

## MASS CULTURE AND TODAY'S ISSUES IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S WORK

МАСОВА КУЛЬТУРА ТА СУЧАСНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ  
У ТВОРЧОСТІ ХАЛЕДА ХОССЕЙНІ

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The aim of the current research in question is to consider mass/pop culture aspects and today's issues in Khaled Hosseini's literary work. On the one hand mass literature can promote standard thinking through imposing stereotypes thus potentially limiting readers' capacity for deeper assessment of ongoing processes. On the other hand, contemporary fiction grapples with topics such as identity and social justice, the impact of culture, history and politics on societal development, the evolving role of literature and art in a multicultural world among others, which are extremely important. Writers explore how global influences affect (or don't) identity, touch upon such matters as migration, diaspora, and search for belonging; confront such issues as inequality, discrimination and human rights abuses related to race, gender, sexuality and indigenous rights.

Khaled Hosseini's novels, such as *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, explore the resilience of human relationships, the plight of Afghan women, and the enduring love for a homeland shaped by conflict and displacement. Key aspects include his realist style, focus on the mother-daughter and father-son bonds, and the exploration of complex characters grappling with their past. A significant focus is placed on the experiences of Afghan women, their struggle against a patriarchal society, and the strength they find in sisterhood and motherhood to resist oppression. Hosseini uses the political and social upheavals in Afghanistan as a backdrop to explore the impact of war and conflict on individuals and families, often through vivid and emotionally resonant scenes. His focus on strong, relatable characters allows readers to connect with the deeper emotional and personal aspects of the stories. He uses various literary devices to convey meaning and emotion, which enhances the reader's understanding of the narrative.

**Key words:** mass culture, gender discourse, discrimination, political issues, cultural aspects.

Метою цього дослідження є спроба розглянути деякі аспекти масової/поп-культури та сучасних проблем у літературній творчості Халеда Хоссейні. З одного боку, масова література може сприяти стандартному мисленню, нав'язуючи стереотипи, тим самим потенційно обмежуючи здатність читачів до глибшої оцінки поточних процесів. З іншого боку, сучасна художня література торкається таких тем, як ідентичність та соціальна справедливість, вплив культури, історії та політики на суспільний розвиток, еволюція ролі літератури та мистецтва в мультикультурному світі та інших, які є надзвичайно важливими. Письменники досліджують, як глобальні тенденції впливають (або не впливають) на ідентичність, торкаються таких питань, як міграція, діаспора та пошук приналежності; стикаються з такими проблемами, як нерівність, дискримінація та порушення прав людини, котрі пов'язані з расою, статтю, сексуальністю, гендером та правами корінних народів.

Романи Халеда Хоссейні, такі як «Той, що біжить за вітром», «Тисяча сяйливих сонць» та «І луна летить по горах», досліджують стійкість людських стосунків, тяжке становище афганських жінок та незмінну любов до батьківщини, сформовану конфліктами та переміщенням. Ключові аспекти включають його реалістичний стиль, зосередження на зв'язках між матір'ю та дочкою, батьком і сином, а також дослідження складних персонажів, які борються зі своїм минулим. Значна увага приділяється досвіду афганських жінок, їхній боротьбі проти патріархального суспільства та силі, яку вони знаходять у сестринстві та материнстві, щоб протистояти гнобленню. Хоссейні використовує політичні та соціальні потрясіння в Афганістані як фон для дослідження впливу війни та конфліктів на окремих осіб та сім'ї, часто через яскраві та емоційно резонансні сцени. Його зосередження на сильних, близьких персонажах дозволяє читачам відчути глибші емоційні та особисті аспекти історії. Він використовує різні літературні прийоми для передачі сенсу та емоцій, що покращує розуміння романів читачем.

**Ключові слова:** масова культура, гендерний дискурс, дискримінація, політичні питання, культурні аспекти.

**Introduction:** Analyzing present day issues may be challenging at times. Many scholars have been trying to define mass culture, though in our humble opinion the definition is still generic. Among scientists working in this field one can name Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and the other members of the Frankfurt Schoolpioneered the study of "mass culture," which they also called the "culture industry". Their work was foundational, but the field

expanded significantly with thinkers from British Cultural Studies, such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams who offered a different perspective on how mass culture is produced and consumed. Other key scholars include Roland Barthes, who analyzed the myths of modern life, and José Ortega y Gasset, who introduced the concept of the "mass man" and "mass society". [8,9,10] Along with that mass literature plays a great role in terms of forming the mass man as well,

Scholars who research mass literature are known as literary critics or literary analysts, and their work involves studying genres like melodramas, detective stories, and fantasy to understand their nature, structure, and influence. Key figures in this field include researchers like Gans, Barsch, and Swirski, who have analyzed aspects such as plot, character systems, and the unique artistic qualities of popular fiction [11].

**The purpose** of this piece is to analyze Khaled Hosseini's literary work from the point of view of mass/pop culture and dwell on the discussion of today's issues in his works. Khaled Hosseini's early life significantly influenced his writing. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, he experienced the political turmoil of the country firsthand, including a communist coup and the Soviet invasion. His family's relocation to Paris and eventual asylum in the United States exposed him to the struggles of displacement and the immigrant experience. These themes of war, loss, and identity are central to his novels, such as "The Kite Runner" and "A Thousand Splendid Suns," which explore the impact of Afghanistan's history on its people.

**Methodology:** To achieve the goal both cultural and historical method and comparative and historical method will be used. The first method will give us opportunity to trace national peculiarities, which influence the whole literary piece in terms of pragmatics: help us to understand the authors ideas, which should be conveyed to the readership, from the socio-cultural point of view, whereas the second method will give us a perspective on modern products of not only mass literature but of mass culture on the whole. The basis for the current study is scientific pieces by both domestic and foreign scholars, which are devoted to the problems of literary reception and intercultural aspect of modern literary pieces.

**Research and Discussion:** Khaled Hosseini is an author and physician born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965, who became a naturalized American citizen after his family was granted political asylum in the U.S. in 1980. He is best known for his bestselling novels. In addition to his writing, Hosseini is also a practicing doctor, a U.S. Goodwill Envoy to the UN Refugee Agency and the founder of The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which provides humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

It is our intention to give a closer look to some of Khaled Hosseini's literary works, namely "The Kite Runner", "Thousand Splendid Suns", "The Mountains Echoed", and "Sea Prayer".

"The Kite Runner" was inspired by Hosseini's memories of growing up in Afghanistan, his experiences as an immigrant, and his desire to shed

light on the country's history and struggles. Khaled Hosseini's works are rich with cultural elements that provide readers with a deep understanding of Afghanistan's history, traditions, and societal dynamics. The author focuses on history and politics, he incorporates significant historical events, such as the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Mujahideen, the civil war, and the Taliban's rule, to provide context for his characters' lives and struggles. His novels explore the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan, particularly the discrimination faced by the Hazara minority, and the societal dynamics between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims [1].

*"Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they're probably more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they've ever had before, Babi said, always lowering his voice, aware of how intolerant Mammy was of even remotely positive talk of the communists. But it's true, Babisaid, it's a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan. And you can take advantage of that, Laila. Of course, women's freedom – here, he shook his head ruefully – is also one of the reasons people out there took up arms in the first place"* [12, p. 289].

It is also very important for him to emphasize the importance of familial bonds, loyalty, and the complexities of relationships, such as father-son dynamics, friendships, and the sacrifices made within families [1]. Of course in terms of family dynamics he does not leave behind gender issues, i.e., gender roles and women's plight. "A Thousand Splendid Suns" particularly highlights the struggles of Afghan women under patriarchal norms and oppressive regimes, addressing issues like forced marriages, domestic abuse, and limited access to education and healthcare [2, 3].

*"What's the sense in schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon. There is only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life [...] taha-mul. Endure. It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have. Do you understand? Besides, they'll laugh at you in school. They will. They'll call you harami. They'll say the most terrible things about you. I won't have it... There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache. I know, akhund sahib. I know"* [12, 102].

He also points out some cultural aspects, which become symbolic and conveys the meaning on multiple levels, e.g., he points out symbolism of burqa. In his literary works burqa is portrayed with complexity, symbolizing both oppression and protection, depending on the characters' perspectives [4]. Among other topics he brings to life in his novels are literature

and Afghan poetry, which are woven into narratives reflecting the country's rich literary heritage. Apart from those Hosseini provides vivid descriptions of Afghan food, clothing, celebrations (e.g., Nauroz), and communal practices like baking bread in shared ovens [5].

His novels explore the experiences of Afghan immigrants, their struggles to adapt to new cultures, and their longing for their homeland, and Islamic beliefs and practices are depicted through characters like Mullah Faizullah, offering insight into the spiritual aspects of Afghan life [4]. These cultural elements not only enrich the storytelling but also educate readers about Afghanistan's multifaceted identity and the resilience of its people amidst adversity.

*“Nor was she old enough to appreciate the injustice, to see that it is the creators of the harami who are culpable, not the harami, whose only sin is being born”* [12, p. 54].

When we talk about Afghan women's rights and agency we need to talk about continued oppression in this country. Hosseini's works, especially “A Thousand Splendid Suns” are still relevant for their depiction of patriarchal oppression, violence, and the marginalization of women in Afghanistan.

*“...his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not”* [12, p. 89].

On the other hand the author also reveals his hope for better future of oppressed groups (including women) and talk about their resilience and ability to save themselves and maybe even to fight back.

*“Mariam lay on the couch, hands tucked between her knees, watched the whirlpool of snow twisting and spinning outside the window. She remembered Nana saying once that each snowflake was a sigh heaved by an aggrieved woman somewhere in the world. That all the sighs drifted up the sky, gathered into clouds, then broke into tiny pieces that fell silently on the people below. As a reminder of how people like us suffer, she said. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us”* [12, p. 237].

Being an immigrant the topics of cultural identity and diaspora are very important for Khaled Hosseini. Contemporary analysis explores the ongoing struggle with identity for Afghan diasporic communities who face cultural displacement, hybridity, and the loss of their native culture while trying to adapt to new societies. Hosseini's works are examined through the lens of multinationalism, showing how global politics and migration create

tensions and a sense of dislocation, as seen in “And the Mountains Echoed”

The continuing relevance of themes like the historical prejudice between Pashtuns and Hazaras in “The Kite Runner” is a subject of discussion, as ethnic discrimination remains a challenge in the country. The author also points out how ethnic discrimination can lead to the dehumanization of minority groups and create lasting social divisions [6]. This discrimination issue also true when we talk about women.

*“Each snowflake was a sigh heard by an aggrieved woman somewhere in the world. All the sighs drifted up the sky, gathered into clouds, then broke into tiny pieces that fell silently on the people below. As a reminder of how women suffer”* [12, p. 304].

Some critics argue that Hosseini's work, written from his perspective as an Afghan-American, may inadvertently reinforce Western orientalist stereotypes and appeal to a "sensationalized" Western view of Afghan trauma. His past support for the American war in Afghanistan is a point of contention for some and has been linked to his narratives by critics who see them as a pro-Western stance.

**Conclusion:** Today's discussions about Khaled Hosseini's work focus on contemporary issues like the ongoing impact of war and migration on Afghan culture and identity, the continued struggle for women's rights and agency, the effects of ethnic discrimination, and critiques of his narratives as potentially reinforcing Western orientalist perspectives. Specifically, academic and public discourse examines how his stories reflect and portray modern-day challenges such as diaspora, hybridity, the psychological toll of trauma, and the fight against patriarchal structures, while also debating the political and cultural implications of his narratives for both Afghans and Western audiences.

Hosseini's portrayal of Afghan women challenges the monolithic and stereotypical image of oppressed victims often seen in global media. His female characters are presented as resilient, empowered, and possessing a fighting spirit that allows them to resist and overcome patriarchal structures, while also enduring hardships. Despite being set in Afghanistan, Hosseini's work resonates with a broad, international audience by focusing on universal themes of love, friendship, and family. He contrasts the peaceful, humanistic practice of Islam with the militaristic version promoted by groups like the Taliban.

Hosseini's storytelling is often grounded in a realist approach, depicting the observable realities of life in Afghanistan and the emotional complexities of his characters.

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