

Traumatic Memory and Migration: In context of Khaled Hosseini's the Kite Runner

Mrs. Poonam

Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Govt. College for Women, Sonipat, Haryana, India Email:

Abstract:

The Kite Runner (2003) is a novel by Khaled Hosseini, and unlike his other novels which focus on many characters, The Kite Runner mainly focuses on two characters, Amir and Hassan. Set in Afghanistan, the story's socio-political backdrop includes events such as the fall of Afghanistan, the Russian invasion, the exodus of millions of Afghans to Pakistan, the United States and Iran, and the rise of the Taliban towards the end of the story. The title of this research is "Remembrance and the Afghan Diaspora: A study of Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner. It focuses on how memories define the life, actions and thought processes of the protagonist Amir. In The Kite Runner, Hosseini's characters are haunted by memories, and Amir achieves spiritual liberation only after resolving his past conflicts. This study explores the dynamics of human memory, with a particular focus on immigration. This book aims to draw on Edward Said's concepts and theories of the British-Arab encounter and the politics of knowledge, as well as those of other thinkers who have provided insights into memory, nostalgia, terrorism, and past trauma.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, Memory, Nostalgia, The Kite Runner, Migration

The Kite Runner was written by Khaled Hosseini in 2003. The novel depicts the plight of Afghan immigrants and those who remain in Afghanistan in a very moving way. This is the story of Amir returning to Afghanistan after more than 20 years to save his half-brother and best friend Hassan's son Sohrab. The novel's background is all made up of memories of beautiful Afghanistan in the 1970s and early 1980s and how Hassan and Amir did their best every day. For Amir, returning home is an act of facing unresolved conflicts and salvation.

In a 2004 interview, "Conversations with Khaled Hosseini" by Farhad Azad, published in Afghanistan Magazine, Hosseini touched on aspects of nostalgia and the Afghan diaspora. He emphasizes how Amir is a prime example of Afghan nostalgia in his literature. He said of Amir's character:

Nostalgia and longing for the homeland. The preservation of culture and language: Amir marries an Afghan woman and stays an active member of the Afghan community in the East Bay; the hard-working immigrant value system; and some sense of survivor's guilt, which I think many of us, particularly in sunny California, have felt at one time or another. (Hosseini, "Interview")

The 1960s-1980s (early) are considered by older generations to be Afghanistan's golden age. In her New York Times article "Remembering Afghanistan's Golden Age" (2009), Elizabeth Bumiller writes that Kabul was once known as the "Paris of Central Asia" (Bumiller). Farhad Azad asked Khaled Hosseini about Afghanistan's "Golden Age" and how his approach criticized the harsh and unjust realities of the time and contradicted the one-sided impressions of older generations of Afghanistan. (Hosseini

"Interview"). This older generation is recreating Afghanistan in their own memories and reconstructing it through nostalgic memories.

The Kite Runner has some autobiographical elements. Khaled Hosseini has left Afghanistan and is facing challenges similar to those faced by Amir and his father in Kite Runner. In the novel, Amir is the only child of a wealthy Afghan businessman. His mother died during childbirth. They are the third generation living with their son Hassan, who is the same age as Ali and Amir. His childhood was unimaginable and inseparable from Hassan. The relationship between Amir and Hassan is very complicated. They belong to different ethnic backgrounds, classes and social status. Even if Hassan's affection is pure and transcends such social imperatives, this social dichotomy is very evident and clear in young Amir's mind. Hassan and Ali belonged to the inferior Hazara ethnic group, while the Amir belonged to the Pashtun and Sunni ethnic groups. Hazaras were considered second-class citizens in Afghan society. Hassan never hides his admiration and unwavering loyalty to Amir. He saves Amir from numerous bullying incidents. Despite being subjected to repeated harassment, sarcasm and insults on Amir's behalf, Hassan never abandoned his service to Amir and his home. Amir describes their relationship in his Kite Runner as follows: "But in none of these stories did Baba call Ali a friend. Oddly enough, I never considered Hassan and myself a friend, at least in the normal sense. Because it is not easy to get past this story. Hassan saves Amir from threats and attacks from school friends Asef, Kamal and Wali.

Hassan meets three people at a kite festival. Asef gives him the choice to renounce the dragon or renounce honour. Hassan chooses the latter. Amir witnesses Hassan's rape, but he prefers to remain silent and not intervene in the crime. He still hasn't let go of his superiority over Hassan. It contrasts with Hassan's fierce loyalty, and Hassan begins to annoy Amir because he chooses to allow himself to be raped but not to defeat Amir. The fact that Hassan loves Amir immeasurably and beyond the normal standards of love worries Amir, who continues to feel guilty after this incident. Hassan tries to be normal, but Amir remains disconnected from him.

Amir is overwhelmed with shame, remorse, and guilt, but there is nothing he can do about it. Amir thinks Baba should consider hiring a new group of servants. Baba strongly denies this idea and reprimands Amir. He falsely accuses his friend and father of theft and decides to evict both Hassan and Ali from the household. After they leave, some of the Amirs are relieved and hope that once they stop seeing Hassan every day, they will forget all their guilt and attacks. Of course not. Amir realized that he could not forget the past. He said, "I know you're wrong about talking about the past and how you're burying it." For the past is about to disappear" (1) Later in the novel, Soviet political forces violently take over Afghan politics, forcing thousands of civilians to migrate to survive. Baba and Amir move to the United States and Rahim Khan goes to visit his loved ones in Pakistan. He thinks of Hassan every day and never forgets his hometown and motherland, Kabul.

Thirty years pass, Amir marries Soraya, and then Baba dies when Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan saying "there is a way to get well again" (148). Amir learns that long ago he secretly suspected. Hassan is his biological brother, the result of his father's love affair with a domestic worker. At this point, Amir has no choice. He must return to his homeland to save Hassan's son Sohrab. Amir learns that Hassan is no more. He struggled to fulfill his duty of guarding and caring for Baba's home. He refused to leave the house and was shot in the head. He sacrificed his life for Amir's father's house, just as he sacrificed his honour for Amir's dragon.

For him, returning to Afghanistan is the only option and the only course of action. That's the only way

for Amir to redeem himself. Hassan was killed by Taliban forces after the civil war in Afghanistan. The only way for Amir to save his conscience and free himself from his guilt is to travel to Afghanistan, risk his safety in the United States, and risk his life to try to save Hassan's son Sohrab. Describing Amir's decision and motives, Saraswat understands that 'Amir eventually became a man to stand up for himself and his sins' (172). But there is no easy way to rescue Sohrab and drive him out of Afghanistan or even Pakistan. Hurt by the unfulfilled promise to Amir, Sohrab attempts suicide. Months after attempting suicide and being transported to the United States, Sohrab was unable to speak or communicate. His first reaction, the first sign that Amir has been saved and that going home will bring at least some peace of mind, was his smile after Amir flew a kite during a rally for Afghan immigrants in Fremont. Amir describes Sohrab's reaction as follows:

It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn't make everything all right. It didn't make anything all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight. But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting. (401)

The characters in *Kite Runner* represent Afghan values. These emphasize the importance of family and childhood ties for humans. The emotional trauma of separation can be very distressing when part of a family relocates. Those left behind feel the same pain of separation and loneliness. Family is very important to Khaled Hosseini. Because "in Afghanistan, we only see ourselves as individuals" (qtd. hobby). "You see yourself as someone's son, someone's brother, someone's cousin, someone's uncle. 'You are part of something bigger than you. I am so fascinated by what happens in families how people destroy and love each other,'" Hosseini says (quoted in Hobby). These factors make *The Kite Runner* a very special novel.

Amir's character is emblematic of the ability of humans to repress memories for life. Traumatic, meaningful and indescribable memories. Sometimes, like this time, life offers us the opportunity to face them, but other times, as in Hassan's case, the problem remains unresolved. *Kite Runner* is therefore a novel about traumatic childhood memories and memories of his native Afghanistan.

Works Cited

1. Bumiller, Elisabeth. "Remembering Afghanistan's Golden Age." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 17 Oct. 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/weekinreview/18bumiller.html>.
2. G.K., Santhosha. "Childhood, Nostalgia and Flashback in *The Kite Runner* ." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2019, pp. 285–287., <http://rjelal.com/7.4.19/285-287%20Dr.SANTHOSHA.G.K.pdf>. Accessed 7 Oct. 2022.
3. Hoby, Hermoine. "Khaled Hosseini: 'If I Could Go Back Now, I'd Take *The Kite Runner* Apart'." *The Guardian*, 1 June 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/01/khaled-hosseini-kite-runner-interview>. Accessed 7 Oct. 2022.
4. Hosseini, Khaled. "Interview by Farhad Azad." Dialogue with Khaled Hosseini, *Afghan Magazine*, June, 2004. 10 June 2019 <https://afghanmagazine.com/post/185415461029/dialogue-with-khaled-hosseini>
5. Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. Print.