



# Representation of Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner

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Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is famous for its devastating and painfully honest depiction of identity, betrayal, deception and atonement. It records the miserable impact of harsh social realities faced by the characters, especially the protagonist Amir. The author conveys a profound description of a story on the background of a splendid culture of the Afghan land, the land which was tortured by wars and poverty, family alienation betrayal, coup, foreign invasion and Taliban ruling. Hosseini provides reader a window to understand Afghan history and culture as well as the impact of trauma on individual life. Amir's personal trauma from sin to self – salvation depicts him both as a victim and a sinner. Hosseini successfully exposes the collective trauma witnessed by the entire society brought by war and the trauma suffered by the Hazaras. This paper focuses and analyses the trauma in personal circumstances through the lives of the main characters in the novel, the trauma of fear and loss of citizen's right under Taliban and the violation of basic human right and the immense trauma generated through war in the minds of the people

Keywords: Trauma, Betrayal, redemption, deception, atonement.

## Representation of Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

In Trauma Theory there is a blend of memories, introspection, retrospection and flashbacks which are usually coloured by pain, wound and trauma. Also, there is this damage to the psyche occurred as a result of severe mental and physical distress. Literature substantiates that trauma is often evidence of forms of domination and misuse of human power, and through its narration, a fiction can make the readers understand the divisions within individuals on how they exist inside and outside their traumas. Cathy Caruth, the famous trauma theorist analysis and set the tone for the critical debate regarding traumas significance in literature and relation between individual and cultural trauma.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan born American writer is perhaps the first English novelist to voice the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan. His debut novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) tells a touching story about boyhood friendship destroyed by jealousy, fear, social evils and war. This bildungsroman novel tells the story of Amir's transition from childhood to adulthood. Amir's quest to redeem himself makes up the heart of the novel. The novel explores the strange bond that the protagonist Amir keeps with his servant friend Hassan. It was a bond that was built on jealousy, superiority feeling and friendship. Amir's sin and remorse and his eventual redemption becomes the crux of the novel. It also throws light on the plight of Afghan people caused by recurrent war, racial discrimination, poverty and so on.

Under the framework of Trauma Theory and through close reading of the novel, the present study seeks to explore the collective trauma of the people of Afghan brought by war, the collective trauma suffered by the ethnic group Hazaras, which is clearly portrayed through its representative Hassan and most significantly the individual trauma experienced by the protagonist Amir, who has been portrayed both as a victim and a sinner.

The story opens in 2001, where the protagonist Amir, now a successful author is living in San Francisco, America. He receives a phone call from his father's friend Rahim Khan, who shares his desire to meet Amir and he tells Amir he knows of "a way to be good again". Here starts the technique of flashback. The phone call brings back memories of 1975, when Amir was just twelve. His memories goes down twenty-six years in the alley of Afghanistan, where he used to fly kites with his friend Hassan

The Pashtun boy Amir and the Hazara boy Hassan were raised together in Kabul. Through these memories we came to analyse the relationship which Amir and Hassan used to have. Hassan being a Hazara boy was always loyal and good natured. His quality of forgiveness and how he stood as a pillar of strength and support for Amir and his family throughout his life is a trademark of his character. On the other hand we can see a series of multiple shades in the attitude of Amir towards Hassan

The friendship between the two grew when they played together, while doing adventures and exploring their surroundings. They enjoyed each other's company. Amir even embarked their names in a pomegranate tree as a token of their friendship. This friendship somehow turned into jealousy mainly because of Amir's insecurity towards his father and the over attachment and concern which Baba shows on Hassan. Amir has a privileged upbringing, being the representative of Pashtun community and the son of a wealthy merchant. The only thing which he felt lacking is his father's love and affection. Baba always finds Amir weak and even discourages his liking towards writing. According to Baba it's a female thing. Baba always tries to satisfy Hassan by giving the same thing which he buys for Amir. He even pays for Hassan's cleft lip surgically operated. It could be said that it is this hidden jealousy which paved way to his betrayal towards Hassan.

The plight and Trauma which the Hazaras has to face is clearly mentioned throughout the novel. The Hazaras were deprived of education and they were even not allowed to do any business of their own. They were constantly tormented by the majority group Pashtun. They have to work as the servants of Pashtuns, the same thing which Hassan and his father Ali is doing for Amir's family. Even the Afghan education system perpetuate this discrimination. They are least concerned of including the history of Hazara ethnic group in the syllabus. We know it from the words of Amir, that "In school, Hazaras are least mentioned"

Amir recalls how he has heard even the young neighbourhood kids hurling insults at Hassan, calling him "flat nosed" and "a load carrying donkey". We can see Amir too has his Pashtun ideas of considering superior to the Hazaras. Despite the days and nights the two boys played together, despite the several adventures and explorations they have executed, Amir never thought or mentioned Hassan as his friend. For him Hassan was more of a playmate. Amir eventually develops this feeling of superiority

considering the relation Baba keeps with Ali . Baba can be seen telling about his childhood with Ali and how they used to play together .But Baba nevertheless mentioned Ali as his good friend.

The discrimination towards Hazaras turned in its most ugly face through the misdeed done by the Pashtun boy Assef towards Hassan. Assef, wanted to beat up Amir , for his friendship with Hassan, because he thought all the Hazaras should be eliminated from the country. The feeling of superiority so inculcated in his psyche that it finally developed into hate. In his mind Hassan and Hazaras are worthless and must be taught a lesson. So he persists and rapes Hassan, an incident which shattered the minds of Hassan and Amir .

The Hazaras are portrayed as showing their acceptance as inferior to the Pashtuns. When Amir and Baba escaped to Pakistan and then to California following the soviet union military intervention in Afghanistan, the house was left to Rahim khan. Hassan and his wife continued to be the caretaker of the house. Though Rahim permitted their entry in the house, Hassan preferred to stay in the backyard small house, where he used to grew up. Hassan and his wife were massacred by the Taliban , as they protested against the confiscation of the mansion by the troop . Hassan remained as a loyal servant till his last breath. Hassan is just one such example of the direct persecution Hazaras face. He is the representative of the class as a whole.

The events which led to the Rape of Hassan and its traumatic impressions in the young lives of Hassan and Amir marked the severity of the novel. Hassan soon collapses into depression and grows detached from his immediate surroundings . Amir suffers from the impact of shame and guilt finds way to distant himself from Hassan. Amir's mental trauma begins in the point when he failed to help Hassan from the clutches of Assef and tried to hide it from others. Being a coward by nature and the long yearning of getting the attention and applaud from his father made him betray Hassan. The weight of sin and regret haunted Amir so much so that he began to distant himself from Hassan and eventually framed Hassan for stealing his money and watch. , by keeping them under his pillow.

Amir's shame and guilt follows him after his escape to America also. This sin became a part of his human psyche. Amir admits how he ignored the tears on Hassan's face and his cracked voice. Hassan displays all those typical signs of trauma for which Amir chose to ignore. Even now ,Amir narrating

those incidents in the present , is unable to name Hassan's assault as Rape .instead he refers as "something that happened in the valley " (74). Amir tried to vent this suffocation of remorse , betrayal and sin through his writings. He was trying to find atonement through the rearrangement of past events. Though he remains successful as a author, he was incapable of leaving his past behind. He was carrying that part of sin wherever he goes. Amir blamed his past actions when he came to know that he and his wife Soraya cannot have baby.

The wound of trauma began to heal , when Amir met Rahim khan at Pakistan and came to know that Hassan was his half-brother and the condition of Hassan's boy Sohrab in the Taliban camp. Amir's path to redemption starts when he believe that he can redeem himself from what he did to Hassan by saving his son Sohrab. He knows that he will never be able to say sorry to Hassan .Amir decides to rescue Sohrab from the orphanage , where he meets Assef, now a Taliban leader. Assef has kept Sohrab as a dancing boy and as sex slave.Amir risks his life to release Sohrab from the clutches of Assef.Amir has been beaten hard. Sohrab wins the fight for Amir by using his slingshot hitting the left eye of Assef. Thus Amir did what he failed to do years ago.

Amir thus find redemption by not only hitting Assef , but saving Hassan's son from a dark and haunting life. Amir adopts Sohrab and takes him back to America. The ending of the novel sees a beautiful picture of Amir flying kite for Sohrab saying, " For you a thousand times over ".

The theme of Rape that is prevalent in the novel mirrors not only the hardships that Hassan has to endure . It is not just the rape of one individual. It is the rape of the entire Hazara community . It shows how this ethnic minority has been thrashed by Pashtuns on one hand and Taliban on the other hand. The novel also focuses on the collective trauma faced by the people of Afghan because of war and because of the Taliban regime. The novel depicts the haunting pictures of desperate children out of poverty. It shows how a man tries to sell his artificial leg , inorder to feed his children. The picture of adulterous couple being stoned to death, hanging bodies on the tree and suicide on the way of escape. Taliban dominance over people and places is a display of terror. Assef like the Taliban manipulate the ideologies of war and violence

In “ Trauma and Recover”: Judith Lewis Herman states : Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims “. For Amir , it is his act of writing which helped him handle the evil side of his past life. The more he matured, the more he started to re- discover himself, the intensity of sin he is bearing and the want of gaining redemption. It is this desire to redeem himself, made him travel back to Kabul and save Sohrab from the clutches of Assef. Thus he finally got salvation from the sin he did to Hassan nearly three decades ago.

Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* finds place as a trauma fiction by employing child characters to express the mental trauma they experience , the painful images of war and the racial and national trauma of the Afghan land. Hosseini successfully employs trauma as a personal and social phenomenon and there by constructing restoration of social order and the healing of individual pain in current Afghan society.



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