



The Juxtaposition of Natural Beauty and Ravages of War: Human Nature Relationship in Khaled Husseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation and significance of nature in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, highlighting the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans beyond traditional hierarchical structures. Moreover, this study examines the intricate relationship between natural beauty and the devastation of war. Through a close textual analysis, the research examines how Hosseini juxtaposes serene landscapes with scenes of violence and destruction to underscore the emotional and psychological impact of conflict on both individuals and their environment. The paper argues that nature serves not only as a backdrop but also as a silent witness and occasional refuge. This paper explores in detail what sorts of ecological disasters have been imposed on Afghanistan by these cruel wars. This juxtaposition of natural beauty and the ravages of war is presented through the ecocritical lens, discussing poverty, cruelty, ethnic cleansing, suffering, and resilience that the Afghans underwent and endured in the novel. The study reveals the lasting human nature bond, the enduring capacity of human beings in all situations to which human beings are bound. This study will ultimately convey the message that homo-sapiens are heading to become human creatures through their prejudices, insanity, and cruelty, and war is their favored method.

Keywords: juxtaposition, cruelty, ravages of war, decay

Introduction

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (2003) is a profound tale of the juxtaposition of natural beauty and the ravages of war after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the Taliban's inauspicious advent in Afghanistan. Moreover, this is also the tale of friendship, betrayal, and redemption. This research investigates how Hosseini employs the landscape of Afghanistan not merely as a setting, but as a symbolic and thematic device. The pre-war Kabul

evokes a sense of innocence and harmony, which is later shattered by the violence and destruction that engulf the nation.

Through this juxtaposition, Hosseini invites readers to reflect on the fragility of both nature and human relationships in the face of war. By analyzing key passages and motifs, this study aims to uncover and portray the human-nature relationship. The paper argues that Hosseini's depiction of nature functions as a silent witness to human suffering and resilience, offering a powerful commentary on the enduring impact of war on both the land and its people. This study will only focus on the juxtaposition of natural beauty and the ravages of war. This study will refrain from dealing with the parallel juxtaposition like Amir's privileged life (comfort) and Hassan's hardship (humble circumstances).

Hosseini's first-person narrator, the protagonist, Amir, is an Americanised Afghan who rescues a young Afghan child to be brought up in America (Chan, 2010, p 830), who suffers unbearably after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. He becomes the victim of his own concepts and attitude. He suffers the ravages of the wars in Afghanistan. Wars in Afghanistan ravage the root of life, i.e. nature and the people of Afghanistan equally. In addition to this, the wars in Afghanistan also collapsed the human nature bond. Nature is the recluse humans visit to get out of their trauma or any other mental defects, but Afghanistan's nature was destroyed by the wars. When nature is attacked and eliminated, mental diseases and characteristic changes occur in human beings. The Soviet invasion filled Afghanistan with MiGs roaring past overhead and incessant gunfire. The Russians made the natural landscapes of Afghanistan battlegrounds. The villages were destroyed and the schools were reduced to ruins.

Set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's rich cultural and geographical landscape, the novel intertwines the characters' emotional lives with the nature's condition. Hosseini portrays a beautiful picture of Amir's surroundings, thus:

Here is what I do on the first day of snowfall every year: I step out of the house early in the morning, still in my pajamas, hugging my arms against the chill. I find the driveway, my father's car, the walls, the trees, the rooftops, and the hills buried under a foot of snow. I smile. The sky is seamless and blue, the snow so white my eyes burn. I shovel a handful of the fresh snow into my mouth, listen to the muffled stillness broken only by the cawing of crows. I walk down the front steps, barefoot, and call for Hassan to come out and see (Hosseini, p.45).

The natural beauty of Afghanistan was matchless. The winter is wonderfully pleasant. Before the Russian invasion, its panoramic beauty was the source of happiness. Snow is always the source of fascination to human beings. Everyone is fond of snow and, thus, the source of happiness and pleasure. Nature is the silent onlooker and active participant in this novel.

Wars create ravages or havoc where they take place. In his adventurous and compulsive comeback to Kabul after 20 years of his leaving Afghanistan, Amir remembers the scene when his father was about to be shot during the effort of escaping to Peshawar 20 years ago. He remembers how horrendous the Roussi invasion was and how it had left a lot of scars on the surface of Afghanistan:

We were driving down the cratered road that winds from Jalalabad to Kabul. The last time I'd traveled that road was in a tarpaulin-covered truck going the other way . . . The trek between Kabul and Jalalabad, a bone-jarring ride down a teetering pass snaking through the rocks, had become a relic now, a relic of two wars (Hosseini, p.224).

The Roussi invasion and its withdrawal did not end the terror in Pakistan. The Alliance caused more suffering later, and the advent of the Taliban created even more grim reminders of the war. They are scattered in every part of Afghanistan.

The destruction of Afghanistan was initiated by the Russians and perpetuated by the Alliance and the Talibans. Amir recounts his reminiscence of war in his narrative, "Twenty years earlier, I had seen some of the first war with my own eyes. Grim reminders of it were strewn along the road: burned carcasses of old Soviet tanks, overturned military trucks gone to rust, a crushed Russian jeep that had plunged over the mountainside. The second war, I had watched on my TV screen. And now I was seeing it through Farid's eyes (Hosseini, p.224). The ravages of war is worst felt in the merciless bombing of the orphanage and the orphans by the Alliance and the Talibans. Once fertile fields, Afghanistan was littered with landmines killing people indiscriminately. Hosseini seems to suggest that environmental destruction exacerbates moral decay.

The natural world in the story is more than just a setting. It serves as an emotional mirror, reflecting the internal conflicts of the protagonist Amir and his struggle to reconcile his past actions. Literature has long served as a mirror to the human condition, reflecting not only the intricacies of interpersonal relationships but also the profound connections between humanity and the natural world.

All homo-sapiens cannot be regarded as human beings. A greater number of homo-sapiens does not qualify to be 'beings'. They remain 'creatures' their entire life. Bestial qualities overpower homo-sapiens. Virtues are rare in homo-sapiens. Homo-sapiens are yet to be human beings. Form-wise, they look human. But, they are lesser beings, and are, thus, human creatures. Rahman, Sheguf, & Alfaruque (2024) explore:

According to naturalists, humans may resort to their basic instincts and engage in desperate or degrading behaviors to survive. As individuals, we are often subjected to strong and conflicting emotions such as lust, greed, the desire for power or pleasure, and the struggle to exist in an amoral universe. This is the darker side of humanity—one that is characterized by arrogance, greed, hatred, and scheming, and which can manifest in our thoughts and actions. In essence, without a strong ethical framework, we are no better than beasts (p.75).

Human creatures trouble others. Human creatures are biased. Human creatures are bestial. Human creatures do not have respect for humanity. They do not qualify to be 'human beings'. The Kite Runner consists of innumerable 'human creatures'. Expecting human quality from them is foolishness. The Russians, Assef, the Alliance, and the Taliban could not display the qualities and nature of proper 'human beings'.

Human creatures (lesser human beings), the cultural and genetic products, have spoiled nature not only in Afghanistan but all over the world. Ecological destruction is global. It is essential now for the world to realize that ecology is on the verge of extinction. Arindam Ghosh (2017) "Man has done enough damage to the earth. Yet we are hardly serious in perceiving the irreversible and impending doom to be brought about by a fatal ecological disorder" (p. 111). Human beings should be aware in time to prevent the world from being irreparable. Moreover, bestial homo-sapiens do not care about ecology, humanity and morality.

Every war is ungenerous. A war invites untold miseries and leaves irreparable terrestrial and mental scars that take ages or generations to forget the irreversible ecological disaster and

brutal human suffering. Mass displacement and migration are common byproducts of war too. Similarly, resource scarcity bites people perpetually after a deadly war. Human survival becomes a prolonged struggle. Environmental collapse may be an insignificant loss in the prolonged struggle.

This research will employ ecocriticism as the primary analytical lens for this study particularly as articulated by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell etc. Their frameworks emphasize the representation of nature in literature, the critique of anthropocentrism, and the exploration of environmental justice. Nature was and is the source of life. Nature is the nurturer and the destroyer too at times. Thus, human activities are to be explored in association ecology around him or her. To trace ecocriticism in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, it is essential to draw Cheryll Glotfelty's (1996) vision about ecocriticism:

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Hosseini, p.415).

Regarding the parameters of all literary theories, ecocriticism has its own approach, and that approach is earth-centered. The savagery of Afghan wars will be studied through the lens of scars imposed upon Afghanistan by the Russians and the Taliban.

Similarly, Lawrence Buell opines that the time has come for the world to give more emphasis on ecology than the human beings. If the ecology is good, human life will automatically be better. Thus, he emphasizes nonhuman environment plays an active role in shaping human history. He introduces ethical distinctions—"humankind-first" vs. "ecosystem-first"—while Christopher Manes adds the terms "second nature" and "first nature" to describe differing views on the human-nature relationship (Buell, *Writing*, p. 227; Manes, p. 23). Nature should receive the first priority in all human actions. In addition to this, ecocriticism asserts that culture and nature, including humans and nonhumans, are deeply interconnected, each shaping and being shaped by the environment (Glotfelty, pp. xviii–xix). Ecocritics are especially concerned with nature's agency and voice, beyond its mere presence and nonhuman interests. The long-standing debate over whether nature can act or speak is highlighted by Christopher Manes, who argues that our culture silences nature by reserving speech exclusively for humans (Manes, p. 15). Nature's voice is often marginalized, much like historically silenced groups such as minorities, women, and children.

Harold Fromm (2013) in his seminal essay "Ecocriticism at Twenty-Five" clarifies about ecocriticism: Ecocriticism, having eluded the constricting essentialist nets of dogmatic academic "theory. . . focus on science, evolution, sociology, biology, philosophy, ethics, religion, aesthetics, the arts have all been afforded yet another enriching point of view, so that even writing not explicitly produced as ecocriticism can be understood ecocritically (p.198). This is the demand of this deadly time when climate change has terrorized the globe.

Ufuk Ozdag prefers ecocriticism because "ecology-based educational programs" (p. 329) are globally essential in the present context. It is time for "hierarchical thinking that subordinates nature to human needs, advocating instead for biocentrism recognizing the nonhuman world as equally significant" (Oppermann, *Viewfinder*, p. 4). Human focus should be shifted to nature focus in all studies.

This study will focus on the following key questions:

- How does Hosseini depict natural beauty to mirror Afghanistan's contrasting states of peace and destruction?
- In what ways have the wars brought ravages upon Afghanistan to cripple the life of the ordinary Afghans?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover how Hosseini brings the Afghan woes into the broad daylight and makes the world aware of the Afghan problems. It will demonstrate how *The Kite Runner* subtly critiques the environmental degradation imposed by wars which have degraded human beings and have reduced them to mere human creatures by highlighting the intricate relationship between literature and the natural world.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis approach to examine the juxtaposition of natural beauty and the ravages of war in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, with a particular focus on the savagery of the Russians and the Taliban. The methodology is grounded in close reading and thematic analysis, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how natural destruction and the impoverishment of Afghanistan have gone hand in hand which has crippled the lives of people and increased the miseries of ordinary people. The textual analysis of this research consists of selected passages from *The Kite Runner* that depict natural landscapes, environmental symbolism, and scenes of war and destruction. These excerpts will explore Hosseini's stark plea to the world to look for the renovation of the idyllic beauty of Afghanistan. The analysis is guided by ecocritical theory, which provides a framework for understanding literature's engagement with environmental concerns and the human-nature dynamic. Similarly, this research will include scholarly articles, critical essays, and comparative studies to contextualize the analysis.

Analysis: The Juxtaposition of Natural Beauty and the Ravages of War

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* intricately weaves natural imagery with the brutal realities of war to explore the fragility of human relationships and societal structures. The novel contrasts Afghanistan's pre-war pastoral beauty with its post-invasion devastation, using nature as both a reflection of characters' psyches and a metaphor for the corrosive effects of political violence.

War is more an ecological tragedy than a human tragedy. The prominent byproduct of war is the human loss. Even the greater loss than the human loss is the ecological loss. Once the ecology is destroyed, decades of preservations is insufficient to maintain the same ecological heritage. The destruction of terrains and mountains cannot be restored. So, the loss is the permanent. The ruined landscape takes decades to recover but the full recovery is impossible. The original landscape is hard to restore once it is destroyed. Hosseini paints a vivid picture of Kabul's transformation from a vibrant city to a war-torn ruin. The once lush gardens, tree-lined streets, and peaceful neighborhoods are replaced by bombed-out buildings, dust-filled air and scarred landscapes. This transformation reflects the ecological cost of prolonged conflict, where nature becomes collateral damage.

The hovering of MiGs over the Afghan skies perpetually terrorized the powerless Afghans. While Amir was on his way to Pakistan, he was stopped at a checkpoint where a MiG hovers around. Hosseini describes the scene, "a MiG suddenly screamed past overhead. Karim

tossed his cigarette and produced a handgun from his waist. Pointing it to the sky and making shooting gestures, he spat and cursed at the MiG" (Hosseini, p.105). This was terrorizing and creating an uncertain tension in the escaping Afghans. These Afghans along with Amir were seeking safety, discarding their ecologically serene Afghanistan and their family property.

The narrator, Amir, describes one typical Afghan winter morning vividly, "I loved wintertime in Kabul. I loved it for the soft pattering of snow against my window at night, for the way fresh snow crunched under my black rubber boots, for the warmth of the cast-iron stove as the wind screeched through the yards, the streets. But mostly because, as the trees froze and ice sheathed the roads" (Hosseini, p.46). This narrative of Amir describing the natural beauty of Afghanistan compels one to envision how pleasant the nation it was.

Nature is the symbol of innocence and hope in *The Kite Runner*. Kabul was serene and lush with natural beauty. Hosseini portrays the exquisite natural beauty of Afghanistan bewitchingly, "The streets glistened with fresh snow and the sky was a blameless blue. Snow blanketed every rooftop and weighed on the branches of the stunted mulberry trees that lined our street. Overnight, snow had nudged its way into every crack and gutter. I squinted against the blinding white when Hassan and I stepped through the wrought-iron gates (Hosseini, p.57). Besides the snow, Afghanistan was beautiful with blooming pomegranate trees, sun-warmed streets etc. that evoked an atmosphere of youthful joy and camaraderie.

Hosseini presents Amir's mental torture when he was escaping to Pakistan with his Baba and many other people escaping the politically unsafe Afghanistan situation pathetically:

What was I doing on this road in the middle of the night? I should have been in bed, under my blanket, a book with dog-eared pages at my side . . . Tomorrow morning, I'd wake up, peek out the window: No grim-faced Russian soldiers patrolling the sidewalks, no tanks rolling up and down the streets of my city, their turrets swiveling like accusing fingers, no rubble, no curfews, no Russian Army Personnel Carriers weaving through the bazaars . . . This was no dream. (Hosseini, p.105).

Amir was leaving the breathtaking natural beauty due to the politically turbulent Afghanistan. He was heading towards Peshawar. He was the victim of the brutal consequences of the recent Russian invasion. Amir knows that discarding his birthplace at night was not a dream.

Thus, the Soviet invasion disrupted the peace and promoted the political unrest, threats and tortures in Afghanistan. Hosseini woefully narrates the woeful escaping effort of Amir to Pakistan with his Baba and other Afghans, "Boot heels clicked on asphalt . . . a grinning Russian, face like a bulldog's, cigarette dangling from the side of his mouth . . . thrust his face into the rear of the truck . . . His eyes settled on the young woman wearing the black shawl . . . the soldier wanted a half hour with the lady in the back of the truck" (Hosseini, p. 106). The Russian soldiers were unethical, monstrous and lecherous. Tolerating any brutality and atrocity was the only way to survive. Bribing the Russian soldiers was not sufficient. Some lady had to be prepared to satisfy their sexual urges. This crosses the boundary of humanity and opens the boundary of the devil or monster. The Russian soldiers seemed to possess animal instinct.

The compulsion to escape to Peshawar was too horrendous. The horror of escaping makes people forget the pleasure of natural beauty. Life was at risk and in trouble. The survival instinct must be high at such a time. There was no option. This was the moment of compulsion for all. Hosseini portrays this moment:

The stench of something dank, like mildew, bludgeoned my nostrils the moment Karim opened the door that led down the creaky steps to the basement . . . Standing in the cold basement, I felt watched by eyes blinking in the dark. I saw shapes huddled around the room, their silhouettes thrown on the walls by the dim light of a pair of kerosene lamps. A low murmur buzzed through the basement, beneath it the sound of water drops trickling somewhere, and, something else, a scratching sound . . . Karim told us it should be a matter of a couple of short days before the truck was fixed. Then we'd be on our way to Peshawar. On to freedom. On to safety . . . The basement was our home for the next week and, by the third night, I discovered the source of the scratching sounds. Rats (Hosseini, p.110).

Natural beauty pleases human beings during the normal hours of life. Nobody cares natural beauty during the time of urgency. Even the scanty air is sufficient to survive. Complaining about the unavailability of comfort is unaffordable. Human beings never know what discomforts one has to endure.

The destruction of Afghanistan was unprecedented. Hosseini narrates this through Rahim Khan at Amir's visit to him in Pakistan. He reminds Amir about the Wall of Ailing Corn. Rahim Khan's question to Amir narrates this all, "What did you and Hassan call it, "the Wall of Ailing Corn"? A rocket destroyed a whole section of that wall in the middle of the night early that fall. Hassan rebuilt the wall brick by brick with his hand . . . Outside the house there was a war raging" (Hosseini, p.193). MiG must have shot a rocket at that house randomly. This is just a representation of the ravages of war portrayed in the novel. An invasion by a powerful country of a weak nation cannot be resisted long. Yet the Afghans fought against the powerful Russians till they could.

Rahim Khan narrates to Amir, upon Amir's arrival in Pakistan from the USA about the end of the Russian rule over Afghanistan. From the frying pan to the fire, Afghanistan suffered even more at the hands of three groups of home-grown fighters/insurgents, worse than it suffered from the Russian invasion. It was more than hell then:

By then—that would have been 1995—the Shorawi were defeated and long gone and Kabul belonged to Massoud, Rabbani, and the Mujahedin. The infighting between the factions was fierce and no one knew if they would live to see the end of the day. Our ears became accustomed to the whistle of falling shells, to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days, Amir jan, was as close as you could get to that proverbial hell on earth. (Hosseini, p.196).

The infighting between the factions made the life of the Afghans especially the Kabul people worse than hell. Even after the departure of the Russians too, Afghanistan could not restore peace and was worsening at its best.

The reminiscences of old-time kite fighting along with the occasional and rare kite fighting of the rule of three rebel factions before the Taliban's overtaking of Afghanistan is narrated by Rahim Khan to Amir:

In the wintertime, Hassan took his son kite running. There were not nearly as many kite tournaments as in the old days--no one felt safe outside for too long--but there were still a few scattered tournaments. Hassan would prop Sohrab on his shoulders and they would go trotting through the streets, running kites, climbing trees where kites had

dropped . . . we all celebrated in 1996 when the Taliban rolled in and put an end to the daily fighting. I remember coming home that night and finding Hassan in the kitchen, listening to the radio. He had a sober look in his eyes. I asked him what was wrong, and he just shook his head. "God help the Hazaras now, Rahim Khan sahib," he said. (Hosseini, p.197)

The Taliban were Pashtuns. They were Sunnis and hated the Shia Hazaras. They were at risk now . Aseff, who was a follower of Hitler, was the Taliban leader who was on the way to do the ethnic cleansing of the Hazaras. It was useless, for Hassan who was a Hazaras in the public eyes, being happy at the advent of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The ecological hazards brought by the war parallels the risk of the Hazars' lives in Afghanistan.

Hosseini may use characters like Assef as metaphors for the violent tendencies among certain Pukhtuns and within the Taliban's interpretation of Islam. However, this focus on individual character development and plot progression might obscure the broader social and political realities in Afghanistan. The novel may sound one-sided to many readers. But, for those who are the blind haters of the Taliban, the novel may sound like god's words. Whatever, the Taliban ended one war and imposed their laws to control people which further added woes in people who were already suffering from the ravages of the Russian invasion and the wars of the Alliance.

When the Taliban defeated all insurgents in Afghanistan, everyone was happy because they had caused more harm to Afghanistan than the Russians. But the happiness was temporary. The Taliban implemented harsh laws in the nation and displayed a cruel nature. Rahim Khan narrates the advent of the Taliban and people's joy at it:

"When the Taliban rolled in and kicked the Alliance out of Kabul, I actually danced on that street," Rahim Khan said. "And, believe me, I wasn't alone. People were celebrating at Chaman, at Deh-Mazang, greeting the Taliban in the streets, climbing their tanks and posing for pictures with them. People were so tired of the constant fighting, tired of the rockets, the gunfire, the explosions, tired of watching Gulbuddin and his cohorts firing on anything that moved. The Alliance did more damage to Kabul than the Shorawi.

They destroyed your father's orphanage, did you know that?" (Hosseini, p.184).

The destruction of the orphanage symbolizes the decay of the Alliance's concepts. This is sheer madness or inhumanity. The Russians, the Alliance and the Taliban destroyed the natural beauty of Afghanistan and the social and cultural norms and heritages.

Hosseini's mastery of narration is visible on this page, in which he juxtaposes the extremes of happiness and the most morbid, inhumane incident in a line:

"The war is over, Hassan," I said. "There's going to be peace, Inshallah and happiness and calm. No more rockets, no more killing, no more funerals!" But he just turned off the radio and asked if he could get me anything before he went to bed.

A few weeks later, the Taliban banned kite-fighting. And two years later, in 1998, they massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif (Hosseini, p.197)

This mastery of narration of Hosseini juxtaposes two greatest contrasts so insidiously: the expectation of the restoration of happiness and the massacre of the Hazaras.

If Hosseini's narrative is to be trusted blindly, evaluating the Talib through the lens of a normal human being is impossible. Destruction of the orphanage and the body parts of children scattered or buried under the rubble of the orphanage is shocking, ghastly and beyond

human comprehension. Hosseini narrates this: "You don't want to know . . . what it was like sifting through the rubble of that orphanage. There were body parts of children..." (Hosseini, p.185). Nothing can be as painful as the scattering of the body parts of children who were bombed inside the orphanage Amir's father constructed as the symbol of philanthropy.

Hassan's letter to Amir portrays the condition of Afghanistan. The ravages or the havoc the wars created in Afghanistan was so much irreparable. Hassan's letter speaks thus:

Amir agha, Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killings. Always the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, it is a part of our lives here, Amir agha. The savages who rule our watan don't care about human decency (Hosseini, p. 200).

There cannot be any better depiction of the worsened state of war-ravaged Afghanistan. Hassan's letter is a great touchstone on this.

When Amir crosses the border of Pakistan and gets into Afghanistan after 20 years, his first impression of Afghanistan, which was the gift of the Russian invasion and the fight of the three factions and the final destruction caused by the Talibans, ". . . Poverty was everywhere . . . A few miles later, I spotted a cluster of men sitting on their haunches, like a row of crows, on the carcass of an old burned-out Soviet tank, the wind fluttering the edges of the blankets thrown around them" (Hosseini, p.214). The war-ravaged poverty was immense. The wars had impoverished Afghanistan. This poverty was the byproduct of war.

Amir's description of Tashakor is a respite from the ecological destruction of Afghanistan. His description of the place speaks vividly of the changed tribal lands of the Khyber Pass: "The arid, imposing mountains sat along deep gorges and soared to jagged peaks. Old fortresses, adobe-walled and crumbling, topped the crags. I tried to keep my eyes glued to the snowcapped Hindu Kush on the north side" (Hosseini, p.212). The snow was still there on the Hindu Kush. This arouses hope in everybody. This symbolizes that something cannot be altered despite adversaries.

Amir presents an excellent example of ravages of War:

By late afternoon, the terrain had changed from one of sun-beaten peaks and barren cliffs to a greener, more rural landscape. The main pass had descended from Landi Kotal through Shinwari territory to Landi Khana. Pine trees flanked the road, fewer than I remembered and many of them bare, but it was good to see trees again after the arduous drive through the Khyber Pass . . . There weren't as many palm trees there as I remembered. (Hosseini, p.215)

The deadly transformation of Afghanistan is so much heart-rending. Ecological destruction was rampant in all areas.

Hosseini's nostalgia is poured in these lines. He is so much hopeful that Afghanistan is not finished yet. It is alive somewhere behind the snowy mountains:

I looked westward and marveled that, somewhere over those mountains, Kabul still existed. It really existed . . . Somewhere over those mountains in the west slept the city where my harelipped brother and I had run kites . . . Once, over those mountains, I had made a choice. And now, a quarter of a century later, that choice had landed me right back on this soil (Hosseini, p.222).

Amir's return to Afghanistan after near about a quarter of a century makes him nostalgic. Amir was happy that some parts of Afghanistan was still intact.

The journey of Amir in search of Shoharab, Hassan's son, drove him past a village. Farid, the driver of the Land Cruiser pointed to "the crumbled, charred remains of a tiny village. It was just a tuft of blackened, roofless walls now . . . "I had a friend there once," Farid said. "He was a very good bicycle repairman. He played the tabla well too. The Taliban killed him and his family and burned the village." (Hosseini, p.225) The Taliban seems to have caused more bruises than the Russian army.

Kabul was unrecognizable to Amir. It was poor and full of beggars. Rubble ruled Kabul. The narration is the clear indication how miserable Kabun had been made in those 20 years. The beggars were not adult males as the wars had finished the adult males:

Rubble and beggars. Everywhere I looked, that was what I saw . . . they squatted at every street corner, dressed in shredded burlap rags, mud-caked hands held out for a coin. And the beggars were mostly children now, thin and grim-faced, some no older than five or six. Hardly any of them sat with an adult male--the wars had made fathers a rare commodity in Afghanistan (Hosseini, p. 225.).

Beggars are the all time presence. They are unavoidable. What only matters is the number. One of the ravages of war is the growth of the number of beggars in Kabul. The deadly gift of Afghan wars was that one or two generations of male were almost all dead. As a result, the poverty was rampant and the children were on the streets of Kabul to beg.

When Amir reached Jadeh Maywand, he was shocked to see the ravages of war which was beyond recognition:

Jadeh Maywand had turned into a giant sand castle. The buildings that hadn't entirely collapsed barely stood, with caved in roofs and walls pierced with rockets shells. Entire blocks had been obliterated to rubble. I saw a bullet-pocked sign half buried at an angle in a heap of debris . . . piles of debris. A haze of dust hovered over the city and, across the river, a single plume of smoke rose to the sky.

"Where are the trees?" I said.

"People cut them down for firewood in the winter," Farid said. "The Shorawi cut a lot of them down too." (Hosseini, p.227)

The deforestation of the area is a sure hint of the destruction of that area. The area was eaten up by the Russian soldiers and the local people.

His visit to his house after 20 years was a matter of unprecedented nostalgia to Amir. It was greatly changed. Amir narrates:

I hunkered down on my knees and brushed my hands against the trunk. I found what I was looking for. The carving had dulled, almost faded altogether, but it was still there: "Amir and Hassan. The Sultans of Kabul." I traced the curve of each letter with my fingers. Picked small bits of bark from the tiny crevasses (Hosseini, p. 243).

The war had left the trees uncared. The pomegranate tree was older and was withering, which had become barren. It could not bear the fruit any more. Thus, the once-fruitful pomegranate tree becomes barren, emblematic of lost innocence of Amir. One good thing Hosseini does is he does not allow violence to fully extinguish beauty. Amir's reconnection with nature is amazingly depicted in the novel. Returning to a war-torn Kabul, he navigates a moonlit

landscape, bombed buildings and mass graves, confronting the consequences of his past cowardice.

Conclusion

Nature witnesses everything, i.e., from human frailty to human potentiality and strength. Nature is not a passive stage but an active participant in the storytelling process. Human beings can destroy nature, but nature still provides a sanctuary to all creatures, including the sapiens. This is the greatness of nature. Nature mends what has been broken or destroyed. Few human creatures can try to fracture the human-nature bond, but nature always tries to mend the bond. The violence against human beings goes hand in hand with nature. Both expect acknowledgment and healing. Natural beauty is a mirror of innocence. It can be hoped that the innocence of Afghanistan, trampled and destroyed by the Russians through their brutal invasion and the Taliban's imposition of Sharia law, will end someday, and the land will be free of religious and political thugs, and the Afghans will be able to live in peace and prosperity. A doubt in readers always lingers whether Hosseini deliberately manipulated his narrative to accuse and defame the Pashtuns of Afghanistan.

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