

Cultural Hybridity in *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

The Kite Runner is a novel written by Khaled Hosseini. The novel is a mirror to see the Afghan history, culture, religion, politics and many other aspects of the nation. Specifically, the novel evolves round the Afghan immigrants in Fremont, California. This paper attempts to reveal the issues of cultural differences between the two cultures: Afghan/Muslim and the American/Christian where the Afghan immigrants face cultural difficulties in a new land. In the colonial, post-colonial and post-modern societies people from across the world travel, migrate, immigrate and even settle in a new cultural location where they have to assimilate, resist or interpret the new culture. In the midst of it, this article will examine the readjustment of the immigrants in a culturally different location. Readjustment is not easy but can be made possible by their choice of cultural hybridization. In this context Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, which talks about the cultural location of a person, is considered for the application in the present study. For Bhabha the cultural space means neither the one nor the other but something else besides, in between. Neither this nor that so the third space is created for the cultural practice. The Afghan immigrants find the third space where they can rest their cultural pain. Certainly, the assumption of 'in between-space' will help to come out of the cultural problems of immigrants in the new land.

Keywords: culture, hybridity, immigrants, in between-space location

Introduction:

The Kite Runner is a novel by Khaled Hosseini. It tells the story of Afghani immigrants living in Fremont, California after leaving home land for a new land. The immigrants face cultural difficulties to be adjusted in a new place. Their adjustment in the new land can not address their cultural pain. So readjustment can create a cultural space to be accepted and their cultural pain can rest over there by means of cultural hybridization. In this regard the researcher will discuss the theme of cultural hybridity that concerns the Afghani immigrants facing difficulties in the adjustment process in Fremont, California. The problem of immigrants in a new land in the adaptation of a new culture in their life will be addressed through the lenses of post-colonial critic Bhabha by whom the problem of cultural pain, which is burning issue in the post-colonial world, is addressed by his idea of 'in between-space' where cultural pain rests.

The novel is set in Afghanistan from the late 1970s to 1981. After that it is set in the Afghani community in Fremont, California from the 1980s to the early 2000s, and finally this is set in contemporary Afghanistan during the Taliban Regime. Since Afghanistan itself is a country of cultural diversity. Amir, who represents a sect of Muslim culture, is the narrator and lives in America. He is a Sunni

Muslim, known as Pashtun. He has got his playmate and servant, Hassan, a Hazara, a member of the ethnic minority. There are cultural differences between the two sects of Muslim cultures but the researcher focuses on Amir and his Baba's immigration to Fremont, California and feeling of cultural gap in a new land. The Muslim immigrants endeavor for their adjustment in a new land which is completely different location in terms of cultural practices. The immigrants of different locations have difficulties across the world to assimilate. In a contact zone the immigrants either influence others or are influenced by others. We cannot find the culture intact and pure. Afghani immigrants, in this context, face cultural problems because of cultural gap to be adjusted in the new land. The researcher believes that their cultural pain can be addressed by the cultural hybridization which helps them find a space to rest their cultural pain. When the Afghan immigrants immigrate to Fremont they begin to negotiate with the environment culture. Amir, Baba, Soraya and many other immigrants can by no means ignore their origin nor they can ignore the western culture. Amir aptly says how his father can carry cultures, "He was wearing his brown suit-his own suit, the same one he wore to Afghan weddings and funerals- and the tie I had bought for his fiftieth birthday that year" (Hosseini, 2013, p.131). In the quote above the cultural practice rests on 'in between-space' where cross roads of two cultures encounter. The cross-roads in Bhava's language is 'in between-space' which means "neither the one nor the other but something else besides, in between" (1994, p. 219).

Thus, the objective of the paper is to take out the main reasons-why/how the immigrants (Afghanis) do face the cultural problem- and how they try their best to be free from the burdens of cultural differences. The researcher assumes that those differences can aptly be addressed by the term coined by Bhava 'in between-space' where cultural pain can rest-somewhere in between, something else besides. The researcher limits to Bhava's idea for the interpretation of the text. Although the novel has many themes within itself like: war, friendship, migration, poverty and so on. And different critics have interpreted the novel from different perspectives. Some have dealt on the themes of national identity, race, migration, family relationship, and betrayal in friendship, Afghan cultural history, and so on. Aubry writes in "Afghanistan Meets the Amazon: Reading *The Kite Runner* in America" as ". . . many appreciate Hossein's novel for offering a digestible history of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001 and for describing some of the country's cultural, social and religious practice" (2017, p. 27). He further writes for its universal human themes". . . *The Kite Runner* is about not just Afghanistan but also universal human themes, such as guilt, friendship, fatherhood and forgiveness, and is therefore a classic" (2017, p. 27). *The Kite Runner* receives the attentions of the critics for its diverse meanings to be interpreted. National identity, culture, and history are also themes of the novel. Miles in his article *The Kite Runner* writes, on the ethnic division as ". . . impossible for Amir to consider Hasson, his closest childhood companion family servant boy, a friend . . . he examines Afghanistan's recent cultural and national history" (2004, p.207). So both articles examine the universal human themes and the cultural history of Afghanistan simultaneously.

Akram Sadat Hosseini et al and Esmail Zohdi in the article "*The Kite Runner* and The Problem of Racism and Ethnicity ". . . in *The Kite Runner*, the subject of racism and ethnicity is thoroughly

conspicuous and perceptible in the book" (2016, p. 39). We can perceive the practice of racism when Assef hurts Hassan like" He (Assef) tipped his chin to Hassan. "Hey flat-nose", he said. How is Babulu?" (Hosseini, p. 39). The rampant practice of racism is abundantly found in the book.

Thus, *The Kite Runner* is about, history, identity, culture, religion, race, and so on. In the midst of it the present paper focuses on how the Afghan immigrants face cultural differences in a new land-Fremont and how the hybridization gives them a way out for their cultural pain to rest in a new contact zone.

Textual Analysis

In the novel *The Kite Runner* we can find the internal mechanism which is based on the relationship of interdependence between the Afghan culture and western culture. We find the clear distinctions between the two cultures: Muslim and Christian. The world 'transculturation' is appropriate in this regard. The Afghan immigrants in Fremont, California are influenced by the western culture because of their cultural consciousness. This 'space' is in Bhabha's term in between space' that is called 'hybridized culture'. Hybridity gives relief to the new comers/ immigrants. They don't have to give up their root culture. Rather they create a third space where they can rest their cultural pain. When Amir and Baba begin to live in Fremont, California they have collected a new experience. Amir says 'Baba loved the idea of America" (Hosseini, p.125). The statement above suggests that Baba, a Muslim from Afghanistan has been influenced by the environment culture.

Both Baba and Amir seem to adopt the new environment in the USA. Amir aptly says, "I remember the two of us walking through Lake Elizabeth Park in Fremont, a few streets down from our apartment, and watching boys at batting practice, little girls giggling on the swings in the playground. Baba would enlighten me with his politics during those walks with long-winded dissertations" (Hosseini, p. 125). Their arrival at Fremont seems to be adjustable They seem happy. They are enjoying the scene in Fremont. Father seems to be teaching his son about the politics. Baba loves the idea of America as well, may be talking about American politics, culture, economy and so on. Despite being Muslim Baba adjusts with the new culture. He seems to practice both cultures. Baba talks about politics of America, Britain and America and at the same time his expression seems Afghani when he says "The rest of them . . . 'he used to have his hand and make a phht sound' – they are like gossiping old women"(Hosseini, p.125). These kinds of cultural practices help to justify how a culture is hybridized. Baba and Amir are gradually adjusting, adopting and practicing the new culture in Fremont. A post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha rightly says about the ambiguous situation of the new comers when they encounter a new culture. Their presence at the 'contact zone' appears ambiguous because they don't stick either side, ignoring the pitfall of each nationality. In the midst of it Bhabha (1994) in *The Location of Culture* rightly says, " To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity" (p. 18). Amir is carrying both consciousness: his past, as an Afghan and his present, as a resident of Fremont, California where he wants to be free from his sins. He is embodied with the double consciousness. He says "America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into the river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry

me some place far. . . . no memories, and no sins. If for nothing else, for that I embraced America" (Hosseini, p. 136). For the certain things like culture, he is close to Afghanistan and for some other things he is close to America. He can not ignore Afghanistan nor he can do for America. He is found somewhere 'in between space'.

The flux of the people, by different cause, has to face difficulties in adjusting with a new culture. In this regard the critics Welson and Dissanayake in their *Global/Local* present the immigrants found somewhere in between. They put, "It doesn't mean to belong to operations of capital with its masculinist sense of space as adventure, movement, action, but to be in between, uprooted, homeless, to belong to neither of two nodes of dystopian or utopian" (1996, p.10).

From the quote above it seems appropriate to the condition of Amir who feels uprooted from his own culture in the new land. Because in the colonial power the feeling towards the root becomes very strong. Many post-colonial societies bear the problem of cultural conflict and hybridity. When the society becomes hybrid, multicultural and transcultural, that turns to be the transit point between the two cultures. Amir's arrival to Fremont and his adjustment in the Christian society denotes how societies are infused with different cultures is an apt example. Amir and Baba are in Fremont. One day after dinner Baba takes Amir to a bar. They are from the Muslim culture but Amir's description of his Baba as "we drew looks, Baba in his brown suit and me in pleated slacks and sports jacket" (Hosseini, p. 132) suggests that they are influenced by the Christina culture. They liked wearing 'suit' and 'pleated slacks' at Fremont, California. In terms of clothes, food, language etc. people remain impure in the post-colonial and the postmodern societies and the Afghani immigrants in the novel *The Kite Runner* is no exception.

Immigrants in a new land face the cultural conflict. The conflict forces them either to assimilate, or resist or adjust with the new culture. American society gives importance to money. Baba in *The Kite Runner* uses a word 'discover'. It is for material prosperity and 'successful life'. Baba inquires Amir for how he manages life in America, "And what will you do while you wait to get good and get discovered? How will you earn money? If you marry, how will you support your Khanum?" (Hosseini, p.134). Both Baba and Amir are engaged on their objective of making money and discovering a successful life. This shows that American way of living is seen rooted in the Afghani immigrants in Fremont.

Aubry in "Afghanistan Meets the Amazon Regarding *The Kite Runner* in America" about Amir's life in America. As Bhava says 'in-between space' Amir is influenced by American/Western culture. Aubry writes. " . . . spends his afternoon viewing American Westerns and drinking Coca-Cola. If Amir is more American than other segments of Afghan society, he also expresses a profound affection for Kabul's local culture-its bazaars, its cuisine, its language-and as an adult he becomes a practicing Muslim" (2009, p. 29). So in betweenness is one of the characteristics of immigrants in a new land; in a location where the culture is different. He is found either this side or the other side of the cultures for his Muslim brought-up and later settlement in the western location in Christina culture. We can further acknowledge about immigrants and, here in *The Kite Runner*, Amir's divided nationality by appearance he is Muslim but by 'tie' looks like a Christian.

Hybrid culture is seen rampantly in the novel *The Kite Runner*. Mainly such cultural hybridity is experienced/detected in the ceremonies. In the engagement party, the Shirini-khori or 'Eating of the sweets ceremony' (Hosseini, p.196) we encounter many such occasions where hybrid culture is practiced. On the one hand they follow their root culture strictly. In their culture it is improper to conduct a visit by the boy and girl before they have a Shirini-khori. Amir clearly puts to justify the idea of Muslim culture as "Soraya and I never went out alone together while preparations for the wedding proceeded-since we were not married yet, hadn't even a Shirini-khori, it was considered improper" (Hosseini, p. 169). Such occasions are many in numbers in the book. For the wedding ceremony Baba spends a large sum of money. Immigrants have been influenced by the environment culture because money matters in the capitalist society. Amir further describes how the wedding ceremony is organized:

Baba rented a large Afghan banquet hall in Fremont- the man who owned it knew him from Kabul and gave him a Substantial discount. Baba paid for the Chilas, our matching wedding bonds, and for the diamond ring I picked out. He bought my tuxedo, and my traditional green suit for the nika-the swearing ceremony (Hosseini, p. 169-70).

In the above quotation we find the clothes that Amir prepares represent the two different cultures: Muslim and Christian. So, the fashion followed at the wedding has been hybridized because Amir's Choice of the tuxedo and the traditional green suit for this wedding justify the same. Some aspects of Muslim culture and some from Christian culture seem to contribute Amir and Soraya's marriage in the Fremont. By combining the cultures, they have hope to be accepted as the wedding couple in a new land. It is fairly hard for the immigrants to create a new space in a new location and more than this the immigrants' marriage in America has given a solution to many other immigrants to be adjusted. Another cultural hybridization can be witnessed with the wedding ring and the Afghan banquet hall. Wedding ring is a western cultural practice at wedding while the Afghan banquet hall carries a lot of meanings for the Afghan people in Fremont.

In the postmodern society, no culture seems to be pure. People all over the world immigrate for various reasons. The difficulty they face in a new land is culture. But people try their best to adjust and readjust by hybridizing their cultural practices and find/create a new space which becomes acceptable and rest their cultural pain.

Conclusion:

In *The Kite Runner*, the novel written by Khaled Hosseini, the subject of hybridity is thoroughly perceptible. The Afghan immigrants in Fremont, California, encounter the different cultural practices. We find certain characters in the novel-Amir, Baba, Taheri, Soraya, etc. who face cultural differences in a new place. They are from Afghanistan and follow their root culture in their day to day life in Fremont. They cannot ignore the environment culture as well. As we see in the process of Amir's marriage to Soraya, Baba Amir's father', rents a large Afghan banquet hall in Fremont and also purchases 'the diamond ring'. He also buys 'tuxedo, and traditional green suit' for the swearing

ceremony. Soraya, Amir's fiancée, an Afghan origin drinks alcohol in the presence of the Taheri, her father and Amir. Such events reveal that they are influenced by others' culture/Christina culture. Their root culture doesn't seem unaffected. It doesn't remain intact and pure. These two different cultures seem colonizing culture and colonized culture. Wedding ring is an influence of American/Christian Culture. A large Afghan banquet hall represents Muslim culture. Wearing suit represents American culture. Drinking alcohol by a woman is the American influence. There are many more such cultural practices found in the novel. Such cultural hybridity occurs in a new land because people have to adopt the new culture for their life to run. Those cultures are not erased rather they combine each other and become the new culture which is the outcome of the two different cultures.

To conclude the discussion Bhabha's phrase 'in between-space' works aptly in this context, which means-neither the one nor the other but something else besides, in between. The 'space' where the two different cultures are practiced, readjusted as the way to solve the problem, e.g. cultural pain, of immigrants that gives them a new cultural identity and keeps the culture workable.

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