All these factors combine to give Amir a very hard time going up the hierarchy of needs, especially the self-esteem need which motivates him to put all that he holds dear on the line for it. This illustrates for us the power of desire when it takes hold of a person's imagination and cripples all his other rational, saner cognitive faculties. In his desperate attempts to scale the hierarchy of needs, Amir commits something which makes the going tough for him as well as vulnerable.

The motivations for his betrayal of his friend are only visible to us when we consider the lifelong aspirations of Amir to gain the love, respect, affection, and esteem of his father that he has been idolizing since a very early age. It is this need to be esteemed by his father that motivates him to do the unthought acts of betrayal and being mean to his best friend. In other words, we come to know how compelling the need to gain self-esteem could be that it would motivate one to violate all norms of decency and norms. Amir's actions, driven as they are by the need to move up the hierarchy, certainly show the force of this motivation.

After Baba's death, the image of the father in Amir's mind now is not only of a hero or an idol but a spiritual stay that loves him and accompanies him. But suddenly, all the adoration is gone when Amir knows that Baba had told a big lie about Hassan's identity. Amir's internal conflict also appears when Amir goes back to Afghanistan after receiving Rahim Khan's letter and learns that Hassan's and his life experience have turned out to be a big lie. It is too shocking to believe when he finally knows that Hassan is his father's love child and thus his brother. He feels "like a man sliding down a steep cliff, ... The room was swooping up and down, swaying side to side" (TKR 195). His dear father, who always taught him not to lie, for him telling a lie was nothing less than an unforgivable sin, actually kept the secret so long-- even after he died. He is angry that the person he loves the deepest is the one who hurts him the most but "There was a way to be good again" (2).

It is at the behest of Rahim Khan that Amir decides to come back to Afghanistan to find Sohrab. He provides him with the opportunity to redeem his self-esteem and deserve it fully. Without this, it would be very difficult for Amir to move up the hierarchy of needs to self-actualization. Despite the fact that the way back might be painful and even dangerous for Amir, it is a form of making him free from his remorse. So once again, for the last time, Rahim Khan saves the situation and helps Amir. Thinking about his role in the novel, it might be said, he symbolizes understanding, forgiveness, and relief in the novel. How saving Sohrab gives him confidence. Hershenson suggests, 'volunteering to help those who may be less fortunate': "Being of service to others helps take you out of your head. When you are able to help someone else, it makes you less focused on your own issues (para 8)". David Simonsen concurs: "What I find is that the more someone does something in

their life that they can be proud of, the easier it is for them to recognize their worth. Doing things that one can respect about themselves is the one key that I have found that works to raise one's worth(para 13)."

In the end, Amir attempts to accept reality as it stands decides to make do with who he is. He tries to take care of Sohrab, Hassan's son, like a father. He gradually realizes the intention of Baba's decision. As a father and an adult, Amir knows that too shocking a truth will break a child's heart. We think that Amir forgives Baba as he comes to know the truth is not that important rather it is true love and understandings that will live in our minds forever.

Another puzzling piece in the picture is presented by the twin characters of Ali and Hassan. They have both their physiological and safety needs taken care of by Amir's father, but do they harbor anything of the kind that Maslow considers to be the next level in the hierarchy of needs like freedom and independence. Maslow leaves this question wide open in the footnote:

Whether or not this particular desire [self-esteem] is universal we do not know. The crucial question, especially important today, is, will men who are enslaved and dominated inevitably feel dissatisfied and rebellious? We may assume in the commonly known clinical data that a man who has known true freedom (not paid for by giving up safety and security but rather built in the basis of adequate safety and security) will not willingly or easily allow his freedom to be taken away from him. But we do not know for sure that this is true for the person born into slavery (1970: 46).

Both Ali and Hassan, being on the cultural and social margins of Afghan society, present an interesting conundrum because they have both their basic needs satisfied but the novel does not give a hint to their desire for further progression. Their loyalty has earned them self-esteem perhaps but it cannot be adequately classified as such given the nature of the social and cultural situation. Do they not harbor any notions of self-esteem like "freedom and independence" as enumerated by Maslow? If they do not do so, it would go against the very natural dispensation that Maslow builds his whole theory upon because he thinks it is intrinsic and holistic and represents the essential nature of man. Does this formulation exclude the socially excluded or marginalized as devoid of humanity or the naturalness that the theory purports to correspond with? Maslow does not supply answers to these questions which leaves his theory to be deficient in this respect. The application of theory to the characters in the novel is therefore beset with problems and, given the main research question of this paper, it cannot be used to understand all the machinations of the characters in the novel. This is one deficiency in Maslow's formulation that comes to light in the present endeavor.

Another piece in the puzzle is an aggressive Assef and his almost timid parents. Assef is the antagonist in the novel and responsible for some of the most tragic scenes in the novel. Following Maslow's formulation of the hierarchy of needs, one can pose the question of what could be driving Assef to such extreme levels of cruelty and callousness? Is he striving for the respect and esteem of his peers? Does it mean, as Maslow holds repeatedly in his books and articles, that his intrinsic, good nature is suppressed at childhood for him to turn out to become the monster that he is? The sheer timidity of his parents nullifies this aspect. This aspect of them is a full exhibit in their arrival at Amir's birthday party where Assef dominates his parents physically as well as metaphorically. In other words, they do not give the impression of the monsters that we see in the character of their son. Does Maslow get it again wrong or are we missing something that could explain the personality behind the monster? Assef is a truly inhuman character who has no guilt for his crimes. Characterizing his involvement in the ethnic cleansing of Hazaras, Assef declares, "You don't know the meaning of the word liberating until you've done that, stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good, and decent" (Hosseini, 277). One reviewer observes: "The main problem in my mind is that there is little character development at all except for the narrator Amir. The good is only good, while evil is only evil. The good is likened to the lamb about to be sacrificed, while the evil thinks Hitler is a good guy"(Aubry, 34). In particular, Hosseini is intent on defining not only Amir but also his country against the monstrosity that Assef instantiates as the book's primary representative of the Taliban.

Amir, Hassan, and Assef all stand out as individuals motivated by different life experiences but all moving along a continuum of self-discovery and, as Maslow has explained, a hierarchy of needs. They come out in different phases and in different modes of being and becoming yet living at one and the same continuous time.

IV. CONCLUSION

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory does help us illustrate the hidden aspects of the characters and bring out their real motivations to the fore. The self-esteem need that we have attempted to understand in the motivating factors of Hosseini's characters make this obvious that Maslow's theory goes a long way in highlighting the hidden dimensions of these characters. It would have been impossible to lay bare their personality structures and the things that compel them along a certain course of action without the theoretical framework afforded by Maslow.

Amir's experiences and ascent to self-esteem come at a very heavy price. This is what makes the term "truly deserved" assume newer meanings. He is made to face his childhood nemesis without which he cannot ascend to the next ladder on the hierarchy of needs. This lends a very eerie sense to the theory as well because it establishes the fact that nothing comes easily in life be it self-esteem, which is, on the face of it, an abstract thought but one laden with far-reaching consequences and impact on one's life and its outcomes.

Maslow adds many a thing to our reading experiences of the literary text and gives it an added flavor and perspective. He enhances what would otherwise remain hidden in plain sight. *The Kite Runner* and its characters would never be the same again because Maslow adds so many psychological dimensions to their personalities that they at times stop being fictional characters and come out as flesh and blood, palpable, tangible people. He, in other words, does what Lamb says about Charles Dickens' uncanny ability to suspend our disbelief. It is for this very ability that Maslowian understanding of man adds so much to our understanding of the novel and helps us reflect on the creativity and genius of Hosseini as a novelist.

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