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Betrayal in Friendship: A Study on Ethnicity and Religion in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

**Betrayal in Friendship: A Study on Ethnicity and Religion in Khaled
Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***

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This thesis entitled "**Betrayal in Friendship: A Study on Ethnicity and Religion in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by **Samir Adhikari** has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Emergence of Conflict and Betrayal

Khaled Hosseini's poignant debut novel *The Kite Runner* emphasizes on the complicated relationship between two characters namely, Amir the privileged son of a wealthy merchant in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Hassan, a loathed minority, the son of Amir's father's servant. The boys are inseparable as children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s but are from different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Though Amir and Hassan both are Muslims, Amir is Sunni and Hassan is Shi'a. Amir is Pashtun, a privileged majority, and Hassan is an ethnic minority Hazara, an oppressed class in Afghanistan. Despite this inseparable friendship Amir never feels comfortable about their relationship. As the consciousness of race and religion grows more and more in Amir's mind, he betrays Hassan and breaks the relationship. The ethnic and the religious gaps between these two characters lead Amir to betray his most loyal and close friend Hassan.

This extraordinary first novel written originally in English by an Afghan, Hosseini, locates the personal struggles and cultural tensions of everyday people in the terrible sweep of history, the struggles on the basis of religion and ethnicity. As an epic tale of friendship and betrayal, the novel takes us from the final days of Afghanistan's monarchy to the atrocities of the present. The novel foregrounds a touching and memorable story of the friendship between two boys of differing social class and ethnic backgrounds. The boys – the protagonist Amir and his friend Hassan – live in Kabul, where they have been tended to by the same wet-nurse and have been reared in the same household. Since Amir springs from the elite Pashtun while Hassan emerges from a marginalized ethnic minority, Hazara, the boys inhabit contrasting

worlds. As Amir slowly and gradually becomes conscious about their cultural and religious differences, he betrays his best friend Hassan and breaks the relationship.

Their symbiotic relationship and their intertwined lives and fates – in particular the critical incident of the racist attack on Hassan by the half – caste Assef while Amir silently looks on – are cleverly utilized by Hosseini to mirror Afghanistan's social and religious tensions and complexities. Hassan always saves and helps Amir as a true friend but Amir shows his superiority on both ethnic and religious sides and never considers Hassan as friend though he pretends to do so. Lucky to escape an Afghanistan besieged by the Russians and their local allies, the Taliban, Amir, after betraying his close friend Hassan, embarks on a new life in California, convinced that his soul can be at peace now that he has left his past behind. Such cruelty is due to the consciousness of race and religion. Had there not been the consciousness of superiority in terms of ethnic differences and the religion, Amir would not have betrayed his most loyal childhood friend Hassan. At the same time, the novel transcends time, place, and the immediate local, for it is an ethnic parable for all peoples who are confronted daily with personal struggles pertaining to family, love, and betrayal.

The Kite Runner, thus presents the odyssey of Amir's life from Kabul to San Francisco through the perspective of Amir himself. After betraying his most loyal and close friend Hassan, Amir flees to America with his father, Baba. Amir's consciousness as a son of privileged Pashtun class in Afghanistan, is shaped by the religious as well as ethnic conflict, which leads him to betray Hassan, an ethnic minority Hazara. Amir always feels some lack in his friendship. Amir is very much conscious about the race and the religion that play a vital role to cheat and betray his friend Hassan. Though their friendship is inseparable, and though Hassan never

denies Amir anything, Amir never thinks Hassan as his friend. Amir knows very well that such religious and ethnic differences, which have been prevailing in Afghanistan for ages are not easy to change as he says that "history isn't easy to overcome. Neither religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun, and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a and nothing was going to change that. Nothing" (22).

This extract depicts how the religious as well as ethnic prejudices have shaped Amir's consciousness. Amir knows that his most loyal friend from ethnic minority will never go against him. He again knows that the so called upper-class people never feel easy with their relationship. The following extract from the text shows how much Amir is conscious about the religious and ethnic differences between them:

I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense, anyhow. Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to built a fully functional homemade camera out of a cardboard box. Never mind that we spent entire winters flying kites, running kites. (22)

Hosseini deals with the inequalities and injustice through symbolic structure, on the ground of religion and ethnicity. The novel's political dimension reveals that Hazaras and Shias could never move up the hierarchy unless they denied their identity or became wealthy. It was not just the Shiás and Hazaras but also the Kuchis, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and 'a trafíyan or deehatíyan' (rural dwellers) no matter if they were Pashtu-speaking, Panjshiris, or Badakhshis.

While Amir Habibulla's (r. 1901-1919) son Shah Amanulla (r. 1919-1929) outlawed slavery, still after his departure from Afghanistan until the early 1970s era when *The Kite Runner's* young Amir grows up in Kabul, the slave-like old practices of Hazaras still continued. While some had broken this bondage, they were not

treated much better earning low pay as servants ('nokahr' or 'muzdur') laboring as attendants, cooks, housekeepers, drivers, midwives, cloth washers, and yard workers in many middle-class to high-ranking households. The socio-economic status was highly correlated with ethnicity stratifying the greater Afghan society. Such stratification made the gap between so called upper ruling class and the minority like Hazara more deeper. Income inequality was vast as most of the upper class came from the royal tribal clan, while the lower class was comprised of the likes of Hassan's family of *The Kite Runner*.

In the mid-1800s, Amir Dost Mohammad, born to a Qizilbash wife of Sardar Payanda, was not sympathetic to the Shias and exploited Sunni-Shia differences. Amir Dost Mohammad aligned the Sunnis and Qizilbash to the detriment of the Hazaras. This alliance served for his conquest of the Hazarajat after which Amir Dost Mohammad declared himself 'Amir-al-Mumineen" (leader of the faithful) attempting to compare himself to the Prophet's cousin, Caliph Ali. In recent times, the Taliban referred to their Leader, Mullah Omar, similarly evoking memories of Amir Dost Mohammad's conquest. In 1891 Amir Dost Mohammad's grandson, Amir Abdur Rahman continued the policy of Sunnis and tribesmen the title of "ghazi" (infidel killer) for his conquest of Hazarajat. The result was the destruction of the of Hazara tribal system, annexation of Hazara personal property and land, and the enslavement Hazaras to be sold in the Kabul bazaar. What ensued was the massive migration of Hazaras to Quetta and Mashad, currently in Pakistan and Iran, respectively. The awareness of such incidents and differences make the protagonist Amir to betray his most loyal childhood friend Hassan.

The novel is told through the character of Amir as he seeks redemption for his betrayal of his friend Hassan. The story is about two friends who symbolize opposite

ends of a socio-political hierarchy. Amir is Pashtun, Sunni, wealthy, and literate; whereas his servant's son, Hassan, is Hazara, Shia, poor, and illiterate. They both have lost their mothers and shared the same wet nurse. Following their growth to adulthood, the reader is drawn to with both characters and their dichotomous personalities. The deformed Hassan and his father are mocked in public, and ironically Amir wishes he could trade families for a moment of compassion that Hassan receives from his father. Uniquely, Amir's father also wished Amir was not his only son because in Hassan he sees all the character attributes, which he wished Amir possessed. Nonetheless, Amir realizes that in the long run he is better off because he is Pashtun and not a Hazara in such a discriminating society. Amir's realization of himself as a Pashtun, a sophisticated ruling class in Afghanistan, and his knowledge of differences between Sunnis and the Shias brings the conflict between Hassan and him, that ultimately betrays Hassan.

In addition, Khaled Hosseini's own personal experiences and impressions that he received during his childhood days in Afghanistan as a sophisticated son of a dominant Pashtun family, like Amir in *The Kite Runner*, have played a vital role in shaping the structure of the novel. Hosseini's work provides an indigenous look into an Afghan experience, which some critiques have considered as a more realistic account of Afghan and Afghanistan than any work produced by even the best journalists.

Hosseini's was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan where his father was a diplomat and his mother taught Farsi and History. The family left Afghanistan in 1976 when Hosseini's father was posted to the Afghan Embassy in Paris. Following the 1978 coup and the subsequent Russian invasion, the Hosseinis emigrated to the United States, receiving political asylum in 1980. Hosseini is now a physician and

lives with his wife and two children in California. Having lived through that time period in Kabul – the final years of the monarchy, the birth of Republic, and the first years of Daoud Khan's leadership – Hosseini has felt comfortable writing about it especially focusing on the conflict of Afghans on the basis of religion and ethnicity.

The Kite Runner, Hosseini's first novel and, reputedly, the first to be written in English by an Afghan, met with great critical and popular acclaim when it was published in 2003. It has been interpreted and analyzed by various critics, scholars and writers from different perspectives. They have focused on different issues like Afghan diaspora, migration, family relationship, hypocrisy of those hiding their sins under the cloak of religious righteousness, the dichotomy of the privileged and unprivileged, and the double standard for men and women. Such perspectives and approaches are mostly reader oriented and the author oriented but they have talked less about the issue that this thesis is going to explore. This dissertation primarily focuses on the burning problems of Afghan society – ethnic as well as religious differences – leading to cultural conflict among the main characters which results ultimate betrayal of Hassan by Amir.

Stella Algoo Baksh describes *The Kite Runner* as a haunting and quite extraordinary first novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan medical doctor now residing in the United States. According to Baksh, the novel:

Launches readers into the realities of Afghan society, using the political events of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001 to foreground a touching and memorable story of the friendship between two boys of differing social class and ethnic backgrounds. It foregrounds the complexity and difficulty of the achievement of personal salvation and the recognition of self. (143)

But more than a touching and memorable story of friendship, *The Kite Runner* is a story of betrayal in friendship due to the ethnic and religious gaps between the two characters.

The other critic Ronny Noor sees the novel as:

A novel of sin and redemption, a son trying to redeem his father's sins. This lucidly written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of not only the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. As far as the Afghan conflict is concerned, we get a selective, simplistic, even simple-minded picture. (148)

Monika Mehta says, "*The Kite Runner* offers a moving portrait of modern Afghanistan, from its pre-Russian-invasion glory days through the terrible reign of the Taliban. Hossein smoothly adds Farsi words to his clear, plot-driven prose; at one point, Amir's enemy eerily foreshadows the slaughter of a persecuted ethnic minority" (82). But not only Amir's enemy Assef but Amir himself feel superiority complex though his loyal friend Hassan is his nearest one among other boys.

Such criticisms and reviews do not talk much about the betrayal that Hassan, as a minority has to face by Amir who is on the upper step of social ladder. The ethnicity and the religiosity has made their friendship impossible. It is very hard for Amir to consider Hassan as his friend because of ethnic and religious differences.

For Loyal Miles, the novel is about national identity. But he agrees with the betrayal in friendship because of the broader elements of Afghan society, ethnic and class divisions:

The tensions in this relationship mirror Afghanistan's struggle in the 1970s to maintain a traditional sense of national identity in the face of government instability and eventual invasion by a foreign power.

Broader elements of Afghan society, such as ethnic and class divisions, also make it impossible for Amir to consider Hassan, his closest childhood companion and family servant boy, a friend. The gradual unraveling of both relationships and Amir's eventual attempts to reconcile with his father and with Hassan provide a structure through which Hosseini compellingly examines Afghanistan's recent cultural and national history. (207)

Thus, Amir's conflicting feelings lead him to betray Hassan in a tragic confrontation with three older boys in the aftermath of Kabul's annual Kite-fighting tournament in 1975. This betrayal, like many moments in *The Kite Runner*, resonates on two levels: on a personal level, this desire to win his father's approval drives Amir's actions; on a cultural level, the older boys, like Amir, are Pashtuns, while Hassan is Hazara, and their confrontation exhibits the deeply felt tensions between the majority and minority ethnic groups, respectively, in Afghanistan. The guilt that follows this betrayal shapes much of the novel's narrative tone and connects Amir's troubled past with his sense of cultural identity as he equates Afghanistan to the disfigured, oppressed boy he himself betrayed. Amir's cultural identity relies on the context of a traditional past juxtaposed against the realities of ethnic divisions and a war-fractured present.

The present dissertation examines the broken relationship between two very close friends, who come from different ethnic backgrounds and religious communities. The study analyzes and interprets how the existing religious and ethnic differences in Afghanistan lead Amir to betray his loyal and close friend Hassan. This research is a text based research so the text has been studied from ethnic and religious perspectives. The differences and the conflict between the royal clan of Afghanistan,

Pashtun, and the ethnic minority, Hazara are distinguished and analyzed. Similarly, the major conflicts and the misunderstandings among the two branches of Muslim, namely Sunni Muslim and Shi'a Muslim are further analyzed. The cultural conflict among the characters due to such ethnic and religious gaps constitutes the theoretical tools for the analysis of the text.

Due to such conflict, Amir never feels comfortable about the friendship with Hassan though Hassan helps him a lot and is very loyal for him, not only as a servant but also as a true friend. But the consciousness of race and religion leads Amir to cultural conflict that ultimately betrays Hassan.

This dissertation is mainly divided into four parts. The first part of the thesis gives general synopsis of the text, writer, and the subject matter. This part elaborates the statement of problem as well as the hypothesis. To prove the hypothesis, it gives some general framework of the theoretical tools as well. Some critics are also brought in the introduction part. In short, it gives the general introduction of the whole thesis.

In the next part, the theoretical tools are discussed for the textual analysis of the text. First of all, ethnicity and the religion are discussed in different titles. The criticisms related to each title are brought and introduced. Then this part shows how the existing ethnic and religious differences bring conflict between people. Even if people are from some religion, they face tussle because of different branches of the same religion. They have the feeling of majority and minority. The majority groups always marginalize the minority groups in the same religion too. For example, Sunnis and the Shia's both are Muslims – same religion different branches – but we find the conflict and killings among them. On the ground of religion, there is the conflict among people that ultimately betrays the relationship between them. Similarly, ethnicity is another major ground on which people fight each other. No matter it is

majority or minority, ethnic groups have their own origin as well as identification. When they are conscious about their ownness, they think that they are superior than the other. It ultimately brings the conflict among people, divides them, and betrays the relationship.

After the discussion of theoretical tools, *The Kite Runner* has been analyzed textually in the third chapter of this thesis. This textual analysis has been done on the basis of the theoretical tools discussed in the second chapter. With the help of different lines of the text, it has been proved that there is the betrayal in friendship among two central characters of the text because of ethnic as well as religious differences among them. It proves that religion and the ethnicity are major factors that leads Amir to betray his most loyal and close friend Hassan. The final chapter of this dissertation consists of a short conclusion. The thesis concludes with the proof that the betrayal in friendship among two boys in the text is due to the consciousness of ethnicity as well as religion.

II. THEORETICAL MODALITY

Ethnicity

The term 'Ethnicity' refers to selected cultural and sometimes physical characteristics used to classify people into groups or categories considered to be significantly different from others. In some cases, ethnicity involves merely a loose group identity with little or no cultural traditions in common. In contrast, some ethnic groups are coherent subcultures with a shared language and body of tradition. Newly arrived immigrant groups often fit this pattern. For many people, ethnic categorization implies a connection between biological inheritance and culture. They believe that biological inheritance determines much of cultural identity. If this were true, for instance, African American cultural traits, such as "Black English", would stem from genetic inheritance. But this is not true – biological race and culture are not the same thing.

The pioneering English anthropologist Edward Tylor wrote in 1871 that cultural traits are entirely learned. Subsequently, a baby can be placed into another culture shortly after birth and can be thoroughly enculturated to that culture, regardless of their skin, color, body shape, and other presumed racial features. Beside this, it is important not to confuse the term 'minority' with 'ethnic group'. Ethnic groups may be either a minority or a majority in a population. Whether a group is a minority or a majority also is not an absolute fact but depends on the perspective. For instance, in some towns along the southern border of the U.S., people of Mexican ancestry are the overwhelming majority population and control most of the important social and political institutions but are still defined by state and national governments as a minority. In small homogenous societies, such as those of hunters and gatherers and pastoralists, there is essentially only one ethnic group and no minorities.

The term 'Ethnic' is derived from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning 'people'. It was typically used to refer to non-Greek people, so the term also connotated 'foreign'. In later Catholic Latin usage, there was the additional connotation of 'heathen'. The noun 'ethnic' ceased to be related to 'heathen' in the early 18th century. The modern usage is closer to the original Greek meaning.

The term 'Ethnicity' goes far beyond the modern ties of the person to a particular nation (e.g. citizenship), and focuses more upon the connection to a perceived shared past and culture. The corresponding terms for ethnicity and nationhood can be closer to each other.

However, even within a state, ethnic differences among the people bring conflict between them because there is cultural difference. For M.G. Smith "ethnicity connotes cultural differences that are quite compatible with the inclusive social order, either because they are differences within a common idiom or a permitted range, or because the groups which practice these variant cultures are numerically weak, and are dependent portions of the larger society" (104). He further elaborates that "the idea of ethnic difference is less precise than that of cultural plurality. In some usages of the term, ethnicity refers to race, in others to culture, and in yet others to nationality" (104).

Ethnicity and supposed racial groups are largely cultural and historical constructs. They are primarily social rather than biological phenomena. This does not mean that they do not exist but ethnic identity is often complex. It can change dynamically through time as situations alter. It can be created by self definition or others can define it for us whether we wish them to or not. The power to label others is the power to control them. Our stereotypes of groups has a strong effect on how we view and relate to members of those groups. It also can have a profound effect on how

we see ourselves. Definitions of ethnicity and race have immense political importance as well because they are related to power and control. Those ethnic groups that have a high public visibility generally have political clout. Those that are largely invisible do not.

For Anthony Smith, "an ethnic group is a human population whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry" (Smith 1986). Ethnic groups are also usually united by common cultural, behavioural, linguistic, or religious practices. In this sense, an ethnic group is also a cultural community. An ethnic group is also an endogenous population, that is, member of an ethnic group procreate primarily with other members of their ethnic group, something which is measurable in terms of characteristics average genetic frequencies. These differences, however, usually do not approach the magnitude of racial differences in that the genetic differences within an ethnic group are greater than the difference between any two ethnic groups.

While ethnicity and race are related concepts, the concept of ethnicity is rooted in the idea of social groups, marked especially by shared nationality, tribal affiliation, genealogy, religious faith, shared language, or cultural and traditional origins, whereas race is rooted in the idea of a biological classification of *Homo Sapiens* according to chosen genotypic and phenotypic traits. M.H. Abrams defines ethnic group in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as, "The group that consists of individuals who are distinguishable, within a majority cultural and social system, by shared characteristics such as race, religion, language, cultural modes and national origin. There is however, much contention, both within and outside these groups" (209-10).

One ethnic group marginalizes and tries to disorient the other, especially minority groups that always results the misunderstanding and conflict. While talking about Europeans, Abrams further elaborates that "ethnic literatures stress the role of culture - formations dominated by white European in suppressing, marginalizing, or distorting the achievements of non-whites and non-Europeans peoples" (187).

Members of an ethnic groups generally claim a strong cultural continuity over time which they think is distinct as well as superior to other ethnic groups. Even within the same state, one ethnic group distorts the achievements of the other groups. This ultimately brings strong conflict between the people from different ethnic groups. Such situation arises the distance and the gap between different ethnic groups. Identity as one ethnic group denies the identity of the other that brings conflict among them.

In this regard, Leela Gandhi agrees with the animosities in terms of ethnicity. The majority uses the 'rhetoric of blame' to the minority to marginalize them. Gandhi writes that people are "caught between the harsh extremes of ethnic cleansing" (129). The preservation and perpetuation of essentialized ethnic identities bring the conflict between people. Gandhi rightly observes:

Working out of Thatcherite Britain, Stuart Hall observes the insidious – and ostensibly multiculturalist – procedures whereby the convenient. Othering and exoticisation of ethnicity merely confirms and stabilizes the hegemonic notion of 'Englishness'. In these circumstances, ethnicity is always already named as marginal or peripheral to the mainstream. (126)

In the west, the notion of ethnicity, like race and nation, developed in the context of European colonial expansion, when mercantile and capitalism were

promoting global movements of populations. In the nineteenth century, modern states generally sought legitimacy through their claim to represent nations. Nation-states, however, invariably include populations that have been excluded from national life for one reason or another. Members of excluded groups, consequently, will either demand inclusion on the basis of equality, or seek autonomy, sometimes even to the extent of complete political separation in their own nation - state.

Sometimes ethnic groups are subject to prejudicial attitudes and actions by the state or its constituents. In the twentieth century, people began to argue that conflicts among ethnic groups or between members of an ethnic group and the state can and should be resolved in one of two ways. Some, like Jürgen Habermas and Bruce Barry, have argued that the legitimacy of modern states must be based on a notion of political rights of autonomous individual subjects. According to this view, the state ought not to acknowledge ethnic, national or racial identity and should instead enforce political and legal equality of all individuals. Others, like Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka argue that the states must recognize ethnic identity and develop processes through which the particular needs of ethnic groups can be accommodated within the boundary of the nation-state.

In Samuel P. Huntington's view "ethnic expansion by one group lead to ethnic cleansing by the other" (261). He further views:

Wars between ethnic groups have been prevalent in every era and in every civilization because they are rooted in the identities of people. These conflicts tend to be particularistic, in that they do not involve broader ideological or political issues of direct interest to non-participants, although they may arouse humanitarian concerns in

outside groups. They also tend to be vicious and bloody, since fundamental issues of identity are at stake. (252)

E.B. Tylor defines the term 'ethnic' in the *Dictionary of Anthropology* as "a group distinguished by common cultural characteristics, e.g., a linguistic group like Bantu or Malayo – Polynesian" (191). There is the feeling that one's group has a mode of living, values and patterns of adaptation that are superior to others.

Vidya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva commonly agree that ethnic feeling is "an assumption that the values, the ways of life and the attitudes of one's own group are superior to those of others. They are the only right ones, while those of the others are inferior and wrong" (243). These writers further add:

They are conscious that their group is the center of everything and others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Each group thinks of itself the best as possessing the highest values and as having accomplished the most. This attitude of superiority is universal existing in all the times and in all the societies. (243)

In the similar vein, John Rex expects the situation "in which ethnically distinct groups meet only in the market - place. And while relations there are based upon exploitation of the harshest sort, each group can and does withdraw to its own independent quarter, where it is not subject to authority of the others" (338). The point is that majority group dominate and oppress the minority groups. It arises the conflict among them because such dominance is linked with the identity of people. The members of minority group share a sense of solidarity and a desire to preserve their culture, traditions, religion, or language.

Ethnic group unity needs to be reinforced by a constant emphasis on what traits set the members apart from others, rather than what they share in common with

the outsiders. This is a universal means of boundary maintenance, or defence, between ethnic groups. Ethnic symbols are convenient markers for making 'we' and 'they' distinctions and are focal points for racism and other unpleasant manifestations of ethnocentrism. They also make in group differences. In the United States, for instance, they help propagate the myth that there is a single, coherent American Indian ethnic group. The same goes for Hispanics, European Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders.

People in political and economic power usually define their own ethnic group as being superior and others as being inferior. This can be done by laws that restrict rights and privileges. It also can be done in subtle pervasive ways even when ethnic favoritism is officially legal. For example, throughout much of the 20th century in America, 'white' became identified in popular literatures, films, and the mass media with intelligent, good, pretty, and successful, while 'black' was identified with the opposite. Such things bring conflict among the people and ultimately betrays the relationship.

Religion

Religion refers to a belief in God or higher power and practices associated with faith-related institutions. Religion involves religious identity, religious group affiliation, behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, religion's negative sanctions against certain behaviours, and practices. Religious beliefs and manners are translated into behaviours that influence to a great extent in human life. It's a quality of being religious which is exaggerated or affected religious zeal. There are at least three components of religious behaviors: knowing (cognition), feeling (affect), and doing (behaviour). These three components are related to each other or one affects the other.

What most measures religious practice is spirituality that remains an illusive term with a variety of meanings regarding the deeply personal and individualized responses to sacred matters or matters affecting the spirit. Most dimensions of the religion are correlated, meaning people who often attend church services (practice dimension) are also likely to score highly on the belief and spirituality dimensions. But this is the importance of delineating the different components of religion, individuals do not have to score high on all dimensions or low on all dimensions; their scores can vary by dimension. It means that individual consciousness and belief of religion affects their life to a great extent and their behaviour towards the other who are from the different religions. It is not to say that there is no tussle inside the same religion. Even within a single religion, the different branches of the same religion can come into a violent conflict that makes them separated to each other. The burning example is Shi'a-Sunni division in Muslim religion.

While defining the term religion, *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language* presents it as a "belief binding the spiritual nature of man to a supernatural being, as involving a feeling of dependence and responsibility, together with the feelings and practices which naturally flow from such a belief." Such feeling and manifestation of the religion causes disastrous attack to the people from different religion which destroys the relationship among people.

Religion is considered as a system of social coherence based on a common group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen being, or system or thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, traditions, and rituals associated with such belief of system of thought. It is sometimes used interchangeably with "faith" or "belief system".

Sociologists and anthropologists see religion as an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed as part of a cultural matrix. It may be defined as the presence of a belief in the sacred or the holy. The religion is a social construction, rather than referring to actual supernatural phenomena; that is, phenomena beyond the natural world. Though some believe on positive effects, many view it as having or having had a mostly injurious or destructive effect in the society and the people.

On the other hand, *Webster's New World College Dictionary* has defined the term religion as "any system of beliefs, practices, ethical values, etc. resembling, suggestive of, or likened to the divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator(s), and ruler(s) of the universe." It further says that "religion is the quality of being religious excessively, ostentatiously, or mawkishly."

But the cult mentality is always dangerous that causes the social ills which plague the societies, such as politically based terrorism, random violence, bullying, drug abuse and organized crime. Nonetheless, since this problem has occurred within what is ostensibly classified as a religious entity, its causes necessarily have distinctive philosophical/religious characteristics. It affects in the personal level as well as the social level. The individual consciousness of religious superiority brings the conflict among the people and those who are supposed to be higher dominate the lower ones.

Malory Nye views the term religion in *Religion The Basics* with a wide range of meanings which "is used on a global scale for a variety of purposes and in many different, often correcting and conflicting ways. In short, religion is not something mystical and detached from the human sphere. It is what people do, and how they talk about what they do" (18). There are the religious differences between different

religions and denominational conflicts within the same religion that creates the mislabeling terror. Nye further elaborates:

Religion is not a *sui generis* category that exists in itself—that is, there is no essence of 'religion'. Instead it is a term with a multitude of meanings and references, to be understood with reference to other human activities. Religion is a key element of many cultural issues, as well as a significant factor in the historical development of the worlds and contexts in which we live. (208-209)

In pre-modern, traditional societies (both East and West) instruction on morality, philosophy and religion formed the basis of the educational system, and concomitantly helped to form the core of the fabric of society. But with the advent of science and materialism, there arose a serious conflict. In the West, scientific inquiries and discoveries seriously undermined literal interpretations of the bible (therefore considered an historically definitive document) about the origin and age of the universe. Narrow-minded religions leaders, fearful not only of refutation of religions doctrines, but also the loss of their position as the high priests of society, initially held the upper hand, and were able to suppress early scientists and their new discoveries. But over a period of a few centuries, science, even with the religious restrictions of thought, gradually succeeded in the elimination of religion from its position as the determinant of social principles. Though there is the tussle between science and religions as a whole, the conflict among the religious groups is increasing in the modern societies which has brought the betrayal among people.

Various critics and thinkers have opined religion in different ways. The most famous of such thinkers is probably Sigmund Freud who proposed that "religion is a misguided and unhealthy outcome of the problems inherent in a young boy working

through his relationship with his father" (qtd. in Nye, *Religion The Basics* 4). The father figure for Freud in terms of religion is 'god'. This misguided and unhealthy outcome leads to the clash and betrayal of the relationship.

In the similar vein, Raymond L Bugham believes that "the true nature of war is centred on the religious ideology and the religious extremists are not only the drivers of conflict, they also appear to serve as the originating source of disagreement" (4). In this article *Bringing the Religious Divide*, he further exemplifies:

In Iraq and Afghanistan, we are currently witnessing a spiritual tug-of-war between Islamic Hirabah (terrorist) and Coalition forces to win the hearts and minds of people who are in essence the living spirit of Islam. This war is about regional stability, and religious ideology- a war unbounded by conventional conflict with a reach that extends to incidents like the recent caricaturing of the Prophet, whereupon terrorists and global jihadists rallied thousands in defense of yet another perceived attack on Islam. (4)

It must be acknowledged that in both East and West, the religion has, not frequently, been poorly and/or wrongly used. They have often either ended up as meaningless exercises destroying the human relationship or have been used in partial, arbitrary and dogmatic fashion for the purpose of ideological control. Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam all have lengthy dogmatic and repressive episodes in their history. Religious practices are deceptive not only for the people from different religion but also in the same religion. In the same religion like Muslim, the so-called superior exploit, and dominate the minority or the people from next branch of the

same religion. In other words, the cult-based mind shape plays a vital role in separating the individuals.

Charls Van Doren takes religion as a "very serious business, more serious than anything else you can do or think about. Furthermore, we now question and condemn the view that any difference of religious opinion is sufficient cause for torture and death" (165-66). He further clarifies, "Christianity, in its many manifestations, perhaps attacks more adherents than any other religion" (21). It is clear, thus, that the conflict in terms of religion is not only on the basis of different religions but also on the basis of different branches and the manifestations of same religion. The intercivizational conflicts are also the causes of betrayal in human relationship.

More generally, even small amounts of violence between people of different religions have simplifications and consequences which intracivizational violence lacks. When Sunni gunmen killed eighteen Shia's worshippers in a mosque in Karachi in February 1995, they further disrupted the peace in the city and created a problem for Pakistan. In 1994, a Jewish settler killed twenty-nine Muslims praying at the cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, he disrupted the middle Eastern peace process and created a problem for the world. Such examples show clearly the interreligious as well as intrareligious conflict among the people that are harmful for human beings.

Samuel P. Huntington talks about the civilizational clash in the world for which, according to him, is on the basis of religious tussle. He agrees that the religion is the key factor to bring the people in conflict and separate them. He opines, "the intensification of religious consciousness and the rise of fundamentalist movements has reinforced the differences among religions. It has necessarily involved significant shifts in the proportions of the world's population adhering to different religions" (60). Huntington again analyzes:

If traditionally dominant religions do not meet the emotional and social needs of the uprooted, other religious groups move in to do so and in the process greatly expand their memberships and the saliency of religion in social and political life. Religious groups meet social needs left untended by state bureaucracies. (98)

Religion is, thus central factor to the individual separation and human betrayal that leads to disaster. The religious consciousness is dangerous feeling that makes one feel superior to other and ultimately results in breakage of the relationship. It is not to say that religion is the sole cause for that but to say that it is also one of the key causes from betrayal in relationships among people.

Conflict in Terms of Ethnicity and the Religion

Both of the terms 'Ethnicity' and the 'Religion' are defined and viewed in the above chapters separately by showing the conflicts that they bring in human relationship. Most of the time, ethnic and the religious differences among the people arise the clash between the individuals and the groups. The individual consciousness of superiority in terms of ethnicity and the religion dominates the other individual that results in separation and betrayal even in friendship. Human history have shown that the cause of war between the groups, societies, communities and the countries are either on the ground of religion or on the ground of ethnic differences.

Ethnic consciousness and the religious consciousness are regarded as a phenomenon, like caste or class consciousness that enforce social distances. The ethnic relations and religious relations, in this sense, are not so much the relations that exist between individuals of different races as between individuals conscious of these differences. "If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God), T.S. Eliot said, "You should pay your respect to Hitler or Stalin" (64).

When Samuel P. Huntington talks about the clash of civilizations and the remarking of world order in the future, he focuses on the main two different sectors by which the civilizational clash occurs: namely ethnicity and the religion. He insists not on ideological conflict among people but the civilizational conflict which means the conflict in terms of different religions as well as ethnic differences. He foresees, "the more fundamental divisions of humanity in terms of ethnicity, religions and civilizations remain and spawn new conflicts" (67), and people "identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, and at the broadest level civilizations [. . .] we know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (21). Huntington again claims:

The intensification of tribal, ethnic and religious conflict; the emergency of international criminal mafias; refugees multiplying into the tens of millions; the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; the spread of terrorism; the prevalence of massacres and ethnic cleansing. (35)

In most cases, the conflict doesn't occur only between different religious groups but it occurs between the groups from same religion , for example even though Shi'a and Sunni are the different branches of same religion and have many things in common like they both accept the same sacred text, the Qur'an, they have many differences resulting the extreme conflicts. Many Shia's have been persecuted, intimidated, and killed. Some Sunni scholars are known to have openly considered the Shi'a as "Kafir" (disbeliever) and condemned them to death. Shi'a believe that the split between Shi'a and Sunni began with Muhammad's death, when some number of Muslims supported the successorship of Ali and the rest forcibly accepted Abu Bakr, then Umar and Uthman.

Likewise, ethnicity plays a vital role in disorienting the relationship between people. Each ethnic group take themselves superior one and dominate the other. The so called majority try to rule over the minority and treat the minority as lower ones. This results serious conflict between the individuals as well as the groups and breaks the relationship. In Afghanistan, for example, Pashtuns are considered to be the royal clan and they try to dominate the minority ethnic groups like Hazara, Uzbeks, Kuchis, Turkmen etc. who are considered to be the lower ones in social hierarchy. Such ethnic consciousness breaks even the inseparable friendship among people.

In this regard, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Triffin believe that "the intervening decades have seen a great change in the ways in which the term ethnicity is used" (82). According to these critics:

There are fewer ethnic groups in which religion has the greatest influence in the way its members see its characters, the concept of race – with some notable exceptions, such as African-American – has become more and more distinct from ethnicity because of the greater specificity of the latter; the practical and social implications of the group's status as an immigrant group have often out weighed memories of a common national origin. (Ashcroft et.al. 82-83)

Therefore, on the basis of religion and the ethnic theoretical perspectives presented above, the tragic betrayal of a simple ethnic Hazara, Hassan, by this own inseparable master–friend Amir, has been explored in the following chapter of this thesis, The heart-pondering breakage of the relationship of Amir and Hassan in *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini is thus, due to the consciousness of religion and ethnicity.

III. BETRAYAL IN FRIENDSHIP: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Kite Runner in Afghan Ethnic and Religious Context

In the well told and extremely readable story *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini explores the nature of friendship and betrayal, set against the turbulent background of his native Afghanistan. The text paints an eye opening picture of what Afghanistan was and what it has become. It describes vividly how the combination of war and religious extremism can devastate a country and its people. *The Kite Runner* also illuminates the fact that most Afghan refugees are just that – peace loving, law abiding people who are in America because their beloved homeland has been rendered uninhabitable. Furthermore, it explores how the religious and ethnic consciousness shapes the individual mind resulting heartaching betrayal.

To some extent, either consciously or unconsciously, this unusually eloquent story depicts Hosseini's own bits and pieces as a child in his homeland. Like Amir in the novel, Hosseini himself lived his childhood life in Afghanistan before shifting to America. It talks to a great extent about the Taliban era in which study of Afghanistan would be incomplete without study of hunger, war, landmines, refugees, and so on. Hosseini left Afghanistan in 1976 at the age of 11 when his father was posted to the Afghan Embassy in Paris. Following the 1978 coup and subsequent Russian invasion, the Hosseini's emigrated to the United States receiving political asylum in 1980. The beginning lines of the novel show the Afghanistan of 1970s:

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975 [. . .] That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about past. I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years. (1)

As a first person narrator, Amir remembers his past Pashtun setting of his house "The living room downstairs had a curved wall with custom-built cabinets. Inside sat framed family pictures: an old, grainy photo of my grandfather and king Nadir Shah taken in 1931, two years before the king's assassination; they are standing over a dead deer, dressed in knee-high boots, rifles slung over their shoulders" (5).

In one way or the other, this description of the picture mirrors the life of Pashtuns who are considered to be the royal clan in Afghanistan, superior to other ethnic groups like Hazara, Uzbeks, and Kuchis. Hosseini engages in nostalgic childhood recreation of a lost Afghanistan during the last days of the monarchy Zahir Shah and the regime that overthrew him in the first part of the novel.

Written in the backdrop of September 11 by an Afghan-born medical doctor, *The Kite Runner* presents a glimpse of socio-political climate in Afghanistan and the Afghan community in northern California. *The Kite Runner* achieves this by offering a functional portrait of recent events manipulated by tribalism and religious conservatism and aggravated by foreign interferences but overcome through the humanism and bravery, which is fueled by the sense of community.

Khaled Hosseini vividly describes Afghanistan, both the privileged world of Amir's childhood and the stricken country under the Taliban. Whatever the truth of the claim to be the first English-language Afghan novel, Hosseini is certainly the first Afghan novelist to fictionalize his culture for a Western readership, melding the personal struggle of ordinary people into the terrible historical sweep of a devastated country in a rich and soul-searching narrative. The novel forecasts more realistic picture of Afghanistan than any journalistic writing:

They weren't shooting ducks after all. As it turned out, they hadn't shot much of anything that night of July 17, 1973. Kabul awoke the next

morning to find that the monarchy was a thing of the past. The king, Zahir Shah, was away in Italy. In his absence, his cousin Daoud Khan had ended the king's forty-year reign with a bloodless coup. (32)

Such realistic account makes *The Kite Runner* a very realistic novel rather than a fictional, "at least it was the beginning of the end. The end, the *official* end, would come first in April 1978 with the communist coup d'etat, and then in December 1979, when Russian tanks would roll into the very same streets where Hassan and I played, bringing the death of the Afghanistan I knew and marking the start of a still ongoing era of bloodletting" (32).

Besides, the novel again forecasts the existing social evils and shocking inhuman betrayal by human on the basis of religion and ethnic consciousness. Particularly, it presents the heart breaking picture of marginalized Hazaras and the devastative thinking of so-called upper class Pashtuns which has been prevailing in Afghanistan for ages. The religious tussle between Shi'a and Sunni is further clarified in the novel, "history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (22).

Through symbolic structure, therefore Hosseini deals with the inequalities and injustices in Afghanistan throughout the terrible sweep of history.

Reality of the Afghan Society

The son of a rich and popular merchant, Amir leads a privileged life, wanting only to please his beloved but demanding father, with Hassan, the child of Ali, Baba's lifelong servant. Both Amir and Hassan are motherless. They spend almost all their time to games and sharing stories in their favourite pomegranate tree. An encounter with Assef, the local bully, in which Hassan spring has appalling consequences,

destroying their friendship and driving Amir to desperate measures to rid himself of Hassan, measures in a puzzling reaction from his father. When Ali and Hassan decide to leave of their own accord, Amir's relief is short lived; his cowardice has been detected.

Baba and Amir are soon in flight themselves when the Russians invade. They flee first to Pakistan, then to America where Baba's old life of influence and power is at an end. They make a new life for themselves, embracing the San Francisco Afghan community, one of whom Amir eventually marries. But Amir remains haunted by his failure to protect Hassan, unable to enjoy his success as a novelist and his marriage to Soraya, convinced that their inability to have a child and his father's death are punishments visited upon him. Once in Peshawar, where Rahim Khan, Baba's old friend is dying, Amir learns that he is to find Hassan's lost son. In so doing, he must summon his courage and face not only his old enemy, but also the destruction that has been wrought upon his homeland.

Amir is a privileged member of the dominant Pashtun tribe growing up in affluent Kabul in the seventies. Hassan is his devoted servant and a member of the oppressed Hazara tribe whose first word was the name of his boy-master. The book focuses on the friendship between the two children and the cruel and shameful sacrifice the rich boy makes of his humble, adoring alter ego to buy the love of his own distant father. Amir realizes, "In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward" (68), as he bolts from the scene that severs his friendship with Hassan, shatters his childhood and haunts him for the rest of life. "I actually aspired to cowardice" (68), Amir further says:

[. . .] because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was

the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?(68)

As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, Amir and Hassan are inseparable. They spend idyllic days running kites and telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted. Even after Amir and his father flee to America, Amir remains haunted by his cowardly actions and disloyalty. In part, it is these demons and sometimes impossible quest for forgiveness that bring him back to his war-torn native land after it comes under Taliban rule.

The book charts Amir's attempts to flee culpability for this act of betrayal, seeking asylum from his hellish homeland in California and a new life buried deep in black velvet portraits of Elvis Amir's story is simultaneously devastating and inspiring. His world is patchwork of the beautiful and horrific, and the book a sharp, unforgettable taste of the trauma and tumult experiences by Afghans as their country buckled.

Metaphor of Kite Running

Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* derives its name from an ancient Afghan hobby of dueling with kites. The title refers to a traditional tournament for Afghan children in which kite flyers compete by slicing through the strings of their opponents with their own razor-sharp, grass-encrusted strings. To be the child who wins the tournament by downing all the other kites -- and to be the "runner" who chases down the last losing kite as it flutters to earth -- is the greatest honor of all. Hosseini's story soars in that metaphor of flyer and runner:

Every winter, districts in Kabul held a kite-fighting tournament. If you were a boy living in Kabul, the day of the tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season. I never slept the night before the tournament. I'd roll from side to side, make shadow animals on the wall, even sit on the balcony in the dark, a blanket wrapped around me. I felt like a soldier trying to sleep in the trenches the night before a major battle. And that wasn't so far off. In Kabul, fighting kites was a little like going to war. (43)

Similar to Afghanistan's tumultuous history, Afghan kite flying involves mid-air duels between rivals. Kite flyers attempt to down their adversary's kites analogous to the fighting between the Afghan government and mujahidin guerrilla factions whose hands are cut and bloodied, as is the hand of the kite flyer when the ground grass coating of the kite string sears through the hands. In most cases, kite flyer is encouraged to kite duel aggressively at high altitudes by the 'string giver' who usually holds the string reel. His role is not much different than the foreign powers that instigated all Afghan sides into battle to fight their proxy war by providing arms, training, and intelligence.

When the opponent's kite has been downed, then the real battle turns into a race, the kite run, to see who retrieves the fallen kite. This is symbolic to the 1992 event in Afghanistan when ethno-religious warlords looted and pillaged Kabul and other cities in a race to see who can amass the most booty. Interestingly enough, in 1994 the emerging Taliban regime banned kite flying and an assortment of other activities. The title *The Kite Runner*, thus is symbolically presented by Hosseini in this text.

Betrayal in Friendship

In the very beginning line of the novel *The Kite Runner*, the narrator Amir takes back to the past, giving the description of setting, "I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975" (1). By saying so he remembers his past "of unatoned sins" he had committed with "Hassan the harelipped kite runner" (1). He remembers it "because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years" (1). The further description of their childhood as:

. . . the poplar trees in the driveway of my father's house and annoy our neighbours by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror. We should sit across from each other on a pair of high branches, our naked feet dangling, our trouser pockets filled with dried mulberries and walnuts we took turns with the mirror as we ate mulberries, pelted each other with them, giggling, laughing. I can still see Hassan up on that tree, sunlight flickering through the leaves on his almost perfectly round face (3),

shows the depth of their friendship and the loyalty of Hassan towards his beloved friend Amir, "Sometimes, up in those trees, I talked Hassan into firing walnuts with his slingshot at the neighbours's one-eyed German shepherd. Hassan never wanted to, but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything" (3-4).

Hassan's physical structure in the eyes of Amir, the narrator, again depicts the gap between Hazara and Pashtun even physically. It means Amir is different than Hassan form outlook too, in the broader sense, Pashtuns are not like that of Hazaras. Hassan is Hazara, a marginalized ethnic individual in Afghanistan whereras Amir

emerges as a dominating Pashtun who views his close friend as having a ". . . perfectly round face, a face like a Chinese doll chiseled from hardwood: his flat, broad nose and slanting, narrow eyes like bamboo leaves, eyes that looked, depending on the light, gold, green, even sapphire. I can still see his tiny low-set ears and that pointed stub of a chin, a meaty appendage that looked like it was added as a mere after thought" (3). Hassan, on the other hand, doesn't have any right to talk about Amir even if he is the closest and the most loyal friend of him.

It is a worse irony and devastating feeling of Amir when he presents the nostalgic thoughts about the relationship between them as, "We were kids who had learned to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that either. I spend most of the first twelve years of my life playing with Hassan. Sometimes my entire childhood seems like one long lazy summer day with Hassan, chasing each other between tangles of trees in my father's yard, playing hide-and-seek, cops and robbers . . ." (22), because Amir never thinks Hassan as his friend. His consciousness as a son of so-called dominating sophisticated Pashtun is shaped by the ethnic and religious conflict that betrays Hassan. The following extract from the text shows how much Amir is conscious about a religious and ethnic differences between them:

The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense, anyhow. Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to build a fully functional home made camera out of a cardboard box. Never mind that we spent entire winters flying kites, running kites. Never mind that to me, the face of Afghanistan is that of a boy with a thin-boned frame, a shaved

head, and low-set ears, a boy with a Chinese doll face perpetually lit by a hare lipped smile. (22)

Some is the case with Baba, Amir's father and Ali, Hassan's father. They both are childhood playmates and close to each other for their entire life. But the problem is at hand-Baba doesn't take Ali as his near and dear one from within even if he shows hypocrisy outside. Ali is gullible and innocent just like his son Hassan but Baba is more and more ethnic as well as religious conscious person like his son Amir, for whom showing and doing are completely different things, "Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates- at least until polio crippled Ali's leg just like Hassan and I grew up a generation later. Baba was telling us about the mischief he and Ali used to cause [. . .] Baba would laugh and throw his arm around Ali. But in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend" (21-22).

Amir knows very well that such religious and ethnic differences, which have been prevailing in Afghanistan for ages, are not easy to change as he says that "history isn't easy to overcome. Neither religion. In the end, I was a Pahtun, and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (22).

This extract depicts how the religious as well as ethnic prejudices have shaped Amir's consciousness. Amir knows that his most loyal friend from ethnic minority will never go against him. He again knows that the so-called upper-class people never feel easy with their relationship with ethnic minorities.

Furthermore, Hassan's small mud shack is situated on the southend of the garden, in the shadow of a loquat tree, the servant's home where Hassan lived with his father. Hassan was born there in the winter of 1964, just one year after Amir's mother died giving birth to him. Amir feels a kind of disillusionment to go to the hut of

Hassan even if it is very near to his own mansion. Had he been a true friend of Hassan, he won't have said:

In the eighteen years that I lived in that house, I stepped into Hassan and Ali's quarters only a handful of times. When the sun dropped low behind the hills and we were done playing for the day, Hassan and I parted ways. I went past the rosebushes to Baba's mansion, Hassan to the mud shack where he had been born, where he'd lived his entire life. I remember it was spare, clean, dimly lit by a pair of kerosene lamps.
(5-6)

Hassan is betrayed from everywhere and everybody just because he is a Shi'a and a Hazara. Is it his mistake to be born as a son of a Hazara? Is it his fault to be a Shi'a? As a boy who even doesn't know what it would be to be a Shi'a or to be a Hazara, he has to face the insult and betrayal wherever he goes:

'You ! The Hazara ! Look at me when I'm talking to you !' The soldier barked. He handed his cigarette to the guy next to him, made a circle with the thumb and index finger of one hand. Poked the middle finger of his other hand through the circle. Poked it in and out. In and out. 'I knew your mother, did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there.' (6)

Hassan's father Ali also face same problem everywhere without any reaction, "They chased him on the street, and mocked him when he hobbled by. Some had taken calling him *Babalu*, or Boogeyman. 'Hey, Babalu, who did you eat today?' They barked to a chorus of laughter. 'Who did you eat, you flat-nosed Babalu?'"(8).

Having Mongoloid features and Mogul descendants, Hazaras are barely mentioned in the textbooks too. Pashtuns had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras

who had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence" (8). They had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. "The reason Pashtun had oppressed Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a" (8).

Ali's song of liberation and desire to live a happy as well as a joyous life focuses on the brotherhood between people either Shi'a or Sunni; a kinship between people either Hazara or Pashtun that not even time could break:

On a high mountain I stood,

And cried the name of Ali, lion of God.

Oh Ali, Lion of God, King of Men,

Bring joy to our sorrowful hearts (Sic). (10)

but it remains only a dream, a dream that is never to be true, a dream that is always only a dream, nothing more than that. Even the teachers distinguish Shi'as and Hazaras as if they are the disease, "He skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. 'That's the only thing Shi'a people do well', he said, picking up his papers, 'passing themselves as martyrs'. He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi'a, like it was some kind of disease" (8), even if Hassan was "incapable of hurting anyone" (9).

"In 1933, the year Baba was born and the year Zahir Shah began his forty-year reign of Afghanistan, two brothers, young men from a wealthy and reputable family in Kabul, got behind the wheel of their father's ford roadster. High on the hashish and *mast* on French wine, they struck and killed a Hazara husband and wife on the road to Paghman" (21). This is not more than the story of Ali himself, took place when he was just five years old. It is clear then that not only Hassan, not only Ali, it has

become a legacy for those who are considered to be in the upper ladder of social hierarchy to torture, to betray, to ruin, and even to seize the life of such gullible ethnic minorities. People like Hassan are the scapegoats in the hands of people like Amir, who even have to pay their life for nothing ! Amir doesn't kill Hassan, Hassan is killed by another Sunni, Pashtun later along with his wife on the streets leaving their son Sohrab, an orphan, same fate that his grandfather had met long ago, but Amir betrays him, the most trusted and loyal friend Hassan ruthlessly because Amir's ego as Sunni and Pashtun always downs in his consciousness.

While playing together and reading some stories to Hassan who cannot read, Amir constantly searches opportunities to betray his friend. He reads fake stories, unchallenging stories realizing the fact that Hassan would know more than him. He becomes satisfied when the big word comes that Hassan is unable to short out, "I read him poems and stories, sometimes riddles – though I stopped reading those when I saw he was far better at solving them than I was. So I read him unchallenging things, like the misadventures of the bumbling Mullah Nasruddin and his donkey [. . .] My favourite part of reading to Hassan was when we came across a big word that he didn't know. I'd tease him, expose his ignorance" (24). Moreover, *"What does he know, that illiterate Hazara? He'll never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?"* (30).

Also, the words that Assef, a son of affluent Pashtun Afghan father and a German mother, mutters in front of Amir and other boys to Hassan, "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our *watan*. They dirty our blood. Afghanistan for Pashtuns" (35), signify the Pashtun mentality to dominate Hazaras. This is the time when it becomes clear that Amir

doesn't treat Hassan his friend as he says, "*But he is not my friend ! He's my servant!*" (36). why "when Baba's friend came to visit with their kids, didn't I ever include Hassan in our games? Why did I play with Hassan only when no one else was around?" (36).

However, Hassan is true to his friendship. He always saves Amir from danger, always comes in front to short out any problem for Amir. He saves Amir a countless time. Does it mean that Amir too takes the side of Hassan? Of course, not ! Amir is saved once more by his loyal friend Hassan in the most dangerous encounter with Assef and other local bullies:

'Perhaps you didn't notice that I'm the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move they'll have to change your nick name from Assef 'The Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef', because I have this rock pointed at your left eye'. He said this so flatly that even I had to strain to hear the fear that I knew hid under that calm voice. Assef's mouth twitched. (37)

In addition, Amir always blames his weakness to Hassan, he panics when Hassan does something brave, he is jealous when people, especially his Baba admires Hassan, and he envies when Hasan shows his skills, "I tripped over a rock and fell – I wasn't just slower than Hassan but clumsier too; I'd always envied his natural athleticism when I staggered to my feet, I caught a glimpse of Hassan disappearing around another street corner [. . .] 'Eat dirt if I told you to', I said. I knew I was being cruel" (46-47). What about Hassan? Hassan always intends not to harm Amir, just opposite, "Hassan always understood about me" (53), as a friend, as a servant, as a near and dear one.

In actual Kite Running day, when Amir and Hassan are on the street, ready to fight the kites, Amir once again shows his ego as a Sunni and Pashtun. His mind is

suddenly filled with the evil knowledge that Hassan is Shi'a and Hazara. From within, he doesn't intend Hassan to win the tournament even though he know Hassan is his own helper, he rather wants to quit the game:

Suddenly I wanted to withdraw. Pack it all in, go back home. What was I thinking? Why was I putting myself through this, when I already knew the outcome? Baba was on the roof, watching me. I felt his glare on me like the heat of a blistering sun. This would be failure on a grand scale, even for me . . . How could I be such an open book to him when, half the time, I had no idea what was milling around in his head? I was the one who went to school, the one who could read, write. I was the smart one. Hassan couldn't read a first-grade textbook but he'd read me plenty. (54)

"For you a thousand times over !" (59), Hassan, on the other hand, never cheats Amir, never makes a mistake while serving him or helping him, never ever thinks to part their relationship as friends, "I had Hassan hold the string and sucked the blood dry, blotted my finger against my jeans" (56). Amir only takes advantage of Hassan. He never treats him as his friend. When asked by a Pashtun, "What is a boy like you doing here at this time of the day looking for a Hazara?", Amir answers, "He is our servant's son" (61). Why doesn't he say Hassan his friend? Because he is not true to Hassan, he wants to betray him. He knows well Hassan is reliable person who keeps his promise at any cost. Hasssan is faithful to Amir who runs for the 'blue kite' that Amir has cut down to offer him as a sign of victory. Doing so, he has to pay a big cost that he doesn't mind because he is faithful to his friend and finds his success in pleasing Amir.

Hassan is too loyal, "Loyal as a dog" (63) to his friend Amir. He knows he is in big trouble with second encounter with Assef in the very evening of kite running tournament. He wants the 'blue kite' for Amir who won the game. When Assef asks a small price 'blue kite' for his generous forgiveness of the torture, Hassan says, "Amir agha won the tournament and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite" (63). Assef knows all Pashtuns including Amir treat him as a pet:

But before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he never includes you in games when he has guests? Why he only plays with you when no one else is around? I'll tell you why, Hazara. Because to him, you're nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he's bored, something he can kick when he's angry. Don't ever fool yourself and think you're something more.

'Amir agha and I are friends', Hassan said. He looked flushed.

'Friends?' Assef said laughing. 'You pathetic fool ! Someday you'll wake up from your little fantasy and learn just how good of a friend he is. Now, *bas* ! Enough of this. Give us that kite.'

Hassan stopped and picked up a rock.

Assef flinched. He began to take a step back, stopped. 'Last chance Hazara.'

Hassan's answer was to cock the arm that held the rock.

'Whatever you wish.' Assef unbuttoned his winter coat . . . (63-64)

Most surprisingly, Amir watches this all torture that Assef and other bullies give to Hassan, without any word, as a coward, as taking revenge to him, or as an unknown person, "I opened my mouth, almost said something. Almost. The rest of my

life might have turned out differently if I had. But I didn't. I just watched. Paralyzed" (64). He watches Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He watches Assef undoing his own belt buckle with his free hand. He watches Hassan being an scapegoat just for him who didn't struggle, didn't even whimper. He watches resignation in Hassan's face—the look of the lamb.

Amir could save Hassan at least this time, for Hassan had saved him countless time. But he doesn't. He runs away leaving Hassan in the most unforgettable, unbelievable and unspeakable trouble, by betraying him completely, breaking the relationship as a close friend, as a near and dear one. He says himself, "I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan – The way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past – and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran" (68).

Not only Amir betrays his loyal friend but he shows his hypocrisy hiding his reality, his real consciousness of differentiating the Sunni and Shi'a, Pashtun and Hazara. Afterwards he pretends knowing nothing and asks Hassan, "Where were you? I looked for you" (68), the words like chewing on a rock. He becomes more cruel to Hassan's father too, "Like I said, how should I know what's wrong with him? Maybe he's sick. People get sick all the time, Ali. Now, am I going to freeze to death or are you planning on lighting the stove today?" (71). In a way, he is a liar betraying Hassan as he lies to Baba too, "He's got a cold or something. Ali says he's sleeping it off" (71).

Afterwards, Amir becomes a monster for Hassan, a monster who ruins the happiness, "I thought about Hassan's dream, the one about us swimming in the lake. *There is no monster*, he'd said, *just water*. Except he'd been wrong about that. There

was a monster in the lake. It had grabbed Hassan by the ankles, dragged him to the murky bottom. I was that monster" (75).

Then Amir starts ignoring and maintaining a distance with Hassan, "I'd hear Hassan shuffling around the kitchen in the morning, hear the clinking of silverware, the whistle of the teapot. I'd wait to hear the door shut and only then I would walk down to eat" (76). Hassan, ignorant about this distance says, "I don't know what I've done, Amir agha. I wish you'd tell me. I don't know why we don't play anymore" (77). But Amir reaches to the apex of his cruelty, "I want you to stop harassing me. I want you to go away" (77), but everywhere he turns, he sees signs of Hassan's loyalty, his goddamn unwavering loyalty.

As a minority Hazara, Hassan has to face terrible encounters time and again. In the birthday of Amir, he serves drinks to Assef and other bullies patiently from a silver platter, "The light winked out, a hiss and a crackle, then another flicker of orange light: Assef grinning, kneading Hassan in the chest with a knuckle" (87).

Amir's shameful lies to betray Hassan emerge from one to another and reach to the target. He himself goes to Ali and Hassan's small hut, plants his watch along with some money under Hassan's mattress, comes out, and tells his watch has been stolen ! Hassan makes final sacrifice to his friend Amir – Yes. Hassan knows Amir has betrayed him and yet he rescues him once again.

The final scene of betrayal is obvious, a pathetic and shameful betrayal. Hasan and his father don't have any option but to leave the place. Ali draws Hassan to him, curls his arms around his son's shoulder, "Life here is impossible for us now, Agha Sahib. We're leaving" (92). Amir's words clarify it further:

That was when I understood the depth of the pain I had caused, the blackness of the grief I had brought onto everyone, that not even Ali's

paralysed face could mask his sorrow. I forced myself to look at Hasan, but his head was downcast, his shoulders slumped, his finger twirling a loose string on the hem of his shirt. (93)

Such shocking and heart rendering betrayal of his own most faithful friend Hassan is nothing more than the religious as well as ethnic mind shape of Amir, as a dominant Sunni and Pashtun leads him to break the relationship.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study of the novel *The Kite Runner* foresees the ethnic and the religious consciousness of the characters that ultimately betrays the relationship among them. Though there are issues like Afghan diaspora, migration, family relationship, hypocrisy of those hiding their sins under the cloak of religious righteousness, the dichotomy of the privileged and unprivileged, double standard for men and women, the novel *The Kite Runner* uses the political events of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001 showing the realities of Afghan society, to foreground a touching and memorable story of the friendship and betrayal in friendship between two boys of differing social class, religion and ethnic backgrounds. The study analyzes and interprets the existing religious and ethnic differences in Afghanistan that lead Amir to betray his friend Hassan.

Khaled Hosseini presents *The Kite Runner* with simplicity and poise, a novel of great hidden intricacy, and most harrowing truth about the power of evil, the power of religious and the ethnic consciousness to reach a shocking betrayal in human relationship. *The Kite Runner* tells a heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between Amir, the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman, and Hassan, the son of his father's servant. Amir is Sunni; Hassan is Shi'a. One is born to a privileged class; the other to a loathed minority. One to a father of enormous presence; the other to a crippled man. One is a voracious reader; the other illiterate. The poor Hassan is born with a here lip, but Amir's gaps are better hidden, deep inside.

This unusually eloquent story is about the fragile relationship between two friends Amir and Hassan who live and play together, not simply as friends, but as brothers without mothers. Their intimate story traces across the expansive canvas of history, 40 years in Afghanistan's tragic evolution, like a kite under a gathering storm.

Hosseini's story soars from the last days of Kabul's monarchy into the atrocities of the Taliban which turned the boy's green playing fields red with blood. It paints an eye opening picture of what Afghanistan was and what it has become. Shockingly, the friendship of the boys turn into betrayal as Amir's realization of his social class and religion downs more and more in his consciousness.

Through symbolic structure, Hosseini deals with the inequalities and injustices. The novel is told through the character of Amir himself. The story is about two friends who symbolize opposite ends of a sociopolitical hierarchy. Amir is Pashtun, Sunni, wealthy and literate; whereas his servant's son, Hassan, is Hazara, Shi'a, poor and illiterate. They both have lost their mothers and shared the same wet nurse. The deformed Hassan and his father are mocked in public as they emerge from a minority Hazara. Hazaras and Shi'as could never move up the hierarchy unless they denied their identity or became wealthy. Hassan neither is wealthy nor he denies his identity. Therefore, he receives a heartbreaking betrayal from a friend to whom he could do everything.

Historically, the Hazaras were the most oppressed ethnicity in Afghanistan. Ironically, today the Pashtuns who were historical ruling community and largest ethnic group, undergo 'reverse discrimination' and 'guilty by ethnicity' bearing the brunt of Taliban atrocities. The Taliban were Pashtun-based but not all Pashtuns supported the Taliban ideology as evident in *The Kite Runner* characters of Baba and Rahim Khan who were diametrically opposed to religious bigots whether the Taliban or mujahidin guerrilla factions. Nonetheless, Amir realizes that in the long run he is better off because he is Pashtun and not a Hazara in such a discriminating society.

In addition to Pashtuns and Hazaras, Afghanistan is comprised of other ethnicities such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen. During the last decade ethnic

and religious warlords dominating each ethnic group committed great atrocities against each other like the grass coating kite string cutting other strings. This period is disdained as a bloody proxy war, symbolically fueled by what can be described as foreign kite flyers, seared and fragmented Afghanistan despite its many cross-ethnic ties; for example, Sunni Hazaras living near the Panjshir valley, Pashtu-speaking Shi'as in Kandahar, Dari-speaking Pashtuns in Kabul, and Pashtu-speaking Tajiks in Wardak.

To a final analysis, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, therefore, depicts the ethno-religious consciousness in the characters, especially Amir, the antagonist in the novel, betraying his most loyal and close friend from different ethnic and religious background, Hassan.

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Samir Adhikari

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* follows the complicated story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy merchant in Kabul, and Hassan, a loathed minority, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, the boys are inseparable. Amir is Sunni, Hassan is Shi'a. One is Pashtun and the other is Hazara. Despite this inseparable friendship, Amir never feels comfortable about their relationship. As the consciousness of race and religion grows more and more in Amir's mind, he betrays Hassan and breaks the relationship. After betraying his most close and loyal friend Hassan, Amir flees to America with his father, Baba. Amir's consciousness as a son of privileged Pashtun class in Afghanistan, is shaped by the religious as well as ethnic conflict, which leads him to betray Hassan, an ethnic minority Hazara. Amir always feels some lack in his friendship. Amir is very much conscious about the race and the religion that play a vital role to cheat and betray his friend Hassan. Though their friendship is inseparable, and though Hassan never denies Amir anything, Amir never thinks Hassan as his friend, and ultimately betrays him. The ethnic and the religious gaps, therefore lead Amir to betray his most loyal and close friend, Hassan.