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The Politics of Representation and the Psychology of Marginality in Hosseini's Novel

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Abstract

Aim: This paper examines *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini in the context of the intertwined themes of guilt, redemption, ethnic marginalization, and the politics of psychological voicelessness in a Pashtun-dominated Afghan society. Through the lens of three Hazara characters—Hassan, Ali, and Sohrab—the paper seeks to investigate how ethnic subordination begets silence across generations and how this silence is mobilized not as passivity but as a survival tactic.

Methodology and Approaches: In terms of methodology, the paper pursues an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis with psychoanalytic theory. The paper engages with Freud's notion of repression, Frantz Fanon's theory of internalized oppression, and Cathy Caruth's model of intergenerational trauma in order to decode the psychological aspects of marginality in the text.

Outcome: The findings of the paper indicate that the Hazara community's apparent silence is the result of systemic domination and psychic erasure rather than inherent submissiveness. Their silence is a manifestation of resilience under oppression. Moreover, Amir's journey towards redemption indicates not only a moral trajectory but also a belated acknowledgement of the erased voices of the ethnic minority.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The paper concludes that *The Kite Runner* reveals the ways in which political domination is internalized at the psychic level. It proposes further research into comparative trauma narratives in postcolonial literature.



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The study will examine the politics of voicelessness among Hazaras in Khaled Hosseini's novel, *The Kite Runner*. The Hazara characters, such as Hassan, his father Ali, and his son Sohrab, exemplify the psychology of marginalization. Silence is often looked at as a passive state, but it acts like a drama of trauma; repression and social isolation are mere secondary effects. By the story of Ali, who was robbed by Baba, the protagonist's (Amir) father. Hassan agonize in a world full of personal betrayal and ethnic discrimination that he cannot ever seem to talk about his own agonies. Sohrab, who was raped by members of the Pashtun society, never found the strength to defend his honour because it was their destiny-what chance did they ever really have when born marginalized. The novel examines emotional and social aspects of voicelessness.

Their silence was not just the absence of words, but had hardened from forced deprivation into a state marked by socio-economic disadvantage and emotional neglect, as well as historic injustice. As psycho-analytic approaches consider driven and repressed instincts, "unconscious pain" and determination towards resistance, the psycho-analytical readings of Fanon referring to "internalized oppression" by their oppressors; the works of Caruth's on intergenerational transfer of trauma as critical models, this paper discusses how the invisible testimonies operate in *The Kite Runner* as both internalized and enforced response to a traumatic event.

The silence in the novel echoes psychoanalytic and postcolonial theories as a way to understand its work to maintain trauma and social oppression. Sigmund Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1900), mentions trauma theory to be "incomplete experiences of early childhood which materialize as subconscious repression and shape adult identity and behavior" (Freud). In *Black Skin White Mask* (1952), the postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon described a model of internalized oppression where dominant groups internalize silence in order to survive in hierarchical social systems (Fanon 37). The fact that three characters continue to endure abuse — manipulation of Baba, violence by Assef or betrayal by Amir and permanent victimization by the practiced trend "bacchabazi" — with no voiced opposition is the location of trauma, ethnicity and social subjugation.

In addition, tacit is locked into the cultural and historical shaping of narratives. “I know the subaltern cannot speak” and when social strata suffocate or drown out voices (Spivak). Thus, Ali’s, Hassan’s and Sohrab’s silence in enduring trauma also remains an example of the historical muting of Hazara communities reflecting larger Afghan political society within which ethnocide sets parameters for speaking up and pursuing justice. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, silence is described as a speech of racial trauma that a slave woman supposed to bear the burden of past. Such intertextual readings positions “silence” as an inherited and systemic state of being rather than simply a personal decision.

The analysis of film and documentaries also studies the silence in stories of ethnic or caste oppression. The other film *13th* by Ava DuVernay which shows how, in the United States, “Systemic racism continues to silence African American voices through the rule of law and economic oppression” as compared to Hassan’s silent existence in Afghan society. ‘Sonic cinema’ in Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* (1998) is a story against the background of India’s partition and an example of how ethnic minorities suffer quietly due to historical narratives that render their suffering unspeakable. This kind of screen presence provides further evidence of the dual nature of silence, as both result and reaction to ethnic subjugation.

The paper analyses how the silence of a character gets invested as a symbol of trauma in marginalized community by focusing on how caste and ethnic prescripts push individuals to passive survival. Its analysis combines post-colonial thought, the narrative of history, and psychoanalytic theory in order to investigate how suffering is met with silence when lived among marginalized people. The analysis deploys psychoanalysis and postcolonial theories such as Freudian theory of repression, Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, and Fanon’s notion of internalized oppression. It finds that Hassan does not talk as an example of how it is a metaphor for the chronic oppression of being an ethnicity that the oppressed self-oppress afterwards.

Caruth’s Trauma Theory states that trauma is not fully absorbed at the time it happens, but rather reappears later on as compulsive behaviors or flashbacks. Freud’s psychoanalysis is particularly relevant to trauma because it explores how repressed memories resurface through compulsive repetition, withdrawal, and incomplete mourning. Fanon’s Postcolonial Trauma and Identity Studies explore

the psychology of colonialism and racial subordination, demonstrating how internalized subordination produces a "divided self" that leads to chronic trauma. This theory sheds light on minority characters such as Ali, his son Hassan, and his grandson Sohrab, who remains silent due to the deep internal wounds caused by ethnic prejudice. The review article will address the following research question: In what ways do Hassan, Ali, and Sohrab's forced silences in *The Kite Runner* illustrate the intergenerational psychology of marginality and the politics of ethnic representation in Pashtun-dominated Afghan society?

The Kite Runner, written by Khaled Hosseini, has been analyzed from different critical perspectives, particularly postcolonial and psychoanalytic criticism. These critical theories help to explain the novel's exploration of themes such as personal guilt, redemption, and the complexities of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan. The process of Amir's growth is described by Ting Wen as an expression of Freudian theory in the article "On the Way to a Good Man Again—An Analysis of Amir in *The Kite Runner* from the perspective of Freud's "Personality Structure Theory," which focuses on Amir's yearning for his father in his childhood and his betrayal and regret. In his academic paper titled "Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: A Psychoanalytic Analysis," Rahim applies Freudian psychoanalytic theory in analyzing the novel, especially in how the unconscious desires and conflicts of Amir affected his choices. According to the paper, the repressed guilt and Oedipus complex affected Amir's relationships, especially with his father and Hassan.

In their academic article entitled "The Kite Runner: A Psychological Analysis of Amir," Aruta et al. analyze the psychological development of the character Amir and how his childhood traumas and the psychological distress that follows influence his self-image and moral development. This analytical approach to the character development of Amir and the effects of his childhood psychological trauma offers a very insightful analysis. In their academic paper titled "An Analysis of Psychological Conflicts in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*," Toni and Nur examine the psychological conflicts of the protagonist in the novel of *The Kite Runner*. Ghulam et al. examine the suppressed desires and conflicts of Hassan in the light of psychoanalytic theory,

analyzing the suppressed emotions, irreconcilable loyalty in terms of socio-economic disparities, and the absence of maternal love.

Whereas many studies have explored the themes of guilt and redemption in *The Kite Runner*, little research has been done that explores the silence of ethnic groups under ethnic repression and the repressed trauma, particularly. Most of the literature seems to focus on Amir's redemption and thus overshadows the psychological effects of institutionalized discrimination on the marginalized characters like Hassan, his father and his son. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the silence of Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab through the lenses of trauma studies and postcolonial studies to offer a more complex understanding of ethnic subjugation and its psychological effects. It argues that the silence of the characters represents the manifestation of the ingrained ethnic oppressions.

This study employs qualitative and interpretive research methodologies that are grounded in psychoanalytic and postcolonial paradigms of thought to analyze the stillness of Hassan, his father and his son in the novel, *The Kite Runner*. A close reading of the novel enables the study to analyze the silence as a symbol of repressed trauma and ethnic oppression. From the psychoanalytic paradigm, the study employs Freudian and post-Freudian theories to interpret the silence of Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab as an avoidance response, a symptom of trauma, and a manifestation of unconscious defiance. The theories of Fanon enable us to analyze the trauma experienced by the oppressed characters in *The Kite Runner*, whose silence is a manifestation of the internalized pain of the oppressed communities. The postcolonial paradigm, which is based on scholars such as Frantz Fanon, enables us to analyze the silence of the characters in the context of the historical discrimination practiced by Afghanistan against the Hazara communities.

The research work uses secondary sources, in this instance, the scholarly assessment of trauma and postcolonial subjection, in addition to the primary textual analysis. The secondary sources are used in this research work for the purpose of comparison of pain experienced by the character. Hassan's experience is situated in a wider discursive context of trauma and exclusion through comparisons with other textual representations of marginalized silence, such as in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. This

exercise enables a close reading of the representation of silence as a psychological and sociopolitical instrument in *The Kite Runner*. The research design is set to respond to the following aims and objectives.

1. To analyze the silence of characters as a reaction to childhood trauma and ethnic oppression.
2. To investigate the manner in which ethnic hierarchies in Afghanistan make possible psychological repression.
3. To apply psychoanalytic and postcolonial theories in analyzing character development.
4. To assist in informing contemporary debates on issues of ethnic discrimination, trauma based on caste, and enforced silence.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) is more than a story about individual betrayal and redemption; it is a politicized depiction of a society's ethnic stratification and psychoanalytic marginalization. Through the experiences of three generations of the Hazara family members—Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab—Hosseini illustrates how oppression leads not only to official silence on the matter but also to a condition of internalized subjugation. The reality is that in this Pashtun-dominated society, ethnicity not only shapes but also defines psychological potential for the members of the Hazara family. The theme is that the condition of silence is not a matter of choice for the Hazaras.

Right from the beginning of the novel, the connection of Hazara to servitude and marginalization has been established. Amir describes how his textbook depicted the Hazaras: "In the end, the book said, a Hazara was only a Hazara, nothing more... Nothing but an ugly pet, an untouchable" (Hosseini 9). This shows how intolerance has been embedded into their society through education and collective memory. This ideology is enforced every day by Baba's family. Though Baba holds himself to be a generous individual, he, however, normalizes their subservient status. When Amir remembers his father, he says, Ali's marginalization is both ethnic and physical. Amir describes him as having a "twisted, atrophied right leg" and a face shaped by paralysis (4). His body itself becomes a sign of exclusion. Ali rarely speaks in the narrative, and when he is indirectly dishonored through Baba's affair with Sanaubar, he does not confront

Baba. Instead, he leaves silently with Hassan. This withdrawal reflects what Fanon calls “internalized subjugation”, the acceptance of injustice as fate. Ali’s silence is thus political: it shows how domination produces resignation rather than rebellion.

Hassan, however, becomes the most emotionally charged symbol of Hazara marginality. His loyalty to Amir is unwavering, even at the cost of dignity and safety. When Assef, who embodies Pashtun supremacy, demeans him as a “flat-nosed Babalu” (42) and states, “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns... always will be” (40), he articulates the ideological reasoning that justifies Hazara abuse. The alleyway rape is not simply a personal crime; it is an ethnic performance of power. Amir bears witness to Hassan’s assault and later recollects: “He had the look of the lamb” (76). The lamb imagery positions Hassan as a sacrificial body—one offered up by history itself. Hassan’s silence post-rape is psychologically and politically weighted. He never narrates his trauma. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principles* Freud argues that trauma is often repressed to avoid psychic collapse (Freud 12). Hassan’s muteness functions as this defence. But it is also conditioned by social knowledge: he knows that as a Hazara, his pain will not be believed, protected, or avenged. Thus, his silence is not weakness; it is learned survival. When Amir later frames Hassan for theft, Hassan falsely confesses, saying, “Yes... I stole it” (Hosseini 104). Even in betrayal, he chooses silence over self-assertion.

Further in the novel the third generation of Ali’s family; “The chain is completed,” concludes Amir with his wife, “Sohrab is the last connection in this line.” (Hosseini 314) He is a product of a life filled with violence under the Taliban and is completely muzzled in his muteness now. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth says, Trauma, “is not ...transmitted...to succeeding generations.” (Caruth 3) Hence, Sohrab is not only mute but is historically so too. He embodies not only his personal trauma but the repressed histories of Hassan and the Hazara people. Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab belong to the trio of the marginalized. They embody the three stages: Ali is the symbol of mute endurance, Hassan is that of loyal but sacrificial allegiance, whereas Sohrab is the representative of inherited muteness here. Their psychology is not historically driven by personal attributes but is a product of ethnic politics instead. These men

lack presence in the story but lack narrative voice too. Hosseini reveals the politics of representation here: only the language of the “Winners” gets representation: the language here is the language of the Pashtuns; the experience is that of the Hazara.

The discussion on The Kite Runner uncovers that the phenomenon of silence in the novel is not a personal phenomenon, but a politically constructed condition. Through the lives of Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab, Hosseini portrays how the condition of ethnicity in a Pashtun-dominated society deliberately limits the ability to speak out, act out, and express oneself psychologically. Ali’s silent resilience, Hassan’s devotedness, and Sohrab’s trauma-ridden silence create a saga of voicelessness through generations. Their silence is a learned phenomenon rather than a chosen act.

The analysis also reveals that in the novel, psychological repression is inextricably linked to a hierarchical system of society. The distance of Ali’s character in relation to other people in the novel as well as Hassan’s silence about his raped character as well as the shutdown of Sohrab after abuse by the Taliban represent Freud’s views about a breakdown in mental functioning called psychological repression as a defence reaction in a breakdown of a mentally unstable person. The psychological repression is further strengthened by ethnicity in the novel in terms of the speech of the characters having no weight in a Pashtun-dominated world.

Secondly, another very important discovery in The Kite Runner is that the trauma in the book stems intergenerationally. This occurs when Hassan inherits Ali's submissiveness, as well as when Sohrab inherits Hassan's silences. This further sustains Cathy Caruth's views when she states that when trauma is not addressed, it returns in the next generation. This child's silence, in this case that of Sohrab, stems not merely from that child's own experience but rather is the aftereffects of the persecution that has been taking place in the Hazara community for years. The study also establishes that Hosseini's narrative form is a representation of the politics of representation. Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab are characters in the novel. They are also in the narrative. However, none of them ever needs to tell the story. They only got through Amir's voice. This is a reflection of the sociopolitical environment in Afghanistan. The history of the

Hazaras is narrated by others. The novel is therefore restating the very condition it is criticizing. Finally, it is apparent from the results that redemption in the novel is an imbalanced process. While Amir has access to a narrative of repentance and redemption, Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab have been deprived of it. The trauma experienced by Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab is validated only by means of Amir's guilt.

The dispute ended in this paper has been that *The Kite Runner* is, at its core, a novel about the politics of representation and psychology of marginality. Through an exploration of the silences of Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab, it has been shown that Hosseini presents Hazara identity as an identity erased by historical trauma, bound by obedience, and haunted by trauma. Silence in *The Kite Runner* is not simply an experience of withdrawal; it is social in that it comes from an ethnic hierarchy of power.

Conveyed through the lens of psychoanalytic theory as well as postcolonial studies, the essay has demonstrated how silence, devotion, or repression are strategies not emblematic of weakness but rather a response to a world which refuses the marginalized their right to speak. Sohrab's silence, Hassan's suffering silence, and little Sohrab's quiet suffering scream each one a manifestation how suffering is passed through the generations in a kind of psychological heritage. However, at the same time, this novel also reveals how there is inequality in representation itself. The characters in this novel are observed, utilized, and remembered but not heard much. The events of their life are defined through Amir's mind, reflecting and perpetuating basically the same inequality this novel tries to communicate in it. At its end, *The Kite Runner* proposes a recognition of silenced histories and unsaid sufferings. Healing, as proposed by the novel, is not only possible on the personal level but also requires a validation on the social level for the silenced voices that have not been granted voice or representation. Through its emphasis on the psychology of marginality and politics of silence, this article proves that justice begins with the ears of the silenced who never got a chance to voice out.

This paper makes a contribution to the literature on *The Kite Runner* in that it moves the critical conversation from the redemptory acts of Amir to the silenced subjectivities of Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab. Using the critical lens of both

postcolonial analysis, psychoanalysis, and the literature on trauma, the paper seeks to highlight how ideas of ethnic hierarchy inform not only ideas of social hierarchy but also the world of the psychic. This paper also makes a contribution to the literature on The Kite Runner in that it proposes that Hazara marginality is a state of a politics of representation, in which silence becomes a form of narrative truth.

These are some of the issues that might explore further research about the phenomenon of silence as a political identity in relation to post-colonial or minority literature, for example. There might also be comparative research, for example, in an ethnically or racially suppressed community, to get further insight into this phenomenon in general. There are also issues to do with ethics, for example, those related to narrative voice from an ethical point of view, or issues related to intentions.

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