

Racial Dehumanization of Hazaras in “The Kite Runner” of Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract: The study focuses on the carnage and the racial dehumanisation of Hazaras on the basis of their racial discrimination in Khaled Hosseini’s magnum opus *The Kite Runner* which was published in 2003. This novel reflects a number of examples that depict the exploitation of Hazaras through the incongruous behaviour of Pashtuns especially towards Hazaras in Afghanistan that leads to their eventual neurosis and enforces them to pathetic submissiveness which gradually becomes their inherited trait. They experience incessant pain; both physical and psychological, that is imposed on them by Pashtuns who believe themselves to be superior and consider Hazaras as dirt and filth that can be easily wiped out. Behavioral dehumanization is mostly predominant in the novel in case of Hazaras such as physical violence, verbal abuse, slavery, delegitimation, objectification, genocide etc. At the meantime, the novel also glimpses Hazaras turmoil and their subsequent marginalisation by Pashtuns. Racial dehumanisation becomes a cause of Hazaras misery which is personified and becomes ostensible in the maltreatment of Hazaras. The genocides of Hazaras in *The Kite Runner* reflect the antipathy and monstrosity of majority that is devoid of the features of humanity which constitutes love, compassion, empathy, generosity, kindness etc.

Keywords: Incongruous, Hazaras, delegitimization, genocide, personification, empathy.

1. Introduction

The Kite Runner is one of the best known fictional works, published in 2003 by Riverhead Books, written by Khaled Hosseini, who is an Afghan- American author. This novel actually ascertains the friendship of Amir and Hassan which is focused on the guilt and redemption of Amir, who is the son of a businessman. It is found that Hazaras were sent to prison and even butchered at large number and which is also the core concern of the novelist to highlight and it takes a major place in *The Kite Runner*, as one of the aspect of the novel. It was stated by [New York Times](#) the bestseller novel for over two years, with over seven million copies sold in the United States. *The Kite Runner* is an unusual and powerful novel that has become a masterpiece of the novelist, a kind of classic novel. The novel also depicts the most realistic situation of contemporary time of Khaled Hosseini that he had experienced in Afghanistan during his childhood days and the changes that occurs in Afghanistan with the passage of time. He portrays the destructive life of Afghanistan and its internal clashes of Pashtuns that is entirely insane and inhumane as well. It is ethnic discrimination that Pashtuns possessed towards Hazaras and is reflected in the novel, which is actually the major topic of discussion.

2. Racial Dehumanization:

Racial dehumanization is actually the treatment of human beings that is brutal at extreme level with people belonging to other ethnic group. It is more like a psychological process that relates to the concept of dehumanisation. This is a kind of philosophy where one ethnic group feels other as “less human” and “the other”. In simple words, it is the denial of humanness to others. David Livingstone Smith, Director and founder of the Human Nature Project at the University of New England, argues historically that human beings have been dehumanizing on another for thousands of years. John Hagan in “The Collective Dynamics of Racial Dehumanization and Genocidal Victimization” has remarked that, “dehumanization is a mechanism that imposes degrading attributes on both individuals and entire groups for purposes of massive group destruction, the defining feature of genocide”. It is evident that the discrimination on the basis of race exists in the society since long. Inhumane people, haters of mankind intend to construct an ideology to suppress others and project themselves as the supreme and powerful through their status, language. So far as the novel *The Kite Runner* is concerned, it portrays a clear picture of racial dehumanization of Hazaras both individual as well as at community level. Racial dehumanization actually shows its influence in almost every culture. For an instance, it is prevalent everywhere such as in Greek, USA and India since times immemorial, that finally gets its reflection through of literature and cinema. The racial xenophobia influence the people in Greek as well, as it has been clearly depicted by Michael Bakaoukas in his discussion as follows,

“The Greeks of central Greece believed they were distinguished from Greek and non- Greek strangers (“xeni”, “barbaroi”) on a cultural basis. On the one hand, the early use of the Greek word “barbarian (barbaros)” means «speaking another language»; on the other hand, it acquired other implications — inferiority, lack of political or moral order, failure to recognise the proper limit set for man with all its implications of the superior intelligence of the Greeks. “Barbaros” changed in meaning from someone who did not speak the Greek tongue to a foreigner whose mode of living and very nature was inferior and contrary to all that the Greeks stood for. One factor must be given due weight in considering the process of this change and that is the peculiar relationship which developed between the Greek colonies abroad (along with the Greek tribes far away from central Greece) and

their mother countries in Greece. These sought to reproduce themselves in the image of their “metropoleis” — but as independent entities. The Greek language was the essential feature of the polis in Greece and the Greek colonies jealously sought to recreate the polis with its characteristic way of life abroad. Hence language, political institutions and social organisation and culture as interpreted by the Greek cities abroad or far away from central Greece (e.g. the Macedonian cities of the North), served to accentuate the difference between the characteristic Greek state and the foreigners outside. And it was not difficult to make the transition from difference to hostility, as the example of the racial prejudice against the Macedonians showed us”

M. Banton declares in his research that,

“Physical differences between peoples have been observed throughout human history; all over the world people have developed words for delineating them. ‘Race’ is a concept rooted in a particular culture and a particular period of history which brings with it suggestions about how these differences are to be explained”

This racial pigmentocracy has been stressed upon brilliantly by Barbara Jeanne Fields also in “Slavery Race and Ideology in the United States of America” with following words,

“Race is not an element of human biology (like breathing or reproducing sexually); nor is it even an idea (like the speed of light) that can be plausibly imagined to live an eternal life of its own. Race is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernible moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons. The revolutionary bicentennials that Americans have celebrated with independence in 1976 and of the constitution in 1989.....serve as the bicentennial of racial ideology, since the birthdays are not far apart. During the revolutionary era, people who favored slavery and people who opposed it collaborated in identifying the racial in capacity of Afro-Americans as the explanation for enslavement. American racial ideology is as original an invention of the Founders as is the United States itself. Those holding liberty to be inalienable and holding Afro-Americans as slaves were bound to end by holding race to be a self-evident truth. Thus we ought to begin by restoring to race __ that is, the American version of race __ its proper history”

The inhumane picture of racial dehumanization is projected even in cinema as well in a very elaborative manner with the movies like Concussion - a great picture based on reality pertains to Dr. Bennet Omalu who had discovered a disease, a football related brain trauma. But on the basis of race he was condemned for his research and Americans regards his research as filth and did not aspire to see a black guy distorting their reputation of sport which is financially so important to them. So, consequently he suffered a lot on the basis of his ethnicity. It is clear in the movie when Dr. Omalu was not referred with his profession but with different insulting remarks upon which he retaliates sometimes angrily and other times submissively. Following is the conversation of Dr. Omalu when he talks to his wife explaining his condition in America,

“I have never wanted anything as much as I wanted to be accepted as American. But Mike Webster (patient) goes mad, and nobody asks why. They make fun of him, they insulted him on TV. And now they want to pretend that his disease does not exist. And they want to bury me. Its offensive! I am offended. I am the wrong person to have discovered this”

He is not even allowed by American officials to present his research in front of them, only because he is black and faced verbal abuse in America such as,

“ You quack; you take your bullshit science and go back to Africa. And get away from our game.”

It occurs in United States due to which they have to brought an act into existence i.e. Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits the discrimination on the basis on color, religion, sex, race or ethnicity. Historically it prevails everywhere in the world and curbs the society since long. It is a major threat to the whole humanity as it denounced people of their basic rights to live, especially those who are marginalized. Racial discrimination and its consequences is also reflected in the novels of a prolific African writer Ngugi. He himself declares once,

“I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a new song” (Ngugi, 1975: 50).

Discussion:

In the novel *The Kite Runner* there are such situations described in the novel that clearly expresses the hate of Pashtuns towards Hazaras in Afghanistan. As described, the major setting of the novel is in Afghanistan where Hazaras lived in the clutches of Taliban during Soviet invasion. Afghanistan is a mosaic of ethnicities and Pashtuns are in large number in Afghanistan while Hazaras are the third largest ethnic group of Afghanistan. Hazaras have the worst experience of inhumane acts in their own country. They are treated brutally by Pashtuns and are deprived of their dignity and right to live. They are treated so badly and are referred often as the other.

Debrah Keenahan explains in “Dehumanization: understanding the paradox of human interaction” that,

“Dehumanization is a phenomenon which can threaten the unique existence and quality of life of each and every one of us. People are social beings but more than that, people are moral beings, and our self-consciousness, our reasoning, our morality suggests that despite obvious differences, those who share our unique capacities are our equals, are human beings and should be treated as such. Yet despite our ability for such reasoning, many of our social interactions present the paradox of dehumanization – a contradiction between what people believe and how people actually live – a paradox made up of a number of different aspects. As indicated in the definition and description of dehumanization. For example, many societies and individuals espouse the desire and need for social relations to function on the basis of equality of people, and the ubiquity of dehumanization is sufficient evidence of the universality of notions of equity”

In this novel we find the incongruous treatment of Pashtuns towards Hazaras, experienced by Hassan as he is threatened by Assef who abused him both at physical as well as psychological level and said,

“There is nothing sinful about teaching a lesson to a disrespectful donkey” p.64

And after saying this Assef with the help of his friends brutally exploits Hassan that is clearly evident with the following lines,

“.... Assef knelt behind Hassan, puts his hands on Hassan’s hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn’t struggle. Didn’t even whimper....”P.64

Hassan has an illusion that he is being treated as a friend and a good human being at Baba’s home especially by Amir whom he thought as his best friend. While at the time of his physical encounter Assef told him to think whether Hassan received the same compassionate treatment at home as Amir or not, he says,

“But before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he never included you in games when he has guests? Why he only plays with you when one else is around? I’ll tell you Hazara. Because to him you are nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he is bored, something he can kick when he is angry. Don’t ever fool yourself and think you are something more” p.61

From the above remarks it is clear that Hassan being Hazara is as a dirt and filth in Baba’s home which was also an ideology of Pashtuns in Afghan culture to treat Hazaras as valueless creature. Hassan one way or the other was exploited both at Amir’s home and outside as well, and has experienced verbal abuse everywhere. And the reason behind all this ingratitude is that he is Hazara. At home, he has to work hard for Amir like to polish his shoes, maintain the decorum of the room of Amir and when he is outside, gets threatened by Assef. In the novel, Hazaras are portrayed realistically who don’t have even identity and were called not with their names but with their ethnicity. When Hassan replied that he and Amir are good friends. Assef referred Hassan with full of ingratitude and spite. Assef replied,

“Friends? Assef said laughing. You pathetic fool someday you’ll wake up from your little fantasy and learn just how good of a friend he is. Now bas! Enough of this. Give us that kite” p. 61

Afterwards Assef beats Hassan and raped him but Amir while watching all this didn’t come up for help. Amir after watching the entire scene left the place as he himself acknowledges that he was a coward. He says,

“I was getting afraid of hurt..... I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right.....” p.65

So finally the thought of supremacy of the Pashtuns ethnicity overcomes Amir, and Amir acknowledges his state of mind while he narrates the following lines,

“....nothing was free in this world. May be 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?” p.65.

And after that Amir rushed away from the place and let Amir to be a prey in villainous hand to face excruciated physical turmoil. This is the situation through which the behavioral dehumanization is apparent from the actions of Assef. This is only the grudge of Assef against Hazaras that led him to commit this violent act against Hassan. It affects his psychology to such an extent that ultimately leads him to a complete frenzy that prompts him to commit the inhumane acts and join terrorism that he opted later in the novel. It is also apparent from the history that the ethnic grudge against Hazaras in Afghanistan leads Pashtuns to commit brutal acts and made them demons of violence.

Moreover, delegitimization which is the striking component of racial dehumanization and of course of this discussion is prevalent in the novel and is clearly depicted through the relationship of Baba with Hassan’s mother. It clears a perception of Pashtuns also who has the tendency to use their supremacy to seduce woman who is not from their own ethnicity. The two central principles of Pashtun men are *nang* (honor) and *namoos* (pride) and Baba is filled with these ideas. It might be the reason for him to sleep with Hassan’s mother and snatched her dignity from her, and let Hassan undergoes a life without the affection of mother and her care.

Hassan is actually the biological son of Baba. It shows that Baba had a sexual relationship with Hassan's mother(?) and created delegitimization in the novel. It is obvious at the end when Amir learns about Baba's past. He himself asserts that his father was a thief as he snatched the mother of Hassan from him and also the dignity of a woman. Amir wondered why Baba used to impose an idea on him that there is nothing sinful than an act of theft, when Baba himself is condemnable. The situation of women in Afghanistan as portrayed in the novel is quite similar to the troublesome situation felt by African women during the regime of colonialism. Vachaspati Dwivedi has remarkably defined the situation of African women who are marginalized like (?) in his study focused on "A Man Of The People" who suffered stupendously on the basis of their race. They were the source of physical pleasure for white people who project themselves as supreme as in the case of Baba and (?). He writes in his essay, "Elsie's rape by Nanga exemplifies the poor status of women in Africa; African society portrays women in general as foolish, weak, dependent, frivolous, and seductive" Similarly, Hassan mother was exploited sexually in the hands of Baba who used his power and strength to seduce her.

As we see during the time colonialism that colonialists referred colonized as the other, savages, criminals, and thieves in order to prove their supremacy. In similar manner Hazaras on the basis of their race are treated as thieves, liars and savages, which is the consequence of constructed ideology of supreme ethnic group of Pashtuns in Afghanistan. 'The Kite Runner' clearly depicts it in the novel when Amir returned to Afghanistan and learns from a letter that Hazaras have left their home and were butchered by Taliban's officials. He learns from Rahim Khan that,

"A pair of Talib officials came to investigate and interrogated Hassan. They accused him of lying when Hassan told them that he was living with me The Talibs said he was liar and thief like all Hazaras and ordered him to get his family out of the house sundown..." (p. 186)

Rahim Khan informed Amir that Hassan retaliated and was shot dead along with his wife who tried to rebel in anger against them. This ideology was even continuously followed Afghan sycophants, who believes them as supreme and thought Hazaras are only liable to faults and only they can commit crimes. In fact, whosoever commit crime in Afghanistan is done by Hazaras only.

The egoistical approach of Pashtuns towards Hazaras is clearly described in the chapter 25 when a General meets Sohrab for the first time, he said,

"So, Amir Jan, you're going to tell us why you have brought back this boy with you?" p.318 ... "While you're busy knitting sweaters, my dear, I have to deal with the community's perception of our family. People will ask..... Want to know why there is a Hazara boy living with our daughter. What do I tell them?" p.319

The General also abused Hassan verbally as he referred him as Hazara. Amir then interrupts and angrily said, "You see General Sahib, my father slept with his servant's wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping on the couch now is Hassan's son. He is my nephew. That's what you tell people when they ask you." "And one more thing General Sahib...never again refer to him as 'Hazara boy' in my presence. He has a name and it's Sohrab." P.319

Komal Kaur Dhillon discussed pigmentocracy, "is detrimental psychologically, physically, and socioeconomically due to the ways in which darker skin of often viewed (by society, media, lighter individuals as well as darker people who subscribe to the belief that white is better) as less attractive, less valuable, less pure, and less clean. For those perceived to be darker, the consequences can include violence, marginalization, and discrimination in areas of employment in areas of employment, education, government, access to resources, psychological trauma, disparities in marital opportunity and conceived notions of beauty, under representation in media."

Findings:

1. Ethnicity is the structural base for the poor masses to be an oppressed creature in Afghanistan during the last decade of 20th century.
2. Ethnic grudge can cause a huge turmoil in the strong relationships also like friendship.
3. Racial discrimination is also an ideological base used to suppress Hazaras in Afghanistan by Pashtuns in order to prove their superiority.
4. Racial dehumanisation causes not only the demolition of a particular person at physical or psychological level but it can demolish the entire nation into disastrous turmoil.
5. People in modern world need to understand each other without taking care of the ethnic background of the people. Because a nation can be progressive only if all the citizens of different ethnicity works together and respect each other.

Conclusion: The Kite Runner undoubtedly gives us number of instances related to the racial discrimination and ethnic grudge of Pashtuns towards Hazaras in Afghanistan, as is discussed above, during the last decade of twentieth century. Khaled Hosseini has successfully described how Hazaras suffered and has shown their pain and agony which is insurmountable. The novelist has realistically portrayed the inextricable plight of Hazaras in Afghanistan. He is able to describe the psychological turmoil and the physical distortions of Hazaras in the novel. Besides that he provides the reader with a deeper inception into the psychic reality of Hazaras during the years of suppression and deterioration. It properly describes the psychological manipulation of one community

towards another on the basis of their sick racial mentality. In general, we can sum up that the novel besides different dimensions like cravenness for culture, love for motherland, cultural clash and military intervention of superpower country in Afghanistan also determinates the inner and darker reality of an ethnic group of Afghanistan who were not only marginalized from the external forces but also from internal forces those were revolving in their surroundings and are completely driven of their rights to work and even to live in proper sense.

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