

Homelessness within Homeland: Oppression of Hazara in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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ABSTRACT

In Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, I explore the ethnic tension between the Pashtun and Hazara communities and the Pashtun's suppression of the Hazara community. Hosseini advocates for the oppressed Hazara minority in the novel, as a member of the ruling Pashtun community, he unconsciously glorifies his own racial superiority by presenting the Hazara as voiceless and miserable, unable to survive without the aid of the Pashtun community. Regarding Hazaras in the novel, the concept of citizen is not applicable since they are discriminated against and excluded by Sunni extremists in Afghanistan. Sunnis are "privileged," and this position has created a situation of discrimination and inequality towards the underprivileged Hazaras, and they are denied to have equal rights. Hazaras in Afghanistan are not treated as "citizen subjects," and they have been living in a stateless condition, full of discrimination, inequality, and mistreatment. To deal with the issues, the internal displacement of Hazara communities and the historical background of refugees in Afghanistan, I have brought the ideas of Derrida, Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Balibar, Hemel, Agamben, Ranciere, as my theoretical tools as well as other references from migration, displacement, and refugee and try to connect the refugee crisis of The Kite Runner in a global spectrum.

Keywords: Ethnic tension, Racial superiority, Privileged, Citizen subjects

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* revolves around the ethnic tension between the Pashtun and Hazara communities, highlighting the Pashtuns' suppression of the Hazara people. Since the novel was published on May 29, 2003, most of Hosseini's critics have focused the issues of historical, religious, and ethnic tension raised in the novel, *The Kite Runner*. However, I argue that the novel foregrounds the sufferings and hardships of the Hazara characters who suffer brutal mistreatment, the Hazara characters in the novel are depicted as perennially persecuted, voiceless, and oppressed, and they are unable to resist the racial oppression of the Pashtuns and the Taliban. They endure extreme torture and are denied basic human rights within their own land. In order to survive in Afghanistan, they are compelled to show submissiveness towards the Pashtun people, and Hazaras have to bear silently brutalities dealt against them. Consequently, Hosseini highlights the fact that Hazaras are not recognized as full Afghan citizens, as they are deprived of basic citizen rights, human rights, and equality within their own country. As a result, the Hazaras live in a state of statelessness within their own home country of Afghanistan, as they are not recognized as citizens of the nation.

The novel *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini depicting the suppression of the Hazara community by Pashtun brings the bitter reality of the condition of statelessness among the Hazara characters. *The Kite Runner* not only foregrounds the subordinating position of Hazara characters but also focuses that they should have a savior from the Pashtun people for survival. They can neither fully live like Afghan people within their homeland nor can they flee outside the country. They live like captives and outsiders within the territory of the ruling Pashtuns. Their condition within the Afghan terrain questions the notion of modern citizens which is analyzed through the notion of power relationships, space, territory, and citizens in connection with the state's exclusion of its population. It deals that the power relationship between the privileged and the underprivileged, which leads to the situation of statelessness for the Hazara people in *The Kite Runner*.

Due to domestic conflicts, inappropriate living conditions, climate change, vulnerable political and unstable economic situations, etc., a large number of people are forced to migrate from one country to another, from one continent to the other. According to Thomas Nail, the twenty-first century is the century of migrants. He mentions in *The Figure of Migrant*, "We all are all becoming migrants" (1). Due to the increased number of oppressors, a large number of people are compelled to live under violence, conflicts, and exploitation. Inequality and oppression have increased the number of victims as well as the numerous replacements from home. They are externally or internally displaced.

The displacement is for the emancipation from suffering and conflict. According to the report in *Global Survey: Internally Displaced People* by the Norwegian Refugee Council, "the main factors leading to 'conflict-induced' displacement include

armed conflict, generalized violence, the systematic violation of human rights and the forced displacement or 'dislocation' of people" (5). In Afghanistan, Hazara people have been tortured by the racial extremist Taliban and are obliged to be displaced within their own home country. The conventionalist ideologist's mission to erase Hazaras is the main cause behind the suffering and internal displacement of the Hazara people. The extremists regard Afghanistan as a land of Pashtuns, and there is no place for Hazaras.

Hazara characters in his novel are mirror images of the worst miseries imaginable. They go through extreme torture by the Pashtuns and extremist Taliban. Hassan is raped by Assef, which is mutely witnessed by his friend Amir. Later Hassan is assassinated by the Taliban. It marks the pitiful life of Hazaras exemplifying how minorities are forced to survive. Hosseini's narration of Afghanistan not only includes the Afghan culture and politics but also brings out the hierarchical traditions, ethnic disparities, and the miserable condition of the Hazara people.

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is basically based on the power relationship between Pashtun and Hazara. Taliban being Pashtun had been oppressing Hazara throughout history. In this connection, Muhammad Asghar Malik and his co-author mention:

The writer shows that the Taliban's oppression of the Hazaras and the Shiites is not new. It is a greatly intensified outcome of long-held discrimination. The writer frames the characters of the Taliban and the Hazara in order to point out the nature of their power relationship as asymmetrical, unequal, and empowering. (74)

The racial tension or the exploitation of Hazaras by Pashtun is the major cause behind the misery of Hazaras in *The Kite Runner*.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country and the major race and ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Pashtuns and followed by the minority groups such as Tajiks, Hazara, etc. Many races and ethnic groups have lived together in the country. According to Wahab in his book *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, "In Afghanistan, the discrimination against minority ethnic groups especially the Hazaras is still conducted by the Pashtuns. Due to the Hazaras' differences in races, beliefs, language, and culture, they are often disrespected and discriminated against" (14-16). Since the Pashtuns are the most powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan that dominates the government and military, they can do anything in order to take control of political power. They even can dispel Hazaras from Afghanistan and try to make Afghanistan the "land of Pashtuns."

Dehumanization is a phenomenon that can threaten the unique existence and quality of life of each and every one of us. Despite obvious differences, those who share our unique capacities are our equals, are human beings, and should be treated as such. Regarding the dehumanization presented in *The Kite Runner*, Amit Kumar mentions, "Racial discrimination is also an ideological base used to suppress Hazaras in Afghanistan by Pashtuns in order to prove their superiority" and "Racial dehumaniza-

tion causes not only the demolition of a particular person at physical or psychological level but it can demolish the entire nation into disastrous turmoil" (267). Thus, dehumanization in *The Kite Runner* has been practiced in order to suppress the Hazaras community. Both males and females from Hazara community are dehumanized by extremists in Afghanistan.

Among the various issues exploitation of women from marginal community too is one of the prominent themes in the novel and Hosseini's writing. In this connection, Sulekha Sundaresan and her co-authors mention, "The idea of woman's rights and sexual orientation value has been brought up in abstract compositions alongside the socio political situation of Afghanistan" (494). In Afghanistan, social radicalism and religious components have been threatening the women liberation. It has been posing genuine hindrances towards the advancement of ladies in Afghanistan. According to Sundaresan et al., these limitations and hindrances had a colossally obliterating sway on their lives, and regularly result in seriously impeding personal satisfaction also, notwithstanding diminishing female future.

Sexual abuse is about dominance and control of other people through humiliation and destruction. Even there was sexual exploitation by the ruling class. It compelled them to flee. The exploitation of Hassan by his own friend and half-brother, Amir is quite notable in the novel. Kamal and Assef are the characters of the novel who have fallen into the majority group. Both of them suppress Hassan. Even the father of Hassan, Ali is treated very badly. He has to live with someone as an obedient houseman who had seduced his own wife. Agha's seduction of Ali's wife and abdication of responsibility falls under the same sexual exploitation. It shows the domination of so-called rich or powerful people over powerless ones.

Hazara people are treated as second-class citizens. They have to work miserably to make a living. Likewise, the panic situation of Hazara is seen in the life of Hassan and Sohrab. They have been treated like animals by the majority of the Pash-tun community. They cannot flee from this pitiful situation. Sohrab even commits an attempt at suicide when he comes to know that he has to stay in an orphanage while he is in the process of being taken to America. Thus, the novel depicts the inter-generational exploitation of Hazara people through three different generations: Ali, Hassan, and his son Sohrab. The historical background of this generation and the history of Afghanistan depict a clear picture of their identity as half-citizens within their homelands where even their right to live is violated time and again. They are obliged to live as "non-citizens" within their homeland.

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who is compelled to leave a country of their own nationality due to fear of being persecuted (Article 1, 1951 Refugee Convention). Hannah Arendt in her writing "We Refugee" conceptualizes refugees as, "A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because

of some act committed or some political opinion held . . . Now 'refugees' are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have been helped by Refugee Committees" (110). Arendt defines refugees as those who have not done anything in the political scenario of the changes, but they are compelled to seek asylum due to the displacement. In the novel, Hazara characters Ali and Hassan have no permanent home. Ali and Hassan have been sheltering on the territory of Amir's father as a refugee. Likewise, Hassan and his father really do not do anything in the life of Amir but they have to leave the house. They are compelled to seek asylum in order to be safe from the bitterness of Amir, "Ali says, 'Life here is impossible for us now, Agha sahib. We are leaving. Ali drew Hassan to him, curled his arm around his son's shoulder . . . 'I am sorry Aghasahib, but our bags are already packed. We have made our decision' (89-90). Thus, Ali and Hassan are compelled to leave their place when something makes life more difficult. People are compelled to flee as there are no other options left. It is a hard time for them to do so.

Hazara people have nowhere to go but they leave. Their life is just like a refugee. They face hardships. However, they go on struggling to make it even better. They never give up hope. They become optimistic. They try to make their life as usual as they can to support the notion. It is one of the features of refugees. Regarding these features of refugees, Arendt says, "We wanted to rebuild our lives that was all. In order to rebuild one's life, one has to be strong and optimistic. So, we are very optimistic. Our optimism indeed, is admirable, even if we say to ourselves" (110). The optimistic idea is seen clearly in the mind of refugees. They think it can be changed. They hope for positive things even at the time very dangerous situation or situation which is beyond their control.

The notion of the rights of refugees is in the control of the nation-state. Due to this, it is very hard to practice the right. Even though the real notion of refugee rights can be given to them or secured by implementing the notion of human rights to them, for Agamben the life of the refugee is not so good in concentration camps or refugee camps. The internally displaced Hazaras' life is similar, in many ways, to life in a refugee camp. The private life of the refugee is not equal to the life of common citizens, but it can be made parallel to the citizens if we practice the human rights notion in a real sense. The bare life of refugees should be included in the inscription of even the most basic elements of existence into the power structure of the nation-state.

From childhood, Hassan goes through extreme torture and exploitation due to racial discrimination. To depict the extreme racial oppression faced by Hassan, Hosseini brings the socio-political problems of the Afghans. The racial discrimination is conducted on the basis of looks, language, and other minute differences between Pashtuns and Hazaras, which is followed by their respective religious practices of Shi'a and Sunni under the same Islamic tradition. Hazaras are the Shi'a Muslims who are regarded as "lower caste" and Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims regarded as superior. In the novel, the character of a staunch Muslim conventionalist ideology is given through the

portrayal of Assef who is from the Pashtun community.

Assef thinks that Afghan is being polluted by “these downtrodden Hazara communities” (35). He takes important measures to eradicate this race even from his childhood, “Afghanistan is a land of Pashtuns. We are the pure Afghans, not this Flat-nose here. His people pollute our homeland and our water. They dirty our blood. Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision.” The narrator Amir describes Assef as a “sociopath” and “racist” as Assef met Amir and Hassan he said that the next king Daoud Khan will come to his house for dinner when he comes he will talk to him about Hitler, “A great leader. A man with a vision. I'll tell Daoud Khan to remember that if they had let Hitler finish what he had started, the world would be a better place now” (35). From this point, it is clear that just like Hitler erasing the entire Jews from Germany, Assef wants to erase the entire Hazaras from Afghanistan, “. . . to rid Afghanistan of all dirty, kasseef (filthy) Hazaras” (36). The religious orthodox followed by Sunni extremists is the main cause behind the exploitation or mistreatment of the Hazara community. Hassan in the novel becomes the victim of similar ethnic cleansing conducted by Sunni Islamic fundamentalists.

Due to the extreme torture and violence, Hazara could not feel Afghanistan as their homeland. On the other hand, the Sunni extremists try to control the Afghan terrain as their territory. In this sense, Hazara could not find their space within Afghanistan. The terrain of Afghanistan is divided among many communities. About the division, Jean Gottmann remarks, “The world we live in happens to be a diversified, highly partitioned space. The surface of the earth is partitioned in a great many ways: politically and physically, economically and culturally” (*World Politics* 153). Both Hazara and Pashtun have been sharing the space in Afghanistan among other communities. Afghanistan is a land or a terrain. However, being a ruling community, Pashtuns have been controlling the terrain as their territory by exploiting the Hazara community.

Robert Sack regards “Territoriality as the basis of power.” For him, it is not “a part of instinct” (*Human Territoriality* 1). According to Sack, “The area or place delimited and controlled through territoriality a territory, but the non-specific nature of his inquiry becomes clear here. A place can be a territory at times but not at others; “territories require constant effort to establish and maintain” (19). They are “the results of strategies to affect, influence, and control people, phenomena, and relationships.”

Pashtun rulers, throughout history, have been influencing, controlling, and dominating the Afghan territory. It is their national or state policy or the discriminatory nature of the state that has been oppressing Hazaras throughout the century. There is the abolition of slavery; however, Hazaras are still regarded as second-class citizens. The discrimination is rooted in the history of Afghanistan. William Maley mentions, “These official histories, written from the perspective of the 'real' Afghans (Pashtun) as the representatives of the true Aryan race . . . Members of non-Pashtun groups were either denied any positive role in the national historical narratives or were assigned a role that was rendered in a negative light” (228). The Hazaras, as Farsi speakers, were

one of the peoples and cultures most rigidly suppressed during this period through systematic denial of their cultural identity and history. The suppression undergone by the Hazaras during these periods planted the seed of never-ending hatred toward the Hazaras. It is still haunting Afghanistan. For this purpose, the Pashtun have seized the territory of Afghanistan.

For Claude Raffestin, "population, territory, and authority" are the three elements of the state, and he suggests that "the entire geography of the state derives from this triad" (17). Raffestin contends that "space" and "territory" are not equivalent, and that using them indiscriminately has led to a lot of confusion (129). Space is an anterior term because territory is generated from space, through the action of the actor, who territorializes space. Territory can be understood as a political technology: it comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain. And, creating a bounded space is already a violent act of exclusion and inclusion; maintaining it as such requires constant vigilance and the mobilization of threats. Michael Foucault claims that there is a shift between territory as the focus of governance and the government of things, essentially people as a population. For him, "Territory is no longer merely the economic object of land or a static terrain; but the territory is a vibrant entity, 'within its frontiers, with its specific qualities'" (99-100). Foucault further claims that "territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it's, first of all, a juridical-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power" (176). For power and oppression, Sunni extremists have been controlling the territory of Afghanistan. Their exercise of power is to suppress Hazara and to gain more social and political control within that space. However, this exercise of power has led to the marginalization of Hazara towards the circumstances of statelessness.

From childhood, Hassan goes through extreme suffering due to racial prejudices. He even faces sexual exploitation in his childhood. This act can be seen when Assef and his two buddies rape Hassan. Sexual abuse also becomes the common act to discriminate against and suppress Hazaras. Sexual abuse is about dominance and control of other people through humiliation and destruction. Assef hates Hassan so much just because Hassan is a Hazara. Assef believes that Hazaras have no rights as they are beneath them. Assef thinks that Afghanistan should be purified of the Hazaras and kept only for the Pashtuns. He believes that Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. Only the pure and real Afghans can live in this country.

According to Assef, only pure and real Afghans can live in this country. For him, only Pashtuns are true Afghans. About his racial prejudice, Amir narrates:

His blue eyes flicked to Hassan. "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, and always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood." He made a sweeping, grandiose gesture with his hands. "Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision." (43-44)

This leads Assef to the conclusion that Pashtuns are the best race among all races

in Afghanistan. He considers the Hazaras as the dirty race that pollutes Afghanistan. Therefore, he feels that he has the right to abuse and humiliate Hassan.

Hassan, his wife Farzana as well as their child Sohrab: all three members of a family turned into the victims of Assef. He hates Hazara people and thinks they are garbage. The readers come to know this entire episode through Rahim Khan, who uncovered the same to Amir. Rahim Khan had heard it from one of his neighbors in Kabul through a phone call, "A pair of Talib officials came to investigate and interrogated Hassan . . . ordered him to get his family out of the house by sundown. Hassan protested . . . So they took him to the street—... and shot him in the back of the head . . . Farzana came screaming and attacked them . . . shot her too. Self-defense, they claimed later" (191-92). This evidence explains to what extent the Taliban are brutal and they kill anybody they want. Hazaras are either killed or abandoned to die by the superior power. Foucault's notion of biopolitics can be linked here. As long as the nation-state or individual keeps sovereignty, there is no possibility of hospitality. State sovereignty resorts to racism and xenophobia to consolidate its power, a routine exercise to give the appearance that it is in total control and that it alone has total power over life and death, as an example of biopolitics degenerating into thanatopolitics or politics of life becoming politics of death. Poor Hazaras could not get any justice since they are non-privileged people. Hassan's murder goes without any legal process. In this connection, Hosseini narrates, "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" (192-93). This cold-blooded murder is only an instance of how simple layman suffered at the hands of the Taliban. In the name of God and religion, the Taliban murdered, mutilated, and tortured thousands of poor Afghans mostly minority Hazaras.

Hosseini even presents the xenophobic mentality of totalitarianism through the character of Assef. The state has adopted race as a nation or racist ethno-nationalism. The hatred towards refugees is presented clearly with the remark of Assef. Assef, a symbolic person for exploitation, treats badly even Sohrab, the son of Hassan. He resembles the nation-state citizen and how the nation-state citizen exploits the internally displaced Hazara refugees. Sohrab, the son of Hassan, a Hazara, has been treated as an animal by Assef. He is not free to enjoy any humanitarian right. He is no more human in the eye of Assef. Sohrab's gang-rape is considered a matter of entertainment. He is made to dance in Pashtun music, "Sohrab danced in a circle, eyes closed, danced until the music stopped...Mashallah! They cheered. Shasbas! Bravo!" (240). These lines visualize Sohrab's dance. Xenophobia is seen in the heart of Assef. His hatred for Hazara can be seen in every word he utters and every action he indulges in. He has massacred Hazaras because he thinks Hazaras are garbage, and this garbage should be cleared or dumped. He blatantly proclaims:

I see this may turn out to be enjoyable after all. But there are things traitors like you don't understand...Like pride in your people, your customs, and your lan-

guage. Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage. Ethnic cleansing I like it. I like the sound of it. (243-44)

Sunni extremists think that they have the right to abuse and humiliate Hazaras because they never regard Hazaras as the people of Afghanistan. For them, Hazaras are not the 'citizens' of the nation. Thus, the 'citizen rights' of Hazara are violated in the novel time and again. They are regarded as citizens by Sunni extremists. Etienne Balibar has conceptualized the citizen subject, which resonates with the context here. For Balibar, "A citizen is a man the enjoyment of all his "natural" rights, completely realizing his individual humanity, a free man simply because he is equal to every other man. This answer . . . the citizen is the subject, the citizen is always a slosed subject (legal subject, psychological subject, transcendental subject)" (45). According to Balibar, citizen means becoming a subject. So, they must be treated or regarded as subjects. However, inequality and discrimination do not let all to be a subject. In this connection, Balibar mentions that "it is practically impossible for the citizen(s) to be presented without being determined as subject(s)" (45). However, citizen universality could come to the subject. Balibar argues, "All are citizens or must be, and whoever is not must be excluded" (45). From the definition, it is clear that all citizens should be treated equally, and there should not be any discrimination or privilege.

Afghanistan cannot guarantee the safety of the Hazara people so they are obliged to run away as far as possible. It is the failure of the nation-state that cannot guarantee the safety of its people. Derrida cautions, "Whenever the state is neither the foremost author of nor the foremost guarantor against the violence which forces refugee or exile to flee, it is often powerless to ensure the protection and the liberty of its citizen before a terrorist menace. Whether or not, it has a religious or nationalist alibi" (6). Derrida mentions the reasons for refugees to flee to a safe place. Refugees are made due to the failure of the nation-state. It cannot secure its citizen from emerging threats. The threat to life is vibrant causes the citizens to flee and compels them to be refugees. The reasons are, maybe terrorists, fear or dispute in religious orthodoxies, or other internal or external factors.

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* portrays the plight of Hazaras in Afghanistan, who face discrimination and exclusion by Sunni extremists. As a result, they are denied equal rights and treated as second-class citizens, living in a stateless condition marked by inequality and mistreatment. The power dynamics between privileged Sunnis and underprivileged Shia communities contribute to this situation of "homelessness within the home" for the Hazara people. The novel highlights the need for a cosmopolitan city that upholds the fundamental human rights of refugees, treating them as humans first and providing them with political space and rights. In my reading, the author advocates for ideal asylums and a change in the behavior of nation-states to address the refugee crisis. Without equal rights, the world risks becoming divided into classes of citizens and rightless individuals, undermining the true essence of humanity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may not be wrong to state that the world needs a cosmopolitan city in order to uphold the fundamental human rights of refugees. Since they are humans before they are refugees, they should be treated similarly as citizens. Only the right to movement is not sufficient for refugees: Until and unless they are given political space, they can't enjoy human rights. So, refugees should have the right to have rights on the sole basis that they are human beings and, by virtue of which, they are entitled to rights but are deprived of them, but they can use this deprivation as the reason to fight for their rights. They should be provided ideal asylums as the philosophers like Arendt, Levinas, Balibar, and Derrida have always been speaking of. The author shows *The Kite Runner* as a plea for refugee rights since there are not sufficient nestling wings to save the rights of refugees. So, the concerned authorities should be liberal, and the behaviors of nation-states should be changed in order to solve the refugee's problems. If the nation-states fail to do so, the world will be a mess of rightless people. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini advocates for as much equality as possible between citizens and refugees. If the refugees do not receive equal rights, then their dire predicament will continue, their life's melancholic memories will never be completely forgotten, and the world will be divided into first-class and second-class citizens or no citizens at all. That can destroy the true beauty of humanity in the world.

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