

EXPLORING THE FRIGHTENING ENCOUNTERS IN HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

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Abstract: Psychology plays a major role in one's life. It is human psyche which holds a lot of past experiences be it happiness, sadness or any traumatic incident. Many theories and definitions related to human psychology and behaviour has been given by Freud, the well-known psychologist. According to him psychological trauma of a person comprises of childhood memory with traumatic incidents, disturbed experiences faced in puberty, horrifying and traumatizing exposures faced by a person in the past that haunts him in his present or tend to reappear in future, affect the mental, physical and overall growth of a child which in turn makes him a coward, faint-hearted person in future. Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner*, a 2003 novel, talks about such traumas faced by the characters in the novel. Right from Amir's father to his adopted son, Sohrab's childhood, the narrative shows the ups and downs they have gone through. The setting of the story is around the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and focuses on the impact of the terror created by the Taliban. The most critical dreadful incident in the novel was when Amir exhibits a traumatizing experience of his friend Hassan's exploitation sexually and consequently raped. He did not help him at that moment as he felt weak and coward at that time. This episode kept on affecting his psyche and made him feel guilty and anguished throughout his life. This childhood heart-wrecking incident in Amir's life affected his adult decision and choice-making in the long run, even though he tried to escape and elope from reality. Not only children but adult characters like Amir's Baba also underwent these traumatic exposures when he went to the USA. He experienced his masculine power fading due to culture, caste, and ethnographic differences. This research paper will try to explore the traumatizing experiences that characters underwent and how harrowing feelings of trauma, guilt, agony, and pain suffered during childhood make a deep scar with a never-ending black hole in one's heart throughout his life.

Keywords: Trauma, Raped, heart-wrecking incident, Decision making, Suppression, Humiliations.

1. Introduction

The author, Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American, is widely known for his renowned book *The Kite Runner*. He is a physician and medical practitioner by profession during the year 1996 to 2004 and turned into a noticeable writer. Khaled was born in 1965 on the 4th of March in Kabul, Afghanistan. Nasser Hosseini, a father of Khaled Hosseini, was a well-known person as he was an Afghan Ambassador, who served at the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Khaled's mother was a teacher at high school in Kabul, where she managed to educate children with Farsi and History as subjects. In 1976, the Hosseini's moved to Paris. They were hesitant to return to Afghanistan due to the distressing circumstances after an incursion of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. Hosseini came up with the idea and began writing *The Kite Runner* while working as a doctor in practice in 2001.

The Kite Runner tells a dramatic tale of family, affection, and companionship against the backdrop of historical upheaval. Young Amir's impressions of Kabul were filled with Afghanistan's cultural heritage which values traditions and rituals, familial bonds, and a deeply rooted ethical identity. *The Kite Runner* is an extraordinary, successful debut and is very emotionally compelling to the readers, published in 2003. The novel's themes are universal such as family relationships, the strength of compromise, the cost of deceit, the viciousnesses of a rigid system of classes. Not only this the novel also contain some incidents which show the brutal realities of war, and one of the most is one's redemption process. The novel also talks about the psychological traumas the characters undergo in the course of the narration. Amir being an ignored child urging to seek his father's attention feels jealous of his loyal friend cum servant, Hassan. Hassan being an innocent and devoted person to his companion, is left alone at the time of his hardship. The variations of nature seen in Hassan, Amir, Baba, and Sohrab because of some traumatic situations led to a feeling of guilt in the future. It is too brought to view how suppression and domination lead to health deterioration in the novel. When Amir's Baba was diagnosed with cancer when he faces humiliations after shifting to the US. Even Sohrab, Hassan's son too went through traumatising and heart-breaking circumstances, right from his father's death to his kidnapping by Assef, till his adoption by Amir from an orphanage home and his adjustment with Amir and his wife in the US. Assef is now a member of the Taliban, a villain right through his childhood and an enemy of Amir and Hassan. Khaled Hosseini himself, being a writer of Diaspora, has faced rootlessness, antipathy, atrocities, and dominations. He has shown his sufferings and self-experiences in his works. He was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, and now lives in the USA since 1980, which autobiographically displayed in his works, especially in *The Kite Runner*. *The Kite Runner* is an internationally recognised work, which is liked and loved by many readers worldwide.

Sin and redemption play a significant role in novel, these feelings are only responsible for a change in the life of Amir and he takes the decisive step to adopt Sohrab as his kid and repay for the compromise Hassan had made for Amir at the day of kite flying competition held during the winters of Kabul in 1979.

The story also focuses on Hassan, a Hazara, who was a companion of Amir when he was ideal and a servant when he was busy with his school and social gatherings. Hassan and Amir were born in the same year and shared the same land in the mansion. The only difference was, Amir was the son of a rich and respected man of Kabul, his Baba. Hassan, on the other hand, was the child of poor Hazara who was serving Amir's family since decades.

1.1 Trauma and Psychological Trauma:

Freud, a well-known psychologist, has given many theories and definitions related to human psychology and behaviour. According to him psychological trauma of a person comprises of childhood memory with traumatic incidents, disturbed experiences faced in puberty, horrifying and traumatizing exposures faced by a person in the past that haunts him in his present or tend to reappear in future, affect the mental, physical and overall growth of a child which in turn makes him a coward, faint-hearted person in future¹. Trauma is a bi-fold expression that refers to mental tribulations one has endured and that links to the extraneous event to the actual after-effect on the emotional nature of a person. He also says that due to the past with sexual seduction and bullying, the patient builds the symptoms of neurosis or psychological disturbances.

The concept of psychological trauma requires a continuous, to and fro communication between the outer and the inner worlds, or more specifically, what is recognized as the subsequent traumatic effect of the direct interaction between the actual reality and the emotional experience. Freud's concern for this led to his description of traumatic neuroses as: 'an exception [for] their relations to the determinants in childhood have hitherto eluded investigation'¹

The Kite Runner is full of violent incidents like sexual assaults and rape by local bullies, the trauma of war, destruction and displacement from the homeland, beloved's death, foreigner's brutal invasion and rule, racial prejudice, etc. The effect of these violent events is so overwhelming that the characters in the novel are left with immense trauma. Based on the feeling of this 'individual' and 'collective trauma' Kai Theodor Erikson, an American sociologist, in his work *Everything in Its Path* (1978) states that,

"By *individual trauma*, I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively.... By *collective trauma*, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic

tissues of social life that damage the bonds attaching people and impair the prevailing sense of community. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock, all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer existed as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared..... “I” continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. “You” continues to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But “we” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. (pp.153-154)”²

1.2 Theme of trauma, guilt, and redemption in *The Kite Runner*

Story of *The Kite Runner* revolves around Amir and people living around him. Amir is living in a big mansion with a lush green garden and marbled floor with beautiful imported decors. His father, popularly called Baba or Baba Sahib, is a well-known person whose victory and hard-work is well known in Kabul. Both Amir and Baba are looked after by Hassan and his father, as being Hazara, their family has been serving Amir’s family for ages. It is shown in the novel that Amir and Hassan were born in the same year and shares their childhood like Amir’s Baba and Hassan’s father Ali did.

“Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates—at least until polio crippled Ali’s leg—just like Hassan and I grew up a generation later.”³ [chapter 4, page-21]

Right from Amir’s childhood Baba used to despise Amir, as he could not find his bravery and leadership quality in Amir. There is one incident where Baba is talking to Rahim Khan and telling him the actions of Amir he has been noticing,

“Sometimes I look out this window and I see him playing on the street with the neighborhood boys, I see how they push him around, take his toys from him, give him a shove here, a whack there. And, you know, he never fights back. Never, He just.....drops his head and...”³ [chapter -3, page-19, line- 79-83]

Baba’s complain is that Amir was always defended by Hassan, be it any situation and circumstances.

“... You know what always happens when the neighbourhood boys tease him? Hassan steps in and fends them off. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. And when they come home, I say to him, ‘How did Hassan get that scrape on his face?’ And he says, ‘He fell down.’ I’m telling you, Rahim, there is something missing in that boy.”³[chapter-3, page 20]

Baba's observations about Amir are shocking:

“I could see him searching, researching for the right words. He lowered his voice, but I heard him anyway. “ If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believed he's my son.””³[chapter-3, page 20]

Through these conversations between Baba and Rahim, we get to know that Baba feels guilty about having Amir in his life.

As we proceed with the story of the characters, we come across a terrible incident that happened when Assef and his gang attacked Hassan on the occasion of kite flying during winters in Kabul. Hassan also threatened Assef to make him 'one-eyed Assef'³ when he was trying to assault Amir. The story goes further when once Amir was searching for a book in his father's study, and he found a book on Hazaras wherein it states that,

“An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had “quelled them with unspeakable violence.” The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a.”³[chapter-2, page 8]

This discrimination can be seen in the text when children and adults of Kabul were mocking and harassing Ali, a Hazara, a minority community who tried to rise against Pashtuns. They made fun of his crippled leg and his zig-zag walk due to polio and even called him 'flat-nosed Babalu'.³

Afghanistan has always been at the crossroads of history and the convergence of cultures. Thousands of Afghans left their country and scattered around the world due to the Russian invasion from 1979 to 1989, followed by the Taliban rule:

“...that night of July 17, 1973. Kabul awoke the next morning to find that the monarchy was a thing of past. The king, Zahir Shah was away in Italy. In his absence, his cousin Daoud Khan had ended the King's forty-year reign with a bloodless coup.”³

The life of the characters is seen changing after this invasion of the Taliban. Many people in Kabul, be it rich or poor or Hazaras or Pashtuns, had to face the hardship of the changing scenario of the Kabul. Those who could afford migrated to other countries while others

stayed at their homeland and tried to adapt according to the situation. Amir and Baba migrated to the US, leaving behind their home and prestige and starting life from new.

Kabul, in Afghanistan, holds awful and disturbing memories, especially of Pashtun boy Amir and Hazara boy Hassan, who were raised together. They shared their free time by playing, plucking fruits and dry fruits from neighbour's trees. The most important is that they were famous playmates of kite flying. Hassan and Amir used to call them 'sultans of Kabul'³ every time they won the kite flying competition. Amir used to fly a kite, and Hassan used to chase the kite and bring it for Amir before it fell on the ground. Such was the bond shared by Amir and Hassan. It was always Hassan who used to put his life in danger for Amir. One day in the winters of Kabul Amir won the kite flying competition, Hassan ran behind the blue kite to bring for Amir so that he can show it to his father and s his victory. Hassan can catch the kite but at the cost of getting life-long trauma of being sexually raped by the local bully of Kabul, Assef and his gang in the silent streets of Kabul. Moreover, to the surprise, Amir witnessed the whole incident but did not attempt to rescue the loyal Hazara, Hassan. Amir was quite feeble to tackle the gang:

"...But there were two things amid the garbage that couldn't stop looking at: One was the blue kite resting against the wall, close to the cast-iron stove: the other was Hassan's brown corduroy pants thrown on a heap of eroded bricks.....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. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb."³ [chapter-7, page 66]

He instead took the blue kite and quietly moved toward his home and attracted everybody's attention towards him as he won the kite competition that day. That day Amir and his Baba grew closer than before, and Baba too started admiring his son. Amir got all this by the price of Hassan's exploitation. Though Amir felt guilty of leaving Hassan alone in that heart-wrecking incident. It can be observed from the lines of Amir,

"....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?"³ [chapter-7,page-68]

Hassan had to pay the price of being a poor Hazara. Hassan was always a faithful companion, he would do anything for Amir 'a thousand time over'. Whereas Amir ruined his life by being a silent spectator of that dastard activity of rape by Assef

Apart from this unforgettable misconduct, characters like Baba, Amir, Hassan, Ali have their personal experiences of trauma and guilt, which keep on haunting their psyche.

Soon, Amir and Hassan got separated. Amir feels burdened with his deeds, and he chooses to leave his house for Hassan. He puts some money and watches under the mattress of Hassan and shows it to Baba that Hassan has stolen all this, Hassan accepts that he has committed the theft. Baba forgives Hassan, but Ali and Hassan abandon the house. Five years later, after the Soviets occupied Afghanistan, his father and Amir fled from Kabul and began a new life in California. Baba is employed at a gas station, while Amir is taking classes to improve his writing skills. Soraya Taheri and Amir were betrothed.

Nevertheless, Amir is unable to shake Hassan's thoughts. Fifteen years after Soraya's wedding, Rahim Khan calls Amir and says he wants to talk to Amir. Rahim Khan here tells Amir that, "There is a way to be good again"⁴ as he can rescue Sohrab from the orphanage and accept him as his child. The breath-taking news Amir receives from Rahim Khan when he enters Afghanistan is that Baba is Hassan's father too. Rahim Khan also reveals that both Ali and Hassan are dead. The primary way to be better again is to save Sohrab, Hassan's son, from Assef. Amir is searching for Sohrab with the help of a Farid, the guide. It was found that Sohrab was to perform in women's clothes, so he was dressed like them. Sohrab protects Amir by blowing out Assef's left eye with a slingshot. Amir is protecting Sohrab by bringing him to the United States and redeeming himself of the guilt and trauma he has been living.

Conclusion: *THE KITE RUNNER* is inter-woven with a lot of secrets and guilts. Amir's father was living with the guilt of not being able to call Hassan as his son. He tried to redeem it by gifting him on his birthday the magical surgery of his lips by calling the expert doctor from India. Similarly, when Amir comes to know about Hassan's son Sohrab entrapped in Afghanistan by Assef. He risked his life and came from the USA to rescue him and adopted him as his child. Amir thought that this was the only way he can repay the favour of Sohrab's father and redeem the burden of his sin with which he has been living from the day of the kite flying competition in Kabul. Therefore there was a chance for him to be good again. At the end of the novel, Amir utters 'for you the thousand times over'³ for Sohrab while saving him from committing suicide, ensuring him his safety and love, the way Hassan did for Amir. This research paper, therefore, talked about the long-lasting effect traumas and guilt on one's psyche which haunt him unless and until redeemed.

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