

Negative Parenting And Its Effects On Children: A Close Reading Of Hosseini's Novels

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Abstract

The current study explores the effects of negative parenting on youngsters in Hosseini's novels. The main argument of the study is that negative parenting either directly or indirectly affects the behavior of their children. To analyze the novels, the researchers have used close reading techniques while applying the social theories of Dodge (1980, 1996), Lyons-Ruth (1996) and Simons et al., (2007). The study is sociological in nature. It has been observed that youngsters are negatively affected because of the behavior and their subsequent decisions. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir suffers, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam's life is ruined, and in *And The Mountains Echoed*, Pari is badly affected by the decisions of her parents. All the three novels depict that the negative attitude of the parents results in deviant and anti-social behavior in their respective children. It is concluded that parents need to be careful about their children by adopting a positive attitude towards them to be able to be good citizens of their country. The parents illustrate negative attitude because of wars, unemployment, and social pressure.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, Close Reading, Sociological Theory, Parental Role, Children Behavior

Introduction

Hosseini is an Afghan American novelist. His three best known novels are: *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013). All the three novels revolve around the different relations which exist within the family. In his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, he talks about the relationship between a father and son. In his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, he discusses the relationship between a mother and daughter.

While in *And The Mountains Echoed*, he gives place to relationship between a brother and sister. In these novels, Hosseini presents the various aspects of life in Afghanistan and Afghan people. He describes the way the Afghan kings lived their luxurious life; the invasion of Soviet Union and destructions of Afghan soil and people; the onslaught of mujahedeen; the oppressive rule of Taliban, and the final invasion of the United States of American. During these several phases of the Afghan history, Hosseini illustrate the lives

of the ill-fated Afghan people, especially women and children.

The position paper elucidates the sufferings of youngsters because of negative parenting attitude in the Afghan patriarchal culture in Hosseini's novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The novels are rich in discussing the political, religious, social, and domestic milieu of Afghanistan. The researchers have identified numerous issues in these novels. Inayatullah (2013) highlights the political and historical perspective of Afghan issues in *The Kite Runner*. Gordon and Almutairi (2013) elucidate the patriarchal family structure of the Afghan society in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Soraya (2015) investigates the characters of Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* for women's persecution in the Taliban regime. Khan (2016) analyzes *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. His study highlights power issues and the use of different voices of gender in these novels. Zahid (2018) worked on oppression in *And the Mountains Echoed*, while Hassan (2019) studied power and oppression in the same novel. Meanwhile, Ahmad (2020) highlights the ideological underpinnings and psychological conditions of women as because of the patriarchal nature of the society in the three novels. Therefore, the current study considers an unexplored and important problem highlighted in Hosseini's all three novels. The article posits the effects of gerontocratic families on youngsters in the Afghan society.

Literature Review

The relation between literature and sociological theories is not new. Researchers like Winter (1975) opine that in theorizing the social world, literature and sociology are parallel and comparable. He makes the statement by comparing the works of sociologists, poets, and novelists. Mills (2001), by giving reference to a

letter written by C Wright Mills in 1957, states that the job of art and social theory is the same, they both not only entertain people but also to make society alive, understandable, and dramatic. Beer (2016) postulates that the main thing which links literature and social theory is "attempt to draw from the vibrancy of cultural forms in order to expand, enrich and energize theoretical projects, concepts and ideas" (p. 410).

Nailah (2016) has applied the theory of Marxist feminism to Collins's (2010) *Mockingjay*. In the story, the main character, Katniss Everdeen, proves herself to be a strong woman by gaining independent and revolutionary status by bringing down patriarchal domination. She survives all her life without extending her hand to men's help and taking benefit from men's power and finances. Ahmad (2021) applies Marxist feminism to Hosseini's novels to study analyze gender issues, ideology, and oppression. Women suffer in Afghanistan because of the traditions, political uncertainty, religion, marriage, wars, and economic dependence on men.

Larasati and Irmawati (2022) have conducted a sociological study on the short story, *God Sees the Truth, But Waits*, written by of Tolstoy. The study links literature and sociology together. The authors have used sociological methods and have found sociological features (social behavior, history, and facts) and literary features (romance, customs, and residence). Likewise, so many researchers have used Foucault's social theories of power and knowledge while analyzing literary texts. Liaqat and Akhtar (2019) applies Foucault's theory to analyze Shamsie's *A God In Every Stone*. Mollayi, Mahmoodi and Zahrazadeh (2018) study *The School Principal* written by Jalal Al Ahmad by applying power theory of Foucault. Theories of Foucault are widely used in critical discourse analysis which is not possible write all of them.

Many studies have been conducted on the role of parental attitude on the behavior of children. Smokowski et al., (2016) have studied the effects of negative parenting on adolescents. Parents' attitude has negative effect on the mental health of children, especially it results in low self-esteem, anxiety, aggression, depression, and child parent conflict. Researchers, like Tomar and Kumar (2018) posit that parents should take care of their children with care, love, kindness, tenderness, and proper guidance. Otherwise, it will badly affect children not only psychologically but also their course of action. Similarly, Duo, Lin, and Wang (2020) conduct a study on the Chinese children to find out the effects of negative parenting. They have observed that negative parenting style results in deviant peer behavior and risky attitudes in children. They have found that negative parenting has a strong positive relation with risk-taking behaviors among children. Kaligid, Sasan and Villegas (2022) establish the point that many mental issues of children are related to parenting styles based on their cultural and societal demands. The socioeconomic condition of parents also affects the physical, emotional, psychological, and social behaviors of children.

Afghanistan is mostly a traditional country and people are bound by customs and tribal values. Rice (2013), while elucidating Afghan family structure, argues that family structure in Afghanistan is hierarchical in nature where elders of the family control any decision regarding the family. Children of the family respect their male elders and obey what they command. Even if a female is the eldest member of the family, still the eldest male takes decisions. Another similar study conducted by UNO shows that Afghan family structure is highly traditional, patriarchal, and hierarchal. Elderly men are the breadwinners and decision make, while women are caretakers. Children are provided with shelter, food and clothing by elders who have unlimited

powers over these children. Even outside the family, youngsters are guided and controlled by teachers, religious leaders, and community elders.

According to a survey conducted in 2016-17 by Central Statistics Organization, about 47.7% of Afghan population is based on youngsters (15 and below), while 2.7% population is above 65. However, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) had conducted a survey in 2011 and had reported violence against children and women, especially their trafficking. O'Leary et al., (2017) have shown their concern over the use of violence against children in Afghanistan due to the decades long wars, poverty and unemployment, and lack of education. Therefore, there is an increase ratio of child and forced marriages, selling of daughters, sodomy, child labor, and rapes (ILO, 2022; OCHCR, 2013; UNICEF, 2018).

Our aim in this paper is to argue that negative parenting attitude in Afghanistan badly affects the lives of the youngsters as presented by Hosseini in his novels. , without considering the negative effects of the decisions of the elderly members on the youth of the society, may result in social evils and will have irreparable consequences for youth.

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

The current research study is based on skimming, scanning and close reading of Hosseini's three novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. Greenham's (2018) close reading technique will be used to analyze the data which consists of six stages: semantic context, syntactic context, thematic context, iterative context, generic context, and adversarial context. The study is sociological in nature, which uses a social theory to analyze novels. The study contends that

Hosseini, in his novels, has depicted the negative influence of parents' behavior and one-sided decisions on children development. The study also posits that parents' negative practices also results in the anti-social and deviant behavior of children. To analyze the novels at hand from this perspective, the researchers have used the ideas of Dodge (1980, 1996), Lyons-Ruth (1996) and Simons et al., (2007). These theorists contend that parental practices directly and indirectly influence the behavior of children.

Analysis and Discussion of Hosseini's Novels

Khaled Hosseini is a diaspora Afghan American novelist. He has written three novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. Stories of the novels are situated in the socio-political environment of Afghanistan. The novels reflect Afghanistan in its social, political, and historical context.

The Kite Runner is Hosseini's first novel. The novelist has beautifully described the events happening in the lives of Baba, Amir, Hassan and Rustam. These are the major characters of the novel. The story of the novel elucidates how Amir, as young boy, suffers at the hands of his father, Baba. Amir's mother died soon after his birth, so he remains under the influence of his father. However, his father, like most of the Afghan fathers, deals him very strictly. It is because of this attitude of his father that Amir is unable to face Assef, the goon and afterwards the Taliban commander. He lets Assef molest Hassan when he could have saved him from Assef and his friends. The second child character in the novel is Hassan. He is the son of Ali, a servant in Amir's house. His mother elopes in his infancy, and he is left to the belligerence of society. Hassan is sexually abused, and this guilt remains with Amir till the end. Secondly, the benign attitude of Baba towards Hassan and the hard handed approach

towards his own son, Amir, further adds to the miseries of Hassan.

Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, mainly depicts the wrongs being committed against an illegitimate girl, Mariam. She is the child of Jalil and Nana. However, she has been given birth because of a relationship outside marriage. The attitude of society is not positive towards such a child. Nana is aware of this and tries in the very beginning to curb the quest for education in Mariam. Mariam is unable to understand the double standards of the Afghan society and demands for schooling like the other daughters of Jalil. Nana commits suicide because she is unable to bear the attitude of society and living an isolated life in kolba. The three wives of Jalil decide to marry Mariam to a fifty year old man to get rid of her. She reminds to them about Nana, an unwanted woman in the house. All the three women try to convince Mariam to marry Rasheed. She was fifteen years of age at that time. However, the women believe that it is the right time to marry a girl. They give several arguments but by now, Mariam realizes that he is not acceptable to them in the same house. Even Jalil is reluctant to defend Mariam. In the end, she is forced to accept Rasheed in marriage. She does not want to marry because she feels that she is just a girl. Jalil's other daughters are of the same age but only Mariam is forced to marry Rasheed.

The wrong and compelling decision of the elders makes Mariam suffer for the rest of her life. Rasheed is a typical Pashtun. He forces her to wear burqa. He abuses her on small pretenses. He beats her severely when she is unable to fulfill any small demand of Rasheed. She is even forced to "chew" pebbles when Rasheed finds grains of sand in the rice. She loses her teeth in the process. Rasheed compares her to an old Russian car, Volga, because of her sturdiness and challenging work. Rasheed knows that she is a harami, illegitimate child. However, he marries Mariam because she was young, beautiful, and not costly

as a wife. Together with Laila, Rasheed's second wife, Mariam tries to run away from her home but is caught by the Taliban and severely beaten by Rasheed when brought back to home. In the process to save Laila and herself, Mariam kills Rasheed. She accepts her crime before the Taliban judges and is sentenced to death as a result.

And the Mountains Echoed also depicts the outcomes of gerontocratic decisions in the Afghan society. Every chapter of the novel has been presented through a different narrator. However, the unifying thread in the story is the events that revolve around the character of Pari. When she is a child, Pari's family suffers in the winter season because of hunger and scarcity of resources. Saboor, her father, loses a child as a result. To save the family from starvation in the coming winter, her father along with her stepmother decides to sell Pari.

There is a wealthy family, the Wahdati's, in Kabul. The family is issueless. Through Paris's uncle, I qbal, they negotiate the buying of Pari from her family. Abdullah is Pari's elder brother. Even he is kept away from the bargain. Their father pretends that he has a contract at a guest house in Kabul, and he is taking Pari there to help him in the construction. Abdullah also goes with them forcefully because, both Pari and Abdullah, are very much attached with each other. Nonetheless, Abdullah realizes in Kabul that Pari has been sold to the family. Abdullah does not react well, but he can do nothing to cancel the bargain. Nobody asks about Pari when Abdullah and Saboor come back to Shadbagh. Parwan tells Abdullah that it was necessary to sell Pari because we had to save the whole family from starvation and death. In her arguments to Abdullah, she says that to save the whole body we must cut the hand.

Both, Abdullah and Pari live a miserable life because they could not see each other till the end. However, Abdullah does not recognize Pari

because of his weak mental position. Pari suffers because of the poor decision being made by her father and stepmother. Nila Wahdati takes great care of her, but she could not take the place of her brother and father. She is separated from her family by the Wahdati's. Secondly, Nila Wahdati migrates to France and takes Pari along with her. Pari lives a carefree life there and cheats on Nila by making affair with Nila's friend. Pari is unable to live a happy and contented life. In the end, she meets Abdullah but at that time Abdullah cannot recognize her.

Conclusion

The analysis illustrates that in the Hosseini's novels most of the children in Afghanistan suffer and live a life of deprivation because of the negative parenting attitude prevalent in the society. The parents adopt this negative attitude because of the conditions of Afghanistan. The country suffers due to wars, political instability, invasion from the foreigners, mujahedeen, and Taliban. All these events and happenings have negatively affected the lives of the parents. As a result, the children suffer because their parents cannot provide them with the facilities which are the birthright of every child. Most of the children have adopted a negative attitude towards life. It is, therefore, concluded that the rest of the world should think over their response and attitude towards Afghanistan to provide a safe and healthy environment for the development of the youngsters of the country and to be positive contributors towards the world in large.

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