



Analyzing the Collective Trauma of Hazaras in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the portrayal of collective trauma experienced by the Hazara community in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Through a psychological and socio-political lens, the research explores themes of marginalisation, racial persecution, and intergenerational trauma. Characters such as Hassan, Ali, Sohrab, and the Hazara women represent the emotional and cultural weight of historical injustices. This paper examines how literature can serve as a voice for marginalised communities, providing insight into their lived experiences and the necessity for collective healing.

Keywords: Hazara community, collective trauma, intergenerational trauma, trauma studies, marginalisation.

INTRODUCTION

The present study explores the key factors that shape the portrayal of collective trauma of the Hazaras' in Khaled Hosseini's novel, *The Kite Runner*, which serves as a vivid reminder of the Hazara community's often-silenced story. It is told with unflinching authenticity, stressing upon the deep-rooted trauma engraved into the community's collective memory. This study focuses on the characters' individual experience and through the analysis of marginalisation, violence, racial segregation and persecution as well as the gendered dimensions of trauma.

The Hazara community occupies a significant yet often marginalised position in Afghan history and literature. They have been subjected to centuries of ethnic discrimination, social exclusion, and political persecution, experiencing suffering that extend beyond individual experience and become embedded within collective memory. This study employs the framework of trauma studies to examine how traumatic historical events shape the identity, memory, and psychological well-being of entire generations. By applying this theoretical perspective to *The Kite Runner*, the paper investigates how Hosseini represents the long-term consequences of ethnic oppression through the experiences of Hazara characters such as Hassan, Ali, Sanaubar, Farzana, and Sohrab.

TRAUMA: A DEFINITION

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5), trauma is defined as when a person is exposed "to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (Treatments of Psychiatric Disorders 2065–82). The meaning of psychological trauma, however, cannot be restricted within the walls of diagnostic criteria. To categorise it in broader terms, Horowitz (1989) defined it as a sudden and forceful event that overwhelms a

person's ability to respond to it, recognising that a trauma need not involve actual physical harm to oneself; an event can be traumatic if it contradicts one's worldview and overpowers one's ability to cope.

Collective trauma refers to a shared experience of a deeply disturbing event by a large group of people, which leaves lasting consequences on the group's social fabric, cultural memories, and collective identity. It can shape intergenerational transmission of trauma, impacting both individuals and the broader community. The use of the term collective trauma is often synonymous with cultural trauma, community-wide trauma, historic grief, historic trauma, mass trauma, intergenerational PTSD, intergenerational trauma, multigenerational trauma and simultaneous trauma.

Kai Erikson, an American sociologist, was among the first to record collective trauma in his book *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. He articulates the difference between individual and collective trauma and its impact on rewriting the personal narrative: "by individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses 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 damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. Erikson's description of the fracturing of bonds within the community in the face of collective trauma reverberates Baumeister and Vohs' argument that "the essence of meaning is connection."

One of the key roles of collective memories is the creation and maintenance of social identity: "history provides us with narratives that tell us who we are, where we came from, and where we

should be going. It defines a trajectory which helps construct the essence of a group's identity" (Liu and Hilton 537). A traumatic effect on collective memory can thus lead to an undermining of the community's sense of security, a crisis/loss of identity, heightened rates of psychological distress, and a significant increase in individual and collective fears. Explaining the term collective, Ursula König (2017) categorised collective trauma into two levels:

- **Identity group level:** Traumatization can occur amongst various identity groups i.e. age, class, caste, religious and/or ethnic groups. Both size and group coherence may differ and different identity markers may overlap (intersectionality), influencing inter and intra-group dynamics.
- **Society-level:** At the societal level, societies may be affected by traumatization within a nation-state or at a sub/transnational level, influencing the fabric of society and the interactions within and between societies.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The history of Afghanistan dates back to thousands of years. It is a home to various diverse ethnic groups and communities as the land is positioned at a geographical location surrounding the empires of the Indian subcontinent, Persia, Mongolia and China. The largest ethnic group are the Pashtuns, encompassing around 40% of the total population. They are further divided into various confederations and smaller sub-tribal groups. The second largest ethnic group are the Tajiks, residing mainly in the north and north-eastern regions, forming around 25% of the population. The third major ethnic group are the Hazaras, comprising around 9% of the population. They are primarily Shia muslims and reside in central Afghanistan. Around 8% of the population consists of the Uzbeks, mainly residing in the northern region.

During the 19th century, Afghanistan was engaged in several wars with Britain, as they intended to expand their empire from India. In 1880, Abdur Rahman came to power, he declared an anti-Shi'a jihad against the Hazarajat, subjecting thousands of Hazaras into enslavement. Under the rule of the Amir, Abdur Rahman Khan, this ethnic group suffered a very dark period in history as they were dehumanised and inflicted with gruesome tortures. Abdur Rahman issued unwarranted taxes, conducted military campaigns, confiscated their lands and redistributed among his loyal subjects, forced conversions and performed widespread massacres in an attempt to ethnically cleanse Afghanistan of Hazaras. He killed around 60% of the Hazara population. Under his rule, it was preached that they will obtain the key to paradise by killing the Hazaras. Also the people of this ethnic group had to undergo a process of "Pashtunization" and conceal their true identities in order to gain state identification.

The 20th and 21st centuries were marked by significant political upheaval, including foreign intervention, civil conflict, and Taliban rule. Although slavery was formally abolished in the early 20th century, the Hazara community continued to face social exclusion, ethnic discrimination, and violence. The rise of the Taliban in the 1990s intensified the persecution of the Hazaras, who were targeted on the basis of both ethnicity and religious identity.

Following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan entered a period of political reconstruction that enabled greater Hazara participation in education, politics, and public life. Despite these advancements, the community continues to face challenges related to security, discrimination, and social inequality. This history of marginalisation and recurring violence forms an important context for understanding the collective trauma experienced by Hazara characters in *The Kite Runner*.

4.1 Hassan as Embodiment of Trauma

Hassan is one the major characters in the novel and the whole story revolves around Amir's relationship with Hassan. Hassan is the ideal representation of trauma, specifically the trauma faced by the Hazaras because he has been ridiculed, humiliated and even abused since before he could take his first breath until the very last. He portrays the unfaltering loyalty that the Hazara community is known for, as well as their resilience and silent endurance of pain, which also symbolises the deep-rooted trauma of the community. His character is a poignant reminder of the lasting impact of injustice, violence and betrayal on an individual and the community at large.

Hassan's hazara identity decided his future long before he was born, "That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born, perhaps even the moment he had been conceived in Sanaubar's unwelcoming womb- after all, what use did a servant have for the written word?"(Hosseini 26). All his life had been mapped out before him right from his education to his career, even the prejudices that he would face, and all his dreams were already crushed before he was even conceived. Not only was he an unwelcomed existence in his mother's womb, he could also never know the identity of his biological father. When Amir becomes aware of the truth, he says, "And now, fifteen years after I'd buried him, I was learning that Baba had been a thief. And a thief of the worst kind, because the things he'd stolen had been sacred: from me the right to know I had a brother, from Hassan his identity, and from Ali his honour" (Hosseini 208). Though Baba is portrayed throughout the novel as a brave man leading a life of dignity and honour, even he couldn't accept Hassan as his son fearing the shame Hassan's partial hazara identity would bring to his name.

The term Hazara is used as a derogatory term to humiliate and create a sense of inferiority among the entire ethnic group. Furthermore, all the hazara characters in the novel were addressed this way throughout the novel, for instance when a soldier on the street shouts at Hassan, “You! The Hazara! Look at me when I’m talking to you!” (Hosseini 7). This is an act of dehumanisation of the entire community, used to strip away the identity of the individuals and reduce them to a stereotype, eventually making it easier to justify discrimination and violence. Repeated exposure to such slurs can cause damage to the individual’s sense of belonging and self-worth. The psychological impact of these slurs can be passed down through generations, creating a lasting legacy of pain and distrust. It may even lead to silencing and invalidation of the community’s voice, creating an atmosphere of fear where the people are afraid to speak up for themselves and their communities. The impact of this is evident in the interaction between Assef and Hassan when Hassan says, “Please leave us alone, Agha”(Hosseini 38), where Agha is a title of respect in the Persian language, showing how this constant bullying and humiliation creates an “ingrained sense of one’s place in a hierarchy”(Hosseini 38).

The relationship between Amir and Hassan lay the foundation of this novel, but while they shared such a strong bond, they couldn’t get past the barriers of societal conventions. As Amir recounts in the novel, “Baba would laugh and throw his arms around Ali. But in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend. The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either” (Hosseini 24). Even the people that were considered closest by them never treated them as equals, they always had a sense of inferiority looming over them.

But before you sacrifice yourself for him, think about this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why he never includes you in games when he has guests? Why he only plays with you when no one else is around? I’ll tell you why, Hazara.

Because to him, you're nothing but an ugly pet. Something he can play with when he's bored, something he can kick when he's angry. Don't ever fool yourself and think you're something more (Hosseini 68).

This is a further act of dehumanising the Hazara and treating them as mere pets or only for their own benefit. It becomes all the way more painful when inflicted by people they love and respect beyond measure. It becomes even more evident in their close relationship when Amir understands, "...Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in the 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" (Hosseini 98). Hassan had known about Amir's betrayal all along but forgiven him anyway, only to be betrayed once again and framed as a thief. His love and kindness had been trampled upon by the one he loved dearly and yet he still remained forgiving and understanding.

Amir is the protagonist of the novel and the story is narrated through his lens. But in all honesty, Amir confesses the moments of his childhood where his Pashtun background gave him the privilege to be the dominant figure in his friendship with Hassan. Hassan did not have the privilege of being educated but inspite of it, loved to listen to stories and learn the mystery of words. Amir, on the other hand, was educated and would read stories to Hassan but instead of helping his friend learn, Amir would enjoy teasing him for his ignorance. He says, "My favourite part of reading to Hassan was when we came across a big word that he didn't know. I'd tease him, expose his ignorance...If he felt the sting of my tease, his smiling face didn't show it" (Hosseini 27). Though aware that his actions were hurting Hassan, he would continue to do so nonetheless and later try to make up for it by giving him his broken toys or old clothes. This also shows how Amir looks down upon Hassan as he hurts his feelings for the sake of his entertainment and tries to settle that by giving something that is useless to himself.

Another such incident happens when Hassan points out a flaw in Amir's story. It hurts his ego as he is unable to bear the thought that Hassan, who is an illiterate, criticised his writing. He confesses his internal dialogue to the readers, "A voice, cold and dark, suddenly whispered in my ear, *What does he know, that illiterate Hazara? He'll never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?*" (Hosseini 32). Amir feels humiliated that an illiterate hazara raised a question on his writing rather than just seeing it as his friend asking a curious question. The hazara stereotype is so concrete in their minds that when they do anything but follow orders, it is looked upon as an insult towards those who hold authority.

Even though Hassan is his friend, in fact, the only true friend he ever had, Amir took his presence for granted. He not only teased Hassan for his entertainment but also humiliated him to test his loyalty. As he says, " 'Eat dirt if I told you to,' I said. I knew I was being cruel, like when I'd taunt him if he didn't know some big word. But there was something fascinating—albeit in a sick way—about teasing Hassan. Kind of like when we used to play insect torture. Except now, he was the ant and I was holding the magnifying glass"(Hosseini 50). On one instance, when Assef questions Amir about how can he even call Hassan his friend, Amir almost blurts out, "But he's not my friend!...He's my servant!"(Hosseini 38).

Hassan valued their friendship dearly and time and again proved his loyalty towards Amir. After the Kite Tournament when he runs the kite for Amir and is caught by Assef and his friends, he does everything in his power to rescue the kite for Amir. Amir remains a silent witness of this, as he recounts, "Even from where I was standing, I could see the fear creeping into Hassan's eyes, but he shook his head. 'Amir agha won the tournament and I ran the kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite'"(Hosseini 68). While Hassan was being raped by Assef, Amir stood hidden there

the whole time. He could have used his privilege of being a Pashtun and saved his friend from the assault but this was the train of thought he had in that moment:

I actually *aspired* to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. 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? (Hosseini 72-73).

After the incident, when Amir feels ashamed of facing Hassan, he plans to get rid of Hassan altogether. He frames Hassan of theft, "I lifted Hassan's mattress and planted my new watch and a handful of Afghani bills under it"(Hosseini 97), because he knew theft was an unforgivable sin for Agha sahib and he would sent them away immediately. Even in the face of betrayal, Hassan remained loyal to Amir and took the blame upon himself. He even stopped Ali from confessing the truth about Amir to Agha sahib. "Experiencing betrayal by a close other can have devastating consequences. Not only does it violate our sense of security and predictability in the world, but it can also call into question our judgment and our very sense of self. When someone we trust deceives or hurts us, we may begin to question our own worth and wonder whether we are deserving of love and respect" (Gable and Reis 483).

Assef is a prime symbol of Pashtun dominance and harboured immense hatred for the Hazaras. Since a very young age, it became evident in his interactions with Hassan. Whenever they crossed paths, he would call Hassan by humiliating slangs such as "kunis" meaning fag or "a motherless Hazara," in fact, he never addresses Hassan by his name but rather by the identity of his ethnic group, " Hazara". This conveys that the insults and assault inflicted on Hassan are not

on a personal level and hence only limited to him but rather a deep-rooted hatred towards the entire ethnic group. He even dehumanises Hassan when Hassan tries to protect the kite from him for Amir; he calls him, “A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog”(Hosseini 68). In all their interactions, Assef acts like he possesses an inherent superiority over Hassan and has the right to treat him any way that he desires.

One of the most devastating scenes in the novel is the incident of Hassan’s rape. It is a vivid portrayal of dehumanisation and persecution of Hazaras. It is even more horrifying to see the youth hold such extremist views. Assef justifies his actions by saying, “...there’s nothing sinful about teaching a lesson to a disrespectful donkey”(Hosseini 71). When his friends are disgusted to take part in his actions, he convinces them by saying, “It’s just a Hazara”(Hosseini 71). He mercilessly rapes Hassan while Amir becomes a silent witness to the pain inflicted upon him. This deeply scars Hassan as he surrenders to his fate knowing his voice won’t reach above their dominance.

The pain and trauma isn’t inflicted upon Hassan on a few occasions but it is rather etched upon his soul throughout his life. On the occasion of Amir’s birthday party for instance, he has to serve and be humiliated by the very people who mercilessly assaulted him, “...Hassan serving drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter. The light winked out, a hiss and a crackle, then another flicker of orange light: Assef grinning, kneading Hassan in the chest with a knuckle”(Hosseini 93). Hassan never complains or objects to any of this as he has known since a very young age the power and dominance that Pashtun held over them.

Years later when Rahim Khan informed him about the deteriorating condition of Baba’s house in Wazir Akbar Khan, he along with his family came and started looking after the house. Hassan

awaited Amir and Baba every single day and cleaned all the rooms to have them ready whenever they arrived. Hassan had stayed loyal until his last breath. The Talibs had framed him and his family of occupying a Pashtun home, “The Talibs said he was a liar and a thief like all Hazaras and ordered him to get his family out of the house by sundown”(Hosseini 202). Even after repeated threats, Hassan kept protesting against leaving the house. He had given his word to Rahim Khan, moreover it was Amir’s house and he would have protected it at all costs. On seeing his determined protest, the Talibs dragged him to the street and ordered him to kneel, “..and shot him in the back of the head”(Hosseini 202). When Farzana, his wife, came screaming behind them they shot her too. No one came to their defense, they were killed in the blink of an eye and left on the street, “The pretext was that they had evicted a trespasser. Hassan’s and Farzana’s murders were dismissed as a case of self-defense. No one said a word about it. Most of it was fear of the Taliban, I think. But no one was going to risk anything for a pair of Hazara servants”(Hosseini 203).

4.2 Ali as the Silent Victim

Hassan’s father, Ali remains a silent victim throughout the novel. Trauma was so intricately entwined with his life that the few instances where it is portrayed also remain normalized. Ali spent his childhood playing with Agha Sahib but was never treated as a friend but only as a servant’s son. Throughout his life he had been ridiculed and insulted not only because of his ethnic background but also because of his physical appearance. He suffered from congenital paralysis of his lower facial muscles which did not allow him to smile. Moreover, he had a twisted, atrophied right leg as a result of polio.

The older kids on the streets would mock and chase after him whenever he went out in the streets, “They chased him on the street, and mocked him when he hobbled by. Some had taken to calling him Babalu, or Boogeyman”(Hosseini 8). Not only did he become the recipient of ridicule for the outsiders, he was also mocked by Amir, whom he treated like his own son, “Ali turned around, caught me aping him. He did not say anything. Not then, not ever”(Hosseini 8). Hinduja and Patchin (2008) discuss the stress response triggered by social rejection. This stress can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Being ridiculed can be a form of social rejection, potentially leading to similar negative effects.

Ali never expresses his feelings to anyone neither does he complain of the hateful treatment he receives, “Ali never retaliated against any of his tormentors, I suppose partly because he could never catch them with that twisted leg dragging behind him. But mostly because Ali was immune to the insults of his assailants...”(Hosseini 9). Racism and dehumanization of the Hazaras is seen in the case of Ali as well when he is insulted with comments such as, “Hey, you flat-nosed Babalu, who did you eat today? Tell us, you slant-eyed donkey!”(Hosseini 36). Dehumanization is one of the most frequently used weapons of the races that consider themselves superior, in order to justify the persecution of the other race or ethnic group by snatching away their rights as a human being.

Despite all the insults and humiliation, Ali is a symbol of Hazara loyalty and dignity. He remains loyal and passes on his values to his son too. He also does not compromise on holding up his dignity, when Hassan is framed for theft, he leaves for Hazarajat immediately. Even though Agha sahib requests them not to leave, he does not stop even for a moment; instead he says, “Respectfully, you can’t forbid me anything, Agha sahib....we don’t work for you anymore”(Hosseini 99).

4.3 Sohrab's Inheritance of Trauma

Hassan's son, Sohrab, grew up under the Taliban regime. He became a witness to his parents being mercilessly shot on the street and then forced to become a slave of a cruel Talib who both physically and mentally tortured him. He has seen loss, hopelessness, abuse and betrayal at a very young age, scarring his poor young soul. When Amir reaches to rescue him from the Talib, he finds him as a slave to Assef who now holds a high position as a Talib. There, he was treated worse than an animal, his body objectified and abused. When he was called on Amir's request, "Sohrab danced in a circle, eyes closed, danced until the music stopped. The bells jingled one final time when he stomped his foot with the song's last note" (Hosseini 257). Throughout the interaction, there are explicit evidences of physical and psychological harassment of the little boy as the Talib slides his hand through Sohrab's body and performs creepy gestures.

After rescuing from the hands of the Taliban when Amir tries to interact with him, his words are often faced with silence or impassivity. For instance, when Farid, the driver, bids him farewell, he receives no response, "He waited for a reply, but Sohrab paid him no attention. Just rocked back and forth, his face lit by the silver glow of the images flickering across the screen"(Hosseini 286). It takes him a long time to let his guards down before Amir even though he has known about Amir through his father's childhood stories and had wanted to meet him since then.

As he finally starts to open up to Amir and begins to share his fears, Amir becomes aware of the intensity of pain that he carries within himself. His innocence had been shattered by the cruelty of his surroundings. In his conversation with Amir, he confesses of his worries saying, "Will God put me in hell for what I did to that man?"(Hosseini 292). He goes on to talk about his physical abuse, "because I don't want them to see me...I'm so dirty," "I'm so dirty and full of

sin,” “—they did things...the bad man and the other two...they did things...did things to me”(Hosseini 293). Amir notices how he takes long baths trying to “scrub off the dirt and sin off of his body and soul.”

Sohrab is also very well aware of his ethnic background and how it is perceived by the people around them. He has witnessed the Hazara persecution in Afghanistan, especially as he grew under the extreme hatred of the Talibans for their ethnic group. When Amir confesses to Sohrab that Hassan was his half-brother, Sohrab immediately understands why this truth was kept hidden from everyone. When Amir tells him, “...Let’s just say they didn’t tell us because your father and I ...we weren’t supposed to be brothers,” Sohrab asks him, “Because he was a Hazara?”(Hosseini 295).

Abuse and the betrayal of trust, the likes of which Sohrab has experienced leads to feelings of worthlessness, shame and difficulty forming healthy attachments. This is evident in Sohrab when he admits his fears to Amir about going to San Francisco with him, he asks Amir, “What if you get tired of me? What if your wife doesn’t like me?”(Hosseini 297). The incidents he experienced hurt his self-esteem and made him believe that no one would accept him for who he was. When Amir suggests that he might have to stay at an orphanage for a few months, he is frightened to tears at the thought of it. He pleads Amir not to do so over and over again as his past trauma is triggered at the mention of orphanage, “Please! Please, no!,” “I’m scared of that place. They’ll hurt me! I don’t want to go,” “No it’s not. Not that place. God, oh God. Please, no!,” “Please promise you won’t! Oh God, Amir agha! Please promise you won’t!”(Hosseini 313).

After this conversation, Sohrab could not bear the thought of going back to an orphanage and attempts to end his life. Though Amir rescues him at the right time and takes him to the hospital, Sohrab loses his trust in him. He feels betrayed after this incident as he believes Amir could not keep his promise of not sending him to the orphanage. When Amir visits him in his hospital room, he receives a cold response from Sohrab, “He held my glance, then looked away, his face set like stone. His eyes were still lightless, I saw, vacant, the way I had found them when I had pulled him out of the bathtub”(Hosseini 323). In a study, Townsend et al. demonstrate that children who had been abused were more likely to report having suicidal thoughts than children who had not been abused. When Amir keeps trying to initiate a conversation with him, he responds after a very long time, he confesses to Amir that he is tired of everything. He says to Amir, “I want my old life back”(Hosseini 324), he is tired of the life after his parent’s death and wishes he could go back to the days when he was living happily surrounded by his family members. He mourns the fact that he is saved, he says, “—wish you hadn’t...I wish you had left me in the water” (Hosseini 325).

Sohrab could not believe in Amir’s promises anymore. He felt betrayed and lost. Even when Amir sorted out a way to take Sohrab to America along with him, Sohrab’s eyes were not beaming with joy at the news like they previously did. Amir understood that the kinship that was built between them over the past few months had been cracked by the loss of trust, he acknowledges,

In the end, Sohrab never accepted my offer. Nor did he decline it. But he knew that when the bandages were removed and the hospital garments returned, he was just another homeless Hazara orphan. What choice did he have? Where could he go? So what I took as a yes from him was in actuality more of a quiet surrender, not so much an acceptance

as an act of relinquishment by one too weary to decide, and far too tired to believe. What he yearned for was his old life. What he got was me and America (Hosseini 326).

Sohrab takes time to feel at ease in America. He could not warm up to Amir like he once used to and though Soraya, Amir's wife, tried her best to make him feel comfortable, it was not easy to adapt in a new surrounding after the traumatic experiences he had gone through. In his initial days in America, he behaves impassively, as Amir notices, "He was looking at us now in the impassive way he looked at the plate of boiled rice the hospital orderly placed before him" (Hosseini 328). A new environment represents uncertainty and a potential lack of safety for a child with PTSD. This can trigger anxiety and fear, making it difficult to adjust. A study by Spates et al. (2021) highlights how "disruption of a safe environment" is a common consequence of trauma in children. This can be further seen as Amir recounts, "Sohrab's silence wasn't the self-imposed silence of those with convictions, of protesters who seek to speak their cause by not speaking at all. It was the silence of one who has taken cover in a dark place, curled up all the edges and tucked them under," "He walked like he was afraid to leave behind footprints. He moved as if not to stir the air around him" (Hosseini 331).

4.4 Hazara Women: Sanaubar and Farzana

Only three women of the Hazara ethnic group are mentioned throughout the novel, Hassan's mother- Sanaubar, Hassan's wife-Farzana and Hassan and Amir's wet nurse- Sakina. Of these characters, Sanaubar is the most mentioned. Though she had eloped years ago when Hassan was born, Hassan is still ashamed of his mother's bad reputation. When Hassan and Amir pass by the street, Hassan is barked upon by a soldier, "I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that

creek over there,” “What a tight little sugary cunt she had!” (Hosseini 7), which shatters Hassan’s heart. Sanaubar is objectified by the entire society and still she is one to be blamed. Every mention of Sanaubar is either about the details of her physical features or her bad character.

In the very lines where she is introduced, she is blamed upon for tempting men to sin, “...Sanaubar’s brilliant green eyes and impish face had, rumor has it, tempted countless men into sin” (Hosseini 7). Remembering the stories he has heard about her, Amir recounts, “I have heard that Sanaubar’s suggestive stride and oscillating hips sent men to reveries of infidelity”(Hosseini 8). Even when she comes back years later, the first thing to be remarked upon are her physical features, “...we found a woman with stringy graying hair and sores on her arms” (Hosseini 194). Followed by a comparison of her present condition to her youthful beauty, “You never saw her, Amir, she was a vision. She had a dimpled smile and a walk that drove men crazy. No one who passed her on the street, be it a man or a woman, could look at her only once. And now...” (Hosseini 194). The descriptions about her are highly limited to bodily features conveying the patriarchal dominance of the society as well the objectification of women of inferior races. Judith Lewis Herman (1992) in "Trauma and Recovery" explores the objectification of women throughout history, "In patriarchal societies, the female body has been viewed as both an object of desire and a site of danger. This cultural construction makes women vulnerable to sexual violation throughout their lives."

Another Hazara woman about whom we find some description is Farzana, Hassan’s wife. She is introduced as, “She was a shy woman, so courteous she spoke in a voice barely higher than a whisper and she would not raise her pretty hazel eyes to meet my gaze” (Hosseini 190). She is always seen involved in household chores and embracing her motherhood. Deborah Tannen

(1990) in "You Just Don't Understand" explores how language can perpetuate gender stereotypes. She argues that men's language often focuses on dominance and control, while women's language is seen as more tentative and polite. This power imbalance in language can contribute to the objectification of women.

On the other hand, Amir's mother, Sofia Akrami who is a Pashtun woman of rich background is always described as a woman of knowledge and high reputation. She is introduced as, "a highly educated woman universally regarded as one of Kabul's most respected, beautiful, and virtuous ladies" (Hosseini 15). Even the stories and memories described by people about her are of respect and admiration. When Amir meets one of her colleagues on his visit to Afghanistan, her colleague reminisces about her saying, "She was a great woman" (Hosseini 230). The clear differentiation in the portrayal of women of two different ethnic groups, convey the dominance of one group over the other and the treatment of women, especially of inferior groups as objects.

4.5 The Kite Tournament as Historical Microcosm

The story is set in a time frame that has been a very crucial part of the history of Afghanistan. It involves the historical events that left a mark on the Afghan population, especially the Hazaras, right from Soviet invasion till the Taliban regime. This phase of history marks the racial segregation and persecution of Hazaras at its peak. These major events form the background of the novel, highlighting the horrifying consequences of war. Especially, the survival and resilience of the ethnic groups that were considered inferior under the crushing force of power and dominance. This chapter analyses the horrifying event that delivers the crux of the Hazara experience in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that this novel commences in Kabul before the Soviet invasion where there were clear-cut societal strata. This division between two different social classes becomes apparent during the kite-fighting tournament itself. Amir, being a well-to-do Pashtun watches over it from rooftop which overlooks half the city while Hassan – his faithful Hazara friend stays down below picking up fallen kites. Such an arrangement of space could not have been accidental; it was designed so as to show just how far apart these boys were socially which in turn hints at unequal power relations between them.

The life of Hazaras is fraught with vulnerability as demonstrated by the apparently lighthearted kite competition. But this game masks a deeper truth behind its objective which is to cut down the opponent's kites and take possession of their fallen spools. In this activity, those roles that require searching for dropped kites are usually given to boys like Hassan who serve affluent Pashtun families thereby making them subjects under their power. The ethnic tensions simmering beneath the surface erupt during the tournament. The ethnic differences are highlighted when Amir remembers the clear differentiation of their ethnicities even in their childhood memories while witnessing the assault. He remembers how the fortune-teller refused to speak about Hassan's fortune on learning about his Hazara ethnicity, as he recounts, "...The calloused pads of his fingers brush against Hassan's eyes. The hand stops there. Lingers. A shadow passes across the old man's face. The old man takes Hassan's hand and puts the rupia back in Hassan's hand"(Hosseini 70). Their ethnicity is used to demean them, denying them individuality and reducing them to a stereotype.

It is also evident when the street vendor is shocked to see Amir, a Pashtun boy, searching for a Hazara servant late in the evening, "What is a boy like you doing here at this time of the day looking for a Hazara?"(Hosseini 65), "...Lucky Hazara, having such a concerned master. His

father should get on his knees, sweep the dust at your feet with his eyelashes” (Hosseini 66). On the contrary, the later assault on Hassan in the alleyway is a brutal reminder of the vulnerability of the Hazara community to violence.

The climax of the tournament arrives with the horrific assault on Hassan by Assef and his Pashtun companions. This act transcends a mere dispute over a kite; it becomes a brutal display of dominance and the ever-present threat of violence faced by the Hazara community. The violation of Hassan, a symbol of unwavering loyalty and innocence, signifies the vulnerability of the entire Hazara population to unchecked violence and exploitation.

Amir's act of cowardice in witnessing the assault without intervening deserves scrutiny. His silence reflects the broader societal silence surrounding the plight of the Hazaras. The Pashtun majority, unwilling to challenge the established order, perpetuates a cycle of oppression through their inaction. This silence becomes a form of complicity, highlighting the collective responsibility for addressing social injustices and speaking out against violence. For the Hazaras, this silence perpetuates the trauma, forcing them to endure the pain without acknowledgement or validation.

The assault on Hassan is not an isolated incident; it reflects a long history of persecution faced by the Hazara community. Their Shia faith and Mongol heritage position them as outsiders within Afghanistan's Sunni Pashtun-dominated society. This marginalization is evident when Amir justifies his silence thinking, “He was just a Hazara, wasn’t he?” (Hosseini 73). This casual prejudice highlights the deeply ingrained societal beliefs that contribute to the Hazara experience of collective trauma. Hassan's assault becomes a horrifying embodiment of this trauma, passed down through generations, shaping the Hazara identity and worldview.

This incident becomes a pivotal point in the narrative, marking the beginning of a cycle of guilt and redemption for Amir. However, for the Hazaras, it represents a continuation of a long history of oppression. The act of violence also foreshadows the rise of the Taliban regime, a period of heightened persecution for the Hazaras. For the Hazaras, the tournament becomes a haunting echo, a constant reminder of their precarious existence within Afghan society.

The narrative primarily focuses on Amir's journey of redemption, with the Hazara experience serving as a backdrop. This narrative choice reflects the societal tendency to silence the voices of the marginalized. The Hazaras, denied a platform to express their experiences and become invisible within their own land. This is evident in the lack of Hazara characters who actively voice their struggles. Hassan, despite his loyalty and courage, remains largely voiceless. This marginalization within the narrative mirrors their marginalization within Afghan society.

The novel subtly hints at the historical context that fuels the Hazara experience. The occasional references to the "Hazara massacres" and the discomfort with the topic suggest a long and painful history of violence directed towards the Hazara community. This is even visible as Amir remarks after witnessing Hassan's assault, "...But no one woke up and in the silence that followed, I understood the nature of my new curse: I was going to get away with it"(Hosseini 80). This silence and overshadowing of the Hazara pain and violence is not just on an individual level but rather it brings forth the reaction of the society at large. This historical trauma shapes the present, fostering a sense of insecurity and mistrust amongst the Hazaras.

The Hazaras struggle not only with physical threats but also with the constant negotiation of their identity within a society that deems them outsiders. Hassan's yearning to belong and be accepted by Amir, a Pashtun, reflects the larger Hazara desire for recognition and integration within

Afghan society. However, Assef's derogatory remarks, "A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog"(Hosseini 68), highlight the constant reminder of their "otherness" that fuel feelings of marginalization and alienation.

The image of the tangled kite strings becomes a powerful metaphor for the complex consequences of Amir's inaction. The seemingly harmless act of watching a kite fight has entangled the lives of the characters in a web of violence and betrayal. It highlights the cost of silence in the face of injustice – the strings that bind Hassan to his trauma are also the threads that forever bind Amir to his guilt. The act of severing the kite string, literally and metaphorically, severs the fragile bond between Amir and Hassan, mirroring the larger societal divisions that leave the Hazaras perpetually on edge. This incident becomes a collective wound, forever etched in the memory of the Hazara community. Hassan's trauma manifests in various ways. He becomes withdrawn and distrustful, a stark contrast to his previous loyalty and devotion to Amir. Hassan's internalized oppression becomes a microcosm of the broader psychological impact of systemic violence on marginalized groups.

In spite of continuous tyranny, the Hazara community remains strong. This strength is evident through the loyalty shown by Hassan towards Amir even when he betrays him. Ali who is Hassan's father models for his son quiet pride and unfailing support. The closeness among their community gives them a feeling of being loved and cared for within themselves hence serving as a safe haven from harsh realities outside their world; this solidarity acts as one vital coping mechanism for them while living in an environment where everything seems to work against them.

The act of violence at the kite tournament sets in motion a cycle of violence that continues to

plague Afghanistan. Assef, emboldened by his actions, goes on to become a prominent figure in the Taliban regime, perpetuating violence against the Hazara community. This highlights the ripple effects of unchecked violence and the importance of holding perpetrators accountable. The violence at the kite tournament is not an isolated incident. It reflects the broader societal context of Afghanistan, where the Hazara people have long been marginalized and discriminated against. The historical persecution of the Hazara people is alluded to throughout the novel, culminating in their brutal treatment under the Taliban regime. The microcosm of the kite tournament becomes a lens through which we can understand the macrocosm of Hazara violence in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to trauma studies by demonstrating how collective trauma operates not only as an individual psychological condition but also as a shared historical experience shaped by ethnic marginalization and social exclusion. Through its focus on the Hazara community in *The Kite Runner*, the study contributes to existing scholarship on trauma by examining the inter-generational transmission of suffering within a specific cultural and socio-political context. Furthermore, it also expands South Asian literary scholarship centering the representation of Hazara identity in Afghan literature and by highlighting the role of fiction in preserving marginalized histories.

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