

Classism, Stereotypes, Persecution, and Man's Inhumanity to Man in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to shed light on issues like classism, stereotype, and persecution as represented in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. This paper is directly concerned with the reasons beyond these issues and their influence over the inner and outer life of people. To understand them well, I approach them through four central questions: How do we conceptualize the terms "classism, stereotype, and persecution"? What are the causes of such awful issues? Who do these issues really benefit and who are their victims? What effects do these issues have on the marginalized? After conceptualizing these issues, in this paper, I attempt to study the reasons beyond them which are social structural factors and social psychological factors. This paper aims to unveil the ugly face of these issues and to reflect the deleteriousness that they have on the disrespected people. By providing some examples from the text, it is shown that while the Sunni Pashtuns are the masters and rulers of the country, the Shi'a Hazaras are servants who are marginalized that they have no equal rights in all fields of life: socially, economically, politically, educationally, etc.

Keywords: stereotype, classism, persecution, Pashtuns, Hazaras.

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التمييز، والنمطية، والاضطهاد، ووحشية الإنسان في رواية

(عداء الطائرة الورقية) لخالد حسيني

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ملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء، على قضايا التمييز، والنمطية، والاضطهاد، التي تناولها الروائي، خالد حسيني، في روايته (عداء الطائرة الورقية)، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على معرفة مسبباتها، وإجلاء تأثيراتها المختلفة على حياة الأفراد والمجتمعات، بوصف ذلك منطلق البحث وفرضيته الرئيسية. ولمقاربة تلك الفرضية، وتحقيق الفهم الواعي والجيد لها، كان لابد من طرح الأسئلة الأربعة الرئيسية: كيف نُعرّف قضايا مثل: التمييز، والنمطية، والاضطهاد، وما حدودها الاصطلاحية؟ ما هي مسبباتها؟ من المستفيد من ممارستها، ومن هم ضحاياها؟ ما آثار ممارسة هذه القضايا على المهمشين؟ وهو ما كان، حيث ناقش هذا البحث تلك الأسئلة، وجاء بمثابة الإجابة عنها. فبعد تعريفه لتلك القضايا، كشف البحث أن بعض العوامل المسببة، لتلك القضايا تتعلق بالنظام الاجتماعي، والبعض الآخر يتعلق بالجانب النفسي الاجتماعي. تجدر الإشارة، إلى أن أحد أهداف هذا البحث، يتمثل في تعرية هذه القضايا، وكشف النقاب عن الوجوه القبيحة لأصحابها، وكشف وتبيين ضررهم على المضطهدين. فمن خلال تقديم بعض الأمثلة من النص، اتضح أنه في حين أن البشتون (السنة) هم سادة وحكام البلاد، فإن الهزارة (الشيعية) هم خدام مهمشون، ولا يتمتعون بأدنى حقوق المواطنة المتساوية في جميع مجالات الحياة: اجتماعيًا، واقتصاديًا، وسياسيًا، وتعليميًا، إلخ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التمييز، النمطية، الاضطهاد، البشتون، الهزارة.

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1. Author Biography

The Afghan-born American novelist, Khalid Hosseini was born in Kabul in 1965. His father was a diplomat with whom he left Afghanistan and moved to Paris in 1976. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan banned them from returning to their country. They moved to America, San Jose, California. There, he finished his education and worked as an internist between 1996 and 2004.

Hosseini is very well known for writing provocative novels. He started to write his first novel, *The Kite Runner* in 2001 and it was published in 2003. It has become an international bestseller. It was published in 70 countries and translated into more than 40 languages. In 2007, it was adapted for a movie directed by Marc Forster. In the same year, his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published, and his third novel *And the Mountains Echoed* was released in 2013. Both novels have been published in more than 70 countries and sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. His visit to Afghanistan in 2007 with UNHCR inspired him to establish The Khaled Hosseini Foundation which provides humanitarian assistance to the needy in Afghanistan. Recently, he lives in northern California along with his wife and two kids.

2. Introduction

Khalid Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner* (2003), is fictional, but based on real historical and political incidents that took place in Afghanistan from 1970 monarchy to the post-Taliban. It is also said that it is, to some extent, an autobiography. In a 2003 interview with *Newsline*, the author mentioned that the most autobiographical parts of his book are those about "the difficult task of assimilating into a new culture. My father and I did work for a while at the flea market and there really are rows of Afghans working there, some of whom I

am related to" ⁽¹⁾. Though it is a reflection of his life experiences, the book's goal is to call attention to the destruction that happened in Afghanistan in the then period.

To begin with, it is a must to have an overview of the synopsis of the narrative. It can be classified into three major parts. The first part takes place in Kabul. In this part, (Amir) the narrator of the book is a Pashtun boy talking about his childhood with his Hazara friend and servant Hassan. This section takes place from the early to mid-1970s. It is the most important as it includes the essential events of the book such as the rape of Hassan. The next part commences in 1981 during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Amir along with his father (Baba) leave their country and move to America where they live as immigrants, and were stereotyped by some Americans. In this section Amir marries Soraya, the daughter of a former Afghan officer who works now with Amir's father in California's flea market. This section ends with the death of Baba in 1989. The last part of the novel takes place in 2001 when Amir gets a call from Rahim Khan (Baba's best friend) telling him that there is still a chance "to be good again" ⁽²⁾. This call marks the beginning of a journey through which Amir gets a chance to get rid of his past sins. Physically, it is Amir's journey from California to Afghanistan to save Hassan's son (Sohrab), but spiritually, it is "journey through guilt and trauma from his childhood" ⁽³⁾.

Actually, the book talks about the powerful as well as the less fortunate people of Afghanistan. On reading *The Kite Runner*,

One embarks on a journey that leads through the life of the glamorous prosperous Afghans, as well as the treacherous horrific life of those less fortunate. Most importantly, however, one encounters face-to-face the good and evil that come out when these two very distinct lives are intertwined ⁽⁴⁾.

The Kite Runner has become widely known especially among Afghans for its depiction of their bitter reality. Hosseini indicates this in his 2003 interview:

I get daily e-mails from Afghans who thank me for writing this book, as they feel a slice of their story has been told by one of their own. So, for the most part, I have been overwhelmed with the kindness of my fellow Afghans⁽⁵⁾.

On the other hand, he adds that there are those who expressed their repulse calling the book 'divisive'. They "objected to some of the issues raised in the book, namely racism, discrimination, ethnic inequality, etc."⁽⁶⁾. In response to such positive and negative comments, in the same interview Hosseini said: "If this book generates any sort of dialogue among Afghans, then I think it will have done a service to the community"⁽⁷⁾.

In this paper, I attempt to discuss terms like stereotype, classism, and persecution, find out the reasons that cause them, and explain their effects on the individuals and society as a whole. These issues are among the worst social problems that are still existent in under developing and even developing countries that have diverse cultural, religious, and social backgrounds, and Afghanistan is no exception. *The Kite Runner* shows how unjust, oppressive, and devastating these issues could be. For the sake of discussing the main ideas of this paper, I give a special focus to the relationship between Amir and Hassan, the two main characters in the novel under scrutiny, for their relationship represents the relation between the master and servant, Sunni and Shi'a, Pashtun and Hazara, rich and poor, but before that we have to take into consideration that the division between the two is society-made as one of them is born to be a master; and the other is born to be a servant. Though individuals play some roles to worsen the situation, they are not the main reasons. The marginalized Hazaras pay the bill for mistakes they have no bearing on, but that they are born to be Hazaras. Hosseini attempts to create a sort of dialogue among the different groups. Like him, throughout this paper, I wish to help people not to make judgment on *others* on the mount of pigment on one's skin, the religion one believes in, or the nation one belongs to; but on personal basis, on direct experiences with them.

3. Literature Review

Classism, stereotype, and persecution are concepts of negative practices which are incompatible with common sense, and inconsistent with the principle of absolute divine justice that is based on the principle of equality among all human beings. Although these concepts are as ancient as man himself, they are still existent till now.

John J. Macionis in his book *Sociology* defines classism as “the belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another”⁽⁸⁾. It is usually based on unreal and untrue prejudices. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* states that it is “the practice of treating one person or group differently from another in an unfair way”⁽⁹⁾. In other words, it is dealing with some people in a different way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin color, sex, race, nation, or religion. In the same way, stereotype is a term that is defined as “an oversimplified perception of some aspect of the social world. Often tends to be a basis for prejudice”⁽¹⁰⁾. Besides, Aisha Al-Mattari in her thesis “Challenging Stereotypes” expresses that “stereotypes are usually used to make a certain group of people feel superior to other individuals or groups of people”⁽¹¹⁾. Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* expresses the same notion averring that a group of people “feels that their race is superior to others and therefore they have the right to rule and control others”⁽¹²⁾. Persecution is having the same meaning. According to *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, it is defined as “unfair or cruel treatment over a long period of time because of race, religion, or political beliefs”⁽¹³⁾. Similarly, *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “an irrational and obsessive feeling that one is the object of collective hostility or ill-treatment on the part of others”⁽¹⁴⁾.

Regardless of all these definitions, it is clear that these issues divide the people and affect their economic and social place in community. The belief that some people are inferior to others due to their physical difference leads to “an ideology that is based upon a type of false consciousness and works to oppress a group of people”⁽¹⁵⁾. This false ideology leads to the slavery of the marginalized. In other words, because of this unnatural ideology which is by all means socio-cultural, some children are named as a ‘Hazara’ which limits their freedom.

The above view is expressed by Akram Sadat Hosseini and Esmail Zohdi in their paper “*The Kite Runner* and the Problem of Racism and Ethnicity.” They study the cultural, social, and scientific reasons that cause ethnical and racial differences taking Afghans as a case study. Based on the Feagin’s theory that denies human difference, their paper examines the root of ethnic prejudices and oppression among the Afghan people in the novel and the reasons for their ethnic behaviours. They aver that the problem of racial discrimination is by no means due to scientific observation, but due to cultural and social differences that took place between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is demonstrated that the biological difference is just some excuses for the masters to gain their egotistic goals⁽¹⁶⁾.

Waseem Ahmad in his paper “Thematic Study of Khaled Hosseini’s Novel *The Kite Runner*” explores how the feeling of guilt may lead one to seek redemption and attain salvation and he uses the narrator Amir’s story with his half-brother, friend, and servant Hassan as a case study⁽¹⁷⁾. In the same way, Niraja Saraswat in her article “Theme of Identity and Redemption in Khaled Hossieni’s *The Kite Runner*,” explores guilt and perseverance in *The Kite Runner* as the motivation for an individual to seek redemption and attain the satisfaction of self-fulfillment⁽¹⁸⁾.

Khoiroton Nisa in her article "Ethnic Conflict in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" attempts to study the reasons of ethnic conflict and divides them into many types. At the end of her paper, she avers that on the name of religion, the Sunni Pashtuns are attempting to rule and control the minority Shi'a Hazaras and the whole country⁽¹⁹⁾.

Ahmad Mohamed in his paper "Once Upon a Kite: Glimpses into Afghanistan's Race Relations," attempts to redress the gap between the different races by studying race relations in *The Kite Runner*. Like Samuel S. Lieberman, He argues that the novel could be perceived as a 'time capsule' that freezes the nation's "warring tribal principalities, petty mountain states, and ethnic enclaves spilling over the present national borders"⁽²⁰⁾. Throughout his paper, he gives special focus on race relations in Afghanistan with the hope to create forever peace in the country⁽²¹⁾.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Reasons beyond Classism, Stereotypes, and Persecution in *The Kite Runner*.

On reading the text, it is shown that both the community and the individuals are all responsible for the prevalence of the issues under scrutiny. To commence with the community's related reasons, the social system is one of the major reasons. It is very well known that historically, Afghanistan consists of many ethnic groups. The text under discussion focuses on two groups namely: Pashtuns and the Hazaras. These two groups differ in terms of religious beliefs, cultural practices, social status, and physical appearances. These differences widen the gap between the two groups. Pashtun forms the majority ruling class while Hazara is the minority aggrieved class. Though both are Muslims, the Pashtun group is Sunni, and the Hazara is Shi'a. Wahab and Youngerman in their book *A Brief History of Afghanistan* indicate that "the major race and ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Pashtuns and followed by the minority groups such as Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Aimaks, Turkmen, and Baluchi"⁽²²⁾.

It is stated by Robert Lauer and Lauer Jeanette in their book *Social Problems* that the main reasons beyond classism, stereotype, and persecution are social structural factors and social psychological factors⁽²³⁾. These factors create the belief that some groups are inferior to others which may cause the marginalized groups to lose self-confidence, and esteem, to be nervous, gloomy, helpless, suspicious, and fearful. The negative effects of racial classism affect not only the individuals but also the community at large. To begin with social structural factor, it is said that they are affected by the way the community despise the low class (Hazara) people. In the novel, the Hazaras are mocked and insulted by the Pashtuns because of their physical appearances. When reading a book about the Hazaras, Amir comments: "It [the book] also said some things I [Amir] did know, like that people called Hazaras *mice-eating, flat-nosed, load carrying donkeys*. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan"⁽²⁴⁾. The Hazaras are oppressed and persecuted because of their facial difference. They resemble the Mongols in many characteristics, including kinship system, language, and physical appearance.

Another social structural factor that causes classism is the diverse religious and cultural practices between the two groups. Hazaras are disrespected "due to their differences in race, belief, language, and culture"⁽²⁵⁾. Both Pashtuns and Hazaras are Muslims. However, they differ in their cultural and religious practices and beliefs. Pashtun is Sunni while Hazara is Shi'a, "the reason the Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that the Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a"⁽²⁶⁾. This issue alone assists in the persecution of the Hazaras. The Sunni majority insults the Shi'a minority for their religious and cultural beliefs. An example of this is when Amir has read in a book that talks about the persecution of Hazaras. He asks his teacher about it and is justified by his teacher in this way:

After class, I showed the book to my teacher and pointed to the chapter on the Hazaras. He skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. "That's the one thing Shi'a people do well," he said, picking up his papers, "passing themselves as martyrs." He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi'a, like it was some kind of disease⁽²⁷⁾.

The second cause of stereotype, classism, and man's in humanity to man is social psychological factors. Prejudices and preconception are among the social psychological factors that cause classism. In the novel, it is obviously expressed that the social status and economy of the Hazaras and Pashtuns are not the same.

The Hazaras are the poorest and most marginalized of ethnic communities of Afghanistan. It is partly their barren landscape and partly long-standing discrimination against them that has placed them in an inferior economic and social position. Until the second decade of last century, it was common to enslave Hazaras⁽²⁸⁾.

In the text, the Hazaras are struggling to live, finding no food to eat, and no place to live in. They live either on the streets or in small dirty rooms in the houses of the families they serve. However, Pashtuns live in big opulent houses. Every rich Pashtun family has their own Hazara servants.

The Hazaras were completely repressed as a political-ethnic group, and much of their land was given to others, whom they were forced to serve as slaves. Others were sold as slaves in Kabul. Thousands fled to Mashad in Persia and Quetta in India⁽²⁹⁾.

What is worse is that the Hazaras are not paid for their services. They serve for the dirty rooms they live in and the food they eat, and Ali and his son Hassan are a case in point. They live in a dirty small accommodation in Baba's home and they are not paid for their work as servants. What is more is that the Pashtuns think that the Hazaras are not true Afghans, so they do not deserve any luxury or privilege. In the book, when they live in the house of Amir's family, Hassan and his wife, Farzana, are killed mercilessly by Taliban, for they thought that all Hazaras are not worthy living in a big house.

The Talibs said he [Hassan] was a liar and a thief like all Hazaras and ordered him to get his family out of the house by sundown. Hassan protested.... They told Hassan they would be moving in to supposedly keep it safe... Hassan protested again. So they took him to the street--"

"--and shot him in the back of the head.

"- Farzana came screaming and attacked them--"

"No".

"-- shot her too"⁽³⁰⁾.

All the above examples that reflect the division between the Pashtuns and Hazaras are society-made. They are man-made to which individuals fall as victims, this is on one side.

The crises presented by Hosseini in the novel stem from inherent weaknesses in Afghanistan's social structure and its cultural prejudices. Amir and his father are Pashtun and Sunni Muslims, and their servants are Hazara and Shi'a Muslims. This is a typical servant-master arrangement. Hazara were often illiterate because they lacked education opportunities. They were seen as ethnically and religiously inferior to the Sunni Pashtuns. Although Baba loves Hassan and Ali, they will always be servants. Ali

and Baba and Amir and Hassan might be like brothers, but a power dynamic makes it possible for Amir to treat Hassan as an inferior, and that allows him to humiliate Hassan without fearing retribution. This same power structure allows Assef to rape Hassan without fear of reprisal, and assures him that he is unlikely to be stopped by casual observers⁽³¹⁾.

On the other side, there are some personal reasons that bring about the division between individuals. In the text, jealousy is one of the reasons that brings about the division between the two friends. Amir is always jealous of Hassan because the latter has all the qualities which Amir lacks the most. "I wasn't just slower than Hassan but clumsier too, I'd always envied his natural athleticism"⁽³²⁾. With this thing in his heart, he ruins the chance to be a true friend of Hassan. Besides, Baba likes Hassan and Ali and treat them kindly. He "never missed Hassan's birthday"⁽³³⁾. This kind treatment makes Amir jealous for he "wanted Baba all to [himself]"⁽³⁴⁾. Baba loves Hassan more than Amir, for Hassan is strong and brave while Amir is weak and coward.

Baba: "Self-defense has nothing to do with meanness. You know what always happens when the neighborhood boys tease him [Amir]? Hassan steps in and fends them off. I've seen it with my own eyes. And when they come home, I say to him, 'How did Hassan get that scrape on his face?' And he says, 'He fell down.' I'm telling you, Rahim, there is something missing in that boy."... "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything.".... "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son"⁽³⁵⁾.

The above conversation between Baba and his friend Rahim Khan increases Amir's jealousy of Hassan to a great extent that he starts planning to send Hassan away of their house.

Amir: "Baba, have you ever thought about getting new servants?"

Baba: "Is this about you and Hassan?"

He [Baba] looked away, shaking his head. "You bring me shame. And Hassan..."

Hassan's not going anywhere, do you understand?".....

"Hassan's not going anywhere," Baba snapped. "He's staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we're his family. Don't you ever ask me that question again!"⁽³⁶⁾.

Hence, it is obvious that individuals play some role to widen the gap between their groups.

4.2. The Pashtuns' Relationship with the Hazaras as in *The Kite Runner*.

For any relationship between any different individuals or races to be successful, it has to be based on the principles of equality and mutual respect. On the contrary, these principles are not existent between the Pashtuns and Hazaras. As shown in the text, it is preconceived by the Pashtuns that the Hazaras are "primitive, uncivilized, unreliable, stupid, dirty, weak, inhuman or lazy as a strategy to assert their claim of their superiority to rule and control the world"⁽³⁷⁾. Ali and his son Hassan are appropriate with those stereotypes. Ali has leg polio and Hassan has a cleft lip. "It wasn't fair. Hassan hadn't done anything to earn Baba's affections; he'd just been born with that stupid harelip"⁽³⁸⁾.

In spite of the existence of some good personal relationships between people of the two ethnic groups, they do not change the social structure in Afghanistan, and people especially 'masters' do not disapprove of this wrong classism. Although Ali and Hassan are the best friends of Baba and Amir, the former have to work as servants to the latter since Ali and Hassan are Hazaras while Baba and Amir are Pashtuns. Both Amir and Hassan were motherless. They were breastfed and brought up by the same Hazara woman who was hired

by Baba. "Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was *Baba*. His was *Amir*. My name"⁽³⁹⁾. However, Amir's position as 'master' gives him the advantage to treat his Hazara friend Hassan with very little respect and Hassan has nothing to do but to accept this humiliating treatment. Hassan calls Amir "Agha" and Amir is happy, for it shows his superiority to Hassan. That's why it is clear that slavery is another form of persecution and man's inhumanity that affects the Hazaras psychologically. Both Hassan and his father work only as cooks, servants, and waiters in the house of Baba and Amir.

By the time I [Amir] dragged myself out of bed and lumbered to the bathroom, Hassan had already washed up... and prepared my breakfast... While I ate and complained about homework, Hassan made my bed, polished my shoes, ironed my outfit for the day, packed my boots and pencils⁽⁴⁰⁾.

These words sum up the nature of the relationship between the Pashtuns and Hazaras. Although Hassan is Amir's half-brother who was brought up with him in the same home, Hassan still has to treat Amir as his master. As a matter of fact, Pashtuns misused the history in order to rule the country. They oppress the Hazaras and prevent them from many social rights.

School textbooks barely mentioned them [Hazaras] and referred to their ancestry only in passing. Then one day, I [Amir] was in Baba's study, looking through his stuff, when I found one of my mother's old history books... and was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history. An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my 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⁽⁴¹⁾.

The arrogance and despotism of the majority group (Pashtun) become unbearable that they think that Afghanistan is their land only. They want to apply what is named in the text as subjects of "ethnic cleansing"⁽⁴²⁾ in order to get rid of all the Hazaras and make Afghanistan the land of Pashtuns. Such a view is expressed through the character of a haughty Pashtun boy named Assef who unequivocally wants the disposal of the Hazaras from Afghanistan. He develops a sense of aggressive "attitudes [that] include unjustified hostility"⁽⁴³⁾ toward the Hazaras. In the text, a Hitler-like, Assef believes that Pashtuns are the only true Afghans and Afghanistan belongs to them. It is a mission for him to eliminate all the Hazaras from the land of Afghanistan. In his first encounter with Hassan and Amir, he remarks:

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 [Hassan's] people pollute our homeland... They dirty our blood." He made a sweeping, grandiose gesture with his hands. "Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision" "To rid Afghanistan of all the dirty Hazaras"⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Furthermore, in his adulthood, he joins Taliban, who are mostly Pashtuns, in order to accomplish his mission. In his second encounter with Amir when Amir is back to look for his half nephew (Sohrab), he says to Amir, "Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage"⁽⁴⁵⁾. Assef strongly believes in what is called "ethnic cleansing"⁽⁴⁶⁾ since it has to do well with his garbage metaphor.

Radical Assef is not angry with the Hazaras only but also with all those who do respect them. He blames Amir and his father for their support of Hassan and his father, Ali because they are Hazaras. "You're part of the problem, Amir. If idiots like you and your father didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them by now. They'd all just go rot in Hazarajat"⁽⁴⁷⁾ where

they belong. You're a disgrace to Afghanistan"⁽⁴⁸⁾. Though he believes that Amir is his twin because both are Pashtuns, he hates him for his friendship with Hassan.

Amir: "We're not bothering you."

"Oh, you're bothering me," Assef said...

"You're bothering me very much. In fact, you bother me more than this Hazara [Hassan] here. How can you talk to him, play with him, let him touch you?"

"How can you call him your 'friend'?"⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The questions in the above quotation reveal the real face of Amir to whom Hassan is a mere servant.

But he's not my friend! I [Amir] almost blurted. *He's my servant!* Had I really thought that? Of course I hadn't. I hadn't. I treated Hassan well, just like a friend, better even, more like a brother. But if so, then why, when Baba's friends came to visit with their kids, didn't I ever include Hassan in our games? Why did I play with Hassan only when no one else was around?⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Thus, it is clear that Amir is very perceptive of the ethnic difference between him and Hassan, nevertheless, he adjusts himself with him for the benefit of protection, guarding, and companionship. "In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shia and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing"⁽⁵¹⁾. Like all other Pashtuns, Amir never thought of Hassan as his friend. Hosseini re-emphasizes this idea through a conversation between Hassan and Assef before the rape scene when Hassan refuses to give Assef Amir's kite claiming that Amir is his friend.

"A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog," Assef said.

"But before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he never includes you in games when he has guests? Why he only plays with you when no one else is around? I'll tell you why, Hazara. Because to him, you're nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he's bored, something he can kick when he's angry. Don't ever fool yourself and think you're something more."

"Amir agha and I are friends," Hassan said.

He looked flushed. "Friends?" Assef said, laughing. "You pathetic fool! Someday you'll wake up from your little fantasy and learn just how good of a friend he is"⁽⁵²⁾.

On reading this scene, one asks oneself 'is it real that Hassan is a mere ugly pet to Amir after all what Hassan has been doing for him?' While Hassan is doing his best to satisfy Amir, the latter is in a conflict over accepting him as a friend. "The curious thing was, I [Amir] never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense... Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion"⁽⁵³⁾. In the same way, "Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates... But in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend"⁽⁵⁴⁾. Hence, these lines expose the strong racist and ethnic relations in Afghanistan. Even if the powerful individuals want to have a more positive attitude to the minority ethnic groups, the social structure prevents them from doing so.

In spite of Amir's selfishness and betrayal, Hassan remains a true and selfless friend. It is him who saves Amir from Assef's rudeness with his slingshot. When Assef and his group were about to beat Amir and Hassan, Hassan points his slingshot toward Assef saying:

...perhaps you [Assef] didn't notice that I'm the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move, they'll have to change your nickname from Assef 'the Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef,' because I have this rock pointed at your left eye⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Once and again the selfishness and the superiority complex of Amir is encountered with loyalty and faithfulness by Hassan. He sacrifices his life more than once for the sake of Amir. In one of the scenes, his loyalty is examined by Amir:

Hassan: "Would I ever lie to you, Amir agha?"

Amir: "I don't know. Would you?"

Hassan: "I'd sooner eat dirt..."

Amir: "Really? You'd do that?"

Hassan: "Do what?"

Amir: "Eat dirt if I told you to,"

Hassan: "If you asked, I would..."⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Honest people like Hassan are really devout, they "mean every-thing they say. They think everyone else does too"⁽⁵⁷⁾. Sometimes, Amir admits Hassan's honesty and good manners. "Hassan was so goddamn pure, you always felt like a phony around him"⁽⁵⁸⁾. Even when they are playing, he loses only for the sake of making Amir happy. "I had the distinct suspicion that Hassan had let me win"⁽⁵⁹⁾. Even the worst incident in his life (his rape by Assef) occurs because he wants to make Amir gleeful. When Hassan is asked by Amir to run after his kite, gleefully, he remarks: "For you a thousand times over!"⁽⁶⁰⁾. He even misses his prayer for the sake of catching Amir's kite. "Hassan never missed any of the five daily prayers.... He was going to miss prayer tonight, though, because of me,"⁽⁶¹⁾ says Amir.

Running after the kite, Hassan encounters Assef and his buddies which makes him late. Amir goes to look for him. When he asks different people about Hassan, they respond with derogative comments questioning Amir's concern for a mere servant. "Your Hazara?" and "what is a boy like you doing here at this time of the day looking for a Hazara.... What is he to you?"⁽⁶²⁾. Amir does not oppose these humiliating comments. Ultimately, he finds him blockaded (eating dirt) rather than giving Amir's kite to Assef. However, Amir keeps watching and never interferes because he is not ready to lose the kite even if its price were Hassan's safety. After the rape, Hassan gives the kite to Amir who inhumanely takes it to Baba as if nothing happened. "Baba held me close to him, rocking me back and forth. In his arms, I forgot what I'd done. And that was good"⁽⁶³⁾. This shows that the Pashtuns see the Hazaras as mere servants who should serve them at any cost.

Hassan's loyalty and faithfulness is timeless and endless. Even when Amir attempts to sound the death knell of their friendship, he remains altruistic and selfless. When Amir accuses him of stealing his watch and money, he takes the blame not because he is a thief nor because he is not able to defend himself, but because he wants to save his friend. "I lifted Hassan's mattress and planted my new watch and a handful of Afghani bills under it,"⁽⁶⁴⁾ says Amir. When he is asked by Baba whether he commits that crime, he admits that.

Baba came right out and asked. "Did you steal that money? Did you steal Amir's watch, Hassan?" Hassan's reply was a single word, delivered in a thin, raspy voice: "Yes."

I flinched, like I'd been slapped. My heart sank and I almost blurted out the truth. Then I understood: This was Hassan's final sacrifice for me. If he'd said no, Baba would have believed him because we all knew Hassan never lied. And if Baba believed him, then

I'd be the accused; I would ...: Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in that alley, that I'd stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time⁽⁶⁵⁾.

People like Hassan knows no animosity. After all the mischief that he has undergone because of Amir, he still loves him. This is shown in the letter that he sends to Amir with Rahim Khan: "... And I dream that someday you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an old faithful friend waiting for you"⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Thus, social structure and some personal rude behaviours act as 'excruciation' to both the Pashtuns and the Hazaras, the rich and the poor, the superiors and the inferiors. In the text, Amir and Hassan are tortured as they are the representatives of the two ethnic groups: Pashtuns and Hazaras.

4.3. The Impact of Classism, Stereotypes, and Persecution on the Hazaras.

An iniquitous impact of classism and stereotype is the persecution of Hazaras and depriving them of all the basic essentials of life, and education is no exception. As depicted in the narrative, the education of the two ethnic groups is different. While the Pashtuns' kids (Amir) are allowed to go to school and learn how to read and write, Hazaras' kids (Hassan) are denied such facility. The only option they have is to work as servants. Many Hazaras, like Ali and Hassan never get proper education. Pashtuns feel that as servants, Hazaras need not to be literate. "That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born... after all, what use did a servant have for the written word?"⁽⁶⁷⁾. Furthermore, Pashtuns use their knowledge to look superior to Hazaras. Though the two kids (Hassan and Amir) were brought up together in the same home, Amir never thought or attempted to instruct Hassan how to read or write. Instead, he ridicules and mocks him for not

being able to read. "My [Amir's] favorite part of reading to Hassan was when we came across a big word that he didn't know. I'd tease him, expose his ignorance"⁽⁶⁸⁾. Thus, it is clear that Amir takes the advantage of Hassan being illiterate to make him seem ignorant. Amir feels that such ignominious behavior makes him look more powerful and superior to Hassan.

Another savage impact of inhumanity, stereotype, and classism that the minority Hazaras suffer from is the issue of sexual abuse which reflects the control, authoritarianism, and dominance of the majority (Pashtuns) through degradation and humiliation of the Hazaras. This act is expressed again and again from the very outset to the end of the novel. Here are some instances of sexual abuse that reflect the Hazaras' sufferings at the hands of the Pashtuns. The very first example is indicated by the narrator (Amir) at the initiation of the narrative. It is the story of one soldier with Hassan's mother (Sanaubar). While Amir and Hassan were going to cinema, a soldier begins to tell his story (illegal relation) with Hassan's mother loudly and openly in front of everybody.

You! [Hassan] The Hazara! Look at me when I'm talking to you!".... "I knew your mother, did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there."... "What a tight little sugary cunt she had!" the soldier was saying, shaking hands with the others, grinning⁽⁶⁹⁾.

Although adultery or fornication is considered a crime in Islamic societies, it may happen. Notwithstanding, you would not find an adulterer (the soldier) talks proudly about his vice to the woman's son (Hassan), only if the family to whom the lady belongs is persecuted, oppressed, and has no place in society as the Hazara in Afghanistan. To tell the truth, it is disheartening that because Hassan is a Hazara, he could not protest or say even a single word

to defend his mother's honor. What he could do is only croaking and weeping silently. One can imagine what effect such act can have on such a little boy.

I [Amir] heard Hassan next to me, croaking. Tears were sliding down his cheeks. I reached across my seat, slung my arm around him, pulled him close. He rested his head on my shoulder. "He took you for someone else," I whispered. "He took you for someone else"⁽⁷⁰⁾.

The silence of Hassan and his tears reflect the extent to which this group of people is downtrodden.

Another instance of sexual abuse which reflects the dominance of the Pashtuns and humiliation of the Hazaras is related to Baba and Hassan. At the last part of the novel, Rahim Khan informs Amir that Hassan is his "illegitimate half-brother"⁽⁷¹⁾. Although Baba "slept with his servant's wife [who] bore him a son named Hassan,"⁽⁷²⁾ he does not admit that because the kid's mother is a Hazara which is shameful and humiliating for him as a Pashtun to have a child from his Hazara lady-servant.

The third and most important instance of sexual abuse which brings about separation between Amir and Hassan is the rape of Hassan by Assef and his friends. Assef hates Hassan so much just because he is a Hazara. Describing the scene, Amir says:

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⁽⁷³⁾.

Again, Hassan's reaction to his humiliation is silence. Indeed, this scene portrays Hassan's helplessness and persecution, Assef's rudeness, and Amir's selfishness. It is because of Amir's silence that Assef and his friends find a good chance to rape Hassan. I think Amir and Assef are partners in this crime as he makes no efforts to save Hassan. Hence, Assef and Amir are not different. "We're the same, you and I... you are my twin,"⁽⁷⁴⁾ says Assef to Amir. It seems that Amir watches Hassan being raped without making any efforts to save him because of his cowardice and egoism. He is afraid that Assef may hurt him too. At the same time, he wants to get the kite at any cost. Hassan is the price of his triumph in the kite tournament. He is the lamb that Amir slaughters to achieve his selfish goals.

In the end, I ran.

... 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. 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?⁽⁷⁵⁾

Hazaras are not treated as humans, this is in the consciousness of the Pashtuns. The sentence "He was just a Hazara," helps Amir to get rid of any feeling of guilt toward Hassan as if Hassan were created only to serve and sacrifice his everything for his Pashtun master Amir. As a human, this humiliation and persecution affect Hassan's psychological health negatively. After the rape, he does nothing but "just wants to crawl under his blanket"⁽⁷⁶⁾. His health deteriorates. He "looked tired too—he'd lost weight and gray circles had formed under his puffed-up eyes"⁽⁷⁷⁾. Thus, it is clear that sexual abuse affects Hassan both internally and

externally. However, he does not talk about it and continues his life as if nothing happened. On reading the novel, Fadlilah Satya Handayani in her “Racial Discrimination towards the Hazaras,” comments on this particular incident saying:

Racial discrimination affects Hassan’s mental health. Hassan is indeed helpless when being raped. He has to endure all the indignity by himself. Sexual abuse affects Hassan very much on the inside, yet he does not show how his feeling on the outside. Hassan chooses to ignore what has happened to him and continues his life as if nothing happened. This accident is very hard for Hassan. He pretends to be silent of this moment forever. Hassan has turned into someone who does not have any confidence due to discrimination that he receives⁽⁷⁸⁾.

The last instance of sexual abuse against the Hazaras has to do with Hassan’s son (Sohrab). In the last part of the novel, Sohrab has been kidnaped by Taliban (Assef) who keeps him as sex slave and forces him to dance for his amusement. This affects Sohrab very much that he wants to commit suicide. He was “tired of everything”⁽⁷⁹⁾.

In the text, Hassan, his father Ali, and his son Sohrab are not the only victims of classism, stereotype, and persecution. Rahim Khan loved a beautiful Hazara girl, but was not allowed to marry her because of her servant status. All her family members were sent out of the city by Rahim Khan’s father.

Her name was Homaira. She was a Hazara, the daughter of our neighbor’s servants. She was as beautiful as a pari⁽⁸⁰⁾, light brown hair, big hazel eyes.... That same day, my father put Homaira and her family on a lorry and sent them off to Hazarajat. I never saw her

again.”..... “She would have suffered. My family would have never accepted her as an equal⁽⁸¹⁾.

He himself admits the social differences between his family and hers remarking that it’s not appropriate to “order someone to polish [one’s] shoes one day and call them sister the next”⁽⁸²⁾. So, it can be understood that social structure in Afghanistan causes such problems and creates such division.

Over and above, the suffering of the Hazaras due to their depreciation and belittlement by the Pashtuns is borderless. They are marginalized in and out of Afghanistan. Hassan’s son (Sohrab) suffers from this when he lives with his half-uncle and his wife (Amir and Soraya) in California. He is named by Soraya’s father and all other Afghans in America as a ‘Hazara boy’. They are all questioning Amir’s heed for a mere Hazara boy. Consider the following scene:

“So, Amir jan, you’re going to tell us why you have brought back this boy [Sohrab] with you?”

“... my dear, I have to deal with the community’s perception of our family. People will ask. They will want to know why there is a Hazara boy living with our daughter. What do I tell them?”

Soraya dropped her spoon. Turned on her father. “You can tell them—”

“It’s okay, Soraya,” I [Amir] said, taking her hand. “It’s okay. General Sahib is quite right. People *will* ask.”

“It’s all right.” I turned to the general. “You see, General Sahib, my father slept with his servant’s wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping on the couch is Hassan’s son. He’s my nephew. That’s what you tell people

when they ask.”

They were all staring at me.

“And one more thing, General Sahib,” I said. “You will never again refer to him as ‘Hazara boy’ in my presence. He has a name and it’s Sohrab”⁽⁸³⁾.

In spite of the rough existence of stereotype and classism which result in the social conflict between groups like Pashtun and Hazara, and the practice of violent acts of some ‘masters’ like Assef toward ‘servants’ like Hassan, there is still hope that such conflicts could be solved and Afghans could be one regardless of their differences socially, economically, religiously, culturally, or physically. The reciprocal sacrifices of Hassan and Amir embody this idea. In their childhood, Hassan substantiates to be an ingenuous and loyal friend. He is not only Amir’s buddy and servant, but also his protector. He helps and defends Amir once and again to the detriment of being raped by Assef and his buddies. Again, in his adulthood, he sacrifices his own life and that of his wife just to protect Amir’s property. In the same way, Amir proves his faithfulness and selflessness when he leaves his family in America and comes back to Afghanistan so as to save Hassan’s son (Sohrab) at the expense of his life being at risk.

Before the conclusion, I would like to ask an exigent and imperative question that comes to mind from the very first moment of reading the story. Is it faithfulness and sacrifice for the sake of friendship or a feeling of inferiority complex that leads Hassan to be such a good friend to Amir? Is it his good manners or a feeling of servitude that he has to do whatever his master wants no matter what? And if it is a feeling of inferiority that leads him to do so, where does this feeling of inferiority spring from? It would not be fair to expect the story or its author to address this question. The wider implications of the individual consciousness portrayed in the story to the question of how the Hazara *self* sees the Pashtun *other*. *The Kite*

Runner is making a fresh approach to this issue or theme in which the *other* is seen not as an equal but as an oppressor and a master. The question still persists: where does this feeling of inferiority spring from? Indeed, I do agree, to some extent, with Rasheed El-Enany that this feeling of inferiority is because “the culture of the self loses ground to the culture of the other”⁽⁸⁴⁾. This feeling of belittlement is created by the social structure in which one is born to be a master; and the other is born to be a servant. To put differently, though both groups are citizens of the same country, there is no equality between the two groups: the Hazaras have no equal economic opportunities, no equal political participation, no equal protection of the law, no equal access to health and education facilities, etc. All this creates an internal feeling in both groups that one of them is superior to the other and that it is the duty of the inferior Hazara to serve the Pashtun no matter what. Thus, “this inferiority is in fact a ‘carry-over’ feeling from one’s own culture” and social structure”⁽⁸⁵⁾.

5. Conclusion

This paper has focused on two broad elements: the reasons beyond concepts like stereotypes, classism, and persecution; and their negative impact on the marginalized. This paper is inspired by my belief that unveiling these issues must be read in relation to the daily transactions of ordinary people. Reading literary works like *The Kite Runner* is a fruitful exercise that will help understand the impact of these issues on the life of people. This paper sought to answer some questions like: How are these issues defined? What are their reasons? What are their effects on the people? Who are the real beneficiaries and losers of these issues?

As has been discussed above, it is apparent that classism, stereotypes, and persecution of some groups by others is not due to their physical difference but because of the inherent weaknesses in Afghanistan’s social structure and its cultural prejudices. The powerful majority

groups (Pashtuns) use their power and money to incite wrong viewpoints or attitudes toward the weak minority (Hazaras). They attempt to control the community, and pulverize whoever they loathe. They utilize the misconception of human distinction to demonstrate that they are better than others.

To conclude, this paper attempted to show how unjust, oppressive, and devastating classism and stereotype could be to individuals as well as to community at large. Hazaras were often illiterate because they lacked education opportunities. They were seen as ethnically and religiously inferior to the Sunni Pashtuns. They are sexually abused and insulted. Yet, some individuals of the two groups may deal with each other as brothers, but the social structure makes it possible for any Pashtun to treat any Hazara as a slave.

A major goal of Hosseini is to reveal the unsightly reality of these issues. He aims to create some kind of awareness about the sufferings of the sidelined groups. He does not want his people to build "irrationally based negative, or occasionally positive, attitudes toward certain groups"⁽⁸⁶⁾ for the color of their skin, their religion, nation, language, sex or race.

I believe that in order to knock these wrong ideas off, and for the marginalized to have equal opportunities and lead a normal life, we as human beings should make judgment about others on personal basis, on direct experience with the others, not on whether they are Pashtuns or Hazaras, rich or poor, masters or servants, etc. Baba and Rahim Khan do not disapprove of social class; they just don't want it to attempt to influence their life. Though Baba, Rahim Khan, Amir, and Assef belong to the same ethnic group, their treatment of the Hazaras is different. So, it is not whether or not one is a Pashtun or Hazara that determines one's character, but the choices one makes with regard to relationships to others.

Further studies in the field have to involve postcolonial fictions from both the Arab and the Western worlds that challenge these erroneous notions. People all over the world even in the developed world are tortured by these irrationally based negative views. So, it is the duty of writers to write in order to close the gaps and create channels of communication between the different groups.

Endnotes:

- (1) See: Razeshta Sethna, Interview: Khaled Hosseini, Newline magazine, Karachi, Nov. 2003.
- (2) Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, New Delhi, Bloomsbury, 2013: 2.
- (3) Geraldine S. Pearson, *The Kite Runner - by Khaled Hosseini*, Hoboken, Wiley Online Library, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 6 Feb. 2007: 66.
- (4) Niraja Saraswat, Theme of Identity and Redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, India, *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1.5, 2014: 166.
- (5) See: Razeshta Sethna, former reference.
- (6) See: Razeshta Sethna, former reference.
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- (9) *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, Pearson Education, 2014, 5th ed.
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- (11) Aisha A. Al-Mattari, *The Role of the Postcolonial Novel in Challenging Stereotypes: A Study of Levy's Small Island and Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy*, English Department, Yemeni Academy for Graduates Studies, Sana'a, 2018: 25.

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- (13) Cambridge Dictionary Online, England, Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- (14) Concise Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2008, 11th ed.
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- (16) Akram Sadat Hosseini and Esmail Zohdi, *The Kite Runner and the Problem of Racism and Ethnicity*, International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, Vol 74, pp. 33-40, 2016.
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- (19) Khoirotnun Nisa', *Ethnic Conflicts in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner*, E-theses of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, 5 June 2014.
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- (21) Ahmad Thamrini Fadzlin B. Syed Mohamed, *Once Upon a Kite: Glimpses into Afghanistan's Race Relations*, *Kaleidoscope*. 5(2), pp.119-131, 2013.
- (22) Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, New York, Facts on File, 2007: 14.
- (23) See: Lauer Robert H. and Jeannette C. Lauer, *Social Problems and the Quality of Life*, United States, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2013, 13th ed.
- (24) The novel: 9.
- (25) Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, former reference: 16.
- (26) The novel: 9.
- (27) The novel: 9.

- (28) Rasul Bux Rais, *Recovering the Frontier State: War, Ethnicity, and State in Afghanistan*, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2009: 32-33.
- (29) Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, former reference: 94.
- (30) The novel: 202-203.
- (31) Rebecca Stuhr, *Reading Khaled Hosseini*, United States, Greenwood Press, 2009: 42.
- (32) The novel: 50.
- (33) The novel: 41.
- (34) The novel: 13.
- (35) The novel: 21-22.
- (36) The novel: 83-84.
- (37) Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, New York, Routledge: Taylor and Francis, 2006: 419.
- (38) The novel: 43.
- (39) The novel: 10.
- (40) The novel: 25-26.
- (41) The novel: 8-9.
- (42) The novel: 261.
- (43) John Arthur, *Race, Equality, and the Burdens of History*, England, Cambridge University Press, 2007: 23.
- (44) The novel: 38.
- (45) The novel: 261.
- (46) The novel: 261.
- (47) Hazarajat is a mountainous region in the central highlands of Afghanistan. It is the homeland of Hazara people.
- (48) The novel: 39.

- (49) The novel: 38.
(50) The novel: 38.
(51) The novel: 24.
(52) The novel: 68.
(53) The novel: 24.
(54) The novel: 24.
(55) The novel: 39-40.
(56) The novel: 50-51.
(57) The novel: 51.
(58) The novel: 54.
(59) The novel: 55.
(60) The novel: 63.
(61) The novel: 65.
(62) The novel: 64-65.
(63) The novel: 74.
(64) The novel: 97.
(65) The novel: 97-98.
(66) The novel: 202.
(67) The novel: 26.
(68) The novel: 27.
(69) The novel: 7.
(70) The novel: 7.
(71) The novel: 219.
(72) The novel: 331.
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(78) Fadlilah Satya Handayani, Racial Discrimination towards the Hazaras as Reflected in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, Lantern, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 2013: 45-46.

(79) The novel: 324.

(80) Pari is an Afghani word that means (angel).

(81) The novel: 91-92.

(82) The novel: 92.

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