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Book Review

*The Kite Runner* is a story which centers in the final decades of the monarchy in Afghanistan. Protagonist of the story is named Amir who is the son of Baba, one of the wealthiest and most charitable Pashtun men in Kabul. They lived in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood with Hassan and his father Ali. Ali is Baba’s servant and Hassan is Amir’s servant and also his closest friend. Hassan is a Hazara where they are historically demeaned and persecuted. Despite their differences, Amir and Hassan were inseparable; they were like real brothers in some way. Hassan would do everything for Amir and considered him as “the best friend he ever had”. Amir liked Hassan too but he felt that he was superior over Hassan with Amir being Pashtun and able to read and write while Hassan was illiterate. Eventually, Amir makes a decision which leads to his betrayal to his closest friend which haunts him with guilt throughout the story until the end.

The most surprising element of this book was about the hidden secret between Amir and Hassan, that they were half-brothers. Amir felt heavy guilt over what he did to Hassan, where he did not stand up to help Hassan when he was getting raped. Amir could possibly justify his cowardice by thinking that Hassan is only a Hazara and Amir does not have to risk his own life to save someone who is not worthy. But after finding out that Hassan was actually his half-brother, Amir’s justification for his cowardice cannot atone him for his sin anymore. If Amir knew back then that Hassan was his brother, chances are Amir might have gone out to save Hassan. Such a twist of the fate make Hassan’s tragedy far more painful after the secret is revealed. At the same time, least surprising element of this book is that Amir and Hassan are brothers. One could possibly guess that Amir and Hassan are related from Baba’s generosity towards Ali and Hassan. Even though Baba is generally generous to others, the compassion he showed for both Ali and Hassan seems a bit too much for the relationship between the Pashtun and the Hazara. One might imagine that there could be something behind Baba’s affection for Ali and Hassan and when the secret is revealed, it is not so shocking if one were suspecting it.

*The Kite Runner* describes the recent political history of Afghanistan from the final decades of the monarchy, fall of monarchy from the Russian invasion and the terrible things Taliban did in Afghanistan, from the 1970s to the year 2002. As seen through Amir’s childhood, on July of 1973, the king’s brother, Daoud Khan seized power while King Zahir Shah was away. The military coup seemed bloodless but from the Amir’s point of view, it was still frightening moment for the people of Kabul who heard gun shots in the streets. Then came the Soviet Army entering Afghanistan in 1979 which forced Baba and Amir to leave Afghanistan. A decade later comes the Soviet withdrawal and then in 1996, the Taliban came along. The story portrays the Taliban’s acts of terror as seen thru Hassan’s death by the Taliban and the abuse Sohrab, Hassan’s son, receive from the Assef who is the antagonist of the story. This book sheds light upon the recent political history of Afghanistan by weaving the story with the characters’ lives and what they experience along the events unfold.

This book confirms my perceptions about life in contemporary Afghanistan. It is my belief that there is always some form of ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan and the example of the relationship between Pashtuns and Hazaras confirms that. Another perception I have is that of harsh environment for the people in Afghanistan. Living in Afghanistan is still dangerous with the Taliban fueling the conflicts throughout the country. Violence and mistreatment of people are still common in Afghanistan which are most likely due to the weak government. Last perception I had was about the mistreatment and inequality shown to Afghanistan women. Soraya, Amir’s wife, had to endure gossips from other people after running off with a man. After listening to Soraya’s story, Amir pities her since she is subject to a sexual double standard. Even though Soraya now lives in America where everyone is equal, she still suffers from the Afghanistan tradition of inequality to women.

The book was really engaging and I was hooked to the story from the beginning to the end. I know for fact that one mistake in the past can haunt you for the rest of your life and what Amir experiences is exactly that. But what Amir goes thru not only hurts him mentally but physically as well. I want to see a story where it has happy ending but this book does not grant me of such a luxury. Every character in this book does not receive eternal happiness, but instead have wounds that hurt them which would hurt them throughout their lives. However, there is redemption for them as well. Amir forgave Baba for keeping the secret until his death, Soraya needed Amir to forgive her before she could marry him, and Amir had to save Sohrab not just for Hassan but to repent for sin of both Amir and Baba.

I will definitely recommend this book to someone wanting to learn more about contemporary Afghanistan. The things described in this book are not light and can be overwhelming. However, nothing in this book is sugarcoated and anyone reading the book can face the harsh reality which is happening in the other side of the world. And with this book, it will make the readers understand about the current situation about the America as well.