



The Political and the Personal Intertwining: A Study of the Parallel Vision of War in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

The current paper investigates parallel vision of war in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Political war in this novel has been paralleled with the internal war of which the characters are suffering from. This study takes up this issue of interconnecting the internal grief and suffering with the political upheaval of the contemporary time analyzing the unusual events behind the sufferings. Focusing on the political instability and consequences of a prolonged war, this research will help reader to identify conjunctions with the loss of lands, culture, freedom of choice and extreme violence by the name of religion that led the characters to an eternal suffering. It will parallel the politics and the personal life in terms of trauma and pain due to the devastating war and also try to express logical statements towards the idea of eternal pain of the wounded memory of the characters, especially in Amir and Baba.

Keywords: War, trauma, wounded memory, Afghanistan, marginalization.

I. Introduction

The *Kite Runner* is said to be the first novel composed in English and translated into different languages by an Afghan novelist, Khaled Hosseini. The extraordinary, tragic story of the improbable friendship between a rich boy and the child of the servant, *The Kite Runner* is a beautifully described novel set in a nation that's within the preparation of being crushed. It is almost the control of perusing,

the cost of selling out, and the possibility of recovery; and an investigation of the control of fathers over sons- their dreams, their penances, and their lies. A clearing story of family, adored, and fellowship told against the destroying background of the history of Afghanistan over the final thirty a long time, *The Kite Runner* is an unconventional and powerful novel that has gotten to be an adored, one-of-a-kind classic.

The study aims to project how politics affect every individual in a sense of loss and pain, in short, a comparison between the political war and the internal war inside the individuals' mind. Apart from the sudden political turmoil, the loss of land and culture is related to almost every character in the novel. The war, as a game-changer affects both; those who has been already suffering and who will be suffering now. The basic study of this research is to show how the possible political reconstruction is still not enough to reduce the suffering of what they have lost as this is an eternal trauma.

II. Effects of Political War

Though many of the critics claim *The Kite Runner* as a bildungsroman novel in a sense of individual transformation throughout the novel, the novel can be considered as a historical classic, blended with a fictional first-person narration from the point of view of the protagonist, Amir.

a. Afghan Politics before the Soviet Invasion

The idea of politics appears for the first time in the novel in chapter five. The narrator describes the ultimate consequence of a sudden breakdown of the political stability of Afghanistan. As the narrator describes,

— *“they hadn't shot much of anything that night of July 17, 1973. Kabul awoke the next morning to find that the monarchy was a thing of the 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."
(Hosseini 32)

That is an actual history portrayed in a fictional plot. From 1933 to 1973, Afghanistan was a monarchy led by King Zahir Khan. On July 17, 1973, with the help of the leftist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Daoud Khan broke the traditional monarchy of King Zahir Shah and established the first Republic of Afghanistan. That was the penetration of upheaval and decades of conflict and suffering for the people of Afghanistan.

The victory of Daoud Khan is accepted either positively or negatively by the characters of the novels, but the author has described the idea of how Daoud Khan influenced the economic development and reformation through women's rights and modern technology. There is an implication of replacing conventional culture with western influence. The 'cowboy hat' that is gifted by Baba to Hasan is used as a metaphor of the penetration of westernization as the narrator describes,

*—“.... A leather cowboy hat just like the one Clint Eastwood wore in *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* which has unseated *The Magnificent Seven* as our favorite Western.”*
(Hosseini 39)

According to the historical reference, PDPA leaders feared that Daoud was planning to eliminate them. On 7 Saur 1357 – 27 April 1978 – a gathering of military officials lined up with the liberal People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), ousted President Daud Khan and held onto power. After twenty months, the Soviet Union attacked to keep the favorable to Soviet Afghan state from falling. Though there is no direct history in the text, Hosseini's brilliant use of foreshadowing narration creates an atmosphere of premonition of war and the sufferings of the character. As Amir says-

— *“Because that was the last winter Hasan stopped smiling” (Hosseini 41)*

— *“The next time I saw him smile unabashedly like that was twenty-six years later, in a faded Polaroid Photograph.” (Hosseini 59)*

b: The Soviet-Afghan War

History recalls the entrance of Soviet influence because of the close ties of PDPA with the Soviet Union. The vast social and political reformation including abolishing religious and traditional customs, affects people to lose their identity and ‘Watan’ in the novel. Because of these in-between factional collisions, the stability of the political equilibrium rigorously becomes challenged. This is resulted in a decade of occupation of The Soviet Army in the year 1979. The influence of the war in *The Kite Runner* is presented as a catalyst of losing the religious and traditional entity. In chapter ten, the upheaval chaos in the individual lives is projected in the ‘tarpaulin-covered cab of an old Russian truck’. Including Amir and Baba, almost a dozen of other strangers is on that truck on the way to Pakistan about to leave from their own country, their own identity and memories of thousand years. This chapter is plotted in March 1981, is brilliantly juxtaposed with the actual forecast of war after the Soviet invasion. As the narrator describes,

—*“You cannot trust anyone in Kabul anymore- for a free or under threat, people told on each other, neighbor on neighbor, child on the parents, brother on brother, a servant on the master, friend on friend.....The Rafiqs, the comrades were everywhere and they'd split Kabul into two groups....The tricky part was that no one knew who belonged to which.....they'd taught children to spy on their parents, what to listen for, whom to tell.”(Hosseini 98)*

The sufferings of people due to political destabilization, start with loss of trust and ends in the loss of land in this contemporary time.

Apart from Amir's personal life the author also projects the sufferings of the general people, the inferiors who are the victims of the dictatorship of the colonial party. The incident with the woman who is insulted by the Russian soldier when he objectifies her womanhood by demanding half an hour with her as 'price for letting them pass' (Hosseini 100). This is the first time the implication of war is obvious, when the Russian officer says, "He says this is war. There is no shame in war." (Hosseini 100)

After reaching Jalalabad all the refugees have to stop on the way to Peshwar and they take shelter in a basement. In this tragic situation, Baba tells Amir to think any of his good memory to replace the chaotic incident in his mind. Amir thinks of his golden childhood of flying kites with Hasan. The loss of culture along with the loss of land is clearly projected by the author as the horror of the war. And the horror continues to a tragic vision to all the refugees when Kamal's son is dead as he cannot breathe in that basement and instantaneous suicide of Kamal himself by a gun. This cruelty of war is continued in the soil of Afghanistan and their loss of identity, culture and tradition.

c. Post-War Taliban Invasion in Afghanistan:

The suffering of the Afghan people that started from the day of Daoud Khan's coup is probably finished but didn't end yet. By the year, 1989, Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan, but they left an unstable political environment. There were rival groups to fight each other in a civil war. The land was haunted by a number of extremist groups that leads the people in an irony of their long-awaited 'Watan'. In 1994 the Taliban took over Kandahar Province and by 1996 they overrun Kabul. Within two years they took control of about 90 percent of Afghanistan.

In power, the Taliban established extreme laws and restrictions on Afghans that implies (replace word) another dictatorial ruling in the

name of an end of the constant fighting and rivalry. The woman and ethnic minority people are extremely victimized by these. From stopping education for women, not allowing women to work, requiring women to wear full-body veils, to brutally terrorizing and killing Afghan civilians (especially the Hazaras). This suffering is described in author's language in Hasan's letter to Amir,

— *"Amir Agha... Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land, and you cannot escape the killings. Always the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere; in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, it is a part of our lives here, Amir Agha. The savages who rule our Watan don't care about human decency". (Hosseini, 189-90)*

In chapter 20, there is a vivid description of the sufferings of the post-war witnesses who are going through new trouble and get oppressed by their own people because of the fundamental possession of the Mujahedeen. When Amir is back in Kabul in search of Sohrab, the land is no more the land he left, not even a little. Through the conversation between Farid (the car driver) and Amir, the readers come to know how the general village people are killed or victimized as refugees in Pakistan. Amir claims this Taliban oppression as the second war and the war's tragedy is here acknowledged by Farid's description.

On Amir's journey within the land, he sees a lot of children no older than five or six and hardly anyone of them is seen with any adult, probably because the war has taken away their fathers, most of the adult males are dead and "the war has made fathers a rare commodity in Afghanistan." (Hosseini 215)

The sufferings know no beyond when the Taliban do not allow the women to work outside and the mothers of the children who have lost their fathers, are forced to stay in the orphanage. The brutality catalyzes at the highest when the owner of the orphanage, Zaman

describes the reason why he allows the Taliban to take away some children

— *“If I deny him one child, he takes ten. So I let him take one and leave the judging to Allah. I swallow my pride and takes his goddamn filthy...dirty money. Then I go to the bazar and buy food for the children.”* (Hosseini 225)

The violence has become extreme when the woman is executed in front of a crowd in chapter 21. It is ironic, while they are making a law to confine women into their veil, in the home but they are exhibited in front of men for execution to ensure their so-called ‘Shariya’. The standards of conventionality have been separated and debased by the Taliban, and dread is utilized as a replacement for law. It is anything but a jury or even an adjudicator that articulates the man and woman blameworthy, however religious cleric, and the punishment for sexual sin is a savage, open demise. This reminds the same violation that Mariam has to face for killing her husband to protest oppression in *The Thousand Splendid Suns* by Hosseini. This was the actual ruling system of Taliban in that contemporary time. By the name Allah they judged people on their own and named it Islamic law that most of the Muslims didn't agree with.

Assef represents the violent, abusive part of Afghanistan. He is one of the Taliban leaders who executes the woman publicly and also responsible for Sohrab's sexual abuse. The racial mistreatment of Hazaras returns as a topic, and he references the slaughter of Hazara residents in the city of Mazar-I-Sharif. He describes by himself shamelessly what he did to the innocent people,

— *“Door to door we went, calling for the men and the boys, we'd shoot them right there in front of their families. Let them see. Let them remember who they are and where they belonged.... sometimes we broke down their doors and went inside their homes. And...I'd...I'd sweep the barrel of machinegun around the room and fire and fire until the smoke blinded me”* (Hosseini 242)

The war affects the innocence of childhood of the vital characters. The memories Amir takes with himself, the abuse of Sohrab and the replacement of all the platforms for the children by violence. The prohibition of kite flying and the replacement of the stadium by an execution area are mentionable.

II. Internal War in the Characters' Lives

Apart from the political turmoil, the internal war in individual characters' is always vigilant among them from the beginning which is catalyzed by the war later. In the narration of the flashback of Amir's memory, the reader comes to know how the characters are suffering inside from anxiety, loss and guilt through a series of unpleasant events. In the first chapter of the novel readers get an idea that there is something already happened before something going to be happened by Rahim Khan's advice to Amir over a phone call, 'There is a way to be good again.' This is because Rahim Khan is concerned about the sufferings of Amir's due to his guilt that reaches now in his manhood after tormenting his childhood and youth. Amir's incapability of responding against Hasan's rape chastises him with his guilty conscience probably until he is about to rescue Sohrab (Hassan's Son). Amir as a child explains his guilt,

— *"A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn't have to live with lie anymore. But no one woke up and in the silence that followed, I understand the nature of my new curse."* (Hosseini, 75)

Even though Amir is physically unharmed, the traumatic memory of his cowardice and disloyalty leaves him in a state of self-actualization and pours him in terrible pain. In his adulthood, Hosseini explains his suffering at the starting of the novel,

— *"standing in kitchen with the receiver to my ear, I knew it wasn't just Rahim Khan on the line, it was my past of unatoned sin"* (Hosseini 1)

Additionally, Amir is not only in a war with himself and his suffering because of his guilt but also there are two major issues. One is the lack of affection from his father and another one is his nostalgia of the lost land.

Firstly, Amir has gone through a deficiency of fatherly love because of having a little emotional attachment with Baba (his father). Amir's initial years are exceptionally hard on him since he lost his mom during his own introduction to the world, blames himself for his mother's death, and does not have a good relationship with his dad. Baba is a generous and great man on a fundamental level; he's only unfit to grapple with his child's advantages, and eventually disregards him on the grounds that there is an absence of an association. Though the war and their survival have improved the relationship later, his sweet childhood is tremendously haunted repeatedly by this lack of affection. Also, Amir is sometimes envious of Hassan because in case of getting fatherly love, because Hassan gets everything that Amir always expects and fails. His pain is so intense and desperate that to get his father back he is ready to sacrifice his friend,

— *"Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was this a fair price?" (Hosseini 89)*

Secondly, the loss of land and identity due to the ruthless Soviet-Afghan war breaks down Amir completely. Along with his personal grief of his previous sins, he takes his additional pain of loss including identity, country and his father later with him to America. While the past sins are already making him suffer, he starts to deal with his memory and nostalgia in Afghanistan,

— *"I only knew the memory lived in me, a perfectly encapsulated morsel of a good past, a brushstroke of color on the gray, barren canvas that our lives had become." (Hosseini, 122-123).*

The cruel war not only affects Amir's psychological development, but it creates an intense wound in Baba's memory too leaving Afghanistan. Baba's feeling of nostalgia is also intensified not only because of living a life as a migrant in America but also, he is in search of his good old days where everything is in its place and under his control that he has left in his naïve country. For Baba, Afghanistan means,

—*“the love of Afghan culture, family, honour, dignity and integrity, and himself as an advocate for honesty and moral upholding. (Sulaiman, The Notion of Homeland, “Imaginary Homeland” and Wounded Memory in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, p. 5).*

But now Afghanistan has been a source of reminiscence of his celebrated life in the past. In Amir's narration,

—*“Baba was like the widower who remarries but can't let go of his dead wife. He missed the sugar cane fields of Jalalabad and the garden of Paghman. He missed people milling in and out of his house, missed walking down the bustling aisles of Shor Bazaar and greeting people who knew him and his father, knew his grandfather, people who shared ancestors with whose pasts intertwined with his.” (Hosseini, 129)*

In Jeffery C. Alexander's word these sufferings of Amir and Baba can be defined as,

— *‘Cultural trauma’ that happens “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. In connection to the subject, cultural trauma, people have constantly used the language of trauma to explain what happened, not only to themselves but also to the collectivities to which they belong.” (Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma”, Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity).*

According to the perspective of Alexander's theory, Amir and Baba often cry out for their loss either of the identity or their luxurious life and honor in Afghanistan which is now replaced with their living as immigrants. For many years his memory remains so vigilant that returning Kabul at his age of thirty-eight he sighs,

— *"A sadness came over me. Returning Kabul was like running into an old, forgotten friend, and seeing that life hadn't been good to him, that he'd become homeless and destitute."* (Hosseini 216)

Apart from his personal grief, Amir is seemed to remember often about his and Hasan's sweet memories of childhood and the events of kite fighting together. Cultural trauma is heavily poured into Baba's memory. He has to leave his honor, power, identity and love for the country. All he has now is described by Amir,

— *"My eyes returned to our suitcase. They made me sad for Baba. After everything he'd built, planned, fought for, fretted over, dreamed of, this was the summation of life: one disappointing son and two suitcases."* (Hosseini 108)

Internal war is seemed to be suffered by another major character of the novel, Hasan, the Hazara. Afghanistan harbors Ethnic discrimination and suppression of the Hazaras of which history witnesses.

According to the history,

— *"It was not until 1923, Hazara slavery was abolished, but still the community were excluded from contributing to, and benefiting from, the development of Afghanistan, and were not viewed as equal citizens."* (Rad, *The Hazaras – Afghanistan's oppressed minority*, *The Morning Star Online*)

This is what is pictured in the story of the Hazara boy Hasan in *The Kite Runner*. Hasan is seemed to be subjugated because of his ethnicity and dissimilarity of the features with the Pashtuns. Starting from his abuse by Aseef, his acceptance of the impossibility of the friendship with Amir, his being a victim of betrayal and finally, he

ends up being the prey of the Taliban's cruel drunkenness. In describing Hasan's tragedy, Professor Nie Zhenzhao says that the moral factors that impact the destiny of the characters ought to be broke down in the social-moral situation of the time. On the off chance that it returns to the setting of Afghan morals portrayed in the novel, it isn't hard to decipher the moral explanations behind Hassan's misfortune

Apart from his ethnic marginalization, Hasan is a victim of social class too. Even by Amir, he is sometimes realized that he and Amir cannot be friends. Hasan has to keep compromising with his fate and friendship.

III. War in a Parallel View

Although there is an only a direct description of the historical war and cruelty of the Taliban Throughout the story, the readers don't miss the chance to feel the characters' internal war too with the flashback and narration of the chronological events either affected by the war or their destiny. If these two types of war are kept in a parallel view, they can be interconnected by analyzing some similarities and dissimilarities. Firstly, the political upheaval of Afghanistan is continuous within the whole-time duration of the novel. From Daoud Khan's coup to the extremist Taliban reign, the whole novel has gone through this timeline. The control of Afghanistan has gone to several hands, but the quest for freedom and intolerable suffering of the people has failed to be secured every time. On the other hand, according to the story, the major characters' especially Hasan, Baba and Amir are already being suffered from the pain of different stories even before the war. Hasan is compromising with being marginalized because of his ethnicity and social class. And, it results in an extremely unpleasant memory of being raped by Aseef. In the case of Amir, being desperate for his father's only attention, he betrays Hasan and

accuses of theft. Moreover, his incapability for being protective of Hasan while he is being raped creates a realization of guilt of which he is suffering from his childhood to salvation after rescuing Sohrab. Though Baba is seemed to be a wealthy and happy man before the war starts, he is also busy with dealing with his guilt and shame of adultery that results in the birth of Hasan. This is almost kept as a secret till more than half of the novel and is told by Rahim Khan to Amir as well as to the reader after Baba has died. Though the novelist directly doesn't express the sense of guilt through Baba or shows him to suffer for this but after knowing the truth which is hidden by Baba for a long time it is visible why he cares for Hasan like his own child.

When the war starts, the remaining war inside their mind collects some new sufferings. Hasan is though kept absent in the middle of the novel but later he appears through a letter to Amir. In this part Rahim Khan lets the reader know that Hasan is murdered by the Taliban. This is really heartbreaking that in his childhood, Hasan was abused by the Aseef, who is now one of the leaders of the Taliban. After several years, he is died by them. On the other hand, Amir and Baba along with their previous pain now suffering from the loss of identity and land. All they have now is the wounded memory and pain.

The war is a game-changer in the novel it's true, but it cannot be denied the war inside them is firing. The politics have been changed from Daoud Khan to Soviet to the Taliban. But, the war inside them is still continuous and there is no way to forget or ignore it. The political war is visible and what is happening inside their mind and how they are suffering is only known by them. The war affects everyone but one day the war will come to an end, but the people who have the memory of the war will be in eternal pain that cannot be undone.

IV. Conclusion

The study has clarified the interconnection between two states of suffering (political and personal) of which the characters have gone through. It also focuses on the impact of prolonged war and misleads of the Taliban reign that affects the individuals along with their previous suffering of guilt. Although the war goes away, the power has been replaced many times. But the people who suffer, who witness the loss must live with eternal mourning probably till their last breath.

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