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Lost Childhood: Trauma and Loss of Identity in the Selected Works of Khaled Hosseini and Paro Anand

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Abstract:

Childhood trauma emerges as a crucial problem during contemporary times and, could result in severe disorders affecting childhood as well as adulthood. The world grapples with the terrible challenges of terrorism, nuclear war, communal hatred, genocide and the massacre of many people simply in the name of terrorism and religion. This research paper deliberates on the severe impact of terrorism and militancy on the mental and emotional health of children in light of the books *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini and *Wild Child and Other Stories* by Paro Anand. These two fictional works record the actual events and are filtered through personal experiences and human emotions.

Keywords: Childhood Trauma, Psychological study, Trauma Studies, Non-fiction.

Since time immemorial, humanity has borne the brunt of several crusades, political annexation, and other terrorist activities. Despite the teachings of the religious leaders stressing tolerance, peace and brotherhood, the world has witnessed militancy and terrorism and there has been no reduction in extremist activities. In the Twentieth century, the world witnessed two world wars causing unimaginable destruction and damage. Terrorism has affected every nation in one way or the other. There has been a tremendous escalation in terrorist and fundamentalist activities all over the world in the twenty-first century.

The goal of these militants is not religious, in the sense of faith, nor cultural, in the sense of values, but political in a dirty way. They aim to take power from those who control the states

and want to hold on to that power to cater to their selfish interests. They are enforcing such practices to strengthen religious orthodoxy and achieve political power. Militancy has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns of our time. It has become an issue in political, cultural and social debates both globally and locally. As a result, militancy has become the focus of much scholarly attention and, has created a significant impact on literature as well. Literature is always a reflection of social, political and religious conditions and so militancy also created a great impact on literature. The writers selected for this paper belong to the nations that have witnessed extremist, fundamentalist and terrorist activities which have left a permanent scar on the psyche of the people of those nations. Cathy Caruth, a leading trauma studies critic in her book titled, *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative and History* explains trauma and its causes:

In recent years, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology have increasingly insisted on the direct effects of external violence on psychic disorders. This trend has culminated in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, which describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (57-58)

The psychological and emotional reaction to an upsetting incident is known as trauma. It has a profound and inexplicable effect on a person's life. Post-traumatic stress disorder is the victim's mental state after a dreadful event and it occurs in the form of repeated hallucinations, terrible dreams, disturbing thoughts or behaviors resulting from the event. The writers selected for the study, Khaled Hosseini and Paro Anand, have been affected by the socio-political conditions around them. Both of them have expressed their experience regarding terrorism and militancy and its impact on society in their context. These writers have focused on the disastrous and devastating impact of such activities on the lives of children.

Childhood trauma is a traumatic experience that causes adverse or an overwhelming impact on a child and can have a long-lasting impact on the child's emotional, physical, and psychological well-being. It changes an individual's perspective on life and the outside world. It has a profound effect on the child's mental health, and experiencing or watching a gruesome event might even interfere with brain development. A child's mental health is impacted by childhood trauma, which also makes it difficult for them to build good connections.

The wounds inflicted by terrorist activities on the psyche of people are hard to heal and the scars often remain forever. No amount of palliatives, public announcements of anguish and symbolic acts of solidarity is likely to wipe out the memory of such traumas from the collective consciousness of the society. We must learn from the tragic and distressing experiences and internalize their meanings to build a sane society informed by a democratic and secular ethos. Both the writers Khaled Hosseini and Paro Anand have attempted to enlighten the readers about these aspects. The writers have traced the growth of militancy in their respective nations and the trauma caused thereafter.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and lived with his family in the affluent Wazir Akbar Khan district of the city, in a cultivated, cosmopolitan atmosphere, where women worked as equals with men. Hosseini liked to watch movies based in India and the United States and he enjoyed the sport of kite fighting that he portrays so vividly in his novel *The Kite Runner*. Although Afghan culture lacked a long tradition of literary fiction, Hosseini enjoyed reading foreign novels in translation and began to write stories of his own. He also made connections with his family's cook, a member of the Hazara ethnic group, a minority that has long suffered discrimination in Afghanistan. Hosseini taught this man, belonging to the Hazara tribe, how to read and write and, gained his first insight into the injustices of his society.

After the departure of the Soviets in 1989, the fundamentalist Taliban faction seized control of Afghanistan, imposing a brutal theocratic rule and providing a base for terrorists. Hosseini felt compelled to tell the world something about the life he had known before his country was consumed by war and dictatorship. With the eyes of the world turned on his country, he completed his tale of two Afghan boys, childhood friends separated by the calamities of terrorism and the divergent paths their lives take. This story changed into a novel *The Kite Runner*, published in the year 2003.

The novel has sold more than twelve million copies and has been published in more than forty languages. The novel also received the South African Boeke Prize in 2004. *The Kite Runner* tells the story of Amir, a well-to-do Pashtun boy, who lives with his father in the Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, Ali, who belongs to the Hazara clan. Amir's father, a wealthy Kabul merchant who is generally referred to as "Baba" in the novel, loves both the boys but seems critical of Amir for not being manly enough.

Amir feels that Baba does not love him because he blames him for his mother's death during childbirth. However, Amir has a kinder father figure in the form of Rahim Khan, Baba's friend, who supports Amir for his interest in writing stories and often comes to his rescue against Baba. They both share a warm friendship. Amir always looks up to Baba while Hassan looks up to Amir. The boys spent the first twelve years of their childhood playing together. Amir would even read stories for Hassan as Hassan was illiterate.

Assef is a notoriously mean and violent older boy with sadistic tendencies, and he frequently mocks Amir for socializing with a Hazara, which is, according to Aseef, an inferior race that should live in Hazarajat. Assef encounters Amir one day and prepares to attack him with brass knuckles, but Hassan bravely stands up for him and threatens to shoot out Assef's left eye with his slingshot. Aseef spares them but warns them that he will soon seek revenge for this insult.

The kite-fighting tournament held every winter in Kabul was an old winter tradition in Afghanistan. Hassan was a successful kite runner and he always reached the spot where the kite would land before time and had never missed a falling kite. Unfortunately during his chase for the kite, Hassan runs into Assef and his two friends. Assef wants Amir's kite but Hassan refuses to part with it so Assef rapes him. Wondering why Hassan is taking so long, Amir goes out to search for him but hides when he discovers Assef threatening Hassan. He witnesses the sodomy but is too scared to intervene, and returns home ashamed, and guilty for not being able to protect Hassan when he needed him as expressed in the novel, "And that led to another understanding: Hassan knew he knew I'd seen everything in that alley, that I'd stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time" (89). He feels that his cowardice in failing to protect Hassan from this shameful act would destroy all hopes of gaining Baba's affection, so he does not say anything to anyone about this matter.

After this incident, Hassan and his father, despite Baba's constant pleas begging them to stay, leave the house. Hassan's departure frees Amir of the constant reminder of his cowardice and betrayal, but he still lives in their shadow and guilt. Six years later, after a Communist coup in Afghanistan, Baba uses his wealth and connections to escape with Amir to the United States through Pakistan. Fifteen years after his marriage, Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan, an old family friend who is on his deathbed due to an illness. Rahim Khan requests Amir to come to

Afghanistan. From Khan, Amir gets to know that Hassan had a wife named Farzana, and a son, named Sohrab, and had returned to Baba's house as a caretaker at Khan's request. By this time the Taliban had taken control of Afghanistan. One day Taliban ordered Hassan to give up the house and leave, but he refused and as a result, was shot dead by the Taliban, along with Farzana. Rahim Khan tells Amir that the real reason for which he had called Amir here is, to go to rescue Hassan's son Sohrab, from an orphanage. Amir decides to go to Kabul and starts searching for Sohrab with the help of Farid, a taxi driver. The director of the orphanage tells Amir that a Taliban official comes often, brings cash, and usually takes a girl child back with him. Once in a while, however, he takes a boy and he had recently taken Sohrab. Sohrab is being kept at the Taliban official's home as a captive, where he is forced to dance and wear girl's clothes and is sexually assaulted.

The punishments given by the Taliban to people all in the name of religion, show how brutally the people of Afghanistan were exploited. The scene of hurling stones at the adulterers by the crowd in open ground, the brutal massacre of the Hazaras, and the raping of women and children, all these descriptions in the novel depict the hypocrisy of these terrorists. The activities that they banned outside were all practised by them inside their houses. So it is evident how the terrorist activities in Afghanistan ruined the lives of people and created a deep impact even on the psyche of children. Sohrab repeatedly tells Amir that he wants his old life back and that he is tired of everything. People like Aseef are responsible for taking the happiness from the lives of children and making them orphans. Amir tried his best to save Sohrab from the clutches of terrorists because he wanted to redeem himself for what he did to Hassan.

Amir and Soraya adopt Sohrab and try to provide him with all the facilities. But, Sohrab takes time to recover from all the mental trauma that he has undergone at such a young age. The novel gives a true picture of the atrocities committed by the Taliban on the people of Afghanistan. Hosseini has depicted the impact of terrorism on child psychology. All the hardships that Sohrab endured at such a young age forced him to attempt suicide. Even in the US Sohrab is not able to adjust soon though Amir tries his best to make him comfortable. Sohrab had detached himself from the world and stopped talking. The novel brings out the adverse effects of terrorism and how it has ruined the future of many children causing severe trauma. The mental

trauma that Sohrab undergoes at such a young age shows how the children were exploited both physically and mentally during these times.

Born in Delhi on February 4, 1957, Paro Anand gained international recognition for her contributions to children's literature shortly after completing her formal schooling. She is well-known for her plays, picture books, short story collections, and novels. She has authored numerous works for adults, youth, and kids. She writes to reach out to Indian youth. For her critically acclaimed book *Wild Child and Other Stories*, she was awarded the esteemed Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puruskar in 2017. Paro Anand has made a significant contribution to children's literature, which is indicative of her decades-long expertise in this area. She works with young people who are facing difficult situations, particularly with Kashmiri orphans whose lives have been destroyed by extremists. Her creations give damaged teens and children a voice to communicate their anguish and pain. The protracted strife that has wracked Kashmir for decades has had a terrible toll on the lives of those who call it home. Children who have experienced extreme trauma in the form of parent loss, violence, displacement, and bloodshed, have been more affected. The chosen works have highlighted the importance of addressing the mental and psychological health of Kashmiri children while also shedding light on the traumatic experiences that have primarily affected youngsters.

Paro Anand's collection of short stories, *Wild Child and Other Stories*, delves deeply into several topics relevant to modern culture. Renowned Indian author, Anand offers a wide range of stories that appeal to readers' emotions and intellect in equal measure. Her writings tackle the complexity of human experiences. Anand's collection covers a wide range of thematic grounds, the most important of which is the trauma children suffer in surroundings rife with conflict. With stories like *Wild Child*, *Breaking Free* and *Voices in the Dark*, Anand eloquently illustrates the physical, psychological, and emotional effects of militancy on developing brains. She sheds light on how children deal with fear, worry, and uncertainty when there is violence, showing the serious implications of trauma on children.

Anand also explores the nuances of identity and belonging in the face of social upheaval and exile. Stories such as *Generations* and *Family Matters* depict characters balancing their cultural legacy against the destabilizing effects of war, emphasizing the deep sense of displacement that children feel when caught in the crossfire of militancy. Anand brought up the

subject of militancy and terrorism and how seriously it affects youngsters. The persistent bloodshed, fighting, and political unrest in Kashmir have caused various types of trauma in children. Children are enticed into terrorism and denied access to fundamental rights like food, shelter, and education. Terrorist organizations and extremists take advantage of innocent kids and young people. The family are compelled to relocate from their Kashmiri homes to other cities.

Although *Like Smoke* is a short narrative, it is gut-wrenching. It forces one to consider the true measures taken to address the situation in Kashmir. The cost of the turmoil is being borne by the civilian population, as militancy is taking so many lives and making them easy targets because they won't leave their country. The tale presents a stark contrast between Kashmir's current situation and life before the arrival of militants. Before the advent of terrorism, there used to be no fear in the Kashmir Valley, and people coexisted peacefully. Children from all communities played together, and women felt safe. There was a sense of respect and care for everyone, regardless of their religion—Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. Because there were no boundaries, everyone enjoyed festivals together. People coexisted fearlessly in Kashmir, a place known for peace and harmony. By inciting instability in the name of religion, the radicals are only furthering their agendas. They instil false notions of bravery and heroism in children in an attempt to entice them to join them. There is perpetual fear in the minds of children in Kashmir.

To arouse empathy and compassion for the experiences of traumatized children, Hosseini and Anand use a range of narrative strategies. Readers can deeply connect with the inner lives of Hosseini's protagonists through the use of flashbacks and first-person narration, which immerses them in the physical immediacy of their trauma and resilience. Similar to this, Anand's vivid imagery and deep characterizations enable readers to identify with the setbacks and victories of her youthful heroes. Anand emphasizes the transformational potential of art in healing and resilience-building for children traumatized by conflict through the power of narrative and artistic expression.

There is an autobiographical note in the works of both writers. In Hosseini's house, there was a cook, an illiterate man who belonged to the Hazara clan. Hosseini has portrayed the character of a similar servant in his novel *The Kite Runner*. In Amir's character, some traits that Hosseini himself possesses are reflected. He has portrayed all the sufferings that he and his

family witnessed while living in Afghanistan and after leaving it. His novels end on a relatively more optimistic note because he has still this hope that one day the conditions will change and he will happily return to his native country. Anand holds the world record for making the world's longest newspaper along with, 3000 children in eleven Indian states and written in thirteen languages. The intention behind this project was to provide a medium for children to speak, to express what they feel and, to encourage them to share their own stories and experiences. She has worked closely with children in Kashmir and, all of them want peace to prevail around them.

In both the selected works, characters are caught in the crossfire and overwhelmed by external forces. Their inner lives are influenced by an often brutal and unforgiving world, and the decisions they make about their lives are influenced by things over which they have no control: terrorism, violence, extremism and oppression. Both works serve a strong message by explaining the trauma caused due to militancy and terrorism. In a similar vein, both authors have revealed the innermost feelings and ideas of their characters through reflective contemplation. Characters are given life by Hosseini and Anand, who vividly capture the inner turmoil, feelings, experiences, and thoughts of their subjects.

These writers teach the lesson that humanity dominates over various distinctions of caste, creed, nationality, gender and colour prevalent in the society. The message is more or less the same, humanity comes first before any religious, political, and social concern. They have attempted to create awareness and consciousness among people to tackle the issue of terrorism and militancy. Such events cast a disastrous effect on the social structure of the society where the feelings of harmony, cordiality and brotherhood give place to bickering, fragmentation, jealousy and enmity. Both the writers have picked the same theme and their main concern is to give a message that people should develop the feeling of love, affection and brotherhood which are the essential traits of humanity.

In conclusion, the selected works of Paro Anand and Khaled Hosseini provide compelling testaments to the bravery, resiliency, and humanity of children who grow up in the shadow of bloodshed and strife. Both writers elucidate the universal themes of loss, resiliency, and optimism in the face of hardship via their nuanced examination of childhood trauma, challenging readers to consider the intricacies of conflict and to imagine solutions to promote empathy and humanity.

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