

Book Review

The Kite Runner

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Title:	<i>The Kite Runner</i>
Author:	Khaled Hosseini
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The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini is indeed a devastating, masterful, and painfully honest story. It is like a condensed history of Afghanistan, mixed with a Shakespearean tale of friendship and love. Rightly called a novel of unusual generosity, honesty, and compassion, this work rightly presents the condition of war-torn Afghanistan. This is also a passionate story of betrayal and redemption of a friend. It presents a searing spectacle of the hard-won personal salvation of an Afghani boy who ditches his bosom friend in his hour of need.

It is a very painful novel as it successfully penetrates the hearts of the millions of Afghanistans who were destined to lead miserable and devastated life due to the oppressions, exploitations, and inhuman tortures carried on by the Taliban. Amir, a younger member of an affluent and aristocratic family flew along with his father to the USA in the wake of unrest and lack of peace due to the dethroning of the king and subsequent intrusion of the Russian army on the pretext of stabilising the country amidst political turmoil. Their journey from Afghanistan to Pakistan turned out to be

almost nightmarish as Russian soldiers tried to molest one of their lady companions. Their turn of fortunes which made them work as ordinary poor citizens on the pavement is heart-rending but satisfactory for them as it provided safety and security.

After many years, Amir returned to Afghanistan, called by his father's business friend. Here he learned a dark secret of his life. His father, a hero in his eyes had slept with his servant's wife and had an illegitimate son Hassan, his bosom childhood friend whom he had betrayed in his hour of need. His father, a role model to him for moral uprightness, truth, and justice had fathered a Hazara boy Hassan. The latter was very close to his heart and soul and had been a victim as he could not protect him from the clutches of a villainous and rowdy who brutally molested the innocent boy. Amir's sense of guilt and shame was manifold as Hassan suffered when was catching the kite for him, a favour. Amir considered it an opportunity to get love and applause from his father. He also knew the harsh reality in his country Afghanistan where anarchy, inhumanity, and terrorism ruled. This was

in sharp contrast with the unflinching devotion, love, and faithfulness of his dear old friend cum half-brother and servant who unhesitatingly sacrificed his life for him. Hassan's character is like a silver lining in the darkness of a dehumanized, callous society. Despite all the callous behaviour, he always waited and longed for his closest friend and unhesitatingly became a target of the bullets of the Taliban. Amir felt it his moral duty to search for his orphaned son Sohrab. Hosseini wonderfully presented the subtle feelings and anguish of a tormented soul. He found barren roads, destroyed buildings, and women covered in burka sitting on the pavements requesting alms. He was told that their husbands were brutally killed by the Taliban and they were unfit for any other job. He even saw an ex-professor in tattered dirty clothes begging for alms.

In this saga of unmitigated anarchy and open play of brutality and bestiality, fathers had become a rare commodity as the Taliban had mercilessly massacred youth. Their bodies even did not get a decent burial as they were left scattered on the roads and if anyone wanted to take them home, they were also shot at. Dogs fed on them. It was appalling, heart-rending, and pathetic to find a man and woman considered adulterers attacked by a jeering crowd pelting stones. It revived memories of medieval dark ages when such dark customs prevailed and people branded heretics and infidels were burnt alive. The so-called mullahs issued decrees in the name of religion and killed and

stabbed anyone, declaring him an infidel, while they delighted in committing heinous crimes like rape, torture, and murder. They sexually exploited not only women but also minor boys. Hassan's son Sohrab also became a victim of such a fanatic Mullah.

The Taliban indulged in beating women on the pretext that they were speaking loudly. People were half-starved due to the scarcity of essential goods. They sold even their artificial limbs to feed their family. Innocent children had to suffer the most as they had to stay in orphanages without food and proper clothing in extremely cold conditions. Some of the boys and girls were seduced by the Taliban. These innocent children were sexually harassed and exploited by the Taliban who swear by Islam and yet commit such heinous crimes in the name of religion.

The courage, valour, and struggle Amir enabled him to save one minor child going through agony but his soul was completely bruised due to the physical and moral trepidation he has gone through. Readers are left shell shocked.

Hosseini's brave attempt brings out the truth that women and children are the worst victims when anarchy and bloodshed devastate a country. Terror and starvation leave indelible marks on the bruised souls of innocent children. This book is a historical chronicle in the sense that it portrays a realistic picture of a war-ravaged country, though the writer has blended imagination and fancy to spice it up.