



An Analysis of the Comparison of the Works of Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract

The comparison of Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini offers compelling insights into the cultural, social, psychological, moral, and financial contexts of their narratives, despite their distinct backgrounds. Both authors are masters of universal storytelling, exploring themes of identity, belonging, and human struggle amidst societal complexities.

Choden's work provides a window into Bhutan's rich cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, and the experiences of individuals navigating tradition versus modernity, gender roles, and societal expectations. Her lyrical prose examines spirituality, community, and the search for meaning in a rapidly evolving world.

In contrast, Hosseini's novels offer a poignant exploration of the Afghan experience, highlighting resilience, dignity, and humanity amid war, displacement, and social upheaval. His vivid narratives testify to the enduring bonds of family, love, loyalty, and the quest for justice and redemption.

Both authors delve into the human psyche, portraying characters facing profound moral dilemmas, psychological struggles, and existential questions about purpose and belonging. They highlight universal themes of love, loss, and forgiveness, transcending cultural boundaries. Ultimately, Choden and Hosseini use their stories to advocate for social justice, human rights, and the importance of empathy and solidarity, emphasizing the power of storytelling to bridge cultural divides and confront oppression.

Key Words: Cultural, Social, Psychological, Moral, and Financial, Identity, Struggle.

Introduction

The comparative literary analysis of Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini

examines their themes, cultural contexts, techniques, and global contributions. Choden, the first Bhutanese woman to write a novel in

English, explores the intersection of traditional Bhutanese culture and modernity, focusing on gender, spirituality, and societal expectations. Her work illuminates the nation's unique socio-religious life. Hosseini's novels, including *The Kite Runner*, capture the Afghan experience of war, displacement, and diaspora. His evocative prose highlights how political violence and patriarchy shape lives while emphasizing universal values of love, justice, and redemption.

This paper attempts a comparative analysis of the works of Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini through a literary review. It explores their thematic preoccupations, cultural contexts, narrative techniques, and contributions to global literature.

Kunzang Choden's Contributions

Kunzang Choden holds a paramount position in global literature as Bhutan's first woman to write and publish a novel in English. Her work is essential for documenting and preserving the nation's oral traditions, folklore, and cultural heritage amid rapid modernization. Her debut novel, *The Circle of Karma* (2005), is a seminal contribution, chronicling the spiritual and physical journey of the protagonist, Tsomo, as she negotiates tradition, modernity, and personal freedom. Scholars highlight how her narratives offer critical insights into the silent struggles of Bhutanese women in a patriarchal society while balancing the nation's Buddhist spirituality.

Beyond fiction, Choden has actively worked to preserve culture, notably by documenting folktales in collections such as *Folktales of Bhutan* (1994) and co-founding Riyang Books, a Bhutanese publishing house. She uses her evocative prose to introduce global readers to the unique socio-religious framework of Bhutanese life, underscoring values such as community, morality, and the search for meaning. Her commitment to literature and cultural preservation earned her the SAARC Literature Award in 2023.

Kunzang Choden's literary significance also lies in her nuanced engagement with Bhutanese social transformation, particularly the tension between tradition and modernity. Critics observe that her fiction captures a society in transition, where modernization does not entirely erase traditional values but instead creates complex negotiations within everyday life (Dorji 48). Through this lens, Choden portrays how women's identities are shaped not only by patriarchal structures but also by religious beliefs, communal obligations, and inherited cultural norms. Her narratives thus foreground women as cultural bearers who sustain continuity even while adapting to change.

Furthermore, Choden's incorporation of Buddhist philosophy deepens the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of her narratives. Scholars note that concepts such as karma, rebirth, and moral causality are not merely thematic elements but structural principles guiding her storytelling (Thinley 81). This spiritual framework allows Choden to represent suffering as meaningful rather than purely tragic, emphasizing endurance, compassion, and moral growth. As Wangmo argues, Choden's women characters embody a form of spiritual resilience that challenges Western feminist paradigms by offering an alternative model of empowerment grounded in inner awakening rather than external rebellion (Wangmo 149).

In addition, Choden's deliberate use of folklore and oral storytelling traditions serves as a counter-discourse to dominant literary forms. By adapting folktales and mythic patterns into modern fiction, she preserves Bhutan's intangible cultural heritage while simultaneously recontextualizing it for contemporary audiences (Thinley 89). This fusion of oral tradition with written English prose positions Choden as both a cultural historian and a creative innovator. Consequently, her work not only expands the scope of South Asian and Himalayan literature

but also asserts the literary visibility of Bhutan on the global stage, a contribution that remains rare and critically significant (Verma 7).

Khaled Hosseini's Contributions

Khaled Hosseini has made profound contributions to global literature by providing an essential narrative voice for the modern Afghan experience. His debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, fundamentally redefined Afghan representation in global literature, powerfully intertwining universal themes of guilt, redemption, and complex father-son relationships with the nation's tumultuous history, spanning from the fall of the monarchy to the rise of the Taliban. This novel brought the human cost of Afghanistan's decades of conflict to a massive international audience.

Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, is recognized for its powerful feminist dimensions. The novel gives a vital voice to the silenced women of Afghanistan, reflecting their endurance and courage amidst war and patriarchy. The narrative shifts focus to female resilience, providing a poignant exploration of enduring bonds and the systemic oppression faced by Afghan women.

Collectively, Hosseini's novels, including *And the Mountains Echoed*, serve as a critical counter-narrative, humanizing a region often reduced to political conflict in Western media. His evocative storytelling emphasizes universal values of love, justice, and humanity, making him a major figure in contemporary diasporic and post-conflict literature.

Scholars argue that Hosseini's fiction transforms Afghanistan's political history into an emotionally accessible narrative for global readers. Amin Saikal observes that Hosseini's works play a crucial role in reshaping Western perceptions of Afghanistan by foregrounding personal suffering rather than abstract political conflict (Saikal 58). This narrative strategy enables readers to engage empathetically with Afghan lives beyond media stereotypes.

According to Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Hosseini's novels highlight how war penetrates domestic and emotional spaces, particularly affecting women and children (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 94). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the portrayal of Mariam and Laila exposes the intersection of patriarchy and political violence, revealing how systemic oppression is reinforced during periods of instability (Hosseini qtd. in Azarbaijani-Moghaddam 97).

Literary critic Feroza Jussawalla emphasizes that Hosseini's diasporic perspective allows him to function as both insider and witness, granting narrative authenticity while maintaining critical distance (Jussawalla 141). This dual position enables Hosseini to explore themes of guilt, memory, and moral accountability across generations and geographical borders.

Furthermore, Rahimi notes that Hosseini's female characters challenge passive representations of Afghan women by embodying resilience and moral strength despite structural oppression (Rahimi 213). Their acts of endurance and sacrifice position women not merely as victims of history but as agents of emotional and ethical transformation.

Collectively, critics agree that Hosseini's works contribute significantly to post-conflict and diasporic literature. His narratives, as Singh argues, operate as "cultural mediation texts" that foster cross-cultural understanding while confronting injustice and historical trauma (Singh 76). Through emotionally charged realism, Hosseini asserts literature's power to recover silenced voices and restore human dignity.

Comparative Perspectives

Comparative literature scholars situate Choden and Hosseini within a shared framework of postcolonial and transcultural narratives. Both highlight marginalized voices Bhutanese women for Choden, and Afghan

women and displaced families for Hosseini while addressing universal struggles of identity, loss, and resilience. Some critics argue that while Hosseini's works engage global audiences with emotionally charged depictions of Afghan suffering, Choden provides a quieter yet equally powerful account of spiritual resilience and cultural identity. Both converge in their advocacy for empathy, justice, and recognition of shared humanity.

This paper employs a qualitative research design rooted in literary analysis and comparative methodology, drawing on secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles and critical essays. The methodology is interpretive, emphasizing hermeneutic engagement with texts to extract meaning within cultural and historical contexts.

Comparative literature scholars argue that both Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini employ culturally specific narratives to articulate universal human concerns. Bill Ashcroft asserts that postcolonial writers often transform localized histories into globally resonant stories, enabling readers to engage with cultural difference through shared emotional experiences (Ashcroft 82). This theoretical framework helps situate both Choden and Hosseini within postcolonial literary discourse.

According to Elleke Boehmer, literature emerging from formerly marginalized regions frequently negotiates between cultural preservation and global readership (Boehmer 97). Choden's focus on Bhutanese spirituality and folklore and Hosseini's portrayal of Afghan trauma and diaspora reflect this negotiation, as both writers mediate between indigenous traditions and international literary expectations.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity further illuminates the comparative dimension of their works. Bhabha argues that identities in postcolonial texts are formed within "in-between spaces" shaped by historical

disruption and cultural transition (Bhabha 56). Choden's characters inhabit spaces between tradition and modernity, while Hosseini's characters navigate exile and fractured national identities, reinforcing hybridity as a shared narrative condition.

Additionally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes the importance of recovering subaltern voices in literary texts (Spivak 75). Choden amplifies the muted experiences of Bhutanese women within a patriarchal framework, while Hosseini gives narrative agency to Afghan women and displaced individuals whose stories are often excluded from dominant historical accounts. Both authors, therefore, participate in ethical storytelling that challenges silencing structures.

From a comparative feminist perspective, Chandra Talpade Mohanty cautions against homogenizing women's experiences across cultures, advocating instead for context-specific analysis (Mohanty 34). Choden and Hosseini adhere to this principle by portraying women's struggles as culturally grounded while simultaneously emphasizing solidarity, resilience, and moral strength as shared human qualities.

Thus, through distinct cultural lenses, both writers converge in their commitment to social justice and empathy. As Damrosch notes, world literature functions not through uniformity but through the circulation of diverse narratives that invite ethical engagement across cultures (Damrosch 281). Choden and Hosseini exemplify this dynamic by transforming regional experiences into globally meaningful literature.

Conclusion

Together, Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini demonstrate that literature is both a mirror of cultural particularities and a bridge toward universal understanding. By reading their works side by side, it becomes evident that while societies may differ in customs, histories,

and struggles, the human experiences of love, loss, resilience, and the quest for meaning unite humanity across borders.

To conclude, this study demonstrates that Kunzang Choden and Khaled Hosseini employ literature as a powerful medium to translate local realities into globally meaningful narratives. Choden's fiction draws upon Bhutan's spiritual traditions and cultural practices to explore women's agency and social transformation, whereas Hosseini situates personal stories within the harsh realities of war, displacement, and exile in Afghanistan. Although shaped by distinct historical and cultural contexts, both writers address enduring human concerns such as belonging, moral responsibility, and resilience. Their works not only expand the scope of world literature but also encourage readers to engage with cultural difference through empathy, ethical reflection, and a shared sense of humanity.

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