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RACIALIZED OTHER IN AFGHAN FICTION: IMPETUS FOR RACIAL DEHUMANIZATION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to explore the sociocultural analysis of dehumanization in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner. The findings of this study show that Hazaras are dehumanized by Pashtuns for a few reasons among which the most important reason is their historical background. The study highlights that other reasons for the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns are their low economic and less powerful status, the difference in religious beliefs, physical appearance, immigrant status, and illiterateness. This study explores that these incidents made Hazaras subordinated politically, socially, economically as well as religiously. Based on Sociocultural theory, this article uses a methodological approach based on close textual reading to analyze the narrative structure of the novel. Using close textual reading analysis, this article investigates how Hazaras are othered in society. As a result of these incidents, Hazaras are completely othered in society which is depicted by Khalid Hosseini in the novel through the prejudice and negative behaviors of Pashtun characters towards Hazaras. The Repercussion of dehumanization can be examined in The Kite Runner written by Khaled Hosseini (2003). The after-effects of the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns resulted in racial discrimination, dehumanization, sexual abuse, religious conflict, socio-political conflict, and economic conflict. The repercussion of dehumanization can be observed in the novel through different characters such as Ali, Hassan, Baba, Sanaubar, and Sohrab. Through these different characters, the Hazaras are presented as enslaved by Pashtuns, objectified, sexually abused, and dehumanized for no good reason but racial differences.

Key Words: Dehumanization, sociocultural theory, postcolonial, objectification, Pashtuns, Hazaras, genocidal conflicts, immigration

INTRODUCTION

Post-colonial writing, a body of literature that highlights the negative aspects of

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colonialization and reflects the feelings and aspirations of people of those countries that have remained occupied colonies, is committed to the criticism of those values that are enforced by colonization directly or indirectly. The themes that arise in the post-colonial writers' works are central to the flaws and negative effects that are produced as a result of colonialization. These post-colonial writers talk about society and how it is still affected by colonization even after the colonizers physically left. Among those themes, dehumanization is a dominant theme that can be found in almost every work of post-colonial writers.

This study is conducted to highlight the characteristics of dehumanization that might be causing both mental and physical barriers to the progress of talented minorities in society. Dehumanization might lead people to commit serious crimes like rape, child abuse, killing, and prostitution. Post-colonial writer, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* highlights that as a result of racial dehumanization, Hazaras are subjected to serious crimes (Khan, 2022). Ali and Hassan are killed and Sanobar and Sohrab are sexually exploited. Thus, this study is conducted to make people conscious of the fact that how the talents and progress of minorities can be suppressed by dehumanizing them either consciously or unconsciously. In the present era, dehumanization has become a hotly debated subject. In most countries, prostitution is legally allowed in the form of porn, which is clear dehumanization. Probably, Hazaras would have achieved many greater things in life if he was not subjected to dehumanization. Unfortunately, this evil act of dehumanization might not be only limited to Afghanistan but it can be analyzed in many societies throughout the world in one shape or another.

The current article provides a detailed analysis of key concepts explored in this study including race, social class, and dehumanization. These concepts are explored within the framework of a sociocultural understanding of social phenomena. Next, the theoretical perspective of the article is explained in terms of sociocultural theory, how it relates to social life, and what is its relevance for understanding and critiquing fictional literary productions. The main section of the article provides key findings from a close textual reading of the novel. It provides examples and analyses of the impetus for dehumanization in *The Kite Runner*. Findings and analysis of the data are integrated into this section and not provided in discrete units because the authors consider this approach more conducive for a paper focusing on literary analysis.

RACE, SOCIAL CLASS, DEHUMANIZATION

Braun & Dickersin (2013) used the term "race" as a group of individuals having a shared country or residence, common culture or language, or particular skin color. Ray & DeLoatch (2016) assumes that race is a human classification system that is socially constructed to distinguish between groups of people who share phenotypical characteristics. According to Macionis (2012), "Racism is the belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another" (p. 326). Sun (1995) defines racism as, a category of humans that are having certain similar distinctive traits. Smedley (2017) sees racism as the belief that humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called 'races' and that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and behavioral features; and that some races are innately superior to others. Smedley argues

that in the 19th century, the United States was popular for racism because the White race was considered better than the black race. Negroes were given dirty work with low wages and they were even not allowed to cast vote. Handyani (2016) describes racism as the unfair treatment of people based on race, color, and religion. In the view of Handyani, races that are dominant in society often avoid and hate those groups of people that belong to lower races. Handyani further highlights that in *The Kite Runner*, racism can be determined by analyzing society, as Hazaras are discriminated against by Pashtuns due to the similarity in their appearances with Mongols and Chinese. Their appearances are different from Pashtuns; therefore Pashtuns discriminate against them and call them bad names. Another reason for racial discrimination against Hazaras is the difference in cultural and religious beliefs. Though both Hazaras and Pashtuns are Muslims, they have different beliefs. Pashtuns are Sunnis, while Hazaras are Shias. (Handyani, 2016).

Wright (1993) viewed social class as a relational concept, where classes are defined and ranked relative to one another. In his view, without a working class, there is no manufacturing class and without a lower class, there is no upper class. Bourdieu (1987) noted, the upper and lower classes, and the manufacturing and working classes, are distinct because they are “situated at extreme ends of the distributions;” such distinctions become “evidently less effective in the intermediate zones. A strict Marxist viewpoint also suggests that classes are well defined and that individuals strongly identify with their specific social class (Jackman & Jackman, 1973). Likewise, Nunns (1930) describes that the occurrence of class distinction is not only on an economic base but also social, cultural, ethical, geographical, and sometimes even physical appearance based. Rubiyanto (2016) framed the social class conflict in *The Kite Runner* using Marxist theory. His findings show that society in the twentieth century is fundamentally separated into two large groups, namely Pashtun and Hazara. The Pashtuns act as the dominant upper class and the Hazaras fill the society of the lower class which fits the theory of Marxism. Westergaard (1996) has identified a very sharp increase in class inequalities in the last decades of the century. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir comes to know that Hazara people have not been treated equally by Pashtuns and they are disrespected in society. Pashtuns always stereotyped and insulted them as “mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys” (Hosseini, 2003, p. 10) due to the differences in their physical appearance and social status, Hazara is a social class, discriminated against not only on a social level but also discriminated educational level. Haslam (2006) described dehumanization as, the denial of humanness of a particular class or group of people such as characteristics that makes human unique and constitute human nature. He assumes that dehumanization occurs in two ways:

- 1) One way of dehumanization is a denial of human attributes of a particular community or ethnic group and considering them like animals.
- 2) Another way is a denial of the human nature of a particular ethnic group or community and considering them as objects, machines, or automata.

Over six million people were subjected to torture and killed during WWII; the theory of dehumanization provides a possible explanation for how people could commit such

horrible acts toward another human being (Dawidowicz, 1981). Harris and Fisk (2006) found that the cognitive reaction to dehumanized groups is demonstrated via exaggerated amygdala and insula reactions, which is consistent with past neurological research about the brain registering disgust. Due to the brain's automatic response of registering disgust when presented with members of outgroups, there is little room left to empathize with members of those groups. Dehumanization has had many negative side effects within society, like discrimination and the development of an unwillingness to engage in helping behavior that could benefit members of out-groups (Haslam, & Stratemeyer, 2016). Dehumanization is an individual cognitive process that in the past has contributed to mass murders such as the holocaust, and currently prevents people from empathizing with members of outgroups (Rabe, 2020). O'Brien (2003) suggests that dehumanization occurs when a particular group of immigrants is considered as polluting threats to the social order by natives like Jews in the Holocaust and Bosnians in the Balkan were subjected to dehumanization by the natives under the same thinking. Chalk and Jonassohn suggest that Dehumanization most often occurs in connection with genocidal conflicts (Kohler, 1991). This discussion highlights that dehumanization is a major evil act that exists even in modern society. Dehumanization can result in serious crimes which makes it a significant area for research and analysis.

SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE AND FICTION

Sanderson (2010) defines the sociocultural perspective as a perspective that describes the mental processes and behavior of people that is shaped according to the social and cultural contact of people like race, nationality, and gender. It deals with how different individuals in society interact with their social groups, how these social groups influence individuals, and how they develop throughout their lives. The sociocultural perspective is important to understand how society or culture can influence the attitudes and actions of a particular group. The sociocultural perspective focuses on the forces within a society that influence the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of individuals. In the view of Vygotsky (1934), human activities, events, and actions cannot be separated from the context in which they occur so, context becomes an important issue in sociocultural research. In his view, adult people in society foster the cognitive development of children by engaging the children in meaningful and challenging activities. They communicate to children about the way their culture and society interpret and respond to the world. The adults educate their children about the meanings their culture and society attach to objects, events, and experiences. The adults provide the children with knowledge and processes based on culture and society.

Dehumanization can be supported by social structural factors and social psychological factors. The dehumanization that originates as a result of structural factors is known as institutional dehumanization. Institutional dehumanization is most often conducted by political, cultural, social, and educational institutions like organizations, corporations, governments, religions, or other institutions having the authority of keeping minorities at lower levels of the stratification system. On the other hand, social psychological factors are generated and supported by negative stereotypes and prejudice in society. Living together in a society usually results in benefits for people but it may be harmful to the evaluation of others. Social connection with people enables an individual to

satisfy his/her needs but it creates disconnection from more distant people. Thus, we can predict that feeling socially connected would increase the tendency to dehumanize more socially distant people because the feeling of living in close connection will consider them different due to differences in their way of living.

The sociocultural perspective is mostly implied by authors in fiction; authors express the influence of society and culture on the human psyche through fictional works (Khan, 2021). In *The Kite Runner*, we can analyze the sociocultural perspective in the way that Hazaras are deprived of human rights and people have no emotions or mercy for them. It is the effect of culture and society that shaped the mentality of the people in a way that they believe the Hazaras deserve unfair behavior and dehumanization. Dehumanization is thus predicated upon a divisive ideology that is reified through social institutions, cultural beliefs, individual biases, and stereotypical projection of the Other.

IMPETUS FOR DEHUMANIZATION IN *THE KITE RUNNER*

The concept of dehumanization does not have a systematic theoretical base. It needs to be integrated into a well-established theory. We can simply assume that dehumanization is the denial of humanness. In *The Kite Runner* dehumanization in an intergroup context is highlighted. Pashtuns dehumanize Hazaras because of their poor status and similarity with Mongols in their physical appearance. Dehumanization is a strategy of racial discrimination. It is usually related to ethnicity, race, immigration, and genocide. In this case, intergroup conflicts arise as a result of which one group dehumanizes others. In the novel, the Pashtuns dehumanize Hazaras because they are immigrants who had migrated from Iran. In the racist perspective of dehumanization, Black Africans are compared to apes and their membership in the human species is explicitly denied sometimes by the white race and other groups among them are compared to parasites, dogs, pigs, etc. Assef calls Ali names like a donkey, rat eater, etc. O'Brien (2003) suggests that dehumanization occurs when a particular group of immigrants is considered as polluting threats to the social order by natives like Jews in the Holocaust and Bosnians in the Balkan were subjected to dehumanization by the natives under the same thinking. In the novel, *The Kite Runner* Hazaras are also dehumanized under similar thinking as Assef praises Hitler for killing Jews and claims that Hazaras should be also killed and vanished from Afghanistan in the same way. O'Brien (2003) also suggests that dehumanization occurs due to disability, disabled people are dehumanized for their disability. In the novel, *The Kite Runner* Ali's face is half paralyzed and due to this disability, Pashtun children in the street see him as a monster.

At the beginning of the novel, when Hassan and Ali go through the shortcut to watch a new Iranian movie, a Russian soldier stops them and says to Hassan "I knew your mother, did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 5). In these lines, it can be seen that Hassan's mother Sanubar was sexually exploited by the Russian soldier, which is a sexual dehumanization. Also, we are told in the novel that Sanubar was Hazara and Shia like Ali and she was forced by her father to marry Ali. Despite Ali's half-paralyzed face and poor status, Sanubar's father forced her into the marriage which is an example of

dehumanization. Likewise, when Ali walks through the street, children in the street are a real problem for him because they use to call him Babalu or Boogeyman. One day when Ali confronts them in the street they say “Hey, Babalu, who did you eat today?” they barked to a chorus of laughter. “Who did you eat you flat-nosed Babalu” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 6). In this line, we can see that because Ali’s face was irregular due to congenital paralysis, children in the street would consider him a monster because of his disability, which is an example of dehumanization. In the novel, it is mentioned that Sanubar always use to say about her husband Ali, “This is a husband?” she would sneer “I have seen old donkeys better suited to be a husband” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 7). From this line, it can be clarified that Sanubar dehumanized Ali by comparing him to an old donkey because of his irregular physical appearance due to paralysis, which is dehumanization. Further, in the novel, when Amir looks for Hassan and asks an old man, whether he has seen Hassan or not, the old man replies by raising his pepper gray eyebrows “He is a lucky Hazara having such a concerned master. His father should get on his knees, sweep the dust at your feet with his eyelashes” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 58). In this line, it can be noticed that the Hazaras were considered slaves and as we know that enslaving is a strategy of dehumanization, also it can be seen in the above statement that Hazaras are dehumanized and degraded so much that they should kneel and clean the dust of Pashtuns’ feet with their eyebrows. Further, in the novel when Amir comes to Pakistan to meet Rahim Khan and asks him about Hassan, Rahim Khan says to Amir that after they left Kabul, Rahim Khan, Hassan and his wife Farzana were living in Baba’s house. When the Taliban heard that Hazara is living alone in such a big house they come to interrogate Hassan. Hassan tells them that he is housekeeping the house of Baba but they do not believe him and call him a liar and thief, they order Hassan to leave the home and go away with his wife but Hassan denies it and says that the house is entrusted to him. The Taliban get angry and “order him to kneel and shot him in the back of the head when he said no. Farzana came screaming and attacked them. They shot her too” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 186). In this example, it can be noticed how the Taliban kills Hassan and his wife brutally without investigation, which is dehumanization. Based on this analysis in the novel, we can assume that dehumanization can happen as a result of the following causes:

Genocidal Conflict and Disability

Genocidal conflicts can be one of the main causes of dehumanization in *The Kite Runner*. If we have a careful look at the novel we can analyze genocidal conflicts. When the protagonist Amir says “For years, that was all I knew about the Hazaras, that they were Mongol descendants, and that they looked a little like Chinese people” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 7). In these lines, we are told that Hazaras are the decedents of Mongols and even their physical appearance was also like Mongolian and Chinese people, since, Pashtuns were having conflicts with Mongols and Hazaras were the decedents of Mongols, thus, the issue of genocidal conflicts arose between Pashtuns and Hazaras, which resulted in the dehumanization of Hazaras by the hands of Pashtuns in Afghanistan.

Disability can be also a major reason for the dehumanization in the novel *The Kite Runner*. At the beginning of the novel, we are told about the disability of the Hazara

character Ali that his face was half-paralyzed due to congenital paralysis. Throughout the novel, Ali is being taunted and dehumanized for this disability both by children in the streets and by his wife Sanubar. Due to this congenital paralysis, Ali's face is irregular which results in being called a monster by kids in the street. Disabled people are usually called bad names by healthy people and they are deprived of their human rights due to disability in their physical appearance, which is dehumanization.

Objectification

Objectification can be also a major reason for dehumanization. Objectification, particularly sexual objectification existed even at the time of barbarians who did not have any culture or morality. These barbarians were having brutish appetites for sex and violence and the rate of sexual objectification was very high in their era. Khaled Hosseini focused on this aspect in his novel, probably to show the readers that objectification exists even in areas like Afghanistan whose people are famous for being closely attached to their culture. In the novel, we can analyze objectification in two directions: one is the objectification of the talents of Hazaras, as in the novel during the tournament Hassan is the most skillful in kite running but when they win, Amir takes the credits alone. Nobody even mentions the name of Hassan and his talent rather everyone praises Amir. Here, we can see the objectification of talent that how talent of Hassan is used by Amir for earning the favor of Baba. Amir never praises Hassan for his talents. Another way of objection in the novel is sexual objectification, as we can see that Hazaras, especially their women are objectified for sexual pleasure by Pashtuns as well as Russians. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) assumes in their Objectification theory that the sexual objectification of women extends to the culture at a large scale in which a normative emphasis on female appearance leads women to take a third-person perspective on their bodies.

In the novel, if we look carefully at Sanubar, she is presented as a beautiful girl with having good appearance, which results in her sexual objectification, as she had been exploited sexually by Baba as well as Russian soldiers. Likewise, Sohrab is also subjected to sexual objectification by the Taliban. They used Sohrab as a source to satisfy their wildness which is completely against human rights and clear dehumanization.

Immigration

Immigration can be another major cause of dehumanization. Mostly, immigrants are not accepted emotionally by the native people of an area because of differences in their ideology, culture, norms, and ways of living. They dehumanize the immigrants because they have no feelings or sympathy for them. This issue is not only limited to a particular country or area rather it exists on a global level and the natives do not consider it wrong or unfair. If we look at history, immigrants are often dehumanized by the natives of the area. Khaled Hosseini attempts to make his readers conscious of this evil act through his novel that this act of dehumanization of immigrants exists even in Afghanistan.

As we can see in the novel that Hazaras are immigrants, who migrated from Iran to Afghanistan, so they are considered pollutants to the social environment of Afghanistan

by Pashtuns. In this context, O'Brien (2003) assumes that when immigrants are seen as polluting threats to the social order by natives, it results in dehumanization like Jews in the Holocaust, Bosnians in the Balkan wars, and Tutsis in Rwanda were dehumanized by the natives under the same thinking. In the novel, Assef says "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our *watan*" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 33). In this example, it is clarified that Hazaras are considered as polluting threats to the social environment by Pashtuns.

Power

Power dynamics can be another major cause of dehumanization. Power dynamics lead to dehumanization to make it easy to enforce the decisions on outgroups that are unfair and unjust. A position of power entails making difficult decisions for other people that may cause pain and suffering. Dehumanization helps to downplay this pain and suffering and to justify these decisions, as the people show no mercy or emotional attachment to the groups that are dehumanized. Probably, Khaled Hosseini wants to make readers aware of the fact in his novel that even in Afghanistan, Pashtuns are dehumanizing Hazaras to retain their powerful status and make people believe that they deserve such behavior by abolishing the emotional attachment of people with Hazaras. Usama Bin Ladin was dehumanized by America to abolish the emotional attachment of people with him and make people believe that any harsh decision about him is fair and justified. Likewise, we can see in the novel that Hazaras are poor and weak in status while Pashtuns are rich and powerful. Thus, to maintain their powerful status, Pashtuns might have to make some decisions that can be painful for Hazaras. Probably, to justify those unfair decisions, Pashtuns dehumanize Hazaras to abolish their emotional attachment to people with them. Hazaras are in minority and Pashtuns are in majority, thus they dehumanize Hazaras because of their powerless status. Likewise, in the novel when Baba left Kabul and went to America they treated him badly because he was powerless there. Thus, dehumanization due to power dynamics can be seen throughout the novel.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to find the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. The findings of the current study indicate that the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns was started because of a historical battle back in 1221 A.D. when Mongols (ancestors of Hazaras) killed and slaughtered Khwarzamis (ancestors of Pashtuns) mercilessly during the Battle of Parwan. Later on, when Pashtuns came into power, they were seeking their revenge on the decedents of Mongols (Hazaras). To take their revenge, in the 19th-century Pashtun ruler Abdur Rahman Khan massacred Hazaras based on ethnicity which caused 60% of its population dead. This was the starting point of the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns. Since that time Hazaras have been dominated, objectified, and dehumanized by Pashtuns. Hazaras are dehumanized by Pashtuns in several ways; they are called rat eaters and monsters due to their physical appearance. They are not allowed to eat or have friendships with Pashtuns. They are not allowed to get a school education or apply

for any government job. Hazaras are treated as slaves of Pashtuns whose only purpose is to serve Pashtuns, as in the novel, every Hazara character is a servant of Pashtun. Furthermore, Hazaras are objectified in the novel sexually from time to time and generation to generation as at first Sanobar was sexually objectified by many people including Baba. Later on, her son Hassan was raped by Assef for being Hazara, then his son Sohrab was sexually abused by the Taliban for his identity as Hazara. In the eyes of Pashtuns, Hazaras are non-indigenous people, who came to Afghanistan and got settled in though their language is different, their religion is different from Pashtuns (Sunni, Shia Clash), and their culture and norms are different, hence, they are considered second class citizens and can never be equal to Pashtuns. Under this thinking, Pashtuns were having no feelings or emotions for Hazaras as humans which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Hazaras many times. In 1993, when Burhanuddin Rabbani was the ruler of Afghanistan, he massacred hundreds of Hazaras and forcibly vanish them which is a clear dehumanization of Hazaras. Later on, in 1998, when the Taliban took over, they also massacred 1500 Hazaras which is also a clear example of dehumanization. Even today, Pashtuns dominate Afghanistan, and Hazaras are dehumanized and suppressed based on tribal, religious, cultural, and physical differences. Similarly, in *The Kite Runner*, Hazaras are shown as the weakest and poorest race in Afghanistan as a poor, slave, illiterate, and disabled race. Therefore, Hazaras are often dehumanized and discriminated against in Afghan society.

Dehumanization is a broad concept and it is still having a large area unexplored. Using these investigations and results, the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns in *The Kite Runner*, I believe future researchers should be able to take this in the direction of dehumanization in religious, genocidal, and political contexts. These findings and results are very useful for those researchers who are interested in finding the issues inherited from ancestors in various ways that later on lead to dehumanization. These results and findings provide plenty of information about the dehumanization of Hazaras by Pashtuns but there are still many loose ends to further study the dehumanization in this novel based on a different aspect and more in-depth.

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