



Multiculturalism and Memory: Nostalgia for the Lost Homeland in *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* offers a vivid picture of multicultural identity through the lens of memory and nostalgia. This paper examines how the novel portrays the immigrant experience and how individuals have an idealized vision of their homeland while living in a multicultural setup with mixed identities. The theories of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha are helpful to present this analysis that shows memory becomes both a sustaining force and a psychological burden for migrants. Nostalgia for the lost homeland makes cultural adaptation more difficult and also makes ideas of belonging and redemption more complicated. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how memory serves not only to preserve cultural heritage but also to motivate personal transformation and ethical responsibility in a multicultural context.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Memory, Nostalgia, Identity, Displacement

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) clearly depicts the experience of cultural displacement. It combines the themes of memory, nostalgia, and identity within a multicultural framework. It shows us how an Afghan who successfully immigrates to America tries to maintain his cultural identity while surviving in a multicultural society. The novel tries to illustrate how various places are reserved for several cultures. When Amir and his father Baba migrate from Afghanistan to the United States, they carry with them not only the trauma of personal guilt and national upheaval as well but also an idealized vision of their lost homeland. The novel time and again shows how it is difficult to leave one's country and settling in another. Baba never showed sympathy for the customs of his country while living there. He was not an

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orthodox Muslim. He never appreciates the works of mullahs and drinks scotch whisky. He eats pork, something that very few Muslims would do (16).

In *The Kite Runner* through the portrayal of memory and nostalgia, Hosseini shows how living in a multicultural existence intensifies the desire for a past that is impossible to recover. Baba was not a nationalist in Afghanistan, but he always keeps a memory of his old country in America. While living in America, he never likes it. Earlier he had very good views about America, but in reality, he seems to not like it, and the main reason behind it is his belongingness to Afghanistan. Amir tells us something important in this regard: "Sometimes I think the only thing he loved as much as his late wife was Afghanistan, his late country" (136).

There are several other possible reasons for Baba's belongingness to Afghanistan. One of the main reasons is he was living an aristocratic life in Afghanistan, and another possible reason is he has several privileges as a male in Afghanistan. Baba was living in Afghanistan like a lord, but in America, he was forced to sell junk with his son. They are doing those things for a living, which they never thought of doing in Afghanistan:

On Saturdays, Baba woke me up at dawn. As he dressed, I scanned the classifieds in the local papers and circled the garage sale ads. . . . Baba drove the bus, sipping hot tea from the thermos, and I navigated. We stopped at garage sales and bought knickknacks that people no longer wanted. We haggled over old sewing machines, one eyed Barbie dolls, wooden tennis rackets, guitars with missing strings, and old Electrolux vacuum cleaners. By midafternoon we'd fill the VW bus with used goods. Then early Sunday mornings, we drove to the San Jose flea market off Berryessa, rented a spot, and sold the junk for a small profit. (119-20)

He is living in America but at the price of leaving all his luxury and position. In his own country, he has Hazaras as his servants because he is Pashtun, but in America, he does not get such privilege. Then in Afghan society he has many rights as a male, which makes him superior to females. A person from a male-dominated society may struggle to adapt in a multicultural environment. Because in a multicultural country like America, women have more rights and power. A secular mindset is required in a multicultural setup. Thus, it seems that Baba has several reasons for his attachment to Afghanistan. But one thing should not be forgotten: Baba has a broad mindset. Baba many times shows a pretty secular mindset. He always makes efforts to broaden the minds and attitudes of Amir and Hassan. More possibly, memory of Afghanistan makes all the difference.

In multicultural settings, memory often plays the role of a bridge between fractured identities. Amir's memories of his old country are vivid, sensory, and selective. He recalls the "poplar trees lining the redbrick driveway, the crisp winter mornings, the smell of lamb kabob grilling" (4). Yet, personal guilt and a sense of national loss are infused in these memories. In the United States, Amir and Baba attempt to reconstruct Afghan culture through participation in the Afghan immigrant community in Fremont, California. They wanted to create an environment in which they feel at home. Baba sometimes finds it difficult to trust other people living around him. But among Afghan migrants, he has some comfort. Even there are trust

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issues among immigrants of different countries. Amir tells: “Baba distrust the Vietnamese couple, just they do him” (111). Multiculturalism is not a seamless integration into American society for Amir and Baba, but it is rather a negotiation between a glorified memory of Afghanistan and the realities of their new lives. Baba’s inability to adjust fully and his nostalgia for the honor-driven country he was once accustomed to underscore this tension. He famously laments, “It may be unfair, but what happens in a few days, sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime” (142). Amir asserts once more that Baba's departure from his country has profoundly impacted him. According to Amir, “It was America that gave him an ulcer” (109). Baba also gave us an impression of the problem of appearance and reality. It seems that Baba loves the idea of something more than reality. He loves the idea of America but not in reality. Again, while living in Afghanistan, he never appreciated it, but in America, he was always trying to keep some good memories of Afghanistan with him.

The realities of multicultural dislocation increase the nostalgic longing for a lost homeland. Edward Said’s concept of “imaginative geography” is useful here: exiles construct mental maps of their homeland, often idealized, which differ significantly from the current reality (Said 177). Amir’s return to Taliban-controlled Kabul shatters his nostalgic memory. When he comes back to his country, he finds a totally different place. In America he thinks of the prosperous Afghanistan, but in reality it is destroyed. He comes as a tourist but still has feelings like his own country:

“I feel like a tourist in my own country,” I said, taking in a goatherd leading a half a dozen emaciated goats along the side of the road. Farid snickered. Tossed his cigarette. “You still think of this place as your own country?” (203)

The city of his childhood, once full of kites and laughter, has become a wasteland of brutality and fear. Amir can do nothing but see the death of Afghans. Even if he is no longer an Afghan, he is deeply moved by the scars on Afghanistan. Amir shares his thoughts once more:

We had crossed the border, and the signs of poverty were everywhere. On either side of the road, I saw chains of little villages sprouting here and there, like discarded toys among the rocks, broken mud houses, and huts A few miles later, I spotted a cluster of men sitting on their haunches, like a row of crows, on the carcass of an old burned-out Soviet tank, the wind fluttering the edges of the blankets thrown around them. . . . “I feel like a tourist in my country.” (203)

Multicultural memory is a complex phenomenon that not only maintains identity in exile but also intensifies the agony of irreconcilable loss.

Furthermore, *The Kite Runner* illustrates that memory in a multicultural framework is often collective as well as individual. The Afghan community in America comes close through shared rituals, language, and food — cultural relics that maintain a sense of belonging. However, as Homi Bhabha argues, the multicultural subject often lives in a “third” space—neither fully attached to the homeland nor completely assimilated into the host country (Bhabha 55). Amir’s journey embodies this hybridity. While he adopts American values, such as

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marrying for love and pursuing a writing career, his guilt, memory, and a sense of unfinished duty keep him bound to Afghanistan. Amir even wants to get rid of the guilt he has because of these feelings by bring Sohrab with him from his bandage in Afghanistan.

The generational gap between Amir and Baba further reveals the complexity of multicultural identity. While Baba focuses on the codes of honor, masculinity, and pride rooted in his Afghan past, Amir is gradually accepting American ideals such as individualism and freedom. Their different responses to exile raise more common issues of cultural continuity and transformation. For Baba, exile is a loss of status and dignity; for Amir, it is a space of possibility in which he can do better things. Such kinds of conflicts serve as an example of how multicultural space not only alters memory but also creates some impact on familial roles and expectations.

Hosseini's portrayal of exile is also linked with the postcolonial concerns. The Afghan diaspora in *The Kite Runner* provides a vital lens through which imperialism, war, and displacement can be examined with broader perspectives. The war among several groups creates chaos in Afghanistan. Things become problematic because of the presence of the Russians and the Taliban groups. Even the Taliban behave in the way that they don't belong to Afghanistan. Their intervention shapes not only politics but also identity to some extent. Thus, memory is a deeply attached political system. Memory in a multicultural setup is not a simple thing. It is deeply related to the history of domination, resistance, and survival.

Ultimately, *The Kite Runner* depicts memory as both psychological suffering and cultural resilience. It is because of his nostalgia that Amir seeks redemption, as he wants to "be good again." Amir has a fearful childhood and feels guilty for some of his works. He reveals some of his thoughts in this regard when he says:

I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that as if was right. Nothing is free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara wasn't he? (68)

Amir was not able to resist the boys who are raping Hassan. Even Hassan knows that Amir is hiding and watching him being raped, but he never tells this fact to anyone. Most probably Amir finally rescues Sohrab to get rid of that past sin. Amir was not able to save Hassan, but he will provide a good future to Sohrab. Thus, in a multicultural setup, memory is not reduced to thinking of the past but to shaping identity in a shifting world.

Amir's emotional journey reflects the fragmented identity of the immigrant. This identity is shaped while struggling with inherited guilt. His storytelling is also an act of shaping his identity. He can reveal his viewpoints and remember the incidents in his own way. The creation of *The Kite Runner* in a fictional background reflects Hosseini's own feelings and ideas of cultural memory. Amir's narration of his own story is an attempt to reclaim himself from past

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sins and traumas. For Hosseini, storytelling becomes an important tool to survive in a multicultural setup. It provides a scope not only to remember what was lost but also to reconstruct the present.

Moreover, *The Kite Runner* challenges those aspects, which is the emergence of diasporic memory. Basically, people want to keep those memories, which are very positive in their old country. Thus, Hosseini tries to expose the violence and inequality that existed in pre-war Afghanistan. Within the country, there are several groups divided on the basis of their ethnicity. The whole Afghan was divided into two groups. The first one is Pashtuns, and the second is Hazaras. Here, Pashtuns consider it a very normal thing to exploit Hazaras. Such ethnic divisions between Pashtuns and Hazaras lead to an uncomfortable situation. In this sense, memory becomes not only a longing for what was lost but also presents a conflicting situation with what was morally neglected.

The Kite Runner offers a positive side of multiculturalism. Both Baba and Amir suffer with their migration to America, but their memory paved different paths for them. Baba wants to keep Afghanistan alive in him; thus, it becomes difficult for him to adopt the American way of living. But Amir's character presents some ray of hope. America gave him confidence so that he could perform his duties, whatever he was not able to perform. He feels helpless to save Hassan but bravely rescues Sohrab. Hosseini's novel also reveals how multiculturalism increases nostalgia for homeland. Memory becomes both a refuge and a burden. It is shaping the immigrant experience and collective identities. *The Kite Runner* highlights the complexities of exile, belonging, and the search for home by examining the interrelationship between memory, nostalgia, and multiculturalism.

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