

KHALED HOSSEINI AND COMPRADOR NARRATION

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ABSTRACT --Home is where your comfort lays, a place where one can connect to ones roots. But for refugees, what does home imply? How hard it will be to leave one's place of birth and move to another land where everything seems other. Thousands of people have lost their lives in their effort to cross the borders and to find a new home and safety. Often people will get used to their new home, new culture, but one can always find a sense of longing for culture, religion and tradition offered by the homeland as it defines what we are. Unable to cope up with their new life, people choose to return to their war torn home where, language and employment will never be a problem. This paper deals with the category of refugee writing in literature and how such writing goes in parallel with the real life incidents of writers such as Khaled Hosseini.

Key words-- Interior Colonization, Idea of Terrorism, Polygamy and Power Rivalry, The Lost World, Political Identity Through Personal Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lost World Every nation in the Asian continent including Afghanistan has its own uncivilized past, where buildings, cars and divisions never existed. Everyone spent time in groups, and none of them wanted to be alone which is in stark contrast to the life in west. Tamim Ansary, an Afghan- American novelist says, most of the people he knew in America demands that they need solitude because when a person is alone, he is free from obligations. But the Afghans achieved this state by being with one another. Being in home with the group gave them satisfaction we associate with solitude- ease, comfort and freedom. Thus the representation of one's home land is always accompanied by sentiments and nostalgia where the author often tries to change the existing attitude towards their homeland and to alter the preconceived notions people have of it. Thus every nation has its own past, its own culture so dear to us which makes us think scornfully of west.

Colonization as a process has wiped us of our culture, the roots, what defined our land for a long period of time. The sentimentality towards homeland and up rootedness prevails in the minds of people, who have escaped their place of birth due to terrorism and war. Such sentiments are reflected in the writings of diasporic authors such as Khaled Hosseini, Amin Saikal, and Tamim Ansary etc.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American novelist who became famous through his debut novel, *The Kite Runner*. He is an author with three successful novels and many other fictional and non-fictional works. Hosseini has his roots in Afghanistan, where he lived for the first 11 years of his life. He lived there till 1976 when the Afghan ministry moved his diplomat father and the entire family to Paris. Four years later, Afghani violence forced

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the family to seek political asylum in U.S. After graduating from college, he worked as a doctor in California. After the success of his first novel, he turned to full time writing after giving up medicine.

Hosseini derived his inspiration for writing from the memory he had of Kabul, his homeland. Revisiting his homeland after 27 years, he felt guilty of his own good luck and wealth. He gets thwarted seeing the county being torn by war. Today, he serves as a goodwill envoy to the United Nations often leading humanitarian missions to Afghanistan to build shelters for refugees and award scholarship for women. Hosseini claims that “he wanted to create a story world that didn’t necessarily begin with Kabul and ends in Kandahar...and wanted to expand the geographic milieu”. But his characters are more or less Afghans and are partially or completely set in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, also called ‘Graveyard of Empires’ is a country that belongs to South of Asia and is largely known as the Islamic republic of Afghanistan. Landlocked by countries such as Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, the country has witnessed numerous military campaigns from the time of Alexander the Great to invasion of United States and its allied countries. Even literature of the country cannot be discussed without focusing on its politics.

II. OBJECTIVES

This paper deals with the diasporic writer Khaled Hosseini, who even though occupying a hybrid subject position, finally tends to exoticise Afghanistan and justify American intervention in Afghanistan. The paper also discusses how he represents both the Afghan and American culture in their literature and a brief look into their personal identity, which is shaped by their political identity. The paper also looks into the normalizing notions of these writers, their generalizing view regarding the issues concerning orient. The paper closely analyses the interior colonization in Hosseini’s homeland, Afghanistan and how it welcomed the patronage of foreign powers. The paper also brings into question the political identity of Hosseini, which shaped his personal identity and his difficulty in distinguishing the good from bad, the self and the other.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The Self and the Other

In an interview given to an online magazine *The Guardian*, he said that he finds a new relationship with the country he left in the 1970s. But Hosseini’s stand on Afghanistan is bizarre and often ambiguous. When the interviewer asks him “I notice you’re careful not to set yourself up as a spokesperson for Afghanistan,” all he said was a complex ambiguous answer, “you must not believe your own PR, and it would be grotesque. I spent my formative years there; I care about what happens there. Afghanistan receded. Since writing the book, Afghanistan has become a big part of my life. I have reconnected with it in an intimate way.” Considering his background as an Afghan born and American raised, it is natural to adopt such hybrid identities where he is caught up between two stances, and sometimes would want both identities. Thus to make a distinction between self and the other often seems impossible.

Syria is another country that gains considerable space in Hosseini’s works. Through his book, *The Sea Prayer* Hosseini discourses on the feelings of refugees to one’s homeland, their culture and past life. No matter what one gets in the refugee land, the tradition offered by homeland will always determine who we are. *The Sea Prayer* is

an illustrated novel in which a father narrated the world of Syria before and after the war. The story centers on the death of Alan Kurdi, a three year old boy who died in his family's efforts to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The book starts with a colorful description of Syria, where he grew up. The illustrations which at first are made with happy colorsturngrey to depict the ravages of war. Family also gains considerable space in Hosseini novels. These are the sentiments upheld by the refugees. His novels contain characters who are Afghan born and American raised. Most of them choose to stay away from the family except few. But content are the ones who choose to stay.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In his ground breaking work *Orientalism*, Edward. W. Said defined Orientalism as “The basic distinction between east and the west as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the orient, its people, customs, minds, destiny and so on.” (Said 1)

He defined it as a corporate institution for “dealing with the orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it. In short, Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restricting and having authority over the orient.” The conceptual frameworks about orient which are taught from history are created only and nothing was there naturally including the discrepancies related to orient and occident. In Vico's words, man makes their own history. Thus the occident caters their imagination to learn about orient but the imagination often fail to produce a real orient.

According to Said, the process date back to the period of post-enlightenment where the west constructed the east and its life as inferior and therefore in need of western intervention or rescue. Mass media, books, paintings and many art forms acted as successful careers of this stereotyping and presented the desired image of orient. They are used by the occident particularly to depict the orient culture as barbaric, exotic, mysterious and often dangerous. But the representation of the subjugated is not how they exist in real world. For instance, during colonization of Algeria by France, the entrepreneurs produced postcards of Algerian women and circulated it all over France. The postcard seems to have captured the real life events of these women but in reality, it was shot in the photographer's studio. But this fabricated photograph serves as evidence that confirms imperial superstition of orient as exotic and backwards.

Most interventions initially came by promising a rescue from the existing unbalanced consensual framework in the society. But the patronage of a foreign power became similar to that of drug addiction. For instance, in Afghanistan, no central government survived and maintained socio-political control without support from abroad. America enjoyed the global supremacy, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth century and thus they are known by the world than they know the world.

The slave always has to know his/her master in order to maximize the chances of survival. The masters can enjoy the luxury of ignorance at least until his throat is cut. (Saikal 7)

And the relationship between Afghan and America was always one of the master-slave. Afghanistan came in to limelight only after the 2001 September 11 attacks by Taliban which destroyed the twin towers in America. But it led to a stereotyping of all Afghans as terrorists. These notions however get boosted by writers such as Hosseini who confirm the already existing notions.

America started dominating the orient and Orientalism after World War I, to define them as previous power like France and Britain once did. An American approaches the orient first as an American, and then as an individual. The process of othering has been the basis for Orientalism where the imperial center can exclude those who they wanted to subordinate. Treating the other as demons, inhuman and inferior, the process has been an extension of the interior colonization in America where various groups of African- Americans, Native Americans etc are represented stereotypically. Treating the other as animals, who lack basic human instincts and in fact dangerous, treating them as close to nature, untouched by civilization and hence required westernization, and treating them as infants, who doesn't speak for themselves, who needs to be taught.

Afghanis always have been an integral part of U.S society since its inception. But there is a disparity between who Afghanis are and how they are generally perceived by U.S public. This disparity has caused due to Orientalism, especially due to over generalized and distorted images produced by institutions such as media. Authors play a pivotal role in it. This process of othering has its own long history where the imperial capital stereotypically represents many ethnic, cultural and religious groups. In Orientalism, Said pointed out this as

The orient is not only adjacent to Europe, it is also the place of Europe greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other. In addition, the orient has helped to define Europe (or the west). (Said 14).

The stereotypical notions account for a range of consequence and impact. In brief, Orientalism made orientals unable to have control over their thoughts or actions by setting the orientals as a sort of "surrogate" or an "underground self," the European culture gained strength. As Amin Saikal puts it, the relationship between afghan and America is that of a master slave. K.M Panicker in his classic *ASIA AND WESTERN DOMINANCE* says that, the relationship between the occident and orient is a relationship of power, of domination.

Said also notes that another reason why the orientals are oriented because they submit themselves to it. For instance he talks about Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan that produced an influential model of oriental women, who never spoke of herself, never represented her emotions, presence or history. But he spoke for her and represented her. She made him speak as he was a foreign man, wealthy and a male. Thus the discourses west make of the orientals is in a way approved by it.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hosseini is largely known for the representation of Afghan women and plights of Afghanistan. His hybrid culture which made it difficult for him to choose between either of the two cultures is discussed by many scholars. Most papers centers on his representation of his homeland, its vast culture and religion in an appealing way.

VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The idea of self and other declines considerably, from his first work, *The Kite Runner* to his third book *And the Mountains Echoed*. Reading *The Kite Runner* is definitely an experience as it presents an Afghan culture which is rich with values and negates the preconceived notions the Americans have of it. In fact his novels helped in changing the existing attitude of Americans towards his homeland. *The Kite Runner* will initially make one think

that he is speaking against America but the characters end up in America on a happy note. For instance, in *The Kite Runner*, Amir and his father whom he calls Baba fled to America during war leaving all their wealth and fortune in Kabul. Initially, for Baba and Amir, American dream was merely an illusion than reality. They were faced with discriminations and language barriers to achieve the opportunities offered by American Dream. But if Hosseini intended to bring out the flaws in American dream, it wouldn't have been published in America's leading publishing house or it wouldn't be New York Times best seller for years. Thus Amir's father finds it difficult to cope up with the cultural shock but Amir succeeded and ends up bringing his Brother Hassan's son Sohrab to America. The novel ends on a happy note when Amir teaches Sohrab to fly kites in America. Amir describes himself as an "Afghan with half of a foot in America" (Hosseini, 120) which makes him feel compromised.

VII. IDEA OF TERRORISM

Rare is the country that sustained as many blows, and such hard blows, as has Afghanistan since its foundation as a distinct political unit in 1747. Yet the country has managed to survive and to retain some form of sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite numerous wars and invasions. The country has witnessed various invasions from Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. All invasions came at first as a promise to renew the land, to recreate a land which is self sufficient. But all of them proved fruitless and further lead to bloodshed as they simply represent a revised version of old rivalries. Some people were welcoming towards the invading forces as the internal politics lead them to ask for foreign aid. Thus they hope, the backward communities may gain an individual political stand. If we closely observe any colonies, all of them were, especially the backward communities were supportive only to experience a more structuralized oppression.

Hosseini's novels cover the history of Afghanistan, and are usually set in a time during the Taliban conquest, the coming of Al-Qaeda, and the coming of United States and its allies. Taliban mainly comprises of students from the Pashtun areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan who had been educated in traditional Islamic schools. They were Totalitarian Islamic emirates who transferred the capital of Afghanistan to Kandahar. The Taliban have been condemned internationally for their harsh enforcement of Islamic Sharia law, which has resulted in the brutal treatment of many Afghans, especially women. According to United Nations, the Taliban and their allies were responsible for 80% of Afghan civilian casualties' altogether. It held control of most of the country until being thrown after the American led invasion of Afghanistan in December 2001 following the September 11 attacks. In all his novels, the brutality of the Taliban war has been discussed especially through the character of Roshni, who lost her entire family in *And the Mountains Echoed*.

VIII. INTERIOR COLONIZATION: POLYGAMY & POWER RIVALRY

Interior colonization is a process popular in countries of Asia, where their lineage determines their rank in society. In India, the society was primarily divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisya and Sudras and their rank determines their role in society. In Afghanistan, the people are traditionally divided into ethnic groups like Pashtun, Hazaras, Sunnis and Shias. Apart from that, another factor that determines power relation is polygamy. Polygamous union for politics and pleasure are still legal throughout Middle East. In eighteenth and nineteenth century, the leaders from Pashtun community of Afghanistan took many wives from various ethnic groups and

tribes in addition to concubines. Thus the children formed from this polygamous union started to compete for power based on the ranks of their mother. This proved to be one of the main cause in preventing Afghans from building an appropriate domestic structure and creating a political stability within the ethnic groups. This union however made it easy for the external powers to intervene in the country.

The attractiveness of Afghanistan for foreign powers has been attributed to rich mineral resources also. However, the comings of foreign powers are attributed as a direct result of interior colonization and terrorism, which led people to flock from their land of birth and ask for foreign aid and live in another land as refugees. The outbreak of war in 2011 forced the people in Syria to escape to a land which is not tainted by the smell of blood. Number of people flocked to Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan midst of unknown faces like Afghans, Somalis, Iraqis and Eritreans, and in tongues they don't speak. They cross lands, mountains, sea and darkness in search of a ray of hope. As of reports, around 6 million people fled from Syria to neighboring countries to escape from the ravages of war. In their efforts to cross boundaries, only few are fortunate enough to reach safety. Like what happened in Afghanistan, the refugees were either shot, bombed, or fell ill due to travelling. For Syrians, one way to escape war is to cross the Mediterranean Sea and thousands of people have died in their efforts to cross it. According to the reports, at least 1000 refugees die in the sea annually and around 1000 people have died in the year 2019 alone.

On September 2001, the authorization for the use of military force against terrorists has gained President George W Bush the authority to attack the Taliban, the Sunni fundamental force. Mr. Bush openly declared that it will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. More than 18 years later today, the U.S military is engaged in counter terrorism mission in 80 nations and 6 continents. A lot of money has been wasted investing for war projects. In the war being fought, thousands of people are killed and many more suffered physical and psychological injuries. Hosseini's characters like himself are Afghan-born, American-raised and are comforted by the opportunities provided by the country and in turn wants to bring in their fellow Afghans up to the states so that they too can enjoy the good luck and wealth.

The UNHCR has a policy of helping refugees work and productivity using their existing skills to meet their own needs and the needs of their own country. But the life they are offered in the host country is no match to the life they had in their homeland where language, climate and culture was never an issue. In their host countries, most refugees live in underemployment and low wages. Thus, most of them fail to provide adequate food, healthcare and housing for their families. As per the UN reports of January 2019, around 15-20 children had died due to cold weather and inadequate medical care. As a means of survival, some women and girls have resorted to prostitution. Some refugees even return back to the bloodshed, to the land where they lived, their parents, their grandparents or great grand parents lived. But the world they seek does not exist anymore; it is a world that is lost to them.

IX. CONCLUSION

American dream that ensures the prosperity of every individual through hard work will not necessarily have a positive impact on every one. What the research also focused was on the hybrid culture that influenced Hosseini and how he used such hybridism as a means to glorify American culture using comprador narration. Thus the truth

is, even after receiving all such military aids from the imperial powers, these countries still remain one of the poorest economies of the world. But in Hosseini's novels, one can sense a narration that caters to what the imperial ears wants to hear. Hosseini, who left his homeland at a very young age, cannot write about the plight of Afghans or the Syrian refugee crisis from experience. His works are filled with characters and events which merely confirms what the Orientalist think of orient. Thus Hosseini uses his hybrid position tactfully to imply that America is a safe place. Thus he applies the comprador narrative strategy through which he implies in most of his novels that escape to America is the final solution.

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