



## **Mapping Guilt, Trauma and Displacement in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to delve deep into the diasporic themes and the ideas of past, trauma and memory, that are explored through the characters of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. This novel employs a unique approach in its treatment of trauma in the diasporic existence, as the trauma is not restricted to the new country; rather the traumatic experiences in one's home country leaves a deep impression in the psyche of the characters. Hosseini essentially positions the narrative as a story of two friends to portray the tragic history of war-ravaged, broken and plundered country—Afghanistan. The idea of 'past' is always fragmented and seldom exists as a whole; it is scattered throughout the tale, in the form of shards of memories, symbols and images. Similarly, the idea of 'home' remains a fragmented unit. The trauma of displacement that is a key element of Hosseini's story, that stems from the attempt to escape a war-torn homeland in a state of turmoil that is facing an acute humanitarian crisis, is augmented by the migration and the ensuing quest for identity in the country that the characters migrate to—US. This is an attempt to trace the ways and forms in which the trauma manifests in the different characters from different generations during varied stages of their life. In this novel, the author's empathy and familiarity with the people uprooted due to socio-political conflicts is evident. This article is a closer look at the plight of the marginalized communities in the novel and the same time, a study of the human bonds and relationships presented in the narrative. Moreover, in the world we inhabit, there is an intensifying refugee/migrant crisis and mass displacement across geographical boundaries is at an all-time high, the themes explored by Hosseini become a potent ground to examine and comprehend our current reality and the very idea of geographical boundaries.

**Keywords:** trauma, displacement, diaspora, migration, post-traumatic stress disorder, violence.



It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

—Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*<sup>i</sup>

The sense of uprootedness and displacement that Rushdie talks about in the essay quoted above serves as a source of tracing the past, memory, alienation, and a possibility of returning to the point of origin. This paper seeks to delve deeper into the diasporic themes and the ideas of past, trauma and memory, and the hurdles faced by refugees, explored through the characters of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

### **Refugees in exile: Mapping the turbulent history of Afghanistan**

The novel contains a plethora of autobiographical elements. The depiction of Hosseini's personages seems to mirror the trajectory of his own life. Much like Amir, Hosseini's family also migrated to America. The most striking similarity lies in Amir's responsibility to write about their country and their nation.

This novel encompasses three different timelines: pre-war, war-torn and post-war Afghanistan, spanning across decades. The writer attempts to fill in the gaps in the country's history by narrating the events of his novel. The entanglement of the past and the present is a pervasive theme in the novel, where the author merges the historical events with the private lives of the characters. The novel is set against the backdrop of a period of turbulent history of Afghanistan. It begins with the downfall of the monarchy, the Soviets invading the country and towards the end we see the rise of the Taliban regime. Critics have identified that the author seems to posit America as the alternative. Amir, Baba, and others who had the financial capacity and means, chose to escape Afghanistan, leaving their life and belongings behind, in a war-torn country that was undergoing violent political upheaval. They manage to rebuild their lives and lead a relatively stable and violence-free life in America. At the end of the story, Sohrab can show signs of recovery after sustaining horrific violence and torture and breathe freely when Amir takes him to America. They are able to fly a kite, an activity that is banned by Taliban in Afghanistan. This act of kite flying that was associated with the rape of Hassan, an incident



that is at the epicenter of the story, later becomes an act that embodies freedom and redemption towards the end of the novel.

At its core, *The Kite Runner* is the story of Amir as we witness his constant struggle to find his place in the world as a consequence of encountering traumatic events during his childhood. The novel opens with an adult Amir, in the present-day United States and then the novel flashes back and revisits Amir's childhood in Afghanistan. We also see Amir grappling with forming a closer bond with his father as he navigates his relationship with the people he is surrounded by, like his servant Hassan. Apart from coping up with the issues that affect his personal life, Amir must also live through the ramifications of the instability of the political system of Afghanistan in the 1970s. Due to the turbulent and volatile political climate of Afghanistan, Amir and his father are forced to leave Afghanistan behind, and Amir views this as an opportunity to let go of his past and begin with a clean slate. In this portion of the novel, we see Amir and Baba toiling away in order to create a new life for themselves in the United States, but soon it becomes amply clear that the past does not remain buried. Living the life of refugees is no easy feat.

As cited in the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>ii</sup>,

According to Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 Convention the term "refugee" shall apply to any person who:

"As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Hannah Arendt<sup>iii</sup>, tries to redefine the notion of a refugee, and suggest the usage of alternatives like 'newcomers' or 'immigrants' while commenting on the constantly evolving connotations of the word.

The historical background of the story depicts the process of formation of a refugee and their struggles and tribulations, as they live their day-to-day lives in different corners of the world. A passage in the novel sums up the condition of the refugees being displaced quite poignantly,

You open your mouth. Open it so wide your jaws creak. You order your lungs to draw air, NOW, you need air, need it NOW. But your airways ignore you. They collapse, tighten, squeeze, and suddenly you're breathing



through a drinking straw. Your mouth closes and your lips purse and all you can manage is a strangled croak. Your hands wriggle and shake. Somewhere a dam has cracked open and a flood of cold sweat spills, drenches your body. You want to scream. You would if you could. But you have to breathe to scream. Panic. <sup>iv</sup>

Derrida discusses the reasons for people to seek asylum and forced migration to a new place, due to emerging threats or imminent danger, owing to external or internal factors. As he formulates,

Whenever the state is neither the foremost guaranter against the violence which forces refugees to exile or flee, it is often powerless to ensure the protection and liberty of its citizens before a terrorist menace. Whether or not, it has a religious or nationalist alibi. <sup>v</sup>

The arrival of an adult Amir after a long time of exile in the US back ‘home’. He experiences a sublime feeling when he reaches Afghanistan, the country he spent his childhood in. <sup>vi</sup>

Hanna Arendt<sup>vii</sup> demonstrates the issue of ‘stateless people’. Even in the novel, we see the attitude that the nation state holds towards stateless people. Amir is trying to adopt Sohrab to save him from a horrid life in Afghanistan, but the nation-state has a lack of a general law that would enable him to be protected by his uncle, as several commentators have pointed out. Nation states asking for legal documents is hardly practical. When one’s life and safety are under imminent danger or threat, legality is hardly a priority. The complications in the adoption process leaves the homeless orphans in an extremely vulnerable position. Granting basic human rights to the refugees is more important and should be the foremost priority.

### **Mapping the Themes of Trauma, Displacement and Diaspora in *The Kite Runner***

In its most general definition trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.

— Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*<sup>viii</sup>



*The Kite Runner* has a rich, layered, and a heart-wrenching narrative that moves its audience through its profound exploration of the trauma of its characters on multifarious levels. In the different timelines that the novel encompasses the post-traumatic stress disorder and because of the cataclysmic event. Most crucial are the explorations of trauma in the characters of Hassan and his son Sohrab. From the beginning of this narrative, it is evident that Amir is haunted by the memory of a traumatic event that he witnessed in his childhood, an event that is not disclosed in the initial part of the story.

The novel encapsulates tender humane emotions such as loyalty, love, penance, and compassion. The familial bonds become fragmented and undergo tensions due to the social-political conflicts that haunt the lives of the characters. To bring the reader's attention to the Afghanistan before the tensions distorted and mutilated the fragment of their society, Hosseini chooses to talk about the cultural richness and identity. However, it is not an idealistic portrayal. He also portrays intricacies of the interpersonal conflicts and the trauma that preceded the war. Hosseini is able to disrupt the Western conception of Afghanistan as merely associated with 'opium trade', Soviet war and the Taliban regime, by presenting a harmonious society that existed before all of that. Jeffrey Charles Alexander traces a connection between trauma and society<sup>ix</sup>, wherein he discusses the concept of 'cultural trauma'<sup>x</sup> and its effects on collective consciousness of a community. As he states, 'It is by constructing Cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering.' This notion of cultural trauma is reflected in the people of Afghanistan as they suffer as a collective, through the external and internal displacement caused by migration that resulted from war and political instability.

The trauma of displacement is narrated in an evocative manner in the novel in the episode where Amir and Baba are forced to flee from Afghanistan in the back of a truck, surrounded by countless other people and families, all forced to uproot their lives and relocate to a foreign land. The migrated communities face the trauma in their quest for identity and culture, as they struggle to rebuild their lives, away from home. The distress experienced by Amir in a new land represents the distress and suffering of the community. Amir seems to find some comfort and reconciliation with his identity after he marries Soraya, the daughter of General Taheri, the Afghan general. The author has also mentioned in an interview that Amir embodies the Afghan diaspora. He says that Amir represents 'Nostalgia and longing for homeland'. He marries an



Afghan woman and participates actively in the Afghan community that existed in East Bay California. He encapsulates the fusion of his identity as a member of Afghan as well as American cultures as he continues to search for the idea of a 'home', away from his homeland.<sup>xi</sup>

The migrated people carry within themselves a hope to reconstruct the native land and pick up the fragments left behind. This tendency is also seen in General Taheri constantly holds out hope for his native country to return to its former glory, and the conflict to be resolved, and their eventual return to their native country. He encourages his daughter to choose a profession of a doctor or a lawyer, as they would need them when they return 'home'.<sup>xii</sup>

In this story the main characters Amir and Hassan, belong to the Pashtun and Hazara tribes respectively. Afghanistan is an ethnically and linguistically diverse. It has undergone geopolitical conflict and invasions. According to analysis of the population data, Pashtuns make up the largest ethnic population, followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, Aimaq, Baluch, among other smaller groups. It is an Islamic country, where approximately eighty per cent of the population is Sunni, and others are Shi'a, predominantly from the Hazara community. The author has delved deeper into the conflicts between the two communities in the story. The people from the Hazara community are shown to be of lower social status<sup>xiii</sup>. The Pashtuns, on the other hand, are shown to be of higher social status and class, honourable and have a good appearance and are successful in their professions. Hassan has a harelip and Ali has polio on his leg. While Baba is described as a 'towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard'. Thus, one gets to see the stark contrast through Amir's gaze. In the novel, Amir lives in a massive mansion while Hassan lives in a mud shack. He describes Hassan's mother as 'beautiful but notoriously unscrupulous woman who lived up to her dishonourable reputation', while Amir portrays his own mother as a 'highly educated woman universally regarded as one of the most respected, beautiful and virtuous ladies'. Moreover, the Hazaras are illiterate, and cannot read books, because they have no money. So, they are fated to live like this, the minute they are born. From this description they are stereotypes to be 'poor and illiterate'. The title of the novel refers to Hasaan, who is a kite runner for Amir. Hassan is given epithets like 'flat-nose', 'A loyal Hazara, Loyal as a dog', and always treated as inferior by those around him. Even Amir who harbours affection for his childhood playmate is affected by the hatred around him. He even goes on to say,

Never mind any of those things. Because history isn't easy to overcome.



Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing.

Thus, due to societal conditioning and rigid hierarchies, religious and ethnic differences become the focal point. Even though they fed from the same breast as babies and were childhood companions, their differences prevail in Amir's mind.

Later in the story Amir discovers that Hassan is actually his half- brother, and Baba had kept this secret from him all his life. But by then, Baba had already been dead for fifteen years, so his feelings of guilt are inadequate to alleviate Amir's psychological burden. It is only when he decides to rescue Sohrab (Hassan's son) from the deplorable conditions and brings him to America, that there is hope of redemption and atonement for Amir. This is poetic justice at its best. Sohrab is saved from a life of misery and pain, and granted a hope for happiness and prosperity, that were not granted to his father Hassan, who was at some moments limited to being just a 'Hazara servant'<sup>xiv</sup>.

This novel is different in its treatment of trauma in the diasporic existence, as the trauma suffered back home is as taxing, if not more than, the trauma suffered in the new country. Hosseini posits it as a story of two friends and utilizes the trajectory of their lives and relationships to portray the tragic history of war-ravaged, broken and plundered Afghanistan. The narrative captures the lives of three generations with events spanning between 1933 and 2002. The past is always fragmented and is never presented to the reader as a whole, instead it is scattered as fragments of memories, symbols and images. The idea of 'home' is also a fragmented entity in the mind of the protagonist. As Amir describes, '...looking down on San Francisco, the city I now call home.' This statement encapsulates the diasporic existence and marginal identity of the displaced. Even though Amir had resided in San Francisco for a while, he still states 'the city I now call home'.

Amir had always grappled with his relationship with his father and always felt like a disappointment to him. Winning the kite flying event was his hope to win Baba's affection. Amir manages to win the competition and is elated to see his father's pride. Hassan ran to fetch the last kite, screaming 'For you a thousand times over', a sentence that carries deep meaning and significance, the final time it is uttered by Amir. Hassan on his way to fetch the kite, encounters Assef, the bully and his allies. He refuses to surrender the kite due to his loyalty he



harbours towards his master. Amir witnesses their entire exchange and does not intervene. He thought to himself,

Nothing was free in this world. Maybe  
Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was  
it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could  
thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?

He manages to win over Baba's affection but loses his childhood friend forever. There can be parallels drawn between Amir's bond with Hassan and his bond with his native country. His act of seeing Hassan as the sacrificial lamb, is parallel to his separation from Afghanistan later in the novel. Amir's silence when he witnessed Hassan's dire fate, and his severing of ties with his friend becomes symbolic of severing his ties with his homeland, an act that would continue to haunt his memories and existence much like the ghost in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'.

In an interview, Hosseini states,

I think that's more of a question for the reader. It's possible to look at the scene in various different ways. To some, the scene is reminiscent for what happened to Afghanistan when the Soviets left, and you substitute Afghanistan for Hassan (the Hazara servant boy). For 10 years the world watched what was happening as Afghanistan was being brutalized, and the world kind of stood around.<sup>xv</sup>

Thus, Hassan is seen as the face of Afghanistan, and the parallels seem to be a potent track to explore the nuances of the narrative. Thus, this incident in the alley is that this can be seen as the point where Amir becomes a true representative of his Pashtun clan<sup>xvi</sup>, Amir is complicit with the aggressor in some ways. The societal dynamics between the aggressor and the victim is highlighted by the choice of one child the 'lamb'. While Amir describes the look in Hassan's eyes, while he was physically assaulted by Assef, he describes him as a 'lamb'.

This event also marks the end of the innocence and childhood of the characters as well as the end of the peaceful days of Afghanistan. In 1978, Daoud Khan was executed by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of the country followed soon after and thus begin the days of conflict and turmoil in the nation. The narrator provides us with a snippet of history as he describes the situation,

You couldn't trust anyone in Kabul anymore—for a fee or under threat,  
people told on each other, neighbor on neighbor, child on parent, brother on  
brother, servant on master, friend on friend.<sup>xvii</sup>





The peaceful days of Afghanistan become a distant reality and constant violence and mistrust that creeps into their daily lives, seem to be a never-ending nightmare. People are forced to migrate to other countries like Iran and Pakistan, leaving behind the war and perpetual deaths. Baba and Amir's migration to Peshawar marks the termination of the first part of the novel. They are uprooted and are forced to contain their entire lives into two suitcases.<sup>xviii</sup> In postcolonial studies, the term 'cultural crisis' is often utilized to refer to an event that affects the individual and the society as a whole. In a globalized world, the notions of migration and fluidity challenges concepts such as borders and boundaries. Bill Ashcroft<sup>xix</sup> has investigated the idea of identity crisis that accompanies displacement and the essential role of the 'relationship between self and place'. This one of the seminal ideas reflected in the character of Amir in this novel.

In the next portion of the novel that takes place in California, accentuates the challenges faced by the diasporic population. In this context and keeping the semi-autobiographical strain of the novel in mind, it is pertinent to quote Hosseini from an interview with Vik Jolly<sup>xx</sup>,

When asked about his inspiration behind writing this book, he says,

The act of novel writing, especially the first novel, is very difficult without dipping into the pools – emotions, experiences, memories and observations – that make up the writer. The protagonist (Amir) and myself had similar upbringings: We grew up in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood, both influenced by Western culture, both precocious writers.

As Pramod K. Nayar<sup>xxi</sup> points out, the writers mapping the diasporic experience are inevitably drawing inspiration from their own life experiences, a statement that holds true for the author as well, who much like his protagonist, Amir, migrated to America with his family.

The guilt in Amir is much akin to the guilt experienced by the diasporic subject in the adopted homeland, physically and metaphorically miles away from 'home'. In reality the subject never drifts far away from the homeland. Instead, the sense of longing for the familiarity of home, and guilt builds up and intensifies further. Amir captures this dichotomy quite aptly in a single line, 'For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his.' In the novel there are two parallel realities that move simultaneously, the first in the 'host' country where the protagonist resides and second the 'home' country, where the time runs ahead albeit in the past. Hosseini has captured the trauma of displacement through Baba and Amir's stream of consciousness as they live in a liminal space, suspended between their present and their respective burdens and guilt that their pasts embody. The wish to escape the war-torn homeland



in a state of turmoil leads to the trauma of displacement and migration and the resultant quest for identity in the migrated country augments this trauma.

After Baba's death Amir sums up Baba's essence as a man who never gave up the memories of his past and died on his own terms.<sup>xxii</sup> Baba struggles to build a new life for Amir by working at the gas station and by selling junk. He feels uprooted and is shocked at the grocery store when he writes a check, when it dawns upon him that the community that he was a respectable member of, was left back 'home'. While Amir had spent his years in America rebuilding a new life with Baba, back 'home' In Afghanistan, Taliban had taken over and banned kite flying and were massacring Hazaras, as Rahim Khan informed Amir. We get a picture of Afghanistan in the letters<sup>xxiii</sup> that Hassan had written to Amir in which Hassan writes about the state of Afghanistan after Amir and Baba moved away.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Hassan and his wife are murdered by Taliban. Rahim Khan asks Amir to save Sohrab. Amir, who hadn't saved Hassan, later goes on to save his son Sohrab. It is later revealed that Hassan was Amir's half-brother and Sohrab his nephew. Upon Rahim Khan's persuasion Amir travels to Kabul to save his nephew Sohrab. This travel reveals a fragmented and ravaged country. Amir even goes to his old house and the sense of kinship and the memories he is flooded with in his home country are indicative of the beginning of a long process of healing and reconciliation. Facing his country is facing his past, facing Hassan and his son Sohrab. Upon enquiring in an orphanage, he finds out that Sohrab had been taken away by Taliban members had taken Sohrab away. Amir meets with them and discovers Sohrab dressed as a girl. He endures physical danger<sup>xxv</sup> and even imminent assault in order to rescue his nephew. But he is saved by Sohrab's slingshot. Amir then takes Sohrab to Peshawar. Sohrab tells Amir that he misses his family but did not wish to see them. When Amir asks him the reason Sohrab says,

“Because—” he said, gasping and hitching between sobs, “because I don't want them to see me...I'm so dirty.” He sucked in his breath and let it out in a long, wheezy cry. “I'm so dirty and full of sin.”

These gut-wrenching words out of a child's mouth are indicative of the deep physical and psychological wounds that Sohrab endured as an orphan at the hands of Taliban officials like Assef. Unlike the time when Amir left Afghanistan with Baba, and when he witnessed Amir raping Hassan, this time he is ready to face the situation in Afghanistan face-to-face, even if that meant putting his own life and safety at risk. Later, as part of the formalities, Amir asks



Sohrab to stay in the orphanage a little longer, so Amir can figure things out and make necessary arrangements. But scarred by the atrocities he had faced and feeling betrayed by his saviour and attempts to commit suicide. Sohrab survives but loses his ability to speak. Finally, Amir is able to take Sohrab to America where he and Soraya love him like a son, but he was still broken.

Caruth has stated<sup>xxvi</sup> that PTSD<sup>xxvii</sup> can be observed by the change in social participation, day to day activities, emotional health, education, work and leisure activities, etc, as pointed out by Sharfudden M.<sup>xxviii</sup>. This can be observed in Amir, as he stops playing with his friends, stops interacting with those around him, and buries himself in his schoolwork in order to avoid coming face to face with Hassan. Even Hassan retreats into his own and stop talking and avoids company, just doing his duties everyday for Amir and disappearing. Amir suffers from a loss of appetite, suffocation, headaches and insomnia. It is evident in his own words ‘I closed my eyes, turned my face to the sun... They twisted, merged formed a single image: Hassan’s brown corduroy pants discarded on a pile of old bricks in the alley’. Amir’s guilt completely occupied his mind and he began picturing himself as a ‘monster’.

Hassan’s rape in the alley is presented from the perspective of Amir, but the narrative also succeeds in portraying the trauma that Hassan underwent in the alley and the indelible scar it left on his psyche. After the incident, Hassan is shown as spending most of his days sleeping, as if to evade reliving the pain and trauma over and over. He finished his chores mechanically and had become like a spectre, an absentia presence. He becomes physically weaker as the story demonstrates, ‘Hassan looked tired too—he’d lost weight and gray circles had formed under his puffed-up eyes.’

Even after Sohrab is rescued things look pretty bleak. From his worldview the world around him was destroyed and his home, terror and atrocities committed by the people in power engulf the surroundings and the people. Amir had forgotten to laugh since the incident in the alley. He starts laughing only when his body is in immense physical pain and torture by Assef. He describes it as,

I don’t know at what point I started laughing, but I did. It hurt to laugh, hurt my jaws, my ribs, my throat. But I was laughing and laughing. And the harder I laughed, the harder he kicked me, punched me, scratched me.



He rediscovers his faith, his belief his own goodness when he faces intense physical pain, while rescuing Sohrab from the clutches of Assef and the other Taliban officials. His laughter can be interpreted as cathartic, as an outlet for years of guilt and pain his inaction many years ago had caused him to carry within. The author manages to contain the complexities and helplessness of his characters when haunted by the memories of abuse endured/witnessed in their childhood.

Hosseini, while offering a socio-political portrait of Afghanistan, manages to objectively highlight the social evils back 'home'. One such aspect that he puts under the spotlight is the sexual abuse of teenage Afghan voice, as is shown in the story of Sohrab, Hassan's son. During the war, young boys become vulnerable to exploitation and unaccompanied/orphaned children like Sohrab were trafficked. This aspect has been explored by critics such as Simone Borlie.<sup>xxix</sup> 'Bacha bazi' is a cultural practice that is prevalent in Afghan society that leads to young boys being exploited by men for social and sexual pleasure. As the people of the orphanage tell Amir, they are forced to comply with the orders of people like Assef who take these boys, under threats of violence and harm to the other children. As pointed out by Pallavi Thakur<sup>xxx</sup>, adult men and their acquaintances keep these young boys for their physical and sexual entertainment and to dance at parties and weddings. Abusive perpetrators like Assef and his companions sustain this vicious cycle, as is demonstrated in the novel. Children like Sohrab are doubly marginalized, for being an orphaned young boy and for being a member of the 'rival ethnic community' (Hazaras in this novel). Assef's perverted ideology and Nazi-worshipping tendencies drove him to sexually exploit Hazara children like Hassan and then Sohrab. He is very transparent about his desire to cleanse Afghanistan of ethnic minorities like the Hazaras, as he proclaims,

Like pride in your people, your customs, your language. Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage.

Due to the vicious nexus of powerlessness and poverty, children become 'commodities' and victims of mistreatment and abuse, both physical and psychological.

A quote from Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*<sup>xxxi</sup>, sums up the essence of Hosseini's novel with flair. She states 'Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order for the healing of individual victims'. In this bildungsroman, we see the author using child characters as a mouthpiece to juxtapose the individual trauma with that of an entire community and nation. Hosseini maps



the trauma of alienation and displacement faced not only in a foreign land but also at one's 'home' as the cycles of communal conflicts, violence and injustice meted out to people on their own land due to geo-political instability and regime changes. The trauma and guilt one suffers at home are not bound by geography, one carries everything within, to one's new 'home'. Despite the unlimited theories and discussions on the subject, the situations of the refugees seeking shelter is far from ideal and total inclusion is still a far-fetched concept. The world at large has failed to address and work on the mounting refugee crisis. Additionally, the story, through its portrayal of Hassan (a Hazara boy) brings the plight of the Hazara community into the spotlight and shows how some communities are excluded from human rights in their own country and are living like refugees. In a Foreword to the tenth anniversary edition<sup>xxxii</sup> of *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini describes feeling satisfied that his novel 'helped make Afghanistan a real place' for readers. Thus, the novel is pertinent in initiating a dialogue about the socio-political conditions of Afghanistan and demonstrates the act of mapping history through the art of storytelling.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (New York: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books).

<sup>ii</sup> (<https://www.unhcr.org/4d93528a9.pdf>)

<sup>iii</sup> in her article titled 'We refugees' in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on exile*, edited by Marc Robinson (Faber, 1994).

<sup>iv</sup> Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).

<sup>v</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Cosmopolitans and Forgiveness*. Trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (Routledge, 2000).

<sup>vi</sup> 'The ground was cool under my bare feet and suddenly, for the first time since we had crossed the border, I felt like I was back. After all these years, I was home again, standing on the soil of my ancestors. This was the soil on which my great-grandfather had married his third wife a year before dying in the cholera epidemic that hit Kabul in 1915. She'd borne him what his first two wives had failed to, a son at last. It was on this soil that my grandfather had gone on a hunting trip with King Nadir Shah and shot a deer. My mother had died on this soil. And on this soil, I had fought for my father's love.' In Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).



- vii in Arendt, Hanna. "The Decline of Nation-State and the End of Rights of Man." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt Brace, 1973.)
- viii Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- ix Alexander, Jeffrey C., *Trauma: A Social Theory* (John Wiley and Sons, 2013).
- x A traumatic event that alters the minds and the identity of the victims.
- xi Rachel Blumenthal, "LOOKING FOR HOME IN THE ISLAMIC DIASPORA OF AYAAN HIRSI ALI, AZAR NAFISI, AND KHALED HOSSEINI", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 250-264 (15 pages), Stable URL-(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858711>)
- xii Hosseini's novels also offers a potent ground for the study of the lives of Afghan women and the family and cultural values that they embody as seen in Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where characters like Laila, Mariam and Tariq carry their cultural trauma within.
- xiii these people are seen engaged in jobs that are accorded a lower social status.
- xiv Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).
- xv Khaled Hosseini, Interview by Vik Jolly. 'The Kite Runner novel moves the world.' (The Orange County Register. Wednesday, February 22 2006) Web- <https://www.ocregister.com/2006/02/22/the-kite-runner-novel-moves-the-world/>
- xvi meting out atrocities on the members of the minority Hazara clan.
- xvii In Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).
- xviii As Amir puts it, 'My eyes returned to our suitcases. They made me sad for Baba. After everything he'd built, planned, fought for, fretted over, dreamed of, this was the summation of his life: one disappointing son and two suitcases.' This is along similar lines to what Salman Rushdie proclaims in *Shame*,  
'It is the emptiness of one's luggage. I'm speaking of invisible suitcases, not the physical, perhaps cardboard, variety containing a few meaning-drained mementoes: we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time.' In Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).
- xix Bill Ashcroft, *Postcolonial Transformation*, London: Routledge, 2001.
- xx Khaled Hosseini, Interview by Vik Jolly. 'The Kite Runner novel moves the world.' (The Orange County Register. Wednesday, February 22 2006) Web- <https://www.ocregister.com/2006/02/22/the-kite-runner-novel-moves-the-world/>.
- xxi Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersly Pvt Ltd., 2008).
- xxii 'As words from the Koran reverberated through the room, I thought of the old story of Baba wrestling a black bear in Baluchistan. Baba had wrestled bears his whole life. Losing his young wife. Raising a son by himself. Leaving his beloved homeland, his watan. Poverty. Indignity. In the end, a bear had come that he couldn't best. But even then, he had lost on his own terms.' In Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).
- xxiii That Amir had received posthumously
- xxiv 'Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killings. Always the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, it is a part of our lives here, Amir agha. The savages who rule our watan don't care about human decency... Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly... The streets are full enough already of hungry orphans...' in Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead Books, New York, 2003).
- xxv Discussed in detail towards the latter half of this paper.
- xxvi in 'Trauma: Exploration in Memory' (1995) and 'Unclaimed Experience' (1996)
- xxvii post-traumatic stress disorder
- xxviii In *Flying Free: 'The Kite Runner' As A Trauma Narrative*, *Literary Endeavour*, Vol. XI, Issue 4 (October 2020).
- xxix Borile, Simone. (2019). *Bacha Bazi: cultural norms and violence against poor children in Afghanistan*. and Jane E. Thorson
- xxx Pallavi Thakur, "Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: Unveiling the Trauma of Adolescent Boys Trapped in Afghanistan's Culturally Legitimised Paedophilia-'Bacha Bazi'", *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (2020): 1-10.



<sup>xxx</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. (1997), *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence—From Domestic abuse to political abuse to political terror*, (New York: Basic Books).

<sup>xxxii</sup> Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*: Tenth anniversary edition. (Bloomsbury Press; 1st edition, January 2013).

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