Perspectives in the novels by Khaled Hosseini

Dilnoza Ramatjanovna RUZMATOVA


Abstract

The present research focuses on the analysis of the novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” by Afghan born American writer Khaled Hosseini in line with the major characteristics of the historical perspective in literature. The literature scholars and researchers are highly interested in Afghan-American literature as representing the diaspora features. In his novels Hosseini could depict Afghanistan in terms of three perspectives: childhood, womanhood and family reunion in pre-in-post Taliban periods. Considering the perspectives found in this research, it is obvious that Hosseini globally demonstrates the real outlook of his nation and country, and moreover establishes that having peace and wealth is the life meaning for Afghan people the same as for other human beings. In the present analysis, the research problem is to investigate how the major perspectives of Afghanistan have been employed to represent Khaled Hosseini’s literary image as a writer. The data collected from the detailed analysis of the texts of Hosseini’s novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” helped to answer questions related to childhood, womanhood and family reunion perspectives of Afghanistan. The results of this work revealed that the writer used these three perspectives effectively in his texts to show the macrocosm of Afghanistan. This study is an effort to unfold the significance of literary characteristics of the novels mentioned above. It will help to decode the essential perspective peculiarities of Hosseini’s works by applying historical perspective method.

Key words: Perspective, childhood, womanhood, family, Afghanistan.

Halit Hüseyni’nin romanlarında perspektifler

Öz


1 Dr. Öğrencisi, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, English Linguistics And Literature Studies (Tashkent, Uzbekistan), dishemu2017@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5235-380X [Makale kayıt tarihi: 05.10.2019-kabul tarihi: 20.11.2019; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.648910]
Hüseyni'nin eserlerinin temel perspektif özelliklerini tarihsel perspektif yöntemini kullanarak çözmeye yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Perspektif, çocukluk, kadınlık, aile, Afganistan.

1. Introduction

The literature scholars and researchers show their keen attitude towards Afghan-American literature as representing the diaspora features. In his novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” Khaled Hosseini could demonstrate Afghanistan through three perspectives: childhood, womanhood and family reunion in pre-in-post Taliban periods. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word “perspective” has three meanings:

- a particular way of considering something;
- to think about a situation or problem in a wise and reasonable way;
- to compare something to other things so that it can be accurately and fairly judged. [3]

In his novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” Hosseini used the second and third meanings of the word “perspective” more efficiently and provided a historical information about his birthplace. While reading any kind of a book, readers see and experience the events and feelings about the characters following their own and author's approaches, called a “perspective.” A perspective is a literary tool, which serves as a lens through which readers observe characters, events, and happenings. Perspectives in literature help to outline the same things with different points of view. S. B. Magali (2017) mentioned the following types of the most established fictional perspectives:

Archetypal perspective means traditional way of patterns used repeatedly in literature. This type of perspective can be found in archetypal themes: love between the poor and the rich, heroism in wars; archetypal images: heaven and hell, isolated islands; archetypal heroes: antagonist, protagonist.

Formalist perspective is related to the “form” in the fiction. Form and content are considered the major principles of literary work. The examples of formalism can be found in poetry. For the Eastern literature the form including meter, rhyme, and stanza is more important while for the Western literature the content plays a significant role. The word gaming, alliteration, repetition and other features of the work are mainly used in this perspective.

Psychoanalytical perspective aims to investigate inner world of characters in fictional works. To define the inner perception of the personages monologues are very essential, that result in the stream of consciousness /unconsciousness/ subconsciousness.

Social-class perspective is a criticized approach, based on class-power understanding. This phenomenon decreases the artistic features of literature. According to social-class perspective and status of the people in the society, the same works belonging to this type of literary perspective can be analyzed differently by different social classes.

Gender perspective is, to some extent, close to the social-class perspective recognizing male and female comprehension in literature. Feminist and masculinist literature representatives stand against each other in their cohesion and consider that in the author/reader perception should have distinctive features of men and women.

Historical perspective, as stated in its name, specifies historical information in the fiction. Real events described in real time and places demonstrate the interconnection of time and space in literature. Khaled Hosseini consumes terror attacks, war, Afghans in his works and this method reflects the history of Afghanistan pre-in-post Taliban periods.
2. Methodology

In the present analysis, the research problem is to investigate how the major perspectives of Afghanistan have been employed to represent Khaled Hosseini’s literary image as a writer. The data collected from the detailed analysis of the texts of Hosseini’s novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” helped to answer questions related to childhood, womanhood and family reunion perspectives of Afghanistan.

2.1. The Procedure of the Research

According to the investigated perspectives of Afghanistan in Khaled Hosseini’s novels the analysis of his works has been undertaken at the following levels:

1. Childhood perspective in “The Kite Runner”
2. Womanhood perspective in “A Thousand Splendid Suns”
3. Family reunion perspective in “And the Mountains Echoed”

3. Discussion

The objective of the present analysis was to identify the perspectives in Khaled Hosseini’s novels by separating into childhood, womanhood and family reunion including the characteristics of historical perspective method.

3.1. Childhood perspective in “The Kite Runner”

Khaled Hosseini depicted children and childhood in Afghanistan in his novel “The Kite Runner” by applying biographical elements. He illustrated the events seen or heard by him to show the reliable reference on his birthplace. The special feature of the writer’s style is transforming happy pre-Taliban childhood into tragic childhood in and post-Taliban periods.

The novel starts using retrospection in Amir’s memory referring to his childhood in his home in Afghanistan. Hosseini used poetic details to show the core meaning of the novel; essentially “kite” is intermingled with “real childhood” existed before the war. The novel opens in winter days when Afghan children did not attend school and had peace and warmth at home during holiday. “The kite fighting tournament was an old winter tradition in Afghanistan. It started early in the morning on the day of the contest and didn’t end until only the winning kite flew in the sky. ... People gathered on sidewalks and roofs to cheer for their kids. The streets filled with kite fighters, jerking and tugging on their lines, squinting up to the sky, trying to gain position to cut the opponents line.” (Hosseini, 2003)

The kite serves as a symbol of Amir’s happiness as well as his guilt. Flying kites is what he enjoys most as a child, not least because it is the only way that he connects fully with Baba, who was once a champion kite fighter. But the kite takes on a different significance when Amir allows Hassan to be raped because he wants to bring the blue kite back to Baba. His recollections after that portray the kite as a sign of his betrayal of Hassan. Amir does not fly a kite again until he does so with Sohrab at the end of the novel, because Amir has already redeemed himself by that point, the kite is no longer a symbol of his guilt. Instead, it acts as a reminder of his childhood, and it also becomes the way that he is finally able to connect with Sohrab, mirroring the kite’s role in Amir’s relationship with Baba.
“Kite”, as stated in the title, is the major symbol of the novel and represents different characteristics. It is the only object that defines “true friendship”, “stable relationship between father and son”, “dreamed victory”, “unlimited pride”, “happy children and childhood”, “independent country”, “peace blue sky”, “regained life”, “torturing memories”, “pure virginity” and more. The author skillfully consumes this symbol in his novel, reading or thinking about it each time, the list of readers’ attitude to the attributes of the “kite” in “The Kite Runner” is refreshed and the new approaches appeared in the readers’ cognition. One more traditional and cultural fact is that “kite fighting” is/was obviously a significant custom in the history of Afghanistan.

Childhood in the novel is rooted to three personages – Amir, Hassan, Sukhrob and they represent the typical children of Afghanistan. Baba could save his son Amir from the danger of the war crossing the borders but his illegitimate son Hassan experienced all terrible cases of the terrorist attacks. What is more tragic, Hassan’s son Sukhrob was left in the center of the most terrified scenes alone and even this innocent boy blamed himself for all terrors in the country.

It is difficult to find happy children in the novel. Amir and Hassan were brought up with the absence of mother’s kindness, Sukhrob’s both parents were killed by the Taliban. Culpability tortured Amir and he found himself guilty for the death of his mother and separation of his parents.

The pure understanding of childhood is broken in differing people into their status and background. Afghan children divide their nation into two: upper class Pashtun and lower class Hazara. Future Taliban boy Assef like Hitler mentioned, “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people (Hazaras) pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood.” (Hosseini, 2003) Therefore the moral tragedy of the country was already set before the war in the country.

The writer dedicated his “The Kite Runner” to celebrate the friendship whereas this friendship never pays attention to race, status, age, religion and interest. It reminds the friendship of different generations such as the relationship between Baba and Hassan, Amir and Hassan, Amir and Sukhrab. Reading the novel one can think how Baba (in Dari means “father”) – strong and wealthy man – can be too kind to the son of his servant; it makes the reader think only about it and portrays “true humanism” until the secrets are released (Baba is Hassan’s biological father, Hassan and Amir are brothers). Baba and Hassan are two different people in age, religion and status; however, these dimensions cannot be obstacles to their mutual understanding. There is a big age difference; Baba hates religion whilst Hassan is very religious, Baba belongs to honorable ethnic group Pashtun whereas Hassan is related to the lowest rank of their society – Hazara.

The mentioned drawbacks even strengthen the feelings of being close and Baba is proud of Hassan for his male power, talent and even wants him to be his announced son more than Amir. Baba is a successful and prosperous businessman and famous for his charity actions. What is very influential in the novel that he builds an orphanage, demonstrates himself being too kind to the orphan children, however, what about his two sons, one is suffering from the lack of attention to him and the other one is tortured by the society, being Hazara – a minority of the Afghan ethnic group. Baba struggles with his personality through the novel, he tries to do whatever seems to be right to forget and redeem his forever guilt and for his good deed he stays as positive as possible in the perception of the readers.
At the end of the novel Amir could save Sukhrob or, without hesitation, Sukhrob rescued Amir from the hands of Taliban Assef. This passage gives a symbolic treatment of Afghan children. “I thought of a line I’d read somewhere, or maybe I’d heard someone say it: There are a lot of children in Afghanistan but little childhood.” (Hosseini, 2003) Replacing Sukhrob in America and giving him a kite, Hosseini could support peace and kindness for one of million Afghan children in his novel.

3.2. Womanhood perspective in “A Thousand Splendid Suns”

The theme of Afghan women is highly interpreted by Khaled Hosseini, Farah Ahmedi, Mir Tamim Ansary, Anne E. Brodsky, Veronica Doubleday, Doris Lessing, Nelofer Pazira and other writers in literature. Restricting archetypal nature of the fiction, Hosseini built a strong “mother-daughter” relationship instead of rivalry in “A Thousand Splendid Suns”.

In order to depict Afghan women the author selected various female age members from Afghanistan to his novel. Mariam and Laila belong to the same man in marriage and they were never happy with him. It can be said that they are very opposite characters. Laila had different relationships in an educated family and Mariam was always alone in her attitudes towards others. “In the tandoor line, Mariam caught sideways glances shot at her, heard whispers. Her hands began to sweat. She imagined they all knew that she had been born a harami, a source of shame to her father and his family. They all knew that she’d betrayed her mother and disgraced herself.” (Hosseini, 2007)

While Laila’s birth gave blessed happiness to her family, Mariam was made to chew pebbles by her husband Rasheed for the meal she prepared but he disliked eating. “His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pied it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles, blood, and fragments of two broken molars.” (Hosseini, 2007)

In their marriage with Rasheed Mariam and Laila were mistreated and beaten continuously by him. They struggled for their freedom and even tried to escape from the country but Taliban made regime didn’t allow them to relieve.

Mariam could find the real meaning for her life with Laila and her children, in addition to this she understood the importance of being accepted by people in the society. For the existence of Laila, she was very thankful. She was ready to do everything for the sake of Laila’s bright days. Mariam could sacrifice her life without thinking, measuring and realizing for Laila and Tariq’s flourished married life. “In the toolshed, Mariam grabbed the shovel. Rasheed didn’t notice her coming back into the room. He was still on top of Laila, his eyes wide and crazy, his hands wrapped around her neck. Laila’s face was turning blue now, and her eyes had rolled back. ... He’s going to kill her, she thought. He really means to. And Mariam could not, would not, allow that to happen. He’d taken so much from her in twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not want him take Laila, too. ... Mariam swung.” (Hosseini, 2007)

Mariam helped Laila and Tariq leave the country with the children and she was found to have killed her husband by the Taliban, and without any rejection, she admitted that. Mariam was killed by kicking the stone into her head publicly. It was the end of the woman who killed her husband to rescue his another wife and her children.

There are great differences between Laila and Mariam not only in their upbringing but in their relationships within their life. Laila’s life is full of various joyful periods till the marriage with Rasheed.
while Mariam realizes the deep meaning of being “harami” practically and tortured due to the fact that each existed moment. If it can be described with the help of lines, it could be drawn as the following:

**Laila:**

- **birth** - Laila’s birth was welcomed by her family members and they called this little angel “Laila – Night Beauty”
- **friendship** – being friendly with both females and males. True relationship with her father and with her boyfriend Tariq
- **love** – transferring friendship into love in the relationship with Tariq
- **education** – learning and teaching process both at home and at school
- **marriage 1** – a 14 year-old girl’s marriage with a 65 year-old man to protect her pregnancy with her first and foremost love. Rasheed could never treat and even never tried to understand the feelings of his young wife.
- **marriage 2** - real happiness as a wife and as a mother in the marriage with Tariq. He could give and show the real meaning of life and helped her to recover herself

**Mariam:**

- **birth** – from her early ages she was isolated from the society as being a “harami”, had to live with her mother in kolba (shelter, cabin) and could meet her father only once a week on Thursdays
- **marriage** – urged to marry a 45 year-old man whom she had never seen when she was only 15
- **friendship** – not only being a friend but at the same time a mother to her husband’s wife. This is the only relationship Mariam could relieve the sufferings form her heart since Laila and her children accepted her as a human being
- **death** – a heroic sacrificing to rescue Laila and Tariq’s love, protecting them and their children from the Taliban
Unfortunately, the notions of “love” and “education” do not exist in Mariam’s life dictionary. She was thoroughly discriminated for being “harami” in her whole life. Once Rasheed compared his wives to cars concerning their qualities or their importance to him. He mentioned about Mariam: “But she is not without qualities, all things considered. You will see for yourself, Laila jan. She is sturdy, for one thing, a good worker, and without pretensions. I’ll say it this way: If she were a car, she would be a Volga.” (Hosseini, 2007) Yet he doesn’t think the same to Laila – his young wife: “you, on the other hand, would be a Benz. A brand-new, first class, shiny Benz. Wah wah. But. But.” He raised one greasy index finger. “One must take certain ...cares... with a Benz. As a matter of respect for its beauty and craftsmanship, you see. Oh, you must be thinking that I am crazy, diwana, with all this talk of automobiles. I am not saying you are cars. I am merely making a point.” (Hosseini, 2007) Materialism or disappearing the qualities of humanism show its power not only because of Taliban regime but because of Afghan males themselves.

In terms of time and space correlation, the historical background of Afghan people focusing on their gender could be seen in the novel by putting the rules of the Taliban. The reader could be aware of the facts how Afghan society lived in-Taliban period and what rules they had to obey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules for both men and women</th>
<th>Rules for men</th>
<th>Rules for women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All citizens must pray five times a day. If it is prayer time and you are caught doing something different, you will be beaten.</td>
<td>All men will grow their beards. The correct length is at least one clenched fist beneath the chin. If you do not abide by this, you will be beaten.</td>
<td>You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing is forbidden.</td>
<td>All boys will wear turbans. Boys in grade one through six will wear black turbans, higher grades will wear white. All boys will wear Islamic clothes. Shirt collars will be buttoned.</td>
<td>You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing is forbidden.</td>
<td>Cosmetics are forbidden.</td>
<td>Jewelry is forbidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing cards, playing chess, gambling, and kiteflying are forbidden.</td>
<td>You will not wear charming clothes.</td>
<td>You will not speak unless spoken to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing books, watching films, and painting pictures are forbidden.</td>
<td>You will not make eye contact with men.</td>
<td>You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten.</td>
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Khaled Hosseini’s last passages returning the personages to their motherland from Pakistan. They could not live far from the country and felt necessity for their people. Once Laila’s father told her “You can be anything you want … I know this about you. And I also know when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you.” (Hosseini, 2007) Laila followed these words and worked as a teacher in Kabul since she had strength to do it.

3.3. Family reunion perspective in “And the Mountains Echoed”

“And the Mountains Echoed”, the third novel written by Khaled Hosseini, depicts more than twenty families from various corners of the society. Being different from “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, the author’s main purpose is to illustrate “Afghanistan” out of the wars and the Taliban; however the inner level of the text indicates the causes and effects of the terror attacks. In terms of artistic originality of the fiction, the novel shows the maturity of the writer both in composition and language peculiarities.

The work consists of nine chapters and each chapter has its detached characters and plot. The novel was written in the way collecting stories of the totally different families from each other. All the stories work for one major story devoted to brother-sister Abdulla and Pari till the end of the novel. Interesting point of the work is that people from different nationalities that have come, been or left Afghanistan glued in one novel to show careful attention of all human beings to this country.

Adding a new personage into the novel the author prepares his readers for this phenomenon and it happens with Idris very skillfully as Nabi remembers his childhood, his father and his farewell before leaving the country to America in chapter four. The main stories connected with Idris go in the next Chapter. In the center of all sequenses is a poor Afghan girl — Roshi, as Amra had called her. Roshi lived with her parents, two sisters, and her baby brother in a village a third of the way between Kabul and Bagram. Roshi’s father and his brother had arguments on the property where Roshi lived. Her uncle felt the house should belong to him. One Friday he came to their house and pretended that he had forgotten everything. All family members were very happy and brothers hug each other, Roshi’s mother prepared a big pot of rice with two chickens for the sake of brothers peace. Having had such a wonderful family occasion, the uncle then excused himself to use the outhouse. When he came back, he had an ax in his hand. The first one to go was Roshi’s father. “Roshi told me her father never even know what happened. He didn’t see anything.” A single strike to the neck, from behind. It nearly decapitated him. Roshi’s mother was next. Then her two sisters were grabbed by the uncle. Roshi and her little brother tried to escape. They ran for the yard, out of panic and desperation, perhaps forgetting that there was no gate in the yard, no way out, the walls too tall to climb. When the uncle burst out of the house and came for them, Roshi saw her little brother, who was five, throw himself into the tandoor, where, only an hour before, his mother had baked bread. Roshi could hear him screaming in the flames, when she
tripped and fell. She turned onto her back in time to see blue sky and the ax whooshing down. And then nothing. (Hosseini, 2013) Uncontrollably the lips could whisper that no need to blame the Taliban but Afghan people, Afghan brothers kill each other for the unnecessary materials in front of true relationships. It is the one of many families given in the novel.

Another considerable point of the novel is that the author tried to compare the difference between Afghans in Afghanistan and out of Afghanistan. Roshi is the girl who needs the urgent operation and the money for the operation as well. “Other Afghans from America, or from Europe,” Amra says, “they come and take picture of her. They take video. They make promises. Then they go home and show their families. Like she is zoo animal. I allow it because I think maybe they will help. But they forget. I never hear from them. (Hosseini, 2013) Only Amra struggles for Roshi – a Bosnian volunteer nurse – not any Afghan, not even her existed relatives.

Another poor girl sacrificed by her family in the novel is Pari. Her father Saboor sells her to rich lady Nila Wahdati. Her marriage with Suleiman could not give a child as she was not able to be a mother physically. Nila could solve her problem by adopting Pari and decided to leave the country for and her husband when he had a terrible health problem. She left for Paris, Nila’s mother was a French woman and she taught her daughter the language. Unfortunately, in Nila’s childhood her parents divorced and Nila stayed with her father who did not marry again. The main goal of the writer to transfer Nila from Afghanistan to France is to show the changes happened in mothers when they had different reactions abroad. Nila’s behavior was not accepted positively in Afghan society since she created more sexual poems which was not appropriate to the norms of Muslims. When Pari was ten, when she’d come home one day from school and found twenty-five francs and a handwritten note on the kitchen table. I’ve gone to Alsace with Marc. You remember him. Back in a couple of days. Be a good girl. (Don’t stay up late!) Je t’aime. Maman. Pari had stood shaking in the kitchen, eyes filling up, telling herself two days wasn’t so bad, it wasn’t so long. (Hosseini, 2013) Someone should be very inattentive and hard-hearted to leave a ten year-old girl alone for two days.
Hosseini forwarded the idea on the concept of “family” and he was concerned not only by the relationships built on blood through living in the same place, but caring for each other also meant the features of a family. He started his work stating the story about Baba Ayub who lived with his family in the village Maidan Sabz. Narration in the novel – inter-text increases the level of emotionality of the work. Baba Ayub and his family were very happy until div (giant) came to their place. Maidan Sabz trembled and held its breath. Families prayed that the div would bypass their home for they knew that if the div tapped on their roof, they would have to give it one child. The div would then toss the child into a sack, sling the sack over its shoulder, and go back the way it had come. No one would ever seem the poor child again. And if a household refused, the div would take all of its children. (Hosseini, 2013)

The div came to the roof of Baba Ayub, neither he nor his wife could choose which child to give to the giant. Writing the names of their children on the rocks and taking one out of the sack was the way they could dare. It was their beloved youngest Qais. Baba Ayub deposited him outside the house and shut the door that the boy realized what was amiss, and there stood Baba Ayub, eyes squeezed shut, tears leaking from both, back against the door, as his beloved Qais pounded his small fists on it, crying for Baba to let him back in, and Baba Ayub stood there, muttering, “Forgive me, forgive me,” as the ground shook with the div’s footsteps, and his son screeched, and the earth trembled again and again as the div took its leave from Maidan Sabz, until at last it was gone, and the earth was still, and all was silence but for Baba Ayub, still weeping and asking Qais for forgiveness. (Hosseini, 2013)

What is good with this tale – at the end Baba Ayub finds his son and rejects to take Qais with him since in the div’s place he witnesses the sight of children running and playing happily in the garden. They chased one another through the walkways and around trees. They played games of hide-and-seek behind the hedges. Baba Ayub’s eyes searched among the children and at last found what he was looking for. There he was! His son Qais, alive, and more than well. He had grown in height, and his hair was longer than Baba Ayub remembered. He wore a beautiful white shirt over handsome trousers. He laughed happily as he ran after a pair of comrades. (Hosseini, 2013)

Saboor also sacrifices his daughter Pari like Baba Ayub wishing her best and keeping his other children from the cold winter. All people in the village forget about Pari but not his brother Abdullah. He suffers the whole life from remembering his sister and being unable to find her. The God cures him with Alzheimer. It was the best way to give freedom to the soul. Little Pari forgets everything, she does not know that she is an adopted daughter of the Wahdati. Although some kind of shadows in her memory appeared and tortured her. Aged Pari and Abdullah find each other when Abdulla forgets everything while Pari starts to recall something.

In “And the Mountains Echoed” the lines with the family perspective were written to describe the families living in different parts of the world as Afghanistan, Pakistan, France, Greece and America. In Hosseini’s novel a family is holy, realizing one is a great honor and being together with the closest people is a unique happiness. The conclusion of the writer is that you cannot choose your family members yet you can make them happy.

4. Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to identify the role of the perspectives including childhood, womanhood and family reunion formed in Afghanistan in the novels “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, “And the Mountains Echoed” by Khaled Hosseini. The detailed analysis of the texts of the novels, both at macro and micro levels proved that the three perspectives: childhood, womanhood and family reunion carry a significant role in the writer's literary career.
As the next step, similarities and differences or relationships among three novels by Hosseini must be explored to notice whether the three perspective features mentioned above can have the importance in all Hosseini’s novels. One of the issues that emerges from these findings is that Hosseini’s works can be characterized within historical perspective.

References

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/perspective