

## Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: A Marxist Analysis

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Article History: Received: Oct. 25, 2022

Revised: Nov. 8, 2023

Received: Dec 5, 2023

### Abstract

This article attempts to analyze Khalid Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* from a Marxist point of view. As a metaphor, Hosseini has used the word "runner" in the title of his novel to speak about one of the classes of people in our society. There are kite runners who run around screaming as they attempt to catch cut and falling kites during the kite flying contest. By looking at some major characters and their roles, an analysis has been presented from the perspective of Marxism. Additionally, the article tries to illustrate how there is an unexplained form of discrimination that prevails even in a friendship between the proletariat and the bourgeois. Despite that friendship appears to be working well namely to say between Amir and Hassan. This article is a qualitative research work for which the novel *The Kite Runner* has been used as the primary source of data. The secondary sources of data used in this research paper are articles published on it both physically and virtually. The discussion and analysis presented in this paper indicate that class struggles exist in various forms at various times, depending on the thoughts and actions of those individuals who are naturally inclined to maintain some sort of distinction that they appear to place a high value on, regardless of the nature of their relationship.

**Keywords:** bourgeois, class- struggle, ethnicity, ideology, Marxism, metaphor, proletariat, redemption, superstructure

### Introduction

*The Kite Runner* (2003) is a powerful and emotional novel written by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. Shortly after its publication, the novel became a worldwide bestseller and was praised for its gripping story, complex characters, and deep analysis of themes. This story takes place in a time of significant political and cultural change in Afghanistan and presents a touching and personal portrait of its characters. The story is told from the point of view of a wealthy Pashtun boy named Amir. During this time, he thinks about his childhood and the many people who shaped his life. As the story starts in Kabul in the 1970s, it shows how close Amir is to his loyal Hazara friend Hassan. The boys' lives are intricately linked by the yearly kite-fighting tournament, which represents both the happiness and sadness of their friendship. An act of betrayal that stays with Amir as an adult adds a dramatic twist to the book. As Afghanistan's government goes through big changes, Amir has to deal with guilt, redemption, and the complicated nature of bonds between people. Through friendship, family, betrayal, and the

search for one's own identity, the story takes readers on a trip that spans continents and decades. Khaled Hosseini uses his own life and his strong connection to his home country to give the book a sense of reality and cultural depth. Not only is "The Kite Runner" an exciting story, but it also shows how political unrest and social unfairness in Afghanistan hurt people.

This research paper seeks to imply the Marxist theory to interpret the story and characters of the novels. Marxism, a materialist philosophy puts people's everyday lives ahead of their ideas and beliefs about life. It views history as, in Marx's words, "the history of class struggle"—the battle for power over the material circumstances of existence. As secondary phenomena, ideas, philosophies, and mental images of the world evolve in reaction to the battle for these material circumstances and as a result of their existence. These secondary phenomena may provide humans with an accurate representation of reality, including themselves and their circumstances. Ideologies are inextricably linked to class positions and, by extension, to material circumstances and the battle for their control. Traditional Marxism has placed enormous emphasis on the dichotomy between base and superstructure, seeing the social foundation as fundamentally economic in character and the superstructure as the realm of mental activity — ideas, beliefs, philosophies, art, and literature (Hawthorn, 2000). It's a political and economic ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883) that explains the changes and developments in society as a consequence of conflict between the social classes (Hornby, 2015). Marxist critique bases its theory and practice on Karl Marx's economic and cultural philosophy in all its manifestations. Marxists believe that the dominant ideology of any given period is ultimately the outcome of its economic structure and the associated class relations and class interests. In a famous architectural metaphor, Marx depicted ideology as the "superstructure" of the contemporary socioeconomic system. According to certain interpretations, a Marxist critic attempts to understand the literature of any historical period not as works made according to timeless creative principles, but as a "product" of that century's economic and ideological factors (Abrams, 2004).

### **The plot in *The Kite Runner***

In the tranquil city of Kabul, Amir, a Pashtun child, and Hassan, the Hazara son of Ali, Amir's father's servant, spend their days by kite-fighting. The lads were able to escape their horrible existence by flying kites. Hassan is Amir's ideal "kite runner." Amir's mother died during childbirth, whereas Hassan and Ali were abandoned by Sanaubar. Baba, Amir's wealthy merchant father, adores his boys. He always buys Hassan the same goods as Amir, much to Amir's chagrin. He pays for Hassan's lip-splitting operation. Baba calls Amir weak and cowardly and threatens to beat him while Amir complains about Hassan. Rahim Khan, Baba's best friend, comprehends Amir and promotes his writing, in contrast to Baba, who believes that writing is for women. Amir, who is sitting on Baba's lap, asks him why he drinks wine despite the fact that it is against Islam's teachings. While the Mullahs preach hypocrisy, Baba tells him that adultery is the worst form of thievery. An older kid named Assef who has an insatiable lust for violence constantly picks on Amir for hanging out with a Hazara, a people who are native to the region of Hazarajat. Assef has a mix of German and Pashtun ancestry. Hassan steps in to protect Amir from Assef's brass knuckle attack by threatening to shoot out his eye with a slingshot. Assef pulls back, sworn to avenge himself.

Amir gains Baba's favour after winning the local kite-fighting competition. Hassan rushes for the last cut kite, a prestigious award, and tells Amir, "A thousand times over, for you." Hassan encounters Assef in an alley after discovering the kite. Assef humiliates Hassan by physically and sexually assaulting him. Amir observes but is too terrified to intervene. He flees because Baba will be displeased if he does not bring the kite home. Amir regrets his cowardice, but he doesn't tell Baba because it would ruin his prospects with her. Amir avoids Hassan due to guilt. Despite Amir's mental and physical degeneration, Hassan communicates with him. Amir hides his watch and birthday money under Hassan's mattress in the hopes that Baba will force him to leave, but Hassan tells Baba a falsehood. "There is no more heinous crime than theft," but Baba pardons him. Hassan informs Ali of what occurred to him, much to Baba's dismay, but he and Ali left anyhow. Amir is no longer confronted with his weakness and betrayal, yet he continues to exist in their shadow.

In 1979, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, five years later. Baba and Amir leave their home in Fremont, California, and travel to Peshawar, Pakistan, where they stay in a rundown apartment for a while. Baba works at a petrol station to make ends meet as a result of his low social standing in the United States. Amir decides to pursue a career as a writer, so he enrolls in San Jose State University after graduating from high school. For extra cash, Baba and Amir attend a weekly flea market in San Jose and sell their worn wares. The Taheri family, including Soraya Taheri, are refugees that Amir encounters. Baba visits Soraya's father for Amir's marriage licence despite the fact that Soraya's father is terminally ill. They were wed. Baba then passes away in peace. Amir and Soraya are delighted with their marriage until they realise they cannot have children. Amir succeeds as an author. 15 years after the wedding, Rahim Khan calls Amir. Rahim Khan, who is dying in Peshawar, begs a visit from Amir. He suddenly informs Amir, "There is a method to regain your decency."

Amir learns of Hassan and Ali's deaths through Rahim Khan. Ali was blown up by a landmine and Hassan and Farzana were slain because he would not let the Taliban into the Kabul residence of Baba and Amir. Rahim Khan claims that Ali, and not Hassan's father, is infertile. To put it simply, Hassan was Amir's half-brother. When all else fails, Rahim Khan tells Amir that he called him to Pakistan so that they may find Hassan's son Sohrab in an orphanage in Kabul and bring him home safely. Being a cab driver and a combat veteran of the Soviet conflict, Farid is able to help Amir find Sohrab. They find out that a Taliban officer routinely visits the orphanage with money and abducts a girl from there. He occasionally chooses males, such as Sohrab. The director of the orphanage instructs Amir on how to locate the official, and Farid obtains an appointment by claiming to have "personal business" with him. Assef, the leader of the Taliban, greets Amir. Sohrab is a boy who dances at Assef's. If Amir escapes from prison, Assef will release him. Sohrab saves Amir and carries out Hassan's threat by firing a brass ball from a slingshot into Assef's left eye. Amir passes out and awakens in a hospital after Sohrab assists him in leaving the house.

Amir informs Sohrab that he intends to adopt him and bring him back to America. US officials seek evidence that Sohrab is an orphan. Sohrab commits suicide by drowning after Amir informs him that he may have to return to an orphanage due to a hitch in the adoption procedure. Soraya aids Amir on his return to America. Sohrab refuses to engage with Amir and Soraya after his adoption until Amir reminisces about Hassan and kites and demonstrates some of Hassan's

talents. Sohrab smiles lopsidedly when Amir helps him win his first kite battle, but Amir responds, "For you, a thousand times over," just as Hassan did many years ago.

### **Review of Literature**

Amir and Hassan represent two distinct social classes. Amir is the protagonist and narrator; he is a Pashtun and a Sunni Muslim. Due to the aftermath and repercussions of a series of horrific childhood experiences, he struggles to find his place in the world. An adult Amir then jumps back to Amir's upbringing in Afghanistan. Amir struggles with developing a deeper connection with his father, Baba; defining the precise nature of his relationship with Hassan, his Shi'a Muslim servant; and, ultimately, finding a means to make amends for mistakes made as a youngster that have enduring consequences.

As a member of the privileged class who grew up in Afghanistan but didn't feel like a privileged member of his own family, one of Amir's biggest problems is figuring out how to deal with the complicated social and economic culture he lives in. Hassan and Ali, his father, are Amir's servants, yet at times their bond feels more like that of family. As if things weren't already unclear enough for young Amir, his father, Baba, who doesn't always adhere to the rules of his culture, just serves to add to the muddle. Amir sees a world of nuance while many in Afghanistan's elite see just black and white. Amir battles with the caste structure, his religious beliefs, the political climate, and his decision whether to participate in the kite-flying tournament and most crucially, his connection with his father. Being a true adult has always been a complicated process, and father-son fights have always been one of its most crucial components. Since biblical times, sons have attempted to disobey their fathers while seeking their affection and approval. The relationship between Amir and his father exemplifies how difficult it may be for a youngster to deal with a quiet and domineering parent (Colona & Gilbert 2006).

Together with the difficulties in his personal life, Amir also has to contend with the instability of the Afghan political system in the 1970s. Amir's inaction in a vital scenario during a crucial kite-flying tournament sets off a chain reaction that results in regret, falsehoods, and betrayals. Amir has the opportunity to confront bullies and aggressors, but instead, he chooses to do nothing. Amir and his father are eventually compelled to escape Afghanistan as a result of the shifting political atmosphere. Amir regards his move to the United States as a chance to escape his past. Amir seeks to cope with his guilt by attempting to escape it. But, it is evident that this accomplishes nothing to redeem him, and thus his guilt persists. Thus, he still recoils whenever Hassan's name is spoken. As Amir learns that his father betrayed Ali, he understands that everything he believed, knew, and comprehended about his father was wrong. Also, Amir feels misled. Yet because Baba has been deceased for fifteen years, he has no control over the issue. Neither treachery nor retribution is sufficient to redeem Amir. Even rescuing Sohrab from Assef is insufficient. Amir takes the required steps towards atonement and forgiveness only when he chooses to bring his nephew to the United States and provides him with the opportunity for happiness and wealth that was denied to his half-brother.

### ***Hassan as a victim of ethnic discrimination***

Hassan is Amir's companion and attendant. Hassan considers Amir to be his buddy, however, Amir never considers Hassan to be his friend. Hassan exemplifies the ideal servant, who remains faithful to his lord even after being betrayed. Several reviewers believe Hassan's character is "too good to be true," since he continues to lie for the guy he considers his buddy

even after Amir betrays him. Being a Pashtun, Amir lives a life of luxury, whereas Hassan is sentenced to a life of pain and slavery as a Hazara. The Kite Runner is set in Afghanistan and, ultimately, the United States, and shows the struggle of two half-brothers whose relationship is determined by class and ethnicity.

The narrative depicts Hassan as a victim of ethnic persecution. The most intriguing aspect is that he is unaware of this, particularly in his youth; instead, he attempts to portray himself as a close friend of Amir, whom he often refers to as "gha" - a term of respect in Afghanistan. Hassan is The Kite Runner, whereas Amir is the kite flyer. Hassan's heritage as a Hazara prevents him from becoming anything other than a kite runner. Kite runner and kite flier's interaction highlights class and economic divide. Amir is the one in charge because he is the kite flyer and hence more important than Hassan. Hassan is instructed by Amir to recover the fallen kite, a hybrid game of catch. "Pashtuns saw Hazaras as an infidel, beast, and other" (Zabriskie, 2017). Hassan answers like a loyal dog, "Thousands of times over!" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 67.). Upon hearing this, he departs to recover the kite for his master.

Hassan is an amazing kite runner, maybe better than Amir could ever aspire to be: "I was not only slower than Hassan but also clumsier; I'd always admired his innate agility" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 53.). Amir feels so intimidated by Hassan's challenge to his control that he starts to put Hassan in his place and deny him the one thing he craves the most, Amir's companionship. Hassan is referred to by Amir and others as "the servant's son." In terms of social position, he lowers himself even further. This treatment of Hassan by Amir is largely motivated by Hassan's race. The socioeconomic realities in Afghanistan, however, continue to illustrate the difference between the Sunni Muslim majority and the Shi'a Muslim minority. Humans discriminate based on physical characteristics and religious beliefs. The childhood relationship between Amir and Hassan seems to have exemplified this part of Afghanistan and her people's social image.

Amir and Hassan are both from different ethnic groups, and their lives show how people with and without political power live. The big difference between Amir's "mansion" and Hassan's "mud hut" is one of the most interesting things about the book. It also depicts the ordinary lives of Afghans in the novel's early chapters. In Kabul, Hassan hears comments such as "mouse-eating, load-carrying, flat-nosed donkeys" that reflect the authoritarian nature of many Afghan Pashtuns.

### ***Religious Ideology and Redemption***

"God, help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into the hands of the Mullahs," says Baba at the opening of the story. This is intimidating. Later, the preacher presenting the execution at the Gazi stadium, who excuses the woman's murder by stating, "God says that every sinner must be punished," demonstrates the corruption of religious authority. Furthermore, Assef's assertion that God wants him to "live for a purpose" might be seen as a symbol of the hubris of people in positions of authority who believe that God approves of their activities. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini depicts the dangers of religious fundamentalism. The Taliban's beliefs and actions are cited as examples of religious fanaticism. Although he concedes that the Taliban put an end to the tribal fighting that had made Kabul a "proverbial hell" after the Soviet withdrawal, he shows that the Taliban were also responsible for massacring Shiites and enacting fundamentalist supremacist laws, such as those that outlawed dance, music, and kite flying and restricted women's rights. They instituted Islamic Shari'ah law in Afghanistan instead of the country's

previous secular legal code to keep the locals as isolated as possible from the supposedly progressive Western way of life.

The story centres on Amir's attempts at self-improvement. Initially, he wants to make amends with Baba after feeling responsible for his mother's death during childbirth. Amir thinks the only way he can make things up to Baba is to win the kite-flying competition and return the lost kite to him. Yet, Amir's desire for forgiveness stems largely from his guilt over what he did to Hassan. Amir's regret is the driving force behind the story's finale events, which include his journey to Kabul to find Sohrab and his meeting with Assef. Baba's early warning that a child who doesn't stand up for himself will grow up to be a man who can't stand up to anything sets the bar high for Amir to climb in order to earn his redemption. Amir cannot speak up for himself as a child. Only by having the courage to stand up for what is right can he redeem himself as an adult. The fundamental subject of *The Kite Runner* is salvation because sin is so pervasive. Amir begins his tale by discussing the persistence of sin, rather than the specifics of his wrongdoing: "It's been a very long time, but I've learned that what they say about burying the past is false. Because the past has a way of resurfacing" (Hosseini, 2003, p.1.). Hosseini emphasises the subject of sin and salvation through the use of structure. When Amir recounts his life, he measures each experience against his transgression, his betrayal of Hassan. Assef aside, Amir is not the only guy who needs salvation. Amir believes he is the lone sinner in his family and friends until Rahim Khan discloses Baba's truth (Saraswat, 2014).

### Methodology

This research paper is a qualitative research work which is based on the analytical approach of interacting with the novel "The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini. For the purpose of conducting this qualitative research, the novel *The Kite Runner* has been used as the primary source of information. Secondary sources of data included in this study include both printed and electronic articles on the topic. The researcher has tried to apply the Marxist point of view to look at the social and economic conditions of some of the major characters of the novels keeping in focus the relations between Amir and Hassan from the very beginning of the novel to the end of the story. Through the intensive use of analytical reading of the opinions of various scholars, the study investigates the hidden role of psychic surrender. This seems to have played a major role in the prevalence of class division in both visible and invisible forms. Discrimination of any type is not only caused by the people in power but also by the people who make them powerful due to their surrendering nature and unjustified devotion or respect. The research paper minutely examines the mental condition of the characters who were bound to undergo difficult political turmoil in Afghanistan from the time of the overthrowing of the monarchy to the rise of the Taliban Regime.

### Results

*The Kite Runner* revolves around the conflict between Amir, the main character, and Hassan, his servant. The character of their relationship is shaped by Amir's higher social status as a Pashtun, making him the more affluent and popular Afghan. Hassan, one of their servants, is a Hazara who works for his family and is socially isolated due to his race-"the predominantly Shi'a, Dari-speaking Hazaras live in the central highlands and have historically been the most economically and politically disadvantaged." (Riphenburg, 2020). In the same way, this circumstance provides a great opportunity to examine the book from a Marxist perspective,

paying particular attention to its social and class structures. This socioeconomic disparity is largely responsible for the condition of the Hazara people, who have remained at the margin of society. The text illustrates Amir's conflict with himself. He wishes to welcome Hassan as a friend, however, he must cross class lines in order to do so. It is ultimately his desire to embrace Hassan that causes their bond to be suffocated and ultimately separates Amir from Hassan. Upon discovering that Hassan is his half-brother, Amir feels at ease. Due to the breach of their class boundaries, Hassan's hesitation to accept him becomes moot. Additionally, it was his father who committed the offence of crossing them, not Amir. As a result, he is free of his obligations.

Kite running, a popular game in Afghanistan, is itself symbolic of class division, establishing a biased role for individuals based on their ethnicity or caste, for example. Kites are flown by the children with the objective of cutting down other kites. A kite runner's goal is to retrieve falling kites, with the last one to fall earning the ultimate prize. Hassan is the kite runner in the story, while Amir is the kite flyer. Hassan cannot fly kites due to his Hazara background. Inequality in class and social status between the kite flyer and the kite runner is highlighted by the link between the two races (Putz, 2023). Since Amir is the kite flyer, he is technically, in the case of the kite, superior to Hassan. Hazara Minorities of Muslims existed in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. As the racial majority, they were at the top of the socioeconomic food chain. In actuality, the rise of the minority may have had a significant impact on the ascension of the Pashtun Taliban to power. Concern among the Pashtuns, who had governed the government for more than three centuries, arose with the fall of the Najibullah communist regime and the subsequent dominance of the Kabul government by Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazara/Shia for the first time in Afghan history (Sullivan, 2016).

Hassan is more proficient at kite flying than Amir could ever hope to be (Hosseini, 2003, p. 53.). Despite Hassan's loyalty, he desires that his dominance remain unchecked. So, he begins to keep Hassan in his position by denying him the exact thing he desires most: Amir's companionship. To excuse his pursuit of Hassan, he refers to him as "his servant's son"; he does not accept Hassan as a servant. Instead, he further diminishes his social position by revealing that he is the son of one of their servants. Class distinction is visible in Amir and Hassan's relationship, which is characterized by Hassan's undying loyalty to Amir. This is why he refuses to hand over the kite he caught to Assef, who then rapes him. Although Amir can hear everything, he remains hidden from view. He could have stopped, but he doesn't because it delights him on the inside—not sexually, but mentally. Assef's actions diminish Hassan's value once more, therefore Amir is no longer in danger. Hence, all of these depictions of individuals like Amir, Assef, and Hassan urge readers to engage in critical analysis of the text, demonstrating that the "characters' heritage and socioeconomic class play a crucial role in character formation" (Putz, 2023).

### Discussion

Despite his Afghan heritage, Assef embodies the Aryan traits prized by Hitler's Germany. Nothing about this seems like a coincidence. The name Assef is designed to convey both the wealth and power of his family in Afghanistan and a more sinister connotation that harkens back to Nazi Germany. As Hosseini puts it, "his family lived a few blocks south of our home, in a luxurious, high-walled property with palm trees," (37) indicating that he and his family are physically and financially dominating in the neighbourhood. Hassan is representative of the

Hazara people of Afghanistan, who have been used as a scapegoat by the economically and socially superior Pashtuns and Sunni Muslims, who have turned Hazara's ethnicity and religion, Shi'a Muslims, against them. Real-world information about the situation in Afghanistan that the book glosses over lends credence to the claims made about the book. For instance, the book merely states, "in 1998, they killed the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif," while alluding to the Hazara genocide that occurred that year (Hosseini, 2003, p. 213.).

Amir's relationship with Hassan's kid, Sohrab, is crucial for applying the Marxist theory to analyse Amir's behaviour in depth and for making sense of the rest of the novel. For what reason, after 20 years, does he feel compelled to come to his rescue? If he adopts Sohrab, does that make up for his sins? Is Amir's acceptance of Sohrab owing to the fact that he discovers Hassan is his illegitimate half-brother and so half-Pashtun or does Amir finally transcend social and class barriers?

The friendship between upper-class Paston Amir and the lower-class Hazara son of their servant, Hassan, has a tragic backstory. In the novel, other issues of Marxist critique include the father-son dynamic, the Soviet invasion, Taliban control, Afghan immigrants, and the plight of Afghan locals. The primary events of the story take place 26 years previously, while Amir was still an Afghan resident, and are related in flashback. When Amir was young, he and his family resided in Afghanistan with his father, Baba, and their two servants, Ali and his son Hassan. Ali and Hassan belong to a historically persecuted group known as the Hazaras. Amir and Hassan are good friends despite being members of different ethnic groups. The Pashtun majority views the Hazara as subhuman and treats them as such. They were raised together and fed from the same breast as infants.

The phenomenon of hegemony, defined as the dominant group's position relative to its peers, was made palpable through kite-running competition. In *The Kite Runner*, the antagonist, Assef, is a mix of Pashtun and German, reflecting the fact that Hassan is the target of racism throughout the book. Because of his friendship with a Hazara, he becomes violent in the story and continually attacks Hazaras and even Amir. He tells Amir he'll beat him up if he doesn't back down. In this sense, he stands in for the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan as a metaphor (Terzi, 2021). Assef's beating of Amir at the novel's conclusion for violating their culture also makes Amir a symbol of the oppression of the dominant class. The novel's themes centre on the class structure. Despite their close proximity to Hazaras, Baba and Amir fail to grasp the concept of marginalization until they, too, are forced to flee to the United States as a result of the Soviet invasion. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan forces them to flee to the United States, where they soon learn the painful truth of discrimination.

### Conclusion

The novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini has been analysed from diverse perspectives by a variety of reviewers. This paper is an attempt to analyse the work from a Marxist perspective by utilizing some of its features, such as class conflict, discrimination based on different situations, the characters' ideologies, religious backgrounds, and so on. Amir has been depicted by Hosseini as one of the protagonists in connection to other characters from Afghanistan to California. What he did as a child, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as in the case of his friend Hassan, how he interacted with him in his adolescence, and how he felt



about all his childhood experiences when he was living in America serve as the basis for this article's discussion of possible Marxist theory dimensions. The seen/unseen battle between Amir and Hassan represents the fight between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Their childhood friendship may seem natural and admirable at first glance, but it has also been subject to several instances of prejudice. Yet, Hassan has protected Amir in very perilous circumstances. This is the likeness between Hassan's repressed mindset and that of his teacher, Amir, whom he refers to as "Amir agha." And maybe this very devoted personality is one of the reasons that Amir feels redeemed for Hassan, despite the fact that it was too late for him to undergo an ideological transformation. Amir encounters both inner and outer turmoil. The source of his inner struggle is an emotional fight with himself. Amir's exterior struggle manifests against Hassan, Baba, Rahim Khan, Assef, and many more people. Kabul, San Francisco, Wazir Akhbar Khan, an alley, Hassan's residence, Pakistan, Sarak-e-Mehta, the American Embassy, etc., are some of the locales associated with Amir's struggle, motivation, and concern. The subject of classes, races, conflict, prejudice, religious confrontations, and political views is present throughout the whole narrative.

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