

Terrorism and Brutality in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract: *Trauma plays a major role in the formation of an individual's self. A devalued self often emerges from having a marginal status in the society, where traumas from racism, poverty, violence and exploitation are more likely to occur. The most difficult aspect of traumatic situations for victims is feeling that one is powerless to change his or her situation. Terrorism in Literature puts forth a number of thought-provoking questions before the readers as well as the writers. It ranges from the ethical function of literature to reconsidering our cultural assumptions about identity, relationality, and intentionality, to what contingencies determine how or if the individuals survive the devastations of trauma. Hosseini's The Kite Runner published in the year 2003, introduces the readers to the country of Afghanistan, looks at the universal theme of transgression and forgiveness, of homeland and exile. This novel serves as a medium for the hapless millions of Afghans to voice the trauma of their existence. The Kite Runner (2003) gives a vision of what Afghanistan was before its association as a haven for terrorists. Hosseini deals with the theme of terrorism in his first novel The Kite Runner, in which he has given a genuine insight to the people of the world about the extremists Taliban, in particular, and the culture, and the traditions of Afghan people in general. This paper seeks to examine Hosseini's depiction of the complexities of life in Afghanistan during the regime of the Taliban. It shows how the country was seen as an asylum for some terrorists and their allies who are accused of the attack in the United States and other countries. Moreover, the paper addresses the need to fight against terrorism as a phenomenon to which the world became the witness of this gruesome reality. It, therefore, provides an analysis of terrorism, revealing the people's suffering caused by this terrorism. This paper seeks to examine Hosseini's depiction of the complexities of life in Afghanistan during the regime of the Taliban. It shows how the country was seen as an asylum for some terrorists and their allies who are accused of the attack in the United States and other countries.*

Keywords: Terrorism, Reconciliation, Conflict, Violence, Suffering

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence has consistently been one of the main themes in Khaled Hosseini's writing and other South Asian writers, like Tehmina Durani, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Taslima Nasrin, and many more. This type of representation is predominantly the result of the geography and history of the area, which has witnessed conflicts due to ethnicity and religion's heterogeneity. These regions have also been a central area for the international powers to intervene in exerting their hegemony and politically influencing regional powers. It is not only armies and superpower countries that create violence; instead, the social, economic, religious, ethnic, and family structures have aided the violent developments. As a result, conflict and violence have inspired writers to represent it through their fictional works. Geographically analyzing, in the past decades, Afghan literature seemed to flourish in trying to represent the Afghan population's condition to the outside world. Novelists like Mahmud Tarzi, Ahmed Rashid, Asne Seierstad, Atiq Rahimi, Ayesha Jalal, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Hamida Ghafour, and Khaled Hosseini were influenced by the significant political and military outbreaks in the country. Hosseini, moreover, has been influenced by his own past life in Afghanistan, America, and the struggle his people witnessed. His novels show the violence and struggle, just like many other authors in the region.

Hosseini pictures a torn and marginalized country that is yet to recover from the years of injustice. Many scholars have tried to identify his works as a mere representation of “Muslim other.” The recognition of Muslims in the present has increasingly become constricted, mainly due to Muslims' political representation post 9/11. Amid the negative portrayal, Muslims worldwide have suffered from deep contradictions and inconsistencies regarding their vexed identities. In this context, the Muslim diaspora writers strived to negotiate between their Muslim identities and the ethnic and diaspora cultural identities. Afghanistan has always remained in the grip of conflict and has even been strongly isolated within the Muslim world. The country's permeable geographic boundaries made it easy at stake in the hands of the potential opponents. Iran has made the country a hub of sophisticated networks, forming indigenous groups and disciplined forces creating internal pressure. On the other side, Saudi Arabia has a close alliance with the United States and Pakistan to oppose the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, which Iran considered a significant security threat. As someone knowing the novels, life of the novelist, and life in Afghanistan, it is complicated to deny that the novelist is narrating real stories of himself or other Afghans living there or in the diaspora. The violence reported in real life and nonfiction is the same or at least very similar to the violence represented in the novels of Hosseini.

Major Thrust

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* presents the 9/11 attacks in a brief postscript to the main narrative of the novel, not showing how the identity of the Afghan protagonist Amir is affected in the wake of the attacks. However, the events of 9/11 have allowed for the novel to gain new relevance by popularising the terms “Taliban” and “fundamentalism” which are dealt with in Hosseini's narrative, and propelling Afghanistan into the popular consciousness. 9/11 becomes a space of resolution in this novel, where difficulties of identity and representation for Amir and his own conflict with terrorism are cathartically highlighted through his adoptive home America's newly formed War on Terror. The various identity-forming moments for Amir all lead him to a strong sense of alignment with American ideals, and the forming of a common enemy after the 9/11 attacks allows him to forge a stronger bond with America. Additionally, his own representation of America as a land of opportunity and his representation of fundamentalism in the Taliban seem to slot in meaningfully with the redemptive events toward the end of the novel where 9/11 is mentioned. Thus, although it is only briefly referred to, 9/11 offers a defining moment in the novel by demonstrating the way in which Amir distances himself from negative representations of Afghanistan and of Islam by viewing post-9/11 American nationalism in a positive light and cementing his identity as an American.

Hosseini's writing aims to remind readers that the conflict in Afghanistan has pushed the country's socioeconomic conditions to an all-time low. The American audience responds well to Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. According to Nielsen Book Scan, his work was the best-seller of 2005. There are social statuses in Afghan culture that categorize people into several identities. Pashtun and Hazara are characters from *The Kite Runner*. Reading about the ban of the kite running by the Taliban in Afghanistan inspired Hosseini to write this novel. Following watching the news in 1999 that the group bans running kites in the country of which Hosseini says that it was an activity he had during his childhood, he writes a short story of twenty-five pages talking about two boys running kites of which he expanded into a novel later (Brooks 2012). The novel narrates Amir and Hassan's story, who are biological brothers from the same father, which is revealed towards the end of the novel. There are many social, cultural, and religious issues covered. Violence is the central theme in the novel, similar to Hosseini's other novels; *The Kite Runner* represents various types of violence. The text's most dramatic scene is Hassan's rape by another child who is older than him. Another intense scene is the stoning of a man and a woman who had sexual affairs without marrying each other. Thus, Hassan's legal status as an illegitimate child remains the novel's core issue, although no one knows about this until the narrative ends. After learning that Hassan is his biological brother to search for his nephew, Amir goes back to Afghanistan, as the Taliban have now killed Hassan.

In Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, violence's representation encourages the reader to relate it to the non-fictional context when the scenes are compared to Afghanistan and Afghans' available knowledge. There are various types of violence represented in *The Kite Runner*. There are multiple types of violence found, but violence theories can also be implemented and studied through this fictional work. That is true that the novel is only narrating imagined stories, but it cannot be denied that the story is inspired by real stories as well as the experience of the author. This is a strong point

on which to start building claims and analyze the text using non-literary theories. Those who are not Afghans and never lived there can relate the novel to what they hear and see from the news. Many elements make the novel connected to the non-fictional life, such as the ban of the running kites, stoning adulterous people, and conflict between Hazaras and Pashtuns. Those are the novel's core issues that the author tries to expand and make them read to get non-Afghan audiences' attention by referring to things they may have heard of on the news.

There are two types of Muslims in Afghanistan. The first is Shia, and the second is Sunni. The first Afghani author who effectively fictionalizes his culture for a western audience is Khaled Hosseini. It is the story of Amir and his relationship with his servant-friend, Hassan. The novel is Amir's psychological journey to find peace with himself, as he is the guilt-ridden witness to the tragic rape of Hassan who is also his half-brother. Amir is destined to carry the immense burden of his betrayal, just because he did not have the courage to stop the things that unfolded before his eyes. Blending the daily struggles of regular people with the horrific historical sweep of a shattered country in a complex and soul searching story shows how Afghanistan has gone from a monarchy to a republic in the blink of an eye. Poverty, economic catastrophe, terror, and uncertainty characterize life in Afghanistan as a result of the Russian-Taliban conflict.

The Kite Runner as a trauma narrative is focused on the individual trauma of each character like Amir, Hassan and Baba. Amir's character is more focused on the internal self but the trauma of Hassan and Baba, in the larger space, also represents collective trauma faced by communities they represent. Amir's trauma can be interpreted as 'survivor's guilt', the feeling of having seen someone wronged, not stopping it and escaping the situation without facing any strong consequences for oneself. Amir belongs to Afghanistan, a part of the world where a multitude of people have witnessed some form of violence inflicted on people around them owing to the difficult times their country has seen. His action of running away and leaving Hassan behind after he was raped show his dissociation from his surroundings as he tries to protect his psyche from further trauma.

The Kite Runner begins with the affirmation that traumatic memories do not rest but keep clawing their way back into the lives of their victims. Even after a lapse of twenty-six years, Amir cannot bury his past, thus suggesting that a traumatic experience is a powerful shaping force that has the potential to determine what course its victim's life should take. Amir has not changed much from what he had become at the age of twelve, in the winter of 1975. The twenty six years of his life that he led since, have hinged on a single event—the rape of his best friend, Hassan to which he has bore witness. This single moment of trauma has defined his entire life. The fact that he is in a land miles away from his homeland, where the event took place, offers him no comfort.

Hosseini's dedication to accurately portraying Afghan history for a Western audience is most evident in his representation of Afghanistan's national pain, which he transforms into Hassan's rape an occurrence seen by Amir. Hosseini presents Hassan's rape and subsequent anguish as an allegory for the turbulence that has engulfed Afghanistan since a revolution in 1973 overthrew the monarchy and prompted decades of political uncertainty, beginning with a communist takeover and Russian invasion in 1979. Hosseini's dedication to accurately portraying Afghan history for a Western audience is most evident in his representation of Afghanistan's national pain, which he transforms into Hassan's rape an occurrence seen by Amir. Hosseini presents Hassan's rape and subsequent anguish as an allegory for the turbulence that has engulfed Afghanistan since a revolution in 1973 overthrew the monarchy and prompted decades of political uncertainty, beginning with a communist takeover and Russian invasion in 1979.

The Kite Runner is a novel about friendship, loyalty and the price that should be paid for betrayal. Written against a history that has not been told in fiction before, the novel describes the rich culture and beauty of the land that is on the verge of complete destruction. Taking us from the Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy to the present, *The Kite Runner* is a beautifully told story of friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan nonetheless grow up in different worlds. Amir is the son of a wealthy and prominent businessman, while Hassan is the son of their servant. Their intertwined lives and their fates reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade, Amir and his father (Baba) flee the country for a new life in the United States. Amir thinks that he has escaped his past but in no time realizes that he cannot leave the memories of Hassan behind.

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Many traumatized persons, however, experience long periods of time in which they live in two different worlds or realms: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life. Very often, it is impossible to bridge these worlds. It is like a permanent duality, or a parallel existence. The young and the adult Amir are similar existences, separated by space and time. The different steps that Amir adopts towards healing would enable him to bridge this gap, narration being one among them. That traumatic memory or experience is timeless, is a fact to be reckoned with. A traumatic memory is not a story placed in time, with a beginning, middle and end that is characteristic of narrative memory. When it gets told, it is still a re-experience. Hassan is the kite runner and the novel projects his victimisation. It almost appears that Amir bears the brunt of the rape, when Hassan is its real victim. Nothing much is revealed about how Hassan copes with the trauma. Occasional references in the narrative like, "*He smiled his Hassan smile and disappeared around the corner. The next time I saw him smile unabashedly like that was twenty-six years later, in a faded Polaroid photograph*" (TKR 59), hints at the impact the rape must have caused in Hassan's life.

II. CONCLUSION

Though Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* lack the chaotic, disorienting and sober aspects that are often associated with trauma fiction, his works offer voice to the millions who suffer in private and attempt to call the world's attention to the issues that are often ignored and go unchecked in the society. The Kite Runner (2003) gives a vision of what Afghanistan was before its association as a haven for terrorists. Hosseini deals with the theme of terrorism in his first novel *The Kite Runner*, in which he has given a genuine insight to the people of the world about the extremists Taliban, in particular, and the culture, and the traditions of Afghan people in general. *The Kite Runner* presents a quest for the self. Amir functions in isolation and his quest takes the shape of an inward journey. The author's use of the first person narrator makes the character into a writer or creator of some sort who is engaged in the process of reconstituting a self diminished by loss. The article addresses the need to fight against terrorism as a phenomenon to which the world became the witness of this gruesome reality. It, therefore, provides an analysis of terrorism, revealing the people's suffering caused by this terrorism.

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