

Symbolic Depictions of Caste in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner

Aleesha Murad¹

¹ Independent Researcher, Peshawar, Pakistan

aleeshamurad033@gmail.com¹

Abstract

This study deals with caste from symbolic perspective in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* through the lens of G.S Ghurye's theory *Caste and race in India* (Ghurye, 1932). *The Kite Runner* is a lucid blend of history, politics and traditions of Afghan culture along with lines of war and social chaos. The analysis shows that Afghan society, as described in the novel, is strongly influenced by a caste system, especially through the divide between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Pashtuns, like Amir and Baba, hold power and privilege, while Hazaras, like Hassan and Ali, face discrimination and marginalization. Overall, this study reveals that *The Kite Runner* isn't just a story about personal struggles and redemption but also a reflection of the larger social issues in Afghan society. By weaving caste dynamics into the narrative, the novel challenges the reader to think about the lasting impact of discrimination and inequality on people and their communities.

Keywords: caste system, Afghan society, upper and lower caste, Class differences.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Caste is the social group that includes people of the same economic status, occupation or rank. "Caste is a social system structured around a hierarchy, where ideas of purity and pollution shape the roles, responsibilities and limitations assigned to each caste group." (Louis, 1966 pp21-489).

The English word 'caste' derives from the Spanish and Portuguese *casta*, which, according to John Minsheu's Spanish dictionary, means "race, lineage, tribe or breed". Caste system is also viewed as a rigid and close system of classification (Minsheu, 1569 pp2-4). There is no movement from one caste status to another. According to Sociologist, caste is often a "close system" of social stratification in which groups are divided on a basis of their occupations, and strictly bounded by the directed codes of tradition concerning marriages and kinship leagues (Surinder, 2015 pp1-252). Caste consists of symbols that indicate the interrelationships under a particular caste group, or in a society (Roy, 2021 pp6-34). G.S Ghurye has also shown the caste as symbolic perspective in his book *Caste and Race in India*, he explores the Indian caste system in his book through Symbolic perspective, in which he talks about different castes upper and lower and their status in Indian society. He analyzes the Indian caste system with respect from different symbols used for it, like occupation, religious and civil privileges, disabilities, hierarchy and endogamy. These are the core ideas which differentiate between caste systems. India is not the only caste-based society but Afghan society also possesses this social ill. In Afghanistan two caste systems are identified through different symbols given by men in order to differentiate between upper and lower classes. In light of Ghurye's perspective of caste in India, we can also highlight Afghan society with this regard in Khalid Hossieni's *The Kite Runner* which is the true depiction of Afghanistan and the caste system of Afghanistan. Ghurye's six characteristics of the caste system can be applied to Afghan society. A clique of Pashtuns thought that they are more superior to Hazaras.

Hence from the above discussion, it may be noted that caste is a system through which people are categorized in groups or within the entire society. Caste symbolizes the status of a person in a society which is not chosen by a person himself but by birth. It is a social stratification by which people are divided into different groups and given different jobs regarding their caste. Caste plays an important role in an enclosing of one's living in a society. It is a caste which transforms a person into the mindset of superiority and inferiority. Caste has a great role in a person's life, it is his caste which decides his future, and it is caste which decides his regard or his disdain in the society.

Khalid Hosseini was born in Afghanistan, on March 4, 1965. He wrote "*The Kite Runner*" (2003), *A Thousand splendid Suns* (Hossieni, 2007), *And the Mountain Echoed* (Hosseini, 2013). In all his famous books he writes about Afghanistan, which shows his love for Afghanistan.

The Kite Runner is a story based on two ethnic groups in Afghanistan, Pashtuns and Hazaras. Pashtuns are the powerful and leading group of Afghanistan considered as the elites or the upper class, whereas Hazaras belong to a minority and are considered the lower class in Afghanistan. The novel is the story of the relationship between a father and a son, and between two brothers. Amir grew up in a Pashtun family; his father Baba is a wealthy and respectable man in Afghanistan. Amir struggles to live up to his father's expectations. Ali and his son Hassan (Amir's best friend) were both servants in Baba's house, they both are loyal servants but belong to the Hazara community who were not respected in Afghanistan. Hassan has been a loyal friend of Amir and always protected him in every field of life but Amir who is a class-conscious boy deep down did not consider Hassan his friend more than a servant.

In the novel, discrimination between castes is identified on the basis of occupation in the society, economic conditions, religion and Endogamy. Amir, who belongs to a wealthy father, is considered a member of the upper caste because of his father's occupation. Baba was a diplomat, which means he belongs to the public sector of the country, which is known to be the respectable occupation in the society, whereas, Hassan, the son of a servant is considered the lower caste of society just because of

his father's occupation. Religion and civil privileges disabilities also symbolize caste. In Afghanistan Sunnis are measured as upper caste and Shias are considered as lower caste. Similarly economic division also symbolizes caste. Thus Amir, a son of a wealthy father is recognized as upper caste and Hassan a son of poor retainer identified as lower caste in Afghan society. On the basis of these factors people are treated differently in an Afghan society. Hazara being a lower class did not allow living in the same house with Pashtuns, nor did they allow living in luxurious houses like Pashtuns.

This research analyzes the Caste System in Hosseini's novel under Symbolic-Interactionism perspective by G.S Ghurye. Govind Sadashive Ghurye was a pioneering Indian academic who was a professor of sociology. In 1924, he became the second person to head the department of Sociology at the University of Bombay. And widely regarded as the founder of Indian Sociology in India. In his book *Caste and race in India* (Ghurye, 1932) develops the concept of Caste as symbolic structure. Caste according to Ghurye is Hierarchical system. According to Ghurye, caste originated from race and occupation stabilized it.

Different researchers use G.S Ghurye's caste system to study the different aspects of the caste system. For instance, A.M Shah explores the study of Caste in the 21st century, particularly the rule of endogamy and its defining criterion by the view point of caste as symbolic perspective. Similarly, M. Subedi in his work analyzes G.S Ghurye's caste as a system from ritual hierarchy to politics difference in India and Nepal.

1.2. Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the current research are given below:

1. To explore the major events in the novel that leads to the representation of Afghan Caste system *The Kite Runner*.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions of the study are given below:

1. How are the major events in the novel represented symbolically to demonstrate the Afghan caste system?

2. Literature Review

This research examines the caste system of Afghan society through symbolic perspective. The major events in the novel *The Kite Runner* examine by keeping in view G.S Ghurye's theory of caste as a symbolic perspective. Many scholars have analyzed "caste system" from different perspectives in various literary works.

Khalid Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* highlights the caste system of Afghan society. Many researchers and critics have explored the novel in many aspects like class difference, ethnicity, racism, power abuse, war, gender inequality, political issues and Talibanization. For example, RakibFarooqMatta (2019) in his research focus on the Afghan conflict from the end of 1970's until 2000's, he described the impact of Afghan conflict created by western forces and Taliban in Afghanistan. He claims that *The Kite Runner* gives the path to real social life conditions of Afghan people and how their lives are affected by the time of Afghan conflict (Matta,2019 pp145-146).

In addition, sexual violation is one of the major ills of Afghan society. The Soviet military used sexual seduction to oppress the people, after the Soviet military Taliban used the same path to oppress the opponents, they sexually violate them to inculcate fear among people, says Georgia Banita. Khalid Hosseini illustrates this ill behavior towards minorities in his novel *The Kite Runner* by the character of Hassan in order to portray the sexual attacks against Hazaras community. Hosseini through his work makes it clear that sexual violation as a social issue and Human right indignity should be investigated as an issue of principle (Banita,2020 pp81-84).

Keeping in views the Thakur's research "Unveiling the Trauma of Adolescent Boys Trapped on Afghanistan's Culturally Legitimised Paedophilia- Bacha Bazi" highlight one of the major social issues "BachaBaazi" in Afghanistan the same-sex pedophilia on Afghan male children. The member of minority always targets for the barbaric attacks from dominant group. Khalid Hosseini in his novel *The Kite Runner* underscores "Bacha Bazi" as a social ill of Afghan society and cultural depravity. Khalid Hosseini in his novel *The Kite Runner* productively portrays the heartbreaking sufferings of Hazara community in the hands of the dominated Pashtuns community. Due to class difference and inferiority the Hazaras children are drag into Bacha Bazi (Child sexual abuse by men of young adolescent males or boys) by Pashtuns to show their superiority towards Hazaras as in the novel Hassan face this ill behavior by character Assef being a member of minority group.

Moreover, George and Babu, in their research "Portrayal of War and Violence and a Cal for Peace in *The Kite Runner*" throw light upon the extreme scale of the poor condition of Afghanistan. *The Kite Runner* realistically portrays the conditions of Afghanistan before the war, after the war and the postwar era of contemporary Afghanistan. They in their research highlight the poor conditions, sufferings and violation of Afghan people. Women were victimized during Taliban control over Afghanistan. They were sexually abused by dominant group and dragged into male dominant society to make a hold on their lives. Children experience severe sufferings during Taliban's rule. Khalid Hosseini in his novel explores these social issues by character of Sohrab when he was torture by Taliban both physically and psychologically (George and Babu, 2016 pp93-93)

In addition, Kumar in his research "Racial Dehumanization of Hazaras in *The Kite Runner* by Khalid Hosseini" highlights the racial discrimination keeping in view "The Collective Dynamics of Racial Dehumanizing and Genocidal Victimization", Genocidal victimization is the international destruction of people. This is the kind of philosophy where one ethnic group treats others as "inhuman" or "less human". Race is not human biology; it is not something natural nor an idea but it is an ideology made by massive groups of the society to degrade the minority to hold the power of the country. He claims that it is the process to victimize an individual and whole group for the purpose of a massive group. Dehumanization is to impute the humiliating traits on both the individuals and the whole group for the reason to hold the power of a massive group in society. People are demoralized physically and verbally which is termed as Behavioral dehumanization. Our morality suggests that all human beings are equal, those who share the unique proportions are equal to us, and they are human beings and should be treated like Humans. But our social interaction presents the contraction of Dehumanization- what people believe and how people live. In the novel *The Kite Runner* Hazara community is dehumanized by the Pashtun dominant group by disregard of Humanity, they consider Hazaras underclass, and treat them inhumanely they lack love, respect, generosity, kindness for them which is the plummet of humanity. Hassan was a target of racial dehumanization physically and psychologically abused by Assef (Kumar 2018, pp264-268).

In addition, Handayani in her research "Racial Discrimination towards Hazaras as Reflected in Khalid Hossieni's *The Kite Runner* " highlights the two terms of racial discrimination one is social structure factor and another one is social psychological factor. Social structure factor concern with the physical appearance, religion and cultural factor while social psychological factor deal with prejudice in society, in *The Kite Runner* both terms are realistically portrayed by Khalid Hosseini by discussing the physical appearance oh Hazaras people on the basis of which they are marginalized, teased and dehumanized in the Afghan society by Pashtuns upper class. While psychologically Hazaras people are considered an ethnic, poor and weakest group of Afghanistan, on the basis of minority they were treated negatively and inhumanely by considering them slaves, illiterate and trash of the society (Handayani, 2016 pp8-19).

Malik and Murtaza in their article "The Levels of Power relationship in *The Kite Runner*" explore the power relationship in Hossieni's *The Kite Runner* by use of linguistic devices. They used the Hossieni's

work to prop up the western journey in Afghanistan. They focus to analyze the role of linguistic devices in the construction for reality in *The Kite Runner* from the text we can see the portrayal of power relationship reality by the character of Hassan when he was raped by Assef which shows the power relationship and women abuse in the time of Taliban ruling is another power relationship (Malik and Murtaza, 2013 pp75-77).

Furthermore, Kalpakli in her research “The Relationship between Nature and Human Psyche in *The Kite Runner*” illustrated the relationship of nature with the psyche of character in *The Kite Runner*. She tries to compare the outer world with the inner spirit through different symbols and motives in the novel. Amir dreamed of a bear which is a sign of suffering and pain he would go through (Kalpakli, 2017 pp84-85). Hassan dreamed a monster in the lake before he raped which is the sign of evil suggested Amir’s unfaithfulness towards Hassan, his dream also symbolizes the brutal behavior or the inhumane behavior of Assef towards Hassan by molding the mind of Amir towards betrayal and break their friendship. Afghanistan's downfall can be symbolized by the turning of white color snow into black with blood stains which shows the bad fortune of Afghanistan after Soviet inventions and Talibanization (Kalpakli, 2017 pp83-85).

Moreover, Salah and Ahmed in their research analyze the division of power and class conflict in Khalid Hossieni’s novel *The Kite Runner*. According to the scholar, power division is based on class struggle and conflict. Class differences are the main reason for exploitation. In the novel Hassan is exploited by Amir because he belongs to the community of lower class. This is only the class difference on the basis of which the power is divided. Exploitation is done not only on behalf of ethnicity, social differences, and religious difference but at the end all matter is class struggle and status. Power is more related to wealthy and rich people and poor people are exploited by them. In short, class differences play a key role in every society in terms of power (Salah and Ahmed, 2021 pp21-141).

The above-mentioned studies analyze Hossieni’s *The Kite Runner* through varieties of aspects such as power abuse, Talibanization, gender role in the novel etc. Some critics explore the class difference in Afghan society. Others have pointed out the racial discrimination between Pashtuns and Hazaras in the novel. Some critics highlight the violence and children trafficking in the novel. This study however, discusses the novel through the caste as symbolic perspective by G.S Ghurye (1932). This study highlights the events which examine the symbolic value of caste system that exist in Afghan society and explores how Hosseini brought these realities to the ground in a realistic way in *The Kite Runner* through different characters.

3. Research Methodology

The current study uses the close content analysis technique for the analysis of selected text. This research is qualitative. G.S Ghurye’s concept of caste is used to analyze the caste system in the selected text *The Kite Runner*.

3.1. Nature of the Research

The nature of the study is qualitative. The researcher investigated the caste system in the novel by comparing it with the similar features of Indian society.

3.2. Data source

The data of the current study was collected from primary and secondary source. For primary sources, the text of selected novel is used which is described through caste as Symbolic-Interactionism theory. For secondary sources other articles, websites and research papers are used.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher uses detailed study of primary and secondary data to examine the caste system by major events in Hossieni’s *The Kite Runner* by utilizing symbolic-interactionism point of view.

3.4. Theoretical framework

G.S Ghurye in his book, *Caste and race in India* 1932 gives the concept of caste system in India. His book consists of seven chapters but the current study derives its theoretical framework from the first two chapters of the book. Ghurye gives us a very systematic and organized understanding of the caste system in India. He applied 'Indological' and comparative methods in his book. His book largely describes the caste system as it was practiced in the 1920s in India. Ghurye in his book, *Caste and Race in India* criticizes dominant theories of the time which show the relationship between caste and race. Later on, he also brings in the concept of politics and caste and other dimensions to give us a good understanding of the caste system in contemporary India.

The first two chapters identify the basic features of the caste system and analyze the nature of the caste group. These chapters give us a true picture of the caste system as it was practiced in the 1920s. According to G.S Ghurye caste is defined by six segmental characteristics, that are segmental division of society, endogamy, religious and civil disabilities, occupation, economic division and food. There is the open description and changes; there is no fixed way in which the caste system could be conceptualized. Only the extreme Brahmins and Shudras are fixed and in between all ambiguities there are different ways to define the caste system and understand the sub-division within it.

Ghurye explains the six segmental features of the caste; they are quite candid about the fluctuating nature of the caste and the principles of caste system and sub-casting and their constraints of social life and cultural pattern. His first feature of caste is the segmental division of the society. He believes that caste is divided into the close sections and compartments. Closed here reflects the idea that caste is no matter of choice but by birth. His second feature of caste is Hierarchy, two castes never be equal some castes acquire the top position, some at the middle and some acquire the lower position. On the basis of positions, the names upper, middle and lower are assigned to them. His third feature of caste is restriction on social interaction and sharing of food. In society lower or untouchable people cannot touch the upper class, nor can they share their food because of the concept of purity and pollution. His fourth feature of caste is restriction on occupation; in this case caste is decided by the nature of occupation. The fifth feature of the caste system pointed out by him is the civil and religious disabilities. Different duties are assigned to different castes. The lower caste is not allowed to live in the same house with the upper class. They are given separate places to live. On the basis of religion, caste is decided. Lower castes are not allowed to enter the worship places of the upper class, there are some activities that can only be performed by the upper class. Above all is the prescription of endogamy. Restriction on marrying and kinship are part of the nature of the caste system which G.S Ghurye has explained. Marriage maintains some form of restrictions and that on the basis of endogamy which is strictly caste based. You have to marry within your own caste. One must be confined to his caste.

4. Text Analysis

4.1. Introduction:

Introduction *The Kite Runner* is the story of two friends who belong to two different ethnic groups Pashtuns and Hazara. The story deals with the discrimination faced by lower caste Hazara in Afghan society in the hands of the dominant Pashtun community. Amir belongs to the Pashtun superior class of Afghanistan and enjoys all the facilities and opportunities which are important for living. Ali and Hassan both are servants in Amir house, they are very true to them. Hassan in his whole life fights for Amir and rescue him from evil things. Hassan was a loyal friend of Amir and always protected him in every field of life but Amir who was a class-conscious boy deep down did not consider Hassan his friend more than a servant. He sacrifices Hassan just to win Baba's heart and did not help him when Assef a member of the Pashtun group raped Hassan. Amir witnesses Assef rape Hassan in front of his own eyes, but did not rescue him resulting in a life full of guilt and regret. After the Soviet invention in Afghanistan, when Baba and Amir fled to California, Amir started his new life by becoming a professional writer and

marrying his dream wife. Rahim Khan who grew up in Kabul was a best friend of Baba. He always appreciates Amir for his achievements whenever Baba ignored him. One day Amir received a phone call from Rahim Khan, he told Amir about the secret of his father that Hassan is Baba's son and Amir's half-brother. He informs Amir that Hassan and his wife are killed by the Taliban he told: "there is a way to be good again". Amir decided to risk his life in America to travel back to Afghanistan to rescue Hassan's orphan son Sohrab, in an attempt to reveal his guilt and to get redemption for his past.

4.2. Caste System as Represented in the Kite Runner:

Caste is defined and explained by a number of scholars, for instance according to Beteille, Caste is "a group of people living in the same area with the ascribed status of living including endogamy, hereditary membership, and lifestyle which are affiliated with ritual status in the hierarchical system". (Beteille, 2022 pp2-5). Ghurye however, claims that the caste system is the combination of six main features which include segmental society, a hierarchy of the group, restriction of feeding and social intercourse, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, religious disabilities, and privileges of different sections and restrictions on marriages. Caste determines the way of life, how you interact with people, your job, your religion, and your economic conditions all determined by caste (Ghurye, 1932 pp2-246).

Caste is the segmental division of the society. In every society, there are various groups with different titles that are prominent. Castes are groups of people with well-developed lives and membership in a society, unlike the class system in the society, caste is not by selection but by birth (Roy, 2021 pp2-34). The living standard of a person is not linked with his wealth but to the traditional importance of caste in which he was born by luck, not by choice. It is not a choice of people to be born in the lower or upper caste, but this is given by their luck to them. As G.S Ghurye states in his book *Caste and Race in India* that, caste were groups with well-developed life of their own, the membership whereof, unlike that of voluntary associations and of classes, was determined not by selection but by birth (Ghurye, 1932 pp2-246). Physical features are one of the aspects which symbolize the caste of people within a society. In Afghanistan the two groups Pashtun and Hazaras can be identified through their corporal features and also symbolize their castes in Afghan society. Hazaras are teased and insulted for their bodily appearance which also characterized against them from the Pashtun upper caste. Their physical appearance is slightly different from Pashtuns which marginalized them in Afghan society. Genetically, Hazaras look like Mongols and the Uygurs of West China so they hold these features genetically from them which are somewhat different from Pashtuns who tend to have light-skinned, sharp noses and different eye colors. Pashtun called Ali and Hassan flat-nose because of Mongoloid features "For years, that all I knew about the Hazaras, that they were Mogul descendants, and that they looked like Chinese people" (Hosseini, 2003 pp9-324). Hazaras' physical features symbolize them as a lower class in Afghan society through which Pashtuns establish a meaning of lower caste and develop their inhumane views about Hazaras. MacIver and Page sociologist gave their views on this, that "a person's birth cannot be controlled and it is his ascribed status that cannot be changed by any factor" (MacIver and Page, 2023 pp10-12).

Moreover, religious and civil disabilities factors are also divided according to caste. In Afghan society there are two religious groups, Sunni and Shi'a. Their difference in religious beliefs also categorizes them into different castes as is mentioned in the novel. When Amir says; "In the end I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (Hosseini, 2003 pp22-324). In Afghanistan a belief in Shi'ism is considered a lower rank in status, the words Shi'a and Sunni segregate the people in Afghan society and lead towards caste based-society because they both are different in religious practices and Hazaras who are Shi'a Muslims and also the minority of Afghanistan are titled as lower-caste because of their difference in religious beliefs as narrated in the novel:

The following weeks, after class, I showed the book to my teacher and pointed to the chapter on the Hazaras. He skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, and handed the book back. "That's the one 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 (Hosseini, 2003 pp8-324).

Hosseini in his novel highlighted the symbol which divided the people into different groups. This is not in

the hands of a person to be born in a lower or upper caste, it is all about luck. But some castes are considered lower in society because of their rituals, beliefs, customs, and traditions. Caste itself is not lower or higher, but the symbols related to it by people classify it as lower or higher. Caste does not divide the people in superiority and inferiority at the very moment of their birth, but the people do, who categorize society related to caste. They separate the characteristics of lower and upper caste, and treat the people accordingly. They create cliques in society on the basis of caste. Furthermore, in Afghan society lower class people like Hazara are not allowed to live in the same houses with Pashtuns which shows the civil disabilities between upper and lower class. They are allotted separate houses for living. They are not allowed to live in the same house with the upper class. In the novel Hosseini highlights this aspect which symbolizes the lower class of Afghan society. For instance, in the novel we can see this aspect through Baba's character who allotted a different place to Ali which is built with mud, to show the difference between Pashtun upper class and Hazara lower class. Amir says, "I went past the rose bushes to Baba's mansion, Hassan to the mud shack where he had been born, where he'd lived his entire life" (Hosseini, 2003 pp5-324). Although, Hassan is Baba's son but because his mother was a lady of lower class that is why he was considered as lower class Hazara and treated like other Hazaras. These lines show the civil privileges and disabilities regarding untouchable classes of Afghan society. Similarly, the situation of the people gets worse by the dominant class, in the villages the oppressed class is living the unbearable life. They are unable to live in the houses which are built from the same material used by the Pashtun upper class. In the novel, Rahim Khan says to Amir about the people who are living in worse conditions. He says; "on either side of the roads, I saw chains of little villages sprouting here and there, like discarded toys among the rocks [...] clothes as roof" (Hosseini, 2003 pp203-324). These instances clearly depict that Afghan society is so far similar to Indian society with regards to Caste system. As G.S Ghurye in his book *Caste and race in India* portrays the caste privileges and disabilities by the Symbolic-Interactionism theory. Segregation of individual caste or a group of castes in a village is the most obvious mark of civil privileges and disabilities (Ghurye, 1932 pp10-246).

Likewise, Religion and caste also play a role in dividing the people economically. In a caste-based society, the occupations are also related to castes, by which a person can identify as an upper and lower class of the society. In every society there are lower and upper ranks of occupations. Economic division is also created by people in the caste system. They specified occupation according to caste division. Occupation is somehow a symbol for people to differentiate between castes in society. Almost in all societies the respectable occupations belong to the upper caste, they are involved in politics, in the medical field, in business, and mostly in courts you can see a judge must belong to the upper caste, and occupations like cleaning, sweeping, laundering, and house holding etc belong to lower-caste. All these occupations identify a person as being of a lower caste. Economic division is also not fixed by birth. No one is born poor or rich, but it is his struggle in life to achieve something, to get success, but despite this struggle in caste-based society, lower rank occupations are always given to lower castes, because they are known by their occupation in a society. This is inculcated in our minds that people who earn money through lower jobs or those who work as a labor, sweeper, cleaner and servants belong to lower caste and they have no respect in the society, because their occupations reflect their caste.

In the same way, people who are the owners of companies, doctors, engineers, and many more are the upper caste and respectable caste in the society. Similarly in Afghanistan Pashtuns and Hazaras or Sunni and Shi'a, two castes can identify through their occupations. Amir who belongs to the upper class, his father was indulged in political affairs and one of the richest persons in Afghanistan therefore he was having more respect because of his father's wealth and occupation. "In Afghanistan, owning anything American, especially if it wasn't second hand, was a sign of wealth" (Hosseini, 2003 pp61-324). These lines clearly show that wealth and occupation are signs of upper caste. Similarly, another character in the novel, Assef who belongs to a Pashtun upper-caste is known by his father's occupation "Assef was a son of one of my father's friends, Mahmood, an air-line pilot" (Hosseini, 2003 pp33-324). His father's occupation symbolizes his caste in society. In contrast to Amir and Assef, Hassan and his father who belong to the Hazara group are servants to Amir. The occupation of being a domestic worker symbolizes the lower caste in society because this occupation is at the hand of the lower caste. All the Hazaras people are servants to Pashtun who recognize them as a lower caste in Afghanistan. Hassan and his father Ali used to keep on home chores, they used to

wash dishes, launder, cleaning in Amir's home as he says, "Hassan stayed home and helped Ali with the day's chores: hand-washing dirty clothes and hanging them to dry in the yard, sweeping the floors, buying fresh naan from the Bazar, marinating meat for dinner, watering the lawn" (Hosseini, 2003 pp24-324). These occupations are not given to them by their birth, but it is man created boundaries to differentiate between castes. Khalid Hosseini through his novel artistically points out the caste system in Afghanistan by using different symbols related to his characters. As it is stated that "religion, economy, and culture come together and form a caste" (Roy, 2021 pp9-34). The theory of Symbolic-Interactionism also highlights the point that occupation plays a vital role in caste. It represents the person's caste to which he belongs. It symbolizes the person's status in society, a person of respectable occupation has respect in society but belonging to disrespected occupation like sweepers has no respect in the society

Ghurye is also of the same opinion and mentions the economic divide in the society thus, "Generally a caste or a group of allied caste considered some of callings as its hereditary occupation, to abandon which in pursuit of another, though it might be more lucrative, was thought not to be right" (Ghurye, 1932 pp15-246). Being a servant in Pashtuns' home, Hazaras considered this duty as their hereditary occupation because Hassan's father and he himself were servants to Pashtuns family. They never even tried to get a higher occupation because Pashtuns did not allow them to enter their caste or their rank. As Ghurye in his book states that "It was not only the moral restraint and the social check of one's caste-fellows that acted as a restraint on the choice of one's occupation, but also the restrictions put by other castes" (Ghurye, 1932 pp16-246).

Just like all other factors of the caste system, Endogamy is another factor of caste which does not allow a member to marry a person from outside of it. This restriction on marrying outside of the caste is such a dominant aspect of the caste society that a notable sociologist considers endogamy as "the essence of the caste system" (Ghurye, 1932 pp18-246). In every caste-based society endogamy is a taboo. A person from lower caste is not acceptable by the upper caste. Similarly keeping in view of this the lower caste did not allow to get married in the high caste of society, nor are they accepted by them. In Afghanistan, the upper caste is not allowed to marry the lower caste. The people who belonged to the upper caste considered this act a disgrace to the family. The principles of marriage must be within one's caste. Hosseini highlighted this point in his novel, that in Afghan society the Pashtuns were not allowed to marry in the Hazaras' caste. To marry in the Hazara caste was against the principles of Afghan society. It is evident from the novel when Rahim Khan narrates his love story to Amir. He says; "It was me and Homaira against the world. And I'll tell you this, Amir Jan: in the end world, always wins. That's just the way of things" [...] that's the same day my father put Homaira and her family on a lorry and sent them off to Hazara Jat. I never saw her again" (Hosseini, 2003 pp86-324). Endogamy has been very common among social classes. India is one of the extreme class-conscious societies. Expectations of caste endogamy continue still in the part of India and it is also called caste discrimination. Endogamy represents the status of classes in society. Similarly in Afghanistan Pashtun caste did not allow their fellow members to marry outside of one's caste, if anyone violated the rules they had to suffer. Because they want to maintain the uniformity of caste, they considered exogamy a shame to their caste. To get married in the lower caste is to bring shame to the family and make the coming generation impure. Just to preserve their pride and purity, the upper caste did not accept to marry the lower caste. "This is done to maintain the homogeneity of castes (and 'purity' for 'upper castes')" (Roy, 2021 pp7-34).

We can see that Pashtuns in Afghanistan follow the patrilineal system for generation succession and purity of caste. Similarly, Hazaras cannot marry in upper-caste they also follow the patrilineal system as is mentioned "Like Ali, she was Shi'a Muslim and an ethnic Hazara. She was also his first cousin and therefore a natural choice for a spouse" (Hosseini, 2003 pp7-324). Although she was a beautiful girl, due to her caste she was not accepted by the upper class of society. Despite her beauty, caste matters when it comes to marriage. According to Ghurye concept of caste the endogamy is "it would be contrary to the native feeling on the subject, and would be highly inconvenient in practice as it creates a bewildering multiplicity of caste" (Ghurye, 1932 pp19-246).

Hierarchy is another aspect of the Caste system highlighted in *The Kite Runner*. Afghanistan is a small country comprising two ethnic groups Pashtun and Hazara. Afghanistan is a racist country that has been

suffering since from foreign interventions. The financial system is based on ethical classification. Mostly it was the Pashtuns who ran the country because they were large in number and considered themselves as the superior class of Afghanistan. When the king of Persian announced that all people must convert into Shims, Pashtun who were against this decision attacked Afghanistan and held the power of the country. As they were the majority of Afghanistan oppressed the minority Hazara and became the upper caste of Afghanistan and treated Hazara as a lower caste. It is evident from the novel when Assef says 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" (Hosseini, 2003 pp35-324). Hosseini clearly mentions the hierarchical aspect in his novel to show the Afghan society. It is not only India which consists of this ill of superiority and inferiority but also Afghanistan is full of racism, full of the concept of superiority and inferiority concept. Pashtuns who lived in the south of Afghanistan were the majority and Hazaras who were the central territory of Mongolia and considered as Mongolian were minority groups. Hazara were treated indifferently because they were less in number and everything which was less in number suffered, and the majority always ruled over them. Pashtuns think their caste is better than their neighbor class and should be high in rank. On account of this they hold the supremacy and devalue the minority. According to the caste as symbolic perspective given by G.S Ghurye in his book *Caste and Race in India* he says; "the order of social precedence amongst the individual caste of any class cannot be made definite, because not only is there no ungrudging acceptance of such rank but also the idea of the people on this point is very nebulous and uncertain (Ghurye,1932 pp6-246).

In addition, Hierarchy also plays an important role in caste system. Social hierarchy affects the society in term of caste system which separates the different social classes. In Afghan society the two different groups Pashtuns and Hazaras can be the example of hierarchy. Pashtuns they are in majority discriminated the Hazara minority of Afghan society. Their differences led Pashtun being majority and Hazara a minority of Afghan society. Hazaras discrimination on the basis of religion, physical appearance, economic division and power affect their everyday life. Pashtun being a majority of Afghan society consider them more powerful than Hazara. In Hierarchy two groups never equal. Groups divided in ranking. In high rank exist authoritative and powerful class while, in lower rank exist poor and lower class of the society. In the Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, the Pashtun community ranking at the top of society and Hazara exist at the lowest rank of the Afghan society. Their social hierarchy causes violence in their lives. Hassan being a lower class deprived of education. When Amir says, "I read him stories he couldn't read for himself. That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali band most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born" (Hosseini, 2003 pp24-324). The lines indicate that the social Hierarchy causes a great damage to lower caste. It deprives lower caste to get educated. The upper class has power to get hold of lower caste and deprived them from their basic rights. Furthermore, Hosseini examines the betrayal between two friends based on class differences. "Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba" (Hossein, 2003 pp68-324). These lines show Amir's willingness to sacrifice Hassan for his purpose. Amir believes that, if he brought that blue kite to Baba so, Baba will proud on him. He sacrifices his true friend for his mean because Amir though that Hassan belong to the class which means nothing to the upper class. Amir abuses his power being upper class by not protecting Hassan from Assef's inhumanity.

From the above discussion, we can see that different symbols are used to differentiate between castes in one society. Moreover, from the close textual analysis, it is clear that the living conditions, traditions, religion, and interaction with each other symbolize the status of a person within a society such as that of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, castes can be recognized by the above characteristics which are highlighted by Hosseini in *The Kite Runner*.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study reveals that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, demonstrates the caste system through different symbols, for example segmental division, restrictions on occupations, restriction on marriage

(endogamy), civil and religious disabilities and Hierarchy. Different characters in the novel highlight the events which represent the caste system of Afghan society for instance, Amir, Baba, Hassan, Rahim khan and Assef. They belong to different classes which ultimately leads to caste-based society. The present study supports the symbolic-interactionism which shows the caste as symbolic values. Pashtuns and Hazaras, two different groups in society, widely represent the caste system and differences that they undergo in Afghan society.

Consequently, the enormous Pashtun community is considered as the upper caste of society and Hazaras are considered as the lower caste of society. The differences between two castes are based on economic division, hierarchy, religious differences, the practice of endogamy and division within society by ranking. Hassan and Ali belong to the lower class because they have all the characteristics or symbols which represent the lower caste of the society. They both are servants in Amir's homes. Their occupation symbolizes them as a lower caste of the society. All the Hazara people are servants to Pashtun in the novel. Similarly, Amir who belongs to a wealthy father and Assef whose father is pilot are the representatives of the upper caste of society. Their occupation and profession highlight them as members of the upper caste. Hassan is not allowed to get educated because of the dominance of the upper caste. Being educated is the sign of the upper caste; they never allow the lower caste to come shoulder to shoulder with them.

Moreover, the members of the lower caste are never allowed to live in the same houses with upper caste. They are allotted different places to live. They live in mud houses, while Pashtuns live in well-furnished houses. Hassan, who is in reality Baba's son, is never allowed to live with Amir in the same place because his mother belonged to a lower caste, therefore Baba never accepted Hassan as his own son in front of his larger community. Hassan and Ali live in the Baba's mansion. Similarly, Hassan was killed by the Taliban for a similar reason.

Another aspect which symbolizes the caste system is Endogamy. Rahim khan who belongs to Pashtun upper caste wants to marry a girl belonging to Hazara, a lower caste never accepted by Rahim khan's father. He sent Homaira and her family to Hazarajat because of the fear of his purity of caste. Marrying in the lower caste means disgrace to the family. Upper caste considers their caste a pure caste and marrying in lower caste means that one is polluted by his or her caste. Similarly, Baba never exposes Hassan as his son because his mother Sanubar belongs to a lower caste. Baba in his entire life never accepted Hassan as his own son because of the fear of impurity of caste and also of his honor.

Different writers analyze *The Kite Runner* through different angles. Some highlight the power relationship, discrimination against Hazaras, sexual violence, and the trauma of adolescence. The present study shows the caste system of Afghan society by symbolic values. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is full of symbols which show the caste system of Afghan society. His characters and his novel's scenarios give us a real picture of Afghan society which still suffers in the caste system. He gives us a realistic essence of Afghan society and the practice of the caste system in the society.

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