

Trauma and the Amalgamation of Past in the Kite Runner

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Abstract:

Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini's debut book is titled *The Kite Runner*. His first book amazed readers with the multiple phases his protagonist goes through in an attempt to win them around to his cause following a previous sin. The protagonist, Amir, has experiences with life in many geographical settings both as an adult in the US and as a child in Afghanistan. Living amid two different cultures takes the character through multiple stages in life. It is Sohrab, who becomes the deciding factor of Amir's inner and outer life that Amir is struggling with. The tension in the novels increases with the rape of Hassan and later with the Taliban regime and the invasion of Russian troops in Afghanistan that acts as terrorism. The victim is not only the minor community the 'Hazaras' but also the 'Pashtuns'. The paper focuses on the characters who are on the periphery and working as a catalyst in the construction of the plot. They provide the post-colonial intellectuals with perseverance, support, and opposition against the prevailing powers, which makes them indispensable.

Keywords: Trauma, identity, Hazara, Pashtun, *The Kite Runner*, memory, theft, past.

Introduction:

1965 saw the birth of Khaled Hosseini in Afghanistan. He lived the most developmental years of his life in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood of Kabul. Hosseini was charmed by American and Indian films and grew up reading classical Persian poetry by poets like Hafez, Saadi, and Rumi. He recollects how much he used to love and enjoy kite fights as a kid. He became friends with Hossein Khan, a young Hazara lad who worked as a household cook. He is the alter ego of Hassan.

The family of Khaled immigrated to the US and settled in San Jose in the 1980s, following the advent of the Soviet War in Afghanistan. His novel *The Kite Runner* is set against the background of 9/11 when Al Qaeda destroyed the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. The novel trip through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US. The protagonist's past and the political history of Afghanistan have been perfectly knit together by Hosseini. The story opens in 2001 and goes back in the past through Amir's memories of his early years in Kabul, his close companionship with Hassan, and the shifting of the country from a monarchy to a parliamentary administration. A psycho rapes Hassan in a culture that is narrow-minded and class-based. Amir is afflicted by his inability to protect his friend from sexual harassment throughout the duration of his stay in San Francisco. His resolve to return to his native country meet with Hassan's son and bring him to the US. Even though Amir's life has improved in the US, he still feels confined in the past and carries with him memories and remorse from his early years. This *kunstlerroman* combines the expansion of Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule with that of its protagonist. The novel presents a picture of the US

in the post-9/11 world in connection to the continuation of Muslims through its coherent storytelling method.

Trauma

The term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, P3). Trauma is an inevitable part of life and it is just like an onion as we peel the outer layer the inner layer again becomes the obstacle to the memory. Trauma is a normal response to the abnormal circumstances. It can affect one's mentality about the time ahead via loss of hope, narrow experiences about life, fear, that life will end suddenly or early, or anticipation that we forget about normal life events. The inferiority and superiority complex in society leads to a gap among the people due to which they are unable to make a balance between their personal and professional lives. They always remain in a state of tension due to their unfulfilled desires at the workplace and home. Fake news and events lead to intensify the tension during such conditions.

It is very normal to feel pain because of abnormal circumstances but if it takes a longer duration of time to get out of it then it's a serious problem. "The most moving poetic picture of a fate such as this," Freud writes, "can be found in the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*":

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. After her burial, he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, P 2).

In the above passage, it is very clear that Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved but the voice from the tree signifies that now he creates a web for himself that is going to be the tragic flaw of Tancred. Clorinda is no more but the memories that he had are the reason due to which his downfall seems to be happening. This downfall can be reversed, as it is very common to all of us that memories haunt, those individuals who are going to control their emotions after a certain point of time.

Representation of Trauma in *The Kite Runner*

Hosseini calls this novel a love story. However, this love story is of a different kind. It is about the father-son relationship, two friends of the same gender not in a sexual sense, and love of a mother-like and father-like figure.

"Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words" (Hosseini, P 10)

Both Hassan and Amir are fed from the same mother-like figure who is a Hazara by ethnicity. In Islam, milk relation is of utmost importance rather than blood relation. Amir's mother died after giving birth and Hassan's mother (Sanaubar) left his husband (Ali) and child because Hassan is born with the harelip and Ali has some physical impairment. Hosseini glorifies the beauty of Sanaubar as

"While Sanaubar's brilliant green eyes and impish face had, rumor has it, tempted countless men into sin...." (Hosseini, P 7).

Sanaubar is so beautiful that it can distraught any person this is what W B Yeats spoke of in "A Prayer for My Daughter"

"May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,

Or hers before a looking glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness....”

The reason behind leaving Ali is the age gap and the physical deformity due to which they are not physically compatible. Hosseini writes that she is 19 years younger than Ali. But physical compatibility is not the only thing for which people get married. It is believed that most relationship continues to be good after the birth of a child if in the past it was not. The child works as a bridge between the emotions of both the man. It is truly said that a child is a form of God. But Sanaubar is so overwhelmed by her beauty that she leaves the child just 5 days after the birth. This is what Yeats emphasizes that one must be kind to first oneself then only he/she is kind to others. Sanaubar comes to know about this simple philosophy at a much later stage. When she becomes old and her beauty is degraded, she realizes that outer beauty is just for the shake of outer attraction which seems to be good at a certain point in time. But the character formed through this beauty is of the worst kind.

Rape:

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines rape as “unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person’s will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception.” It is a heinous crime. If one categorizes crimes into hierarchies it will be on the zenith.

It is very true that when someone is raped it is her/his body is disturbed which is seen from a superficial level. There is a very minute difference between physical and mental trauma one leads to another and they are so entangled that the boundaries between them are blurred. This can be understood through the difference between witty and mad people. John Dryden in his poem “Absalom and Achitophel”

“Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.”

During the whole process of rape, the victim for a certain point of time resists but a stage comes when he/she realizes that he/she is unable to overcome the rapist and this is the moment when the mental trauma starts. It is this mental trauma that is going to haunt me for a lifetime.

Hassan was raped by Assef but during this whole process, he never resisted. It is evident from the very beginning of the novel that Hassan belongs to a minority community in Afghanistan. Children in the street call him by different names to degrade him for instance flat-nosed, Babalu, mice-eating, load-carrying donkeys, etc.

“Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan’s hips, and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan’s 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. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face.” (Hosseini, P 71).

Hassan has a few chances to escape this heinous crime but the cost is too much that he has to give the “Blue Kite” that Amir cut during the competition. It was the last kite that Amir cut and it becomes a pious symbol of “winning” for Hassan. Though this win is of Amir because the bond between the two is so strong that Hassan resisted when Assef, Kamal, and Wali asked for the kite at this point he comes to know about the result but he is not aware of the fact that they will rape him because of the same sex.

Amir stands at the back looking at all the cruelty but he dares not to speak and does not even try to stop them. Baba was right about him

“A boy who won’t stand up for himself becomes a man who can’t stand up to anything.” (Hosseini, P 22). Baba observed from the very early of his life that Amir is unable to take a stand when someone teases Hassan and even when someone comments on Amir himself.

When an asteroid is moving toward Earth to smash. Jupiter acts as an elder brother to Earth and the asteroid collides with Jupiter making Earth safe. Hassan is that Jupiter never left a chance to make Amir safe like Earth.

“Self-defense has nothing to do with meanness. You know what always happens when the neighborhood boys tease him? Hassan steps in and fends them off.” (Hosseini, P 21).

Theft:

In the view of Khaled Hosseini, the biggest crime is “theft”

“Now, no matter what the mullah teaches, there is only one sin, only one. And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. Do you understand that?” (Hosseini, P 17).

In one way or another Baba, Amir’s father is ignorant of Islamic rules and regulations as he denies the teachings of mullah without any hesitation. He is fond of drinking and eating pork which is considered to be a sin in Islam. Hosseini through Baba writes that if there is a God he must have more important works to be done rather than focusing on such trivial things as drinking and eating pork.

It can be interpreted that Hosseini universalizes every crime under the umbrella of “theft”. It is good to classify a thing on this basis but there is a huge difference between equality and uniformity. Baba forced this idea on Amir that “theft” is the only sin and all other sin is the form of it. Amir is different from his father. Baba even questions whether Amir is his son or not.

“If I hadn’t seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I’d never believe he’s, my son.” (Hosseini, P 22).

Every individual is unique in herself /himself. Baba does not want to accept this fact. He wants his son to be exactly a copy of him. Though, Amir is the biological son of Baba so there is a transfer of genes from parents to offspring. Plato advocated that poetry is mere imitation whereas Aristotle partially agreed to this notion and added that poetry is imitation but imitation is itself a creative process. Baba is more like Plato whereas Amir is more like Aristotle. Baba is of the belief that a male child must have an interest in outdoor activities. In contrast to this view, Amir is more interested in reading and indoor activities. He is fond of Poems

“In School, we used to play a game called Sherjangi, or “Battle of the Poems.” (Hosseini, P 18).

From the very opening of the novel past is shown as a metaphor for all the good or wrong deeds a man does. It is this traumatic past that tries to steal all the happiness that the characters face. Baba makes Amir understand that theft is the biggest sin and he advocates it with a firm statement

“When you kill a man, you steal a life,” Baba said. “You steal his wife’s right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone’s right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness.” (Hosseini, P 17).

Amir lies as well as steals. He lies to himself, to his father, and everyone about Hassan that Hassan was raped. Hassan copes with all this alone. Once Amir wins the kite fight, he is changed as if he gets what he wanted, the love of his father. He does not stop only this but also makes Hassan a thief.

Memories:

The capacity to recollect the emotions of the past. It can be either good or bad. Both memories make a character traumatic. Though in the novel most of the characters are recollecting their memories but most of them are bad memories whether it is Amir, who does not stand against the rape of Hassan; Baba, who makes a sexual relationship with Hassan's mother Sanaubar; Hassan, who feels uncomfortable because he is a Hazara and his mother has several relationships with different people; Rahim Khan, who never does disclose the relationship of Baba and Sanaubar; "Ali was sterile, Rahim Khan said." (Hosseini, P 205) but has a child. Amir compares Hassan to a lamb that he used to see during the sacrifice his eyes look the same as those of the lamb.

"He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb." (Hosseini, P 71).

However, at the last of the novel when Afghanistan is under attack and Hassan is killed by the Taliban his only son Sohrab is taken by those attackers and made an object of sexual pleasure. This is revealed at the end that it is Assef who takes the revenge of Hassan on his son Sohrab.

Amir and his father moved to the US when the Taliban attacked Afghanistan. Though the geographical place changes for both of them the memories are going to haunt them for the rest of their life. Amir shares his guilt later with his wife when Rahim Khan asks him to save Sohrab because he is the nephew of Amir's half-brother. Rahim Khan knows about the rape of Hassan and that is why he said, "There is a way to be good again." (Hosseini, P 2). This is the statement that makes an impact on Amir. He wants to get rid of these haunting memories.

Conclusion:

The guilt of Amir is so deep that the changing of the country, marriage, and safe life in the US do not affect his emotions. He is so delved into it that Sohrab at the end of the novel becomes the only key through which he can get rid of his guilt. To make himself free from this guilt he left the US for Pakistan and then to Afghanistan. It is sure that he can lose his life in the whole rescue operation but he chooses to do so. And last, he becomes successful in his attempts and takes Sohrab back to the US for his bright future. The US becomes the land of opportunities for Amir and Sohrab.

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