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Gender Inequality in *The Kite Runner*

Throughout Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, female dehumanization and the degradation of males reoccur consistently. When the Taliban reign began in Afghanistan, women were objectified and deprived of civil rights granted to males. Although women were hyper sexualized and deemed unequal, males faced repercussions for lacking masculinity or possessing feminine traits. With each sex facing prejudice for their actions, sexism and inequality are present throughout the novel. As a result, *The Kite Runner* exemplifies the objectification of women in Afghanistan and thus posits a need for a balance between feminine and masculine qualities.

The lack of women’s fundamental human rights in Afghanistan during the Taliban’s time in power exemplifies the inequality and double standard of the sexes. When the Taliban formed a “restrictions list” for females, freedoms such as the right to education and freedom of expression were withdrawn, alongside countless others. With this list of deprivations, the Taliban wished women to live a life free of any individuality or choice, and to only act under the eye of a male relative, or mahram. By doing so, women’s actions were sexualized and any act deemed not appropriate by the list resulted in punishment such as whipping, beating, and at heightened severity, death. Actions such as wearing nail polish or brightly coloured clothing were presumably a desire for male’s attention, and therefore were not acceptable for everyday life (Baxter 48, 49). By imposing rules such as, “A man must not hear a women’s footsteps,” or “No stranger should hear a woman’s voice,” women lived lives of invisibility, and in fear of the Taliban’s dominance (Baxter 48, 49). Similarly, women living in Kabul in *The Kite Runner*

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faced collateral treatment when the Taliban rose to power. Examples such as the stoning of a woman having sex out of wedlock, or Farzana speaking too powerfully at the Bazaar reflect the list’s extremism firsthand (Hosseini 284, 228). By oppressing these women to such great extremes, the need for balance is present within the total lack of gender equality. Due to the extent of abuse administered, and the horrendous means of dealing with conflict, the Taliban diminished all balance between the sexes, exemplifying the iniquity of Kabul at the time. As the actions were so revolting and degrading towards women, it is evident that balance was not prioritized under Taliban power.

Although men in *The Kite Runner* were not objectified to the same extent as women, they still faced repercussions for possessing feminine traits or lacking hyper masculine qualities. For example, Baba represents the “ideal male”, one with masculinity and strength, whereas Amir epitomizes sensitivity and reliance on others. Throughout the totality of the novel, Baba and Amir’s relationship remains consistently hostile and complicated as Baba wishes for his son to act more masculine. As Amir enjoys storytelling and lives to avoid confrontation, Baba fears his son will never become a true man. Through lacking the ability to stand up for himself against neighborhood children, or crying at the annual *Buzkashi* tournament, Baba is hesitant to believe that Amir is even a child of his own blood (Hosseini 22, 23, and 24). Although Baba is often described as both strong and heroic, his ability to portray constant courageousness affects his ability to display sensitivity, empathy, or care in various situations. Examples such as Baba fighting a black bear, or standing up to a soldier wishing to rape a woman illustrate his bravery and willingness to stand up for others (Hosseini 13 and 122). Although many graciously accept his strength, Amir detests his father’s masculinity for the sole fact that Baba focuses so heavily

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on his son displaying the same qualities. While growing up without a mother figure, Amir lacked the tender love and maternal care of a woman, and was unable to see this in his father due to his hyper-masculine qualities. By degrading his son with comments such as, “I mean to speak to you man to man. Do you think you can handle that for once,” Baba fails to act as a caring father that both empathizes with and understands his son (Hosseini 18). The relationship within this family reflects the constant need for balance between feminine and masculine qualities, as the two characters represent the consistent contradictory relationship between the two. Without this balance, it becomes evident that possessing stronger traits of one sex results in both difficulty portraying qualities of the other, and hostility among opposing personalities.

Throughout the duration of the novel *The Kite Runner*, gender inequality is a common reoccurrence. Due to the Taliban’s fanaticism, the extent of oppression females faced daily increased, therefore resulting in the constant degradation of women. Through dehumanizing acts such as a restrictions list and public beatings, females were denied fundamental human rights, forcing them to live a life under constant male control. Similarly, men were objectified for acting with sensitivity and care, often deeming them to be too feminine, and far from the “ideal man”. To contrast, other males throughout the novel faced challenges when they possessed hyper-masculine characteristics, or lacked empathy towards loved ones. The sexism seen throughout the novel epitomizes life under Taliban reign, and the extent of gender inequality among the sexes. Without equity between male and female qualities, it becomes evident that each sex is objectified for exhibiting one extreme above the other. In order to live free of this constant oppression and prejudice, each sex must maintain a balance between the two, and live according to their gender’s rightful stereotypes.

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**Works Cited**

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