
Inheritance of Scars: A psychology of parenting across Generations in The kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract:

Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" (2003) offers a poignant exploration of the transformation of fatherhood and also evolving ideologies of parenting that exist in Afghan society. The article traces the shift from rigid patriarchal traditions to Redemptive Fatherhood, examining how cultural and personal transformations redefine the paternal role. Baba, a traditional patriarch of 1970's Afghanistan, embodies pride and physical strength, yet struggles with emotional expression and vulnerability, especially in relation to his son. The oppressive expectations of traditional parenting give way to psychological deprivation in child. This research also showcases how society normalizes trauma easily when it comes to child. This is a qualitative study of parental psychology which delves into the core study of childhood trauma. Traditional patriarchy challenges sons to be performative and not authentic. This study also explores how ethnic identity, particularly among the pashtun and Hazara communities shapes the psychological development and internal conflict among children. Baba's decisions are highly influenced by Afghan society following his role of hidden paternity towards Hassan. Weight of expectation implied in traditional parenting paved the way for modern parenting like how modernism paved way to postmodernism. Through in-depth analysis of Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Trauma theory Cathy Caruth and through psychological insights of John Bowlby's Attachment theory the evolution of Afghan parenting can be determined in association with various types of parenting that exists in the novel.

Keywords: collective wound, Redemption, Intergenerational trauma, Hidden paternity, Ethnic identity, performativity.

Introduction

“If you don’t heal the wounds of your childhood, you bleed into the future” (Vanzant)

This study examines the issue of parenting on Khaled Hosseini’s novel *The Kite Runner* published in 2003. Hosseini is noted for his unique vision of seeing Afghanistan, focusing on conflicts and friendship during colonial and postcolonial periods. Since many of the other writers talked on various subjects of Afghanistan. He aims to reveal the life of Afghanistan before soviet war.

The children face “Attachment insecurity” because of the lack of parental support which metaphorically signifies a child to a ‘broken compass’ where a child feels lost and directionless and also Lack of maternal love is like ‘withered leaves’ where it leads to stunned existence. Both Amir and Hassan lacked Maternal care which instilled a paramount impact from their Early childhood. While we are entering into the world our first task is to attach with our primary caregivers, but in this novel that predominant task of attachment with parent is denied because of Indirect Trauma.

“The primary ingredient of secure attachment experiences is a pattern of emotional communication between child and caregiver.” (siegal,2010)

Children often feel upset when their parents are not emotionally supportive. The emotional wellbeing of parents can be affected by social, cultural and ethnic background which confines their emotional expression into themselves and parenting style also challenges the emotional quotient and intellectual quotient in Individual. Hosseini highlights parenting not just as biological duty but as a dynamic role of societal expectations. While much has been written about the political backdrop of kite runner, the transformation of fatherhood from rigid patriarchal roles to Redemptive fathering remains a less explored aspect. Parents manifest in the emotional downfall of children. Post war factor is also a pivotal role in father son bondage especially War and displacement can significantly impact parenting practices, leading to economic hardship, parental psychological distress.

Historical context of Parenting in Afghan culture

The Afghanistan is culturally mixed nation in south Asia. After gaining full Independence from United Kingdom on August 19 1919, the county has experienced continuous conflict. While associating with the context of parenting it involves both father and mother but in Afghanistan culture the concept of fatherhood is highly valued, often linked to honour, duty, social standing and also parental influence on the identity of their sons and restricting them to choose their path . Baba, Amir's father is a representation of traditional Afghan ideal. He feels responsible for Amir but he doesn’t show his love openly. He held responsible in fulfilling his son’s basic needs but he doesn’t stood for his son emotionally especially his concern, care for him was from little to nothing. This questions the very essence of parental love. Here baba’s love is associated to that of materialistic love. The novel also look at the effect of missing mothers, especially in the lives

of Amir and Hassan, particularly in case of Amir and Hassan. This absence particularly highlights the role of fathers in shaping and building the lives of children. According to the United Nations “Afghanistan has a high maternal mortality ratio, with one woman dying every two hours during childbirth”. And moreover 40 % Afghan women give birth at home with high risk without skilled help, increasing the risk of complications. A lack of nutrients particularly folic acid, during early pregnancy, can lead to birth defects like cleft lip.. This is evident in the character Hassan who is of cleft lip. Amir seeks for father's love and approval in every other situation because in Afghan culture the eldest patriarch has a decision making power . This clearly depicts Baba and Amir's dysfunctional relationship from the beginning. In some cases, families may raise a daughter as a son (bacha posh) to gain social or economic benefits. This elucidates patriarchal roles in Afghan society. In Afghan historical context the pashtuns follow traditional code called pashtunwali which provides ethical values and social behaviour. Emotional expression of tenderness from father to son is seen as the sign of weakness in Afghan society. Migration also erodes patriarchal hierarchy and this is evident when Baba shifts from Kabul to US working in a gas station. This erases his traditional cultural norms. The novel serves as a powerful reminder of how it can affect individual lives.

The Influence of Ethnic Hierarchy on Parental Behaviour

Afghanistan’s complex societal dynamics encapsulated social status, power, identity etc... Baba holds a prestigious position in Afghan society and is often associated with Pashtunwali ,so here hegemony that is power construct also shapes the characteristics of parent . Baba’s Hidden paternity towards Hassan signifies how ethnic hierarchy continued to ground in prejudice, Discrimination against minority communities (Hazaras). This is evident through Baba’s secret, Hassan as a illegitimate son.

“Baba never missed Hassan’s birthday

For a while he used to ask Hassan what he wanted

that because Hassan was always too modest to suggest a present” (Hosseini 41)

The secrecy reflects Baba’s patriarchal favouritism in order to conform ethnic norms and avoid shame. These standards also passed on to the childrens and the partiality among Ethnicity continued even in his child’s friendship. Ethnic Hierarchy internalised the conflict among children especially in the characters Asseef, Kamal, Wali. Parental favouritism of Baba made him to live with his inferior status, and experienced self doubt and shame. This incident provoked cultural transmission which predicts parents biased nature towards children and they are emotionally deprived which created impact on children's Identity formation. Parents from different ethnic backgrounds may hold varying cultural beliefs about parenting, such as the importance of independence versus interdependence, or the extent of parental authority. For instance Baba from wealthy and Influential figure who has a control towards Amir’s choice of

Identity and whereas Ali from Minority group upbringing him with his own freedom of choice. Also Hassan is initially viewed as a subordinate character due to his minority community, Eventually he attained “Higher form of masculinity” based on qualities of

forgiveness and loyalty towards his friendship. so these contrasting paternal characters influence different cultural significance and also how parents role helps in shaping betterment of an individual to the society. Irrespective of Ethnic hierarchy parenthood is often seen as moral inheritance. Amir inhibits not only baba's justice but also his shortcomings. This "Moral inheritance" isn't simple or perfect it's a mix of strengths and struggles which each generation has to reinterpret. Amir's realization of baba's hidden faults doesn't mean him love his father less; it deepens his understanding of what it means to human. Through Amirs journey Hosseini reminds us that fatherhood isn't about being perfect, its about growing and doing better than the previous generation

"Hassan's not going anywhere..... He's staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we're his family"(39).

This states Hassan as his own son but he doesn't explicitly reveal because of the lack of courage to confess it in front of the society.

performative Fatherhood

Baba epitomizes a fatherhood that is deeply performative with lack of genuine emotional expression. Judith Butler's Theory of performativity states "Gender proves to be the Performance" Baba's identity is often shaped by the society and his performative role highlights tension between patriarchal traditions and unspoken emotional wounds .The masculinity as a performance is witnessed in the novel because baba rejected his son's interest in poetry and writing as he considered it as traditionally "feminine "due to his traditional conventional archetype. He is more concerned in shaping Amir into a son who upholds family dignity and prestige rather than upholding and nurturing his individual skill. Baba's love for Amir in sacrificing for his son and providing financial support to Ali and Hassan is an act of duty rather than vulnerability. In Afghan society the fatherhood is measured by external validation of action and not by internal expression of true emotions. Baba's expectation with son is tension between love and expectations who is frustrated by his son's lack of courage.

Baba says "There is only one sin, only one and that is theft" (16).

In this novel there is a glimpse where baba himself fails to live by his ethics with regard to his son Hassan's parentage. His essence of principle itself is subjective and not objective. Baba's moral rigidity and Amir's struggle to live upto his standards are portrayed. "I am moftakhir (proud) of you Amir" says Baba for which Amir is delighted not for his personal victory but forproving himself of Baba's respect. He also gives in insights on balancing tradition and change. Hosseini doesn't reject Afghan traditions; instead he shows how they can grow. The story reveals that values like honour, Responsibility and courage don't have to be tied to a strict patriarchal mindset. Baba's bravery and moral strength though it is flawed it is in amir but amir expresses them in gentle, more emotionally open way. Hosseini also means in the novel that Afghan fatherhood doesn't have to mean distance and silence, it can evolve to reduce both strength and tenderness.

Healing Through Redemption

When Amir steps up to care for Sohrab, Hassan's son, he starts to rethink what it means to be a father that is moving away from the traditional, patriarchal version he grew with. Unlike his own father, Baba who often hide his flaws behind pride and authority. Amir approaches Sohrab with humility and vulnerability. This shift offers a new kind of Afghan fatherhood which focuses on healing, not control. By focusing to be emotionally present and honest with Sohrab, Amir's attitude of leaving guilt that redefined his past. His actions aren't just about making peace with himself. It also means about reshaping what it means to be a father in Afghan culture, where love no longer hidden behind pride. By the end of the novel Hosseini paints a hopeful picture; The emotional wounds caused by traditional patriarchal expectations like silence, emotional distance and guilt doesn't disappear but they can be healed. Amir's decision to stay with Sohrab, to face his pain instead of avoiding it, stands in contrast to Baba's emotional absence.

"You will never again refer to him as 'Hazara boy' in my presence. He has a name and its Sohrab" (Hosseini 331). This embarks on Amir's journey of redemption where he wholeheartedly accepted Sohrab. Metamorphosis and healing happened through past mistakes.

By critically Evaluating this novel using Theoretical Framework of Mary Wollstonecraft Vindication of Rights of women. She believed that children shouldn't blindly follow father's orders. Instead, fathers should help their children learn to think for themselves becoming independent rather than just obedient. sometimes the rules and stigmas which is laid by society is controlling the children and not helping them to grow emotionally stable. While contrasting this with Kite Runner it shows Baba who is very strict father which made Amir to wait desperately for fathers approval. This led him to experience the cycle of guilt, shame, betrayal. A parent should show empathy and reason to help children grow Independently. Wollstonecraft argues that when parent rule through arbitrary power, children are denied opportunity to develop basic thinking and self autonomy. In Kite Runner Amir's role of being emotionally distant from Baba exemplifies insecurity throughout his life. For Instance when a parent demand obedience without explaining why, using their power to control every aspect of a child's life instead of guiding them with reason. This kind of parenting will make child dumped and they are left unable to think for themselves. They simply follow orders rather than independent and confident Individuals. This is evident in character Amir who followed Baba's order but failed to stand for his friend Hassan because of hesitant character.

This novel could be seen through the eyes of trauma Theory Cathy Caruth emphasise on "DELAYED" aspect of trauma. This shows how characters with unresolved Trauma is passed on to next generation and how these experiences shapes their identity. Trauma theory reinforces that healing is often observed through past wrongs. The trauma could affect individual in indirect way also that is through guilt, shame and can lead to silent inheritance of trauma within them. So in this novel the central Traumatic event is Hassan's assault which

also traumatize and makes Amir to experience the guilt as he witnessed Hassan's guilt. So in this case Trauma destabilized the emotions of both witnesser and victim. Trauma is processed in the young minds, then transmitted and healed. Here silence is perpetuating the characters to experience trauma. This is evident through this incident that is Baba's inability to express his own feeling towards son Hassan. Here both individual trauma and collective trauma shaped characters.

Conclusion

It is necessary to obtain a secured attachment with parents and heal from the scars of past trauma through active resistance. Events like abuse, war, punishment, oppression create trauma in the young minds of the people. We have to set limits and protect peace and harmony within ourselves to heal from traumas. Like Intergenerational trauma which happened in children Healing should also be passed from one generation to another. The past cannot be changed but the future can be changed through Self Healing. The novel ultimately focus that even for the deep profound individual and collective suffering, healing is still possible through redemption. This also leads to the shaping of Individual Identity.

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