

War and Refugee impact in “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns”: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini is a famous writer who writes about war that took place on his birth country Afghanistan. The overwhelming effect of Afghan war led to the displacement of large number of people to distant places. The crime of war adversely affected people of Afghanistan particularly women in every aspect both physically and mentally. People of every age were caught by its turmoil. Men, women, children, young or all tasted its disastrous effect. While going through the works of Khaled Hosseini, one can discern crisis of war and refugee a staple thread through them. More over Afghan war and refugee crisis is the talk of current time in the world. In fact, political analysts were referring it, would be cause of third world war. In this paper I would focus on to his two novels The Kite Runner and A thousand Splendid Suns and would determine the impact of war and migration problem on his main characters, particularly Women.

Keywords: Afghan war, refugee crisis, marginalized, Oppressed

Introduction

Lot of literature is written on war that has been fought between different countries. World War 1 and World War 2 attracted many writers across globe. In fact style of life and literature took a major turn during these wars. What is war and conflict let me quote Ahmad Misuri Gibran

“Conflict is a savage competition between two or some individuals such as ethnic groups or political parties that has become more intense, and always involving weapons and artilleries in the process, and war is defined as the more dangerous form of conflict as it will cost lots of assets, especially those belonged to the nations, and cause several chaotic events in the history of mankind. (p 16)

To what extent are the assets that the war costs during its turmoil? History is witness to the fact that the assets of country that are lost during the war can not be measured and counted by any means. When it is fought it brings destruction and devastation to its inhabitants at a large scale. People are affected both physically and mentally and their survival is changed to hell.

Generally speaking, any individual who is forced to leave his place of permanent residence and move to new place as to safeguard his living is a refugee. Many causes and conditions can become the reason to an individual to leave his/her birth place like social, political, religious, environmental factors etc. According to the 1995 Refugee Convention, which sets criteria of being refugee, a refugee is:

[...] any person who... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.(Article 1, 1951 Refugee Convention).

The image of war and refugee crises in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be best understood by a note in “Afterword” by Khaled Hosseini himself. He writes,

“For almost three decades now, the Afghan refugee crisis has been one of the most severe around the globe. War, hunger, anarchy, and oppression forces millions of people to abandon their homes and flee Afghanistan to settle in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. At the height of the exodus, as many as eight million Afghans were living abroad as refugees. Today, more than two million Afghan refugees remain in Pakistan.

Since 2002, nearly five million refugees have returned home with assistance from the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. In September 2007, I visited some of these returnees in northern Afghanistan. I met families who lived on less than a dollar a day. They spent entire winters cooped up in holes dug underground. I visited villages where families routinely lost ten to fifteen children to the elements every winter and every summer. The people I met drank water from muddy rivers and died of easily preventable diseases. They had little shelter and no access to healthcare facilities, schools, food, or jobs. I was devastated.”

In both the novels “The Kite Runner” and “A thousand Splendid Suns” khaled Hosseini delves deep into the theme of War and Refugee crisis. The war in Afghanistan leads to migration of its people to Pakistan, Iran and other places in order to protect their lives. The characters of both these fiction books are adversely affected by war which compelled them to leave Kabul and live a contend life in Pakistan and America albeit not.

Brief Summary of The Kite Runner

In his debut novel *The kite runner*, Amir, a well-to-do Pashtun boy, and Hassan, a Hazara boy who is the son of Ali, Amir's father's servant, spend their days kite fighting in the hitherto peaceful city of Kabul. Both boys are motherless: Amir's mother died in childbirth, while Hassan's mother, Sanaubar, simply abandoned him and Ali. Amir's father, a wealthy merchant Amir affectionately refers to as *Baba*, loves both boys. Amir finds a kinder fatherly figure in Rahim Khan, Baba's closest friend, who understands him and supports his interest in writing. Assef, an older boy with a sadistic taste for violence, mocks Amir for socializing with an Hazara which, according to him, is an inferior race whose members belong only in Hazarajat. One day, he prepares to attack Amir with brass knuckles, but Hassan defends Amir, threatening to shoot out Assef's eye with his slingshot. Assef backs off but swears to take revenge one day. Another time, Hassan encounters Assef who beats and rapes him. Five years later, the Soviet Union militarily intervened in Afghanistan. Baba and Amir escape to Peshawar, Pakistan and later to Calafornia America. Fifteen years after his wedding, Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan who tells him that Hassan and Ali are both dead. Ali was killed by a land mine. Hassan and

his wife were killed after Hassan refused to allow the Taliban to confiscate Baba and Amir's house in Kabul. Rahim Khan further reveals that Ali was sterile and was not Hassan's biological father. Hassan was actually the son of Sanaubar and Baba, making him Amir's half brother. Finally, Khan tells Amir that the reason he has called Amir to Pakistan is to ask him to rescue Hassan's son, Sohrab, from an orphanage in Kabul. Amir searches for Sohrab who was taken by a Taliban official. Amir meets the Taliban leader, who reveals himself as Assef. Sohrab is being kept at Assef's house as a dancing boy. Assef agrees to relinquish him if Amir can beat him in a fight. Assef then badly beats Amir, breaking several bones, until Sohrab uses a slingshot to fire a brass ball into Assef's left eye. Sohrab helps Amir out of the house.

Brief Summary of A thousand Splendid Suns

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a 2007 novel where Mariam, an illegitimate teenager from Herat, is forced to marry a shoemaker from Kabul after a family tragedy. Laila, born a generation later, lives a relatively privileged life, but her life intersects with Mariam's when a similar tragedy forces her to accept a marriage proposal from Mariam's husband. Hosseini visited Afghanistan in 2003, and "heard so many stories about what happened to women, the tragedies that they had endured, the difficulties, the gender-based violence that they had suffered, the discrimination, the being barred from active life during the Taliban, having their movement restricted, being banned essentially from practicing their legal, social rights, political rights". This motivated him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women. In the book, both Mariam and Laila are forced into accepting marriage to Rasheed, who requires them to wear a burqa long before it is implemented by law under the Taliban. He later becomes increasingly abusive. Fariba, mother of Laila, who experiences poor mental health has lost her two sons fighting for Mujahideen against Soviets.

When Afghanistan enters civil war and Kabul is bombarded by rocket attacks, Tariq's family decide to leave the city, Shortly afterwards, Laila's family decide to also leave the city, but before they can, a rocket hits their home, killing Hakim and Fariba and severely injuring Laila. Laila and her lover Tariq escape Afghanistan and migrate to Pakistan where they get married. There Laila take a sigh of relief from the torture of Rasheed and live her life happily with Tariq. Soon after the fall of Taliban Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan again where they get the news of Mariam's death. In Kabul the family renovated Orphanage where Aziza their daughter was taught. Laila works there as a teacher and soon becomes pregnant with the third child whom they intend to name Mariam.

War and refugee problem in The Kite Runner

Kite flying was the cherished game of Afghans that they fell love for it as is evident from the novel. Amir and Hassan flew their kites, in the end Amir wins and is so praised and applauded by the Baba that he brings him many gifts. When the tournament of kite running was held in Afghanistan the streets became busy. In the novel it is mentioned that

“The kite-fighting tournament was an old winter tradition in Afghanistan. It started early in the morning on the day of the contest and didn't end until only winning kite flew in the sky.....for kite runners, the most coveted prize was the last fallen kite of the winter tournament. It was a trophy of honour,” (p.48-49)

However during the war peace and freedom of Afghanistan changed drastically. The children and women suffered most. Their freedom was prisoned and jailed into orphanage and homes. Brutal and black laws were administered in the country that the age old customs and traditions faded like a flower. The contest of kite flying was banned and no where played in the Kabul.

“The government of Taliban mercilessly banned these important competitions and it struck Hosseini so much that he wrote this complete and beautiful novel, *The Kite Runner*.”(Naeem Khan jadoon, p. 1239)

War changed not only culture and tradition of Kabul but the displacement and migration of its people to other places also made them miserable and tough. When Baba and Amir moved to America, they felt lot of hurdles to adjust there. In America their life remained bleak and blank. They missed Kabul badly. They felt homesickness and want to return again to Afghanistan where lot of memories of past were present there. Amir longed for the pastoral beauty of Afghanistan and said that in America,

“fruit was never sweet enough, the water never clean enough, and where were all the trees and open fields? For two years, I tried to get Baba to enroll in ESL classes to improve his broken English. But he scoffed at the idea.”(p 117)

Loss of identity and Afghan culture in USA is the primary quest of *The Kite Runner*. Amir and Baba become identity less and rootless in USA facing lot of problems in adopting its culture. They become lonely and socially distracted. When they follow the alien American culture, their own culture becomes scattered and in great danger. They lost their own native culture which they have followed from their birth.

Baba was one day cashless and wanted to buy oranges but he was asked to show his ID. Baba shouts,

“He wants to see my licence,” Baba bellowed in Farsi. “Almost two years we’ve bought his damn fruits and put money in pocket and the son of dog wants to see my licence”..... What kind of country is this? No one trusts anybody!” (p.118)

War and Refugee problem in A Thousand Splendid Suns

A Thousand splendid suns is the novel that portrays the Afghan war throughout its whole creation and its dark impact on characters both physically as well as mentally. All main characters and others characters are characterized as the reflection of war in Afghanistan. The whole plot of the novel revolves around the Afghan war which is one of the brutal wars of world where by every thing is at destruction. Rape, jail, torture, killing or everything brutal is the cause of this war. Women are the most victims of this barbaric war whose freedom is snatched from the beginning of the novel. Taliban imposed harsh laws of *sharia* for the women of Afghanistan which debarred them to get education. They were not allowed to go outside without a male relative. A veil was compulsory for them to wear during Taliban rule.

Mariam, characterized as the patient women in the novel, is mostly oppressed in the novel who is sentenced to death by the Taliban Goons. Fed up by the cruelty and mass beatings of his husband Rasheed, who at one scene almost killed his second wife Laila, Mariam hits him by a shovel and killed him. Later on she was jailed by the Taliban for her crime and sentenced to death. She was asked to kneel by a talib. “Kneel here, *hamshira* (sister). And look down.” “One last time, Mariam did as she was told.” (p.361)

Laila is another protagonist of the novel whose wishes and desires are suppressed and oppressed by the war of Afghanistan. Her cruel and dominant husband, Rasheed(a shoe maker) torments her at home who is fond of Taliban's harsh laws of *sharia*. He asks both Laila and Mariam to wear *burqa*(*Veil*) which they submissively did. Laila in her childhood was a good student and her friends had positive expectations about her. Hasina her friend used to say, "You're going to be somebody. I know one day I'll pick up a newspaper and find your picture on the front page."(p.163) However when the war started she was robbed off her education and her parents started her education at home. During the war Laila's lover Tariq fled to Afghanistan and resided in Pakistan and left Laila pregnant with the daughter Aziza. Laila a teenaged girl was forced to marry an already married old man Rasheed who devastated her and Aziza. The most tragic part of this Afghan war is when a rocket hits house of Laila and causing parents of Laila Bibi and Mammy's death. Laila's two brothers Ahmad and Noor were already dead during the war against Communist rule of Soviet Russia. Laila ,Therefore found herself alone and miserable she marries Rasheed as his second wife.

This is the clear cut example of how women in Afghanistan were treated and marginalized during war. Their was silence and patience around them. They were deprived off their basic rights and ambitions. They were not allowed to work outside and earn. Adornments were not allowed to decorate their bodies. All these boundaries were created during dictatorial Taliban reign. Discrimination of gender and inequality of women to men was the cause of Afghan war. Two central characters (Mariam and Laila) from their girlhood to womanhood are miserably caught off this turmoil and major plot of the novel revolves round their tragic fate.

Besides war, there was also found refugee problem in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. When the war reached to its peak most of the families in Kabul migrated to Pakistan and Iran to safeguard their living which did not happen smoothly. Their life became more miserable and sad in the host countries. They had to live their life in refugee camps where their condition was becoming worse day by day. The refugees of Afghanistan were deprived off with the basic necessities of life in these camps. They worked as labourers for few rupees. Their health got deteriorated in these camps.

During the war when Tariq and his family migrated to Pakistan, Tariq describes to Laila, the miserable condition of refugees in Nasir Bag where they stayed for a year. Tariq narrated to Laila,

“There was a leafless tree he climbed every day, where he straddled a branch and watched the refugees lying about in the sun, their sores and stumps in plain view. He watched little emaciated boys carrying water in their jerry cans, gathering dog droppings to make fire, carving toy AK-47s out of wood with dull knives, lugging the sacks of wheat flour that no one could make bread from that held together. All around the refugee town, the wind made the tents flap. It hurled stubbles of weed everywhere, lifted kites flown from the roofs of mud hovels.”

“A lot of kids died. Dysentery, TB, hunger-you name it. Mostly, that damn dysentery. God , Laila. I saw so many kids buried. There’s nothing worse a person can see.” (p.326-327)

The ‘leafless tree’ has a symbolic significance signifying life without greenery, peace or satisfaction. Similarly ‘Kites’ symbolize young boys whose flight was disturbed by the weeds every where. Weeds symbolize the refugee crisis due to war.

Conclusion

To end up my paper, I would like to say that Khaled Hosseini vividly and most dynamically describes the situation of Afghanistan and its people during the war. Through his novels he minutely narrates the disgust he feels for the war which engulfed lovely people of Afghanistan especially women. Through his works he advocates peace which is essential for human growth and prosperity. His moral is simple to give women equal place among men so that they might not be marginalized and deprived of their basic rights.

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