



## **Power, Privilege, and Abuse: A Marxist Examination of ‘Bacha Bazi’ in *The Kite Runner***

Kritika Srivastava

Manju Rani

*Chandigarh University, India*

Aanchal Arora

*Lovely Professional University, India*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The term ‘Bacha Bazi’ is a commonplace term used in reference to the pervasive act of objectification and sexual abuse of preadolescent kids by predominant male patrons in the Afghanistan society, festering it rotten from inside. Existing in an unofficial, institutionalized setting, it often results in a culturally enforced and approved metamorphosis of young boys, affecting how they construct their social and sexual identity—which stays distinct and unaltered—as they are coerced into becoming dancing boys and male escorts for wealthy patrons compelling them to serve as both, a source of sexual pleasure and amusement. Bacha Bazi is a new social function that has been given cultural legitimacy by a society that is sharply split between the powerful and the powerless. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is a sharp social commentary on the Marxist nature of this cultural malpractice from the points of view of Hassan and Sohrab. The current paper is qualitative research into the power play and politics of Bacha Bazi in the Afghanistan society from a Marxist perspective.*

**Keywords:** *Bacha Bazi, Culture, Dancing Boys, Marxism and *The Kite Runner**

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## INTRODUCTION

**K**haled Hosseini's voice is one of the most compelling voices in modern times. Hosseini was born against the stormy backdrop of Afghanistan's history. His journey from a war-torn Kabul to the literary heights of global eminence is a testament to the perseverance and persistence built into the very fabric of his novels especially his masterpiece, *The Kite Runner*. Few books in the annals of modern literature have had the same profound impact on society and intensity as Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. This ground-breaking work is evidence to the persistent ability of narrative to shed light on the darkest facets of the human experience, especially considering Afghanistan's chaotic past. Essentially, the story addresses the severe consequences of child abuse and delivers a biting critique of a society shattered by violence, betrayal, and the unwavering quest for forgiveness.

The events shown in *The Kite Runner* take place in Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion, a place where friendships are both holy and brittle, with kites soaring and secrets being whispered. Amir, a child at the core of the narrative, is plagued by the ghost of his own timidity and the terrible repercussions of a single act of treachery. However, beneath the surface, there lies a deeper truth that pierces to the heart of Afghanistan's most reprehensible secret: the gruesome acts of child exploitation and abuse.

*The Kite Runner* exposes the harsh reality of a society plagued by the mistreatment of its most defenseless citizens, from the menacing picture of Hassan, Amir's devoted friend and victim of abhorrent assault, to the sneaky presence of Assef, the personification of cruelty and corruption. Hassan's son Sohrab is born into a world still haunted by the horrors of the past, carrying on his father's legacy of pain. After his parents pass away, Sohrab is left orphaned and alone to fend for himself. He gets caught up in a vicious game of politics and power and is forced to endure the same kind of maltreatment and exploitation that killed his father before him. As a result, his innocence and spirit are shattered, and he becomes a passive witness to the atrocities committed against him.

Researchers have observed the harsh truth of a world where innocence is destroyed, and youthful ambitions are dashed under the weight of unimaginable trauma via the prism of Hosseini's exquisite words. "By naming and shaming a rapist, Hosseini makes clear that sexual violence is an affront to social order and human rights that deserves global scrutiny as an issue of principle" (Banita, 2019).

This sexual violence shown in the novel takes place in the name of "*Bacha Bazi*", a sacrilegious and abominable act of sexually exploiting young boys, which goes beyond dancing and voyeurism. "It also includes activities

such as forcing victims to dance in public and private ceremonies, subjecting them to massages, pederasty, rape, intercourse, touching, pornography and more” (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

The recruitment of young preadolescent boys marks the beginning of the *Bacha Bazi* cycle. The men who own these ‘Bachas’ or who are only following the horrendous custom are known as the ‘Bacha Baz’. They search for boys amongst the impoverished villages of Afghanistan between the ages of eleven and twelve. The *Bacha Baz* would either kidnap these youngsters or traffic them for a specific sum of money thus exploiting vulnerable families living in extreme poverty. In the Uzbek community of Afghanistan, this practice is also referred as *bachabozlik*, and the terms of address between an Uzbek dancing boy and his lover are *uka* (“younger brother”) and *aka* (“older brother”) (Baldauf et al., 1990).

*Bacha*, the boys who dance, are kept by the *Bacha Baz* up until they turn twenty and are no longer sexually appealing (Russia Today, 2016). Older boys in their twenties are not considered good enough to be a *Bacha* by the *Bacha Baz*. The transaction starts when the boys perform for older males at private parties where they are kept by the *Bacha Baz* for entertainment purposes. The guests would then bid to take their favorite *Bacha* home after the celebration. Sometimes a *Bacha Baz* would spend time with the *Bacha* for a while, or lay claim on him thus preventing any other *Bacha Baz* from spending the night with him.

In most cases, the private party would end with the young child (*Bacha*) being coerced into having coerced sex (rape) by the patron *Bacha Baz*. This perverted act of *Bacha Bazi* has attributed to a breach of a large percentage of Afghanistan's human rights, leaving permanent damage on the young impressionable minds of the *Bachas* who become unequipped to seek meaningful lives. Additionally, for most of the young boys involved in the company, dancing is the only skill they shall have for the rest of their lives thus rendering them unemployable in other areas.

The exposure of the tale of the dancing boys by the international media began in the year 2012. In the same year, a man from the U.S army was shot dead by a sniper hired by a *Bacha Baz* who was confronted for having a *Bacha* chained to a bed in his barrack (Goldstein and New York Times, 2015). Nevertheless, the United Nations (UN) had been watching the recruitment of *Bachas* long before the tragedy of 2012. Consequently, the United Nations and the Afghan government signed an agreement to stop the malpractice of *Bacha Bazi* (US News, 2011). Furthermore, the UN implemented the speech act that year, marking the beginning of securitization, by declaring “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, 2011). The UN persisted in pressuring the Afghan government to terminate the practice of *Bacha Bazi* from the country, even if the speech act itself did not significantly alter the country’s situation. The UN's SIGAR 2017 report demonstrated this endeavor, stating that *Bacha Bazi* must end and that Afghan officials were involved in its practice.

Another Speech act had also been done by AIHRC or Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. This NGO decided to speak up about *Bacha Bazi* as a threat towards human security and propose the government to establish a law to put *Bacha Bazi* down (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2014).

The practice of *Bacha Bazi* is still widespread in the community even though the UN and AIHRC's address led to the Afghan government acting against it in 2015. The custom that was perceived as a danger to public safety was elevated to a national security concern. The shift began in 2015 when the Afghans began to publicly discuss the atrocities committed by the Taliban against their people during their rule. Once they were set free from the Taliban, they realized that the people put into power were doing even worse things than the Taliban itself (Goldstein and New York Times, 2015). Since then, the *Bacha Bazi* securitization process has continued unabated.

The government is still working to abolish the tradition, as are other players like the UN and AIHRC. The latest move done by the Afghan government is revising the entire chapter of the criminal code to *Bacha Bazi* in 2017 (The revised Afghanistan criminal code: an end for *Bacha Bazi*, 2018). The objective of the current study is to use the Marxist theory in order to examine how the class struggle depicted in Khaled Hosseini's book *The Kite Runner* led to *Bacha Bazi*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A vivid literature review sheds light on the gruesome act of *Bacha Bazi* in Afghanistan as archived by several scholars. Pallavi Thakur in her paper titled “AFGHAN WAR-ZONES AND BACHA BAZI: AN ANALYSIS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF KHALED HOSSEINI AND NADEEM ASLAM” highlights the chaotic lives of the native people in the conflict-ridden areas in *The Kite Runner* and *The Blind Man's Garden* while telling the tale of the commodification of children during war in parallel. These books are a patchwork of interpersonal connections and the war's toll on them. Both Hosseini and Aslam expose the plight of the defenseless youngsters caught in the whirlpool of the "war on terror" while also portraying

the geopolitical issues. Due to their homelessness, ethnic rivalry, poverty, parent loss, and compromised security, Afghan children were particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation during war and strife. The fundamental rights of children have been violated by Afghanistan's culturally accepted pedophilia. When local warlords sexually abuse children and US security troops refuse to defend the defenseless victims, it takes on its most repulsive form. These books highlight the hypocrisy of war and conflict, which serve to uphold the status quo of power structures rather than protect the rights of the populace.

Aanchal Arora and Manju Rani explore the arrival of *Bacha Bazi* in Afghanistan and its psychological impact on the mental wellbeing of the victims as depicted by Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* emphasizing how the coerced androgynous identity availed by the young dancing boys leaves permanent psychological scars.

Amalendu Misra derives the civil war and political instability in Afghanistan to be the prime factors contributing to the deteriorating condition of the Bachas. He highlights how this ominous trend of rape and sexual violence are further incentivized in military war zones.

Sen in paper titled “Breaking Silence, Telling Stories: Unveiling the Trope of Male Rape in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*” has decoded the idea that men are ‘unrapable’ is stigmatized by the gendered discourse around rape. She further investigated why most occurrences of male rape have gone unreported. She further draws attention to how Hosseini illustrates the challenges faced by young onlookers who struggle with their duty to rape survivors and ultimately prioritize their safety over helping the victims. She examines how Hosseini avoids the physical experience of rape by framing it as a question of race, national identity, and power. Amongst the rape novels of the twenty-first century, it attests to the predicaments of onlookers and the general public due to their inaction and quiet, and how it results in the communal responsibility of child survivors of sexual assault.

Gibran et al. in the paper titled “The Negative Impacts of the Cultural Ban and Oppression of Human Rights on the Afghan’s Psychological Condition in Khaled Hosseini’s Novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” has exposed that Khaled Hosseini's novels, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, depict examples of cultural ban and human rights violations in Afghanistan, would have a profound effect on the characters' psychological growth. Both Hazaras, Hassan and Sohrab, were victims of Taliban violations in *The Kite Runner*. Sohrab is the main character of the story because his psychological state is shown to be impacted by Assef's mistreatment of him, which led him to become his sex slave. The novel also

mentions the ban on kite-fighting, though Sohrab is never shown playing kite before the last chapter. Nonetheless, the abuse he endured during the novel's battle did illustrate the detrimental effects of human rights violations on psychological development.

*Bacha Bazi* as a concept has recently gained traction due to international interference. However, there remains much to be explored. The objective of this paper is to critically examine the root cause of *Bacha Bazi* in Afghanistan from a Marxist perspective

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Karl Heinrich Marx and Friedrich Engels founded a political and economic theory popularly known as the Marxist theory that primarily draws its foundation from social class conflicts. Marx's central thesis was that those in society who possessed the means of production held all the power, and as a result, they were able to oppress and take advantage of those who lacked it. Marx thought that all cultures harbored an underlying political unconsciousness that included oppression. For instance, the owner of the factory exploits his employees, while the owner of the land exploits the farmer. One of the key claims of this theory is class distinction, which holds that people are split into groups according to their power and income, which leads to conflict within these groups. The lower class was deprived out of necessities like food, shelter, healthcare, education, and other things by the upper class, who took advantage of them in every manner possible. Marxism holds that a piece of literature reflects its cultural, social, and political context. In *The Kite Runner*, the Afghan society is split into two sections i.e., the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. While the former represents the economically and socially stronger class, the latter form the weaker socio-economic section of the society. The novel explores the atrocities committed by Pashtuns in the name of ethnic differences and the subsequent consequences of such heinous actions.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

According to scholars (Creswell & Maietta, 2002), qualitative research is aimed to deeply investigate, infer and analyze social phenomena through a typical context. Qualitative research is always based on the researcher's own interpretation of the given text. The use of these qualitative research methods in this study serves the goal of providing a thorough description of the text. The text is examined and assessed in-depth to answer the three vital questions in the world of research: What, Why and How? Hence, for the purpose of this study, an in-depth study of the primary text (i.e., Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*) was done. Consequently, relevant

books and articles served as secondary sources to bolster the findings. Techniques such as comprehensive descriptions, contextual details and engaging in the dialogic narrative proved quite useful in deciphering the driving motive behind each character's actions.

### **CONFLICT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS: AFGHANISTAN'S BACHA BAZI AS FORERUNNERS OF EXPLOITATION**

According to Trading Economics (2021), the poverty in Afghanistan brought on by high unemployment rates (13.28%) pushes people to look for other means of money, which in turn leads to the exploitation of young boys who are already vulnerable. The percentage of the population below the poverty line in 2020 is 49.4% as per the statistics published by the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2020). The All-Survivors Project (2021) conducted a study focused on enhancing survivor-centered healthcare responses for male victims/survivors of sexual violence in Afghanistan. Kandahar, a male victim/survivor, states that: "Some boys have economic problems, some are jobless, so they want to address their needs and make relationships with such people. The perpetrators get benefits from their economic weakness" (Corboz, 2023).

### **RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND HOMOSEXUALITY**

The young boys are terrorized into performing organized sodomy and homosexuality which has been condemned in various incidents amongst religious texts such as The Holy Bible and the Qur'an. The tale of Lot is one such instance. In Arabic, the word used for sodomy is *liwāt* (Bosworth et al., 1986). *Luṭ* (Lot) was a Prophet and messenger of God sent to educate and guide the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is told that God punished them as a warning against homosexuality alluding to it as a sin or "abomination" (*fāḥisha*). Consequently, the name *Lut* (Lot) came to be connected to the phrase for someone who engages in sodomy i.e., the sodomite, or *lūṭī* as a reference to the biblical narrative. The Qur'an (7:78–81) states: "And Lot, when he said to his people ...: 'See, you approach men lustfully instead of women; no, you are a people that do exceed (musrif)'" (Arberry, 1980).

### **BACHA BAZI DUE TO CLASS CONFLICT DEPICTED IN *THE KITE RUNNER***

Afghanistan has always been the land of cultural and ethnic conflicts. The root cause of these class conflicts that give rise to the exploitation of Hazaras is the ethnic strife between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Hosseini employs

his characters to illustrate this dilemma effortlessly. His depiction of Hassan and Sohrab illustrates the maltreatment of the minority Hazara children. Assef mistreats Hassan as he thinks “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be” (Hosseini, 2013). This shows how the feeling of class superiority complex is hammered into every Pashtun, right from their early childhood. Amir is a Pashtun too while Hassan is a member of the Hazara community. Hence, Assef doesn't enjoy Amir and Hassan's friendship and thinks of Hassan as beneath them. He deliberately bullies Hassan and refers to him as "flat-nose" indicating his inferior Hazara identity (Hosseini, 2013). His maltreatment of Hassan is motivated by his hatred towards the Hazara community.

Hassan is a skilled kite runner. During the kite flying competition, while trailing the blue kite that Amir cut off, Hassan runs into Assef on his way back. “When Amir hurriedly approached the bazaar, he saw Hassan holding the blue kite and was trapped by Assef and the two other boys. Despite numerous threats, Hassan refused to give Assef the kite when he asked for it” (Arora and Manju, 2023). Assef gets ballistic on being refused by an ordinary Hazara servant boy. Thus, he takes revenge by forcing sodomy on Hassan. This act of raping gives Assef a sense of dominance both physically and metaphorically while Hassan quietly resigns himself to his fate of subversion as the inevitable fate of every *Bacha* in the land of *Bacha Bazi* (See figure 1).

*One was the blue kite resting against the wall, close to the cast iron stove; the other was Hassan's brown corduroy pants thrown on a heap of eroded bricks. Assef knelt behind Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb. (Hosseini, 2013)*

Amir is a gullible onlooker during the episode and refrains from intervening to assist Hassan out of fear for his own safety. He goes into detail about his escape from the alley.

*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”. He rationalizes his cowardly deed as a way to ease and heal his guilt. “He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (Hosseini, 2013)*

This again solidifies the destiny of a poor Hazara in a world dominated by Pashtuns.

**Figure 1***Kite Runner Timeline (Krespil, 2011)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event(s)</b>	<b>Amir's age</b>	<b>Page</b>
1915	Baba's grandfather married his 3 <sup>rd</sup> wife and Baba's father was born.		
1931	Picture of Baba's father with <i>King Mohammad Nadir Shah</i> (displayed in living room). <i>He reigned from 1929-1933.</i>		5
1933	Baba is born		24
	<i>King Nadir Shah is assassinated.</i>		
	<i>Mohammad Sahir(Zahir) Shah takes throne.</i>		24
1963	Amir's birth		
	Amir's mother, Sofia Akrami, dies		
1964	Hassan's birth	1	6
	Sanubar leaves		6
1973	<i>King Mohammad Sahir Shah, away in Italy, is overthrown by his cousin Mohammad Daoud Khan, ending "the king's forty-year reign with a bloodless coup" (36).</i>	10	35-37
	<i>Daoud abolishes monarchy, establishes himself as President</i>		36
1974	Hassan's surgery	11	47
1975	Amir wins the kite contest	12	66
	Hassan's rape		73/75
1976	Amir's 13 <sup>th</sup> birthday party	13	94-100
	Hassan and Ali leave		109
1978	<i>Daoud is assassinated</i>	15	
1980	<i>U.S. boycotts Olympic games in Moscow</i>	17	
1981	<i>Russians invade.</i> (March) Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan.	18	110-124
	Amir and Baba are in Pakistan		

The fact that Hassan was consistently picked out for bullying and humiliation demonstrates that the wealthy and majority always held the reins of power in society. In contrast, despite Amir's timidity and cowardice, he was consistently spared because he was the powerful man's son. "How lucky I was to have Baba as my father, the sole reason, I believed Assef mostly refrained from harassing me too much" (Hosseini, 2013). Assef capitalizes on his Pashtun heritage and his vile actions are further intensified with the invasion of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan worsened following the Taliban invasion. While resourceful Pashtuns fled to America or Pakistan, those who were less affluent remained in the country and became affiliated with the Taliban. The worst was reserved for the Hazaras in the country. Amir was one of the few lucky ones who moved to the United States. Amidst the nation's turmoil, Hassan was left on his own. He had a child named Sohrab after

getting married. Unfortunately, he and his wife were assassinated by the Taliban one day, leaving Sohrab as an orphan. When Amir discovers that Sohrab is his nephew and Hassan is his half-brother, he hurries back to Kabul to defend Sohrab from the Taliban and *Bacha Bazi*. As Rahim Khan tells him “Children are fragile, Amir Jan. Kabul is already full of broken children and I don’t want Sohrab to become another” (Hosseini, 2013). Amir, the book's protagonist, becomes intimately involved in Sohrab's life as he looks for forgiveness for his past wrongdoings. Sohrab's desire for atonement is intertwined with his road to rehabilitation. Through the lens of Sohrab's depiction, the piece addresses issues of guilt, atonement, and the generational ramifications of violence. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini subtly refers to the concept of *Bacha Bazi* through the characterization of Sohrab.

The orphanage is mostly home to Hazaras and other impoverished, malnourished youngsters. The proprietor of the orphanage informs Amir when he goes to save Sohrab “There is very little shelter here, almost no food, no clean water” (Hosseini, 2013). The children are taken from the orphanage by wealthy Pashtuns who in turn sexually abuse them. One such sexual predator harassing Sohrab is none other than Assef.

Amir, in his urge to save Sohrab gave Sohrab’s polaroid to Zaman, the orphanage caretaker. “Salaam alaykum,” I said. I showed him the Polaroid. “We’re searching for this boy” (Hosseini, 2013). At first, Amir is turned away by the orphanage director, who thinks that Amir is a Talib who has come to take a child to satiate his sexual avarice. “I am sorry. I have never seen him” (Hosseini 2013). Upon knowing that Amir has actually come to protect Sohrab, Zaman tells him that the boy has been abducted from the orphanage by a Talib, obliquely warning him that he might become a victim of sexual exploitation.

*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.* (Hosseini, 2013)

Zaman also regrets not being able to protect the children in the orphanage from the dangerous warlord. “If I deny him one child, he takes ten. So, I let him take one and leave the judging on Allah” (Hosseini, 2013). This demonstrates the Talib's sadistic indulgence in using children to satiate his need for sex. Zaman acknowledges his powerlessness by saying “I swallow my pride and take his goddamn filthy... dirty money. Then I go to the bazaar and buy food for the children” (Hosseini, 2013). The text further highlights how the Taliban has seized total control and is responsible for the suffering of the Hazaras. It illustrates how poverty and helplessness have contributed

to the spread of *Bacha Bazi* throughout Afghanistan thus resulting in their children being mistreated, abused, and treated like commodities.

*The poverty index of Afghanistan was rising from 2007 to 2017. It grew by 4% from 2007-08 to 2011-2012 before increasing sharply within 2016-17. The poverty gap also grew by 5% in total from 2007-08 to 2016-17. The trend seems to keep increasing every year, and it becomes a severe problem and a trigger to the practice of the cause of BachaBazi.* (Nisya et al, 2019)

Amir runs to the place where Sohrab is being held to find him. The fact that the crime against Sohrab is committed in public, far more so than the attack on Hassan, and without guilt or concern for repercussions, adds to its horrific aspect. He freezes on seeing Assef. Knowing that Sohrab is Hassan's kid, acts as a catalyst for Assef's hatred towards him. Amir requests Assef to let go of Sohrab. Assef sends his men in to bring the youngster. As Sohrab enters the room, Amir hears a jingling sound. He is stunned to see Sohrab:

*A boy dressed in a loose, sapphire blue pirhan-tumban followed. The resemblance was breath-taking. 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.* (Hosseini, 2013).

This description of *Bacha Bazi* centers on the deliberate reconstruction of a young boy's sexual identity to suit the palate of the pedophilic *Bacha Baz*. Amir remarks, "I guessed the music wasn't sinful as long as it played to Taliban ears" (Hosseini, 2013). He observes Sohrab dancing for the Taliban.

*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 table. He kept his eyes closed.* (Hosseini, 2013)

Sohrab is in terrible shape wrapped in fear and humiliation. He has experienced emotional and physical trauma since childhood. He is extremely terrified and made aware of the horrors of sexual assault by the Talib's presence. Here Sohrab is representative of the dancing boys of Afghanistan who are easy targets of *Bacha Bazi* due to their lack of resources as orphans. Amir witnesses Talib's seductive efforts towards Sohrab. By referring to Sohrab as "my Hazara boy", Assef confirms that he views the youngster as his property. "Bia, bia, my boy," the Talib said, calling Sohrab to him. Sohrab went to him, head down, stood between his thighs. The Talib wrapped his arms around the boy.

*How talented he is, nay, my Hazara boy!” he said. His hands slid down the child’s back, then up, felt under his armpits. One of the guards elbowed the other and snickered. (Hosseini, 2013)*

The Talib’s sexual perversity is evident in the way he caresses Sohrab’s body. Hosseini aptly depicts the plight of the Hazara youngsters who are confined in *Bacha Bazi* and are sexually abused because of the ongoing antagonism between the two ethnic groups. The book reveals the Pashtuns’ unwavering determination to eradicate all trace of the Hazara population from Afghanistan. The Talib, Assef, 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)*

The comment makes clear how deeply Pashtuns hate Hazaras and other ethnic groups, a hatred that has resulted in bloodshed, killings, barbarism, and ruthlessness in Afghanistan.

For example, the Hazaras in Afghanistan are never treated on par with the Pashtuns, and their distinctiveness allows the suppressed Hazaras to lead a restricted life without demanding much from society, while the Pashtuns continue their dominance (Ethnicity in Afghanistan Literature, 2021).

Children are the victims of violence and sexual abuse due to this culturally induced civil war. Amir criticizes Assef for his unwavering 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)*

The novel portrays *Bacha Bazi*’s existence as partly motivated by cultural rivalry. Diana Saltarelli and Kenneth D. Bush explain that the main ethnic group uses a variety of tactics to subjugate the minority ethnic groupings, “Their strategies include scorched earth tactics to starve populations and destroy infrastructures, sexual torture and mass rape, ethnic and social cleansing, and even genocide” (2000).

*The Kite Runner* projects the predicament faced by thousands of male Afghan children who are entrenched in the culture of *Bacha Bazi*. “*Bacha Bazi* is a reflection of an extreme instance of the oppressive, sexually perverse Afghan patriarchy” (Arora and Rani, 2024). The book also makes the case that individuals as well as society as a collective unit must take action against the imposing and authoritarian power structures that seek to control it through the imposition of harsh rules. Any culture that violates people’s human rights and is based on exploitation ought to be rejected rather than nurtured.

## RESULTS

Marxism helps us understand how historical materialism, class conflict, and ideological hegemony interact to sustain oppressive and exploitative regimes, especially when it comes to the precarious situation of youngsters like Hassan and Sohrab. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* uses these characters as powerful metaphors for the working class under capitalism. As a Hazara born into slavery, Hassan's life paints the innate power disparities that are maintained by socio-economic classes. He is brutalized by the affluent Pashtun class. His son, Sohrab, carries on his father's history of exploitation by succumbing to political unrest and war, highlighting the novel's portrayal of oppression's cyclical nature. The novel also emphasizes how ideology plays a part in maintaining and legitimizing exploitative regimes. Characters such as Assef, motivated by an ideology of racist, ethnic and social superiority, take advantage of their power and victimize others who are considered inferior. This intellectual hegemony maintains the status quo of power relations and permits the unfettered exploitation of weak people such as Hassan and Sohrab. Those in authority use Hassan's loyalty and innocence as a commodity, turning him into a tool for their own gain. In a world full of instability and bloodshed, Sohrab loses his identity and agency and is used as a pawn by warlords and opportunists underlining the structural inequities that sustain cycles of exploitation and oppression better by analyzing the power dynamics, and ideological hegemony that are present in the book.

## CONCLUSION

Ethnic strife and instable political environment are some of the root causes of the abominable act of *Bacha Bazi*. It is a clear violation of children's human rights committed in the name of class dominance in Afghanistan which needs to be curbed at all costs. The UN should formulate and implement stricter legal mandates against such form of child/human trafficking, slavery and abuse. The perpetrators should be given quick and severe punishments. While concerned individuals should stay active and alert at the first signs of sexual and child abuse, sex education and self-defense classes should be made mandatory in all schools in Afghanistan. Apart from this, the socio-economic gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the country needs to be addressed. Easy and free access to both physical and mental healthcare should be provided equally for all irrespective of their class, ethnic or racial identity. It is only via a combined effort that we can hope to bring in a better tomorrow for the children of Afghanistan, free of *Bacha Bazi* and its repercussions.

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**KRIKA SRIVASTAVA** is a Research Scholar at the Department of English, University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities, Chandigarh University. She is also a teacher, freelance writer and mental health advocate. Her areas of expertise are Indian Writing in English, Gender studies and Professional Communication.

**Dr. MANJU RANI**, an author of five books and many research papers, is a professor at Chandigarh University. Her areas of expertise are Indian Writing in English, Translation Studies, and Indian Classical Literature.

**AANCHAL ARORA**, PhD is an Assistant Professor at Lovely Professional University. Her research interest lies in Asian Studies. She is currently serving as a reviewer and editor at various journals. She is also an author of bestselling book the efflorescence.

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