



Unveiling the Trauma: Discovering Pedophilia in *The Kite Runner*

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ABSTRACT

*The sexual exploitation of adolescents has recently gained international attention and is a major problem in many countries. Afghanistan, a South Asian nation, is one of these countries with a startlingly high rate of sexual exploitation incidents; among these, the practice known as Bacha Bazi has attracted criticism from all sides. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini exposes the terrible Afghan culture of Bacha Bazi, which damages the social and sexual identities of many Afghan boys and has a negative impact on their mental well-being as a result of traumatic events that cause them to exhibit PTSD symptoms. This paper explores the issue of child sexual exploitation in general, as well as the arrival of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan and its effects on children's mental health in particular, as depicted in *The Kite Runner*.*

Keywords: *The Kite Runner*, Bacha Bazi, PTSD, mental health, and dancing boys.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Khaled Hosseini, an acclaimed Afghan-American writer, reflects on the city where he was born and spent his childhood, observing that Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, did not always have horrifying scenes but once it had magnificent historical monuments, art, architecture, gardens, and delectable delicacies. It was erroneously turned into an image that would always lament a fall from grace. Hosseini recalls that Kabul was not always known as the Islamic city that it is today. Women were free to choose and pursue careers, and they worked in offices alongside men. However, as Afghanistan gradually fell into the tyrant hands of the Soviet Union, Mujahidin, and Taliban, the plight of women began to loom large alongside the country's deteriorating socio-political conditions. Hosseini has expressed his concern about the plight of people in general, and women and children in particular, who have been marginalized on two fronts: by society and within the four walls of their houses, in his novels. Khaled Hosseini stated candidly in one of his 2003 interviews that the treatment of women in certain Muslim nations, including the country he belongs to, has been characterized by a significant lack of progress and respect.

Hosseini was influenced by Afghan history when he penned *The Kite Runner*, his first book. *The Kite Runner* depicts the state of Afghanistan society, which has led to major problems like racism, discrimination, and identity. Khaled Hosseini's poignant book *The Kite Runner* examines the difficulties of friendship, atonement, and the eerie legacy of the past in war-torn Afghanistan. The story is structured by the turbulent events that take place in the lives of Amir and Hassan, two childhood friends, against the backdrop of political unrest. The main theme of the book is redemption, as Amir, scarred by a childhood betrayal, embarks on a journey to seek forgiveness and atone for his misdeeds. Sohrab, Hassan's son, plays a crucial role in this redemption story. Sohrab represents the innocence lost in the middle of battle, and his terrible life serves as a mirror for the generational effects of previous transgressions. Sohrab turns into a moving illustration of the effects of violence and the wounds it causes in the wake of future generations. His adversities and resiliency highlight the larger issue of how historical and personal tragedies affect people and their potential for recovery. Finally, *The Kite Runner* skillfully crafts a story that cuts over cultural divides and offers a profound examination of interpersonal connections, shame, and the never-ending quest for atonement.

Afghanistan and Bacha Bazi

Afghan traditions and customs prohibit women and girls from the performing arts and dancing in public, and so Afghan boys as young as nine to 12 years of age, particularly those from poor and marginalized communities and considered good-looking, are targeted for recruitment as Bacha Bazi (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The translation of Bacha Bazi is a boy play (Jones, 2015). It involves the coercion or forced performance of young boys, usually between the ages of 10 and 18, as dancers and entertainers at social functions. Tragically, it frequently entails abuse and exploitation of sexual rights. Boy players, also known as Bacha Bazi, are males who enslave young boys in Bacha Bazi. These men are powerful businessmen, public servants, or militia members. Boys who are stuck in Bacha Bazi are typically orphans and poor. According to Thorson (2013): Perpetrators were very strategic, taking time to hunt for boys who fit the following criteria:

- Those unaccompanied
- Those under the age of 15
- Those from unstable family backgrounds (p.1)

Poor families occasionally sell their sons to Bacha Bazi or allow their sons to be adopted to receive clothing, food, or money. Other boys are abducted in open spaces like the market. Boys from the Bacha Bazi community are made to dress like women, put on lipstick, and dance at men's parties where they are sexually abused. The prostitution and slavery of these young boys have become rampant (Thorson, 2013). They may be physically punished if they displease their onlookers. The youngsters are subsequently shared among Afghan guys or sold to the highest bidder observed.

The Emergence of Bacha Bazi

The practice of Bacha Bazi has spread throughout Afghanistan's northern and southern countryside, where it is shockingly widespread now. The commanders of the Mujahideen who repelled the Soviet invasion in the 1980s frequently abused children. It became fashionable to keep boy conscripts around for domestic and sexual encounters. In 1996, when the Taliban took over, Bacha Bazi was outlawed as a result of the implementation of rigorous Sharia law. Those who continued to perform it did so covertly. Islamic law stipulated that offenders would be subjected to flagellation, amputation, and execution.

When the American military entered Afghanistan in 2001, it was able to overthrow the Taliban by working with the Northern Alliance, a group of former Mujahideen commanders who eventually came back to power after the Taliban was vanquished. When the warlords regained control, they

resurrected the practice of Bacha Bazi, in which powerful predators abducted, raped, and forced youngsters into sexual servitude. Afghan families with a surplus of kids are eager to give any of their kids to the local warlord or official, even though they are aware of the sexual repercussions, for the sake of money or due to certain other reasons.

Bacha Bazi and Islam

Islam, the major religion of Afghanistan, forbids homosexuality. Even though it is forbidden, cultural interpretations of Islamic scripture enable sexual offenders to escape punishment. According to a lax interpretation of Islam, it is sinful to love a male, yet it is not wrong to use a boy for sexual pleasure. Many may argue that in a strict Islamic country, such a homosexual act, performed by force and coercion, would be strictly banned. However, many Afghans say that Bacha Bazi is not homosexual and should not be regarded as such. According to the study “Pashtun Sexuality” by the Human Terrain Team Study, it is not homosexuality that propels men toward Bacha Bazi. The study says that Bacha Bazi is not un-Islamic and is ethical in nature till the man is not in love with the boy. However, civilized countries consider such statements significantly misleading (Verma, 2019).

Precisely, the practice of Bacha Bazi has grown to be a serious issue in Afghanistan since the American invasion in 2001. Islam and Afghan cultural interpretations of the Quran both fell short of putting an end to this system of exploitation and sexual servitude.

Government of Afghanistan And Bacha Bazi

According to Commission (2014), 427 of the Criminal Law forbids rape and pederasty and stipulates that those who commit it face lengthy prison sentences. It also states that if a child is the victim and the perpetrator is a tutor, servant, or teacher, the situation is deemed aggravating. Therefore, although this law clearly addresses acts of pederasty and rape, it does not specifically address the practice of Bacha Bazi. Furthermore, it excludes the sodomy, touching, massage, and other sexual behaviors that are frequently associated with Bacha Bazi. This explains the gaps and ambiguities in Afghanistan's laws pertaining to Bacha Bazi.

Regardless of whether Islamic law prohibits Bacha Bazi, United Nations officials and human rights organizations widely view it as an unacceptable form of child sexual servitude (*AIHRC Turns toward Stemming Bacha Bazi*, 2013). But unlike many forms of organized child sexual slavery, Bacha Bazi flourishes unabated, with seemingly tacit approval of the government despite its contrary treaty obligations (Werban et al., 2009). The

Security Council has flatly condemned the deplorable circumstances affecting Afghan children and urged the Afghan government to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of ... Bacha Bazi (*Statement by Chairman of Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict | UN Press*, n.d.). The United Nations published a detailed manual tailored to help the Afghanistan government implement a legal framework for banning child sex trafficking (*Appropriate Legal Responses to Combating Trafficking in Persons in Afghanistan Manual for Parliaments of Afghanistan*, n.d.).

The Afghan government also signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and acceded to the Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263, 2000). Still, the Afghan government has failed to implement an effective system of justice designed to enforce these treaty obligations and prohibit the rape of male children (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Upon receiving news that Bacha Bazi represented a grave breach of its human rights obligations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai dismissed the idea of instituting immediate measures to protect Afghan boys from sexual servitude and replied, let us win the war first. Then, we will deal with such matters (Yerman, 2012). State officials sexually abuse young boys with startling impunity, and the Afghan government is known to punish the child victims of Bacha Bazi rather than the adult male perpetrators. Some Afghan provincial governors are known to openly keep Bacha Bazi harems (Child Rights International Network, 2013).

Afghanistan's military and police officials are some of the most vigorous sexual predators (Human Rights Watch, 2011) and do not try to hide their sexual exploitation of the young boy community in Afghanistan. Numerous Afghan boys are detained and sexually assaulted in government facilities without charges or an opportunity to have the legality of their imprisonment reviewed by a court. (Cook, 2012) Frontline's documentary, *The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan*, presented video footage of Afghan police officers openly fondling young Afghan boys. An Afghan Thursday night tradition involves uniformed Afghan police officers lining up several pre-teen boys and taking a select few into the police station for hours at a time (Yerman, 2012). The discoveries reported in the documentary not only comport with findings made by the Security Council, but also validate reports by the U.S. State Department, which found that the Afghan government has failed to make "discernible progress in protecting victims of trafficking" and

its officials systematically engage in the "sexual abuse of boys" ((United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008).

In May 2014, the U.N. Secretary-General officially designated the Afghan National Police and Local Police as "parties" that engage in the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children, recurrent attacks on schools and/or hospitals and recurrent attacks or threats of attacks against protected personnel in contravention of international law (Tremblay, 2017). Because of Bacha Bazi's resurgence after being banned by the Taliban, and the Afghan government's complicity in the practice, obtaining an accurate count of child victims of bacha bazi is virtually impossible (USAID, 2022). But at least one observer has noted that approximately half the Pashtun tribal members in Kandahar and other southern towns are Bacha Baz (Abawi, 2009). Observers claim that at least one out of every five Afghan weddings include Bacha Bazi (Londono, 2012).

Bacha Bazi so freely permeates Afghanistan that it now threatens the legitimacy and authority of the Afghan government. The woeful reality of the Afghan government's complicity in Bacha Bazi and the absence of an effective legal infrastructure to halt its growth has left scores of Afghans with a seething outrage and deep-rooted doubt regarding the international government corruption is so heightened that many Afghan citizens now prefer Taliban rule (Cockburn, 2009). Many insurgents continue to fight in Afghanistan because they view the Taliban as the only viable alternative to the existing government, which they deem too corrupt to provide basic needs such as long term employment, schools, hospitals and a justice system (Johnson, 2010) The Afghan government's failure to safeguard its populace from sexual violence has significantly undermined U.S. counterinsurgency objectives, raising serious questions about prospects for peace and security in the region. There is no denying that the safety of the Afghan people is the primary factor in the effectiveness of US counterinsurgency strategy. The United States declared in 2009 that efforts to protect Afghan civilians would even supersede efforts to eliminate the Taliban (Jones, 2014). The dangerous reality of systematic child sex trafficking in Afghanistan has made peace and security less likely, raising important concerns about whether the international community is required by the Responsibility to protect theory to act on behalf of the victims.

Effects of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan

Bacha Bazi is a reflection of an extreme instance of the oppressive, sexually perverse Afghan patriarchy. The practice has a negative impact on

Afghanistan that is both severe and long-lasting, affecting both the individuals and the society as a whole. It is believed that Bacha Bazi violates fundamental human rights, especially the rights of the children who are impacted. It violates their right to be shielded from mistreatment and exploitation. The victim's mental capacity is severely diminished by this evil culture, which also appropriates the sexual and gender identities of boys. According to Afghan society, it is androgynous for guys to dress like women and mimic their mannerisms on the outside. Adult males use this act of gender transition to disprove any claims that they have committed homosexual violence as “the sexual act is consummated with persons whose sexual identity is no longer masculine but is a new one, culturally perceived as androgynous (Borile, 2019).

Their solitude is exacerbated by society's disgust with their sexual exploitation and development of feminine features. The victims who come from minority ethnic groups experience double marginalization: first for being a boy, then for being born into a competing ethnic group. The victims are unable to rid themselves of the traumas of their past because they lack psychosocial support. Abawi, in one of the articles, mentioned once individuals have been stigmatized as males who engage in female dance performances, they are unable to reverse or undo this label. Social isolation victims have low levels of self-respect and self-esteem for themselves. Some victims were killed by their families to restore their honor, while others committed suicide as a result of the shame, insult, and humiliation. Their innocence being violated, exploited, and abused can leave them with permanent emotional wounds that impair their mental health and may even exacerbate conditions like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Experiencing the sexual perversity of adult males gives some Bacha Bazi victims a new understanding of male sexual appetite, and this understanding makes them spiteful as adults. As a result, their psychological trauma is only soothed when they relive their suffering on another victim, which feeds the abuse cycle.

Bacha Bazi contributes to a culture of violence and exploitation, reinforcing power imbalances and perpetuating harmful norms. It may have a detrimental effect on societal values and legitimize abusive behavior. In communities, the presence of Bacha Bazi can cause trust to break down. It fosters an atmosphere in which people take advantage of weaker members of the community, weakening social ties and escalating feelings of unease. The potential for the spread of sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs), such as HIV/AIDS, is increased by sexual activity occurring in some Bacha Bazi incidents. This presents a risk to the general public's health that could impact

not just the victims but also the larger community. The prevalence of Bacha Bazi puts the rule of law and the legal system's capacity to defend citizens—especially vulnerable children—in jeopardy. The issue may persist due to a lack of legal remedies and ineffective law enforcement.

The study, which is based on Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, investigates the suffering endured by Afghan boys trapped in Bacha Bazi as a result of persistent sexism and racial animosity between Pashtuns and Hazaras. The book emphasizes Pashtuns engaging in Bacha Bazi for two reasons: to exact revenge on Hazaras for the harm done to their people and to quench their sexual appetite. Esmatullah Nasari claims that the phenomenon of child abuse perpetrated by individuals in positions of authority seems to have become a regrettable facet of Afghan society. The individual persists in their actions. If left unchecked, the issue of sexual assault has the potential to proliferate and yield severe ramifications for the nation.

Najibullah Quraishi's documentary infiltrates this secretive culture by following Dastager, a key figure of Bacha Bazi. We meet Imam. Aged 15, Imam has been a 'dancing boy' for four years. Tonight, as every other night, he dresses in special women's clothing, with bells tied to his feet, and dances the night away. Gathered around him, twenty men aged 35 to 60. Their crooked smiles reveal the pleasure they take in their macabre tradition. Their eyes are vicious. When asked if Imam will be going back home with him tonight, Dastager nods: 'yes, of course'. He claims to have had about 2000 to 3000 boys stay with him: 'they come and go', he laughs. The next day, the journalist meets another man whose blond mustache has earned him the nickname 'the German' amongst his harem of prepubescent boys. 'I go to every province to have happiness and pleasure with boys. I like watching them. Some boys are no good for dancing, but they can be used for other purposes. For other bacha bazi activities'. The reporter questions him about the nature of these 'other activities'. Without a hint of remorse or shame, the German replies: 'I mean sodomy and other sexual activities. (Neyra, 2019).

What the Sources Say

Three groups of people were interviewed during this investigation: a number of local witnesses and elites, thirty-one Bacha Bazi victims, and thirty-six of the offenders. The following is a presentation of the interview findings: Of those who committed Bacha Bazi, 25% were between the ages of 21 and 30, 28% were between the ages of 31 and 40, 28% were between the ages of 41 and 50, and 8% were between the ages of 51 and 40. Overall, 56% of them were in the age range of 41 to 50. An essential and useful factor in determining Bacha Bazi incidence is literacy. The percentage of illiterate

offenders is 58%. The marital status of the offenders does not directly relate to Bacha Bazi; just 22% are single, while 78% of the offenders are married. Eighteen percent of married people have more than one wife. Over 46 percent of married individuals were wed between the ages of 18 and 25. Of those who are married, 46% say they are happy in their union. Nonetheless, 43% of them are just somewhat content with their marriage. Sixty-four percent of the criminals are considered regular members of society. Eight percent of the offenders are also the wealthy, the powerful, and the old. The majority of the victims are younger than eighteen.

However, Bacha Bazi can also affect young people who are older than 18. Of the victims, 42% are between the ages of 13 and 15. Forty-five percent of them are in the 16–18 age range. Of the victims, 13% are between the ages of 18 and 25. Awareness and literacy have a powerful correlation; the literate is less susceptible. 48% of the victims are illiterate, making up the majority. 87% of the kids affected by Bacha Bazi are unable to go to school. 75% of the offenders have admitted to only having one male at home. 14% of respondents claimed to have two boys. Nonetheless, two of them claimed to be in possession of three boys apiece. According to 81.6% of the offenders, the boys were between the ages of 13 and 16 while 14% were more interested in boys between the ages of 17 and 18. Recreation, lust, and personal interests have been identified as Bacha Bazi's main motivations, and 69.5% of the perpetrators concur. Lust encompasses a variety of behaviors, such as stroking males' bodies, making them dance at parties, and satisfying sexual cravings. According to some other offenders, they pursued the crime because it is either quite common in their communities or seen as normal; alternatively, they do it only to outdo their rivals.

According to 29% of the offenders, they paid money to purchase the boys, taking advantage of their lack of resources. 13% of respondents claimed to be able to contact the boy through their friends. Nine percent have admitted to threatening and using force to get the boys. Uncertain additional means were cited by the remaining 24% of respondents. The primary factor behind Bacha Bazi's emergence and widespread presence is poverty. Of the victims, 68% have admitted to receiving payment for their actions. 86% of the offenders have admitted that the lads' good looks are what draws them in. The other 14%, however, don't care about this. According to 39% of the offenders, they live together and have the victims under their control around the clock. 14% of respondents indicated their boys are available to them for 12 hours a day, 8% stated they have possession for 6 hours, 14% and 25% stated they have possession for 3 hours and 1 hour, respectively. Bedding and sexual use

of the victims are the most popular methods of victimization. 39% of the analysis confirms this.

The second most popular form of exploitation, accounting for 36% of cases, is dancing and having fun. Nonetheless, 31% of the victims claimed that they danced in front of the offenders to amuse them, and 33% of the victims admitted to being used sexually. 53% of the offenders have admitted to hosting drinking gatherings where they force their boys to dance and socialize with other Bacha Bazi offenders. 47 percent of people have denied doing this. While 14% of the perpetrators have disputed it, 86% of them have stated that the boys are pleased with the deed. The victims' reactions, however, contradict the aforementioned claims. 87% of respondents said they were not entrapped voluntarily. Merely 13% acknowledged having obtained consent. 81% of the victims have shown a desire to leave their current position. However, 19% of them had an unfavorable response. According to 58% of the victims, they had experienced violence. Their statements indicate that the most frequent kinds of violence against them are beatings, incarceration, and threats of death. 69% of the offenders have acknowledged that they have encountered criticism and responses from others regarding their behavior. However, 31% of them had not experienced any of these responses. According to 89% of the offenders, they were not prosecuted by the security services for their Bacha Bazi activities. Ninety percent of witnesses and local elites claim that the offenders have not faced judicial consequences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bacha Bazi and The Kite Runner

Pallavi Thakur brought attention to the Bacha Bazi issue that was touched with in Khaled Hosseini's book *The Kite Runner*. She stated Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is a powerful narrative on Bacha Bazi, same-sex pedophilia restricted to adult men and adolescent boys prevalent in Afghanistan (Powell, 2018, 2020). She illustrated how Bacha Bazi had a negative impact on male children in Afghanistan. It clarifies the psychological anguish experienced by teenage Afghan males as a result of being sexually abused and having an imposed androgynous identity. Khan and et al. paper title determined the root causes of the Pashtun-Hazara genocide. According to this study, Hazaras were the victims of a genocide because of a historical fight that occurred in 1221 CE between the Mongols, who were Hazaras' ancestors, and the Khawarzamis, who were the Pashtuns' ancestors. The fight took on the form of a genocide because the Mongols detested the Khawarzamis. Over time, it took on several forms, including cultural, social, and religiopolitical tensions. These conflicts led to the marginalization,

subordination, and death of thousands of Hazaras, and they continue to this day. Ahmad Misuari Gibran, M. Amir P, and Herawaty Abbas analyzed that *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tell the tale of how Afghanistan is negatively impacted by protracted conflicts and other societal issues.

The results came out to be that the Hazara characters Hassan and Sohrab — the latter being the most talked-about — are the center of attention in *The Kite Runner*. Merdekawati et al. goal was to pinpoint behaviors that demonstrate atonement. The three actions—the first, sacrifice; the second, adoption; and the third, fight — are the ones that the researchers interpreted as describing the main character's redemption. Dr. Purnima Bhardwaj and Dilkes Kumar analyzed the sociopolitical environment, painful and moving interpersonal interactions, hollow conventions, and unsaid sadness of Afghans as they are depicted in Hosseini's book *The Kite Runner*. The paper's examination of the novel notes that Muslims in a Muslim nation subject each other to severe torment simply for holding divergent ideas. While male members endure more severe trauma than a woman could possibly imagine in her lifetime. When discussing the viewpoint of women, it can be observed that their exploitation increases by a factor of over a thousand. All they are are sex slaves. Arora and Manju (2023) used the Batsan Empathy Theory to illustrate the empathy displayed by Sohrab and Hassan. In the paper it is concluded that Hosseini brought to light what it meant to be altruistic through his characters Hassan and Sohrab. This study aims to investigate the origins of the concept of Bacha Bazi in the Afghan context, as well as the behavioral markers of PTSD in the characters and the identity ramifications of trauma resulting from Bacha Bazi.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To bring awareness among the downtrodden of the society regarding their basic rights and to enable them to ask for their rights by interweaving facts with the fiction.
2. To highlight how this sexual exploitation is the cause of many physical and psychological ailments resulting into trauma and PTSD symptoms.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research has been conducted by analyzing numerous academic and research papers and newspaper articles portraying the violation of human rights in Afghanistan, and Khaled Hosseini' has made it more sensitive by illustrating it in his literary works, specially in his novel *The Kite Runner*. Since the entire study is predicated on the theoretical episodes found in the

texts, it is qualitative research. *The Kite Runner* is the main source of data, and research papers and newspaper pieces are the secondary sources.

TRAUMA: A KEYWORD

A mental health disorder known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may arise from experiencing or witnessing a stressful event. Natural catastrophes, severe accidents, war, sexual assault, and other potentially fatal circumstances are examples of traumatic events that can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Stress and worry are natural after such situations, but when these feelings worsen, last longer, or get in the way of day-to-day activities, it's called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Herman (1992) and others have argued that the experience of prolonged totalitarian control in association with organized violence—whether in a political, criminal, or domestic context—causes a disorder that is more severe, more complex, and more enduring than is the DSM-defined PTSD that may be caused by exposure to any traumatic event.

There are four primary categories into which PTSD symptoms are typically classified: Intrusive thoughts, memories, or dreams associated with the traumatic incident are examples of intrusive symptoms. PTSD sufferers may have flashbacks, in which they perceive themselves to be reliving the trauma. PTSD sufferers may stay away from people, places, or things that bring up the traumatic experience. They might also refrain from talking about it or feeling anything connected to it. These comprise detached sentiments, trouble focusing, pessimistic ideas about oneself or the outside world, and an incapacity to feel happy. People may exhibit self-destructive behavior, become easily startled, become more irritated, or have difficulty falling asleep. Even in the absence of a direct threat, this elevated state of alertness may endure. An individual's daily life, relationships, and general well-being can all be profoundly impacted by PTSD.

DEMONSTRATING BACHA BAZI IN *THE KITE RUNNER*

The portrayal of the character Sohrab in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* implicitly alludes to the idea of Bacha Bazi. The book highlights the cultural and socioeconomic problems that are common in Afghanistan by hinting to the sexual exploitation and abuse that Sohrab endured. The history of Afghanistan is encapsulated in *The Kite Runner*. Afghanistan has always struggled with the racism dilemma and developing a national ideology due to its multi-ethnic background. The hostility between the ethnic groups in Afghan society was made worse by the developing affinities and pride for one's ethnicity. According to Zain (2006) stated that ethnic affinities and

identities remain high even after the unpleasant development of the last two and a half decades in Afghanistan. In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini depicts the mistreatment of Hazara children who are lured into Bacha Bazi by Pashtun warlords in order to assuage their animosity for the opposing ethnic group.

Hassan and his family served as a vehicle for Hosseini to highlight the Hazaras' atrocities. Assef, the main antagonist, was Pashtun and felt "Afghanistan is land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 38). Assef was extremely hostile towards Hazaras. He even disliked the friendship between the Hazara and the Pashtun. The other important character in the novel, Amir a Pashtun, was acquainted with Hassan, a Hazara. Amir used to receive threats and abuse from Assef since he was Hassan's friend. Assef used to say "You're bothering me very much. In fact, you bother me more than this Hazara here. How can you talk to him, play with him, let him touch you?" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 39). Hassan was once sodomized by Assef out of enmity and desire for retribution. Amir saw all of this, but at that precise moment, he chose not to intervene to save Hassan. When the Taliban invaded Afghanistan, Assef continued his nasty behavior and even got more vicious.

Situation of Afghanistan deteriorated after the Taliban invasion. The majority of Pashtuns fled to Pakistan or America. The situation for the remaining Hazaras in the nation was the worst. The orphanage housed underprivileged children who were malnourished and basically Hazaras. When Amir went to save Sohrab, the owner of the orphanage told him "There is very little shelter here, almost no food, no clean water" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 244). Wealthy Pashtuns took the kids from the orphanage and assaulted them sexually. Assef was one of them who participated in Bacha Bazi.

When the Taliban invaded Afghanistan, Amir migrated to America. Hassan was abandoned amid the nation that was racked by conflict. Hassan was married and had a kid named Sohrab. However, one day the Taliban killed both Hassan and his wife, leaving Sohrab an orphan. Amir learned that Hassan was his half-brother and that Sohrab was his nephew, at that time he hastened back to Kabul to protect Sohrab from the Taliban. The protagonist of the book, Amir, is deeply entangled in Sohrab's life as he seeks atonement for previous transgressions. Sohrab's path to recovery is entwined with his yearning for atonement. The work tackles themes of guilt, atonement, and the generational effects of violence through the prism of Sohrab's representation. He located an orphanage and handed the Zaman, caretaker at orphanage with the Sohrab polaroid. "Salaam alaykum," I said. I showed him the Polaroid. "We're searching for this boy" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 242). The director of the

orphanage initially rejected him because he believed Amir was a Taliban member. “I am sorry. I have never seen him” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 242). Later, the director informed him that one of the Taliban members had taken Sohrab from the orphanage, subtly warning him that he would become a victim of sexual exploitation; Hosseini (2013), in *The Kite Runner*, highlighted

There is a Talib official, he muttered. “He visits once every month or two. He brings cash with him, not a lot, but better than nothing at all.” His shifty eyes fell on me, rolled away. “Usually he’ll take a girl. But not always”. (p.246)

Zaman also laments his inability to defend the orphanage's youngsters from the formidable warlord. “If I deny him one child, he takes ten. So I let him take one and leave the judging on Allah” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 248). This illustrates Talib's great indulgence in gratifying his sexual fulfillment through minors. Zaman admits his helplessness when he says I swallow my pride and take his goddamn filthy... dirty money. Then I go to the bazar and buy food for the children (Hosseini, 2013, p. 248). The book demonstrates poverty and helplessness are the reasons for Bacha Bazi's proliferation in Afghanistan.

Amir hurried to the location in search of Sohrab where he was kept in search of him. The sight of Assef startled him. Assef seized Sohrab only for the purpose of exacting revenge, knowing that he was Hassan's child. Assef sent his guy to bring the boy in after Amir asked for the Sohrab, while Amir listened to the jingling sound. Sohrab's appearance astonished Amir, as Hosseini (2013) described

A boy dressed in a loose, sapphire blue *pirhan-tumban* followed. The resemblance was breathtaking. Disorienting. Rahim Khan's Polaroid hadn't done justice to it. His head was shaved, his eyes darkened with mascara, and his cheeks glowed with an unnatural red. (p. 268-269)

The description focuses on the reshaping of a male child's sexual identity in Bacha Bazi. Additionally, it shows Pashtuns enjoying Bacha Bazi, which was infamous for brutally punishing homosexuality. Mondloch (2013) asserts that Pashtun social norms dictate that Bacha Bazi is not unIslamic or homosexual at all. In one of her articles Shaista Gohir (2010) discusses the widespread Bacha Bazi culture in any Muslim Countries around the World. The prevalence of moral hypocrisy is highly concerning within a nation where not only is homosexuality strictly prohibited, but also subject to severe punishment, even in cases involving consenting adults. Nevertheless, individuals who engage in the act of sodomising young boys are not typically classified as homosexuals or pedophiles. Talibs were not ashamed, but by

clapping, they were encouraging this wrongdoing. They said “Wah wah! Mashallah!” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 269). Amir noticed Sohrab dancing. Sohrab raised his arms and turned slowly. He stood on tip-toes, spun gracefully, dipped to his knees, straightened, and spun again. His little hands swiveled at the wrists, his fingers snapped, and his head swung side to side like a pendulum. His feet pounded the floor, the bells jingling in perfect harmony with the beat of the tabla. He kept his eyes closed. Sohrab danced in a circle, eyes closed, danced until the music stopped. The bells jingled one final time when he stomped his foot with the song’s last note (Hosseini, 2013). Sohrab appears to be engulfed in shame and terror in this appalling situation. He suffers from both physical and psychological abuse as a child. He is frightened and filled with the nightmares of sexual assault by the Talib’s presence. Sohrab stands in for the condition of Hazara boys, who are frequently orphaned and hence easily available to warlords due to their poverty. The sexual advances made by the Talib toward Sohrab were clearly visible to Amir. The small boy is head down, expressing his mute consent to the Warlord’s lewd advances. “Bia, bia, my boy,” the Talib said, calling Sohrab to him” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 269). This confirms Talib’s view of the child as his property.

Talib’s sexism is evident in the way he fondles Sohrab’s body. The book reveals the Pashtuns’ unwavering goal to eradicate all evidence of Hazara presence from Afghanistan. Aseef, the Talib explains the rationale behind the Pashtuns’ choice to purge Afghanistan. “Like pride in your people, your customs, your language. Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage” (Hosseini, 2013, p.274). The declaration clearly expresses the Pashtuns’ unrelenting animosity towards Hazaras and other ethnic groups, which resulted in bloodbaths, massacres, cruelty, and ruthlessness in Afghanistan. Children were the victims of violence and sexual abuse due to racial prejudice. Amir questions Aseef about his unyielding resolve: “What mission is that? I heard myself say. Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam?” (Hosseini, 2013, p.273).

Hosseini underplays the psychological impact of Bacha Bazi on Afghan children through the character of Sohrab, in addition to emphasizing how ethnic conflict affects Hazara male children. Sohrab was rescued by Amir from Assef. He brought him to Pakistan. Sohrab enjoyed watching the Urdu program. “Just rocked back and forth, his face lit by the silver glow of the images flickering across the screen” (Hosseini, 2013). Sohrab seemed to be content and loving his life right now. He went to the mosque alone and

conversed with Amir. However, the truth was different; Bacha Bazzi had a significant impact on him. He hated himself and was terrified. He said I'm so dirty (Hosseini, 2013, p.300). He assured Amir he would be good with him. His post-traumatic stress disorder is evident from this. One of the symptoms of his PTSD is his emotional outburst.

Amir desired to accompany Sohrab to America. Amir was unable to provide evidence that Sohrab is his nephew. He was having trouble taking Sohrab to America. Hosseini (2013) mentioned

Well, it's like this. In the aftermath of a disaster, whether it be natural or man-made--and the Taliban are a disaster, Amir, believe me--it's always difficult to ascertain that a child is an orphan. Kids get displaced in refugee camps, or parents just abandon them because they can't take care of them. Happens all the time. So the INS won't grant a visa unless it's clear the child meets the definition of an eligible orphan. I'm sorry, I know it sounds ridiculous, but you need death certificates (p. 329).

Amir made every effort—he even desired to adopt Sohrab—but this was not possible given the unrest in Afghanistan. Hosseini (2013) highlighted

Now, a child has to be legally adopted according to the laws and regulations of his own country. But when you have a country in turmoil, say a country like Afghanistan, government offices are busy with emergencies, and processing adoptions won't be a top priority (p. 329).

Advisor also informed him “It still may not permit this adoption. In fact, even the more moderate Muslim nations are hesitant with adoptions because in many of those countries, Islamic law, Shari'a, doesn't recognize adoption”(Hosseini, 2013, p. 329). Every attempt made by Amir failed.

He advised him to remain at the Pakistani orphanage, and assured him that he would pick him up later. Sohrab tried to kill himself out of concern that he would return to the orphanage and might be trapped in the cycle of sexual slavery once more. Amir remembers Sohrab's body floating in the bathtub of the room in the hotel. The horrible experience in Afghanistan left Sohrab disturbed. His identity has been obscured. He is incapable of recalling that existence. Sohrab is plagued by intrusive thoughts and flashbacks of his orphanage days and his ordeal as a victim of Bacha Bazi. His disengagement and suicide attempt point to a reliving of the experience, which is a frequent

PTSD symptom. This narrative shows how Sohrab's current condition is still impacted by the eerie memories of the trauma.

Sohrab moves to America with Amir, but he decides to stay a recluse. Amir describes Sohrab's silence as “it was the silence of one who has taken cover in a dark place, curled up all the edges and tucked them under” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 352).

Traumatic experiences cause emotional numbness and make it difficult for people to form close bonds with others. Sohrab was devoid of feeling. Sohrab's emotional disengagement stems from his trauma. The emotional toll of Bacha Bazi is reflected in his grim posture and quietness as he struggles to communicate with people and express himself. Sohrab also has severe trust issues as a result of being Bacha Bazi's victim. It is difficult for him to connect with people because of his past, especially with adults. His early hesitation to interact with Amir and other authority officials is clear evidence of his lack of trust.

Sohrab's recovery from his abnormal life is attempted many times by Amir and Soraya, Amir's wife but most of the time they failed. The book closes on a happy note when Amir finally succeeds in igniting a flame in Sohrab's eyes through the kite flying activity set up during an Afghan gathering in Fremont. Sohrab was reluctant to participate in the activity at first, but Amir soon discovered him taking part. When he noticed Sohrab smiling, he felt at ease. Amir and Soraya's attempt to be a helping role model for Sohrab show that he understands how crucial connections are to helping people deal with trauma. The two characters' bond grows to be a source of support and reconciliation.

RESULTS

There was a time when Bacha Bazi was not even identified as a problem, as this inhuman and heinous practice was nothing more than revenge and a source of entertainment. When Khaled Hosseini wrote *The Kite Runner*, he wrote about Bacha Bazi, but his focus was on the war and the conflict between Hazaras and Pashtuns, as Hazaras were there in the minority and the innocent children of the community who had nothing to do with the political propagandas were also targeted and sexually abused. The issue of Bacha Bazi was not given as much importance as it should have been. The present research is an effort to highlight the horrors of Bacha Bazi so that necessary actions can be taken to stop this inhuman practice. Bacha Bazi is not only a physical abuse, but it is such a traumatic experience that the child Sohrab, the victim of Bacha Bazi, is not able to trust even his family members after bearing the dreadful act of Bacha Bazi. He prefers to remain silent and tries

to commit suicide, as death seems easier than to live with such a trauma within the mind. Certain psychological theories have been used in this research to prove the emergency of the situation. An effort has been made to draw the attention of the policy maker to eradicate such inhuman practices.

CONCLUSION

The heinous practice known as Bacha Bazi, which has its origins in Afghanistan, is sadly leaking into other countries too. This cruel practice of sexual and mental harassment of children destroys their innocence and makes them vulnerable to a lifetime of sexual abuse, mental anguish, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and it must be curtailed for the well-being of the posterity. The social acceptance of this exploitation, which powerful people frequently support, exacerbates it. It is a blatant violation of children's rights that requires immediate attention from the international community and needs to be identified as trauma, pedophilia, rape, and sexual and mental abuse worldwide. Perpetrators may have the upper hand, but advocacy and group efforts can defeat them. A comprehensive strategy that includes legal assistance, sex education, vocational training, mental health care, comprehensive child support programs, diplomatic pressure, and forums where children's opinions can be heard is necessary to end Bacha Bazi. It is equally important to question deeply held societal beliefs as it is to hold people accountable through punishment. Formal and informal education proves to be a potent weapon in this conflict. We will have to look at it as a sin as well as crime to eliminate Bacha Bazi.

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