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NEGOTIATING MUSLIM IDENTITY AMIDST DIASPORIC DISPLACEMENT:A POST-COLONIAL CRITIQUE OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

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Abstract
This research paper examines the complexities of Muslim identity formation within the context of diasporic displacement, with a particular focus on Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner. Focusing on the complex experiences of displacement, cultural dislocation, and identity negotiation, the research paper examines how Muslim characters struggle to reconcile their religious and cultural heritage with the values and expectations of Western society. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Bhabha, the research paper reveals how the diasporic condition intensifies internal conflicts related to faith, belonging, and selfhood. The novel is situated within a broader discourse on post-9/11 representations of Muslim identity, highlighting the ways in which migration and exile exacerbate psychological and cultural fragmentation. By employing a qualitative and interpretive approach, this paper demonstrates that The Kite Runner not only portrays the individual trauma of its characters but also reflects a collective identity crisis rooted in the diasporic Muslim experience. The research paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship on diaspora, Muslim representation, and postcolonial literature, emphasizing the need for nuanced understandings of identity in a globalized world.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Muslim identity, Cultural hybridity, Assimilation, Identity crisis, Migration and displacement*

Introduction

Diaspora denotes the relocation of communities across geographical boundaries, frequently involving movements from the Global South to the Global North. These migratory flows, often characterized by the displacement of non-Western and non-white populations to Western societies, serve to disrupt conventional conceptions of Western identity and provoke critical discourse on the dynamics of multiculturalism. Emerging primarily in the context of post-World War II and postcolonial transitions, such movements underscore the intricate entanglements of identity, cultural negotiation, and power relations within an increasingly interconnected global landscape (Hall & Morley, 2019). Diaspora refers to "any ethnic group or community that is forced or induced to leave their original homeland for another place in the world" (Dapke, 2022, p. 1), resulting in a population that lives dispersed and disconnected from its nation. It also encompasses "the traditions and culture that these people develop throughout time away from their original countries" (Dapke, 2022, p. 1), reflecting the evolving identity and cultural expressions of displaced communities. "Diaspora offers a complex dilemma, leading to the formation of a hyphenated identity. Immigrants face challenges on multiple levels — physically, mentally, and psychologically" (Qasim etal., 2024, p. 596 and Gul et al., 2022).

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Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American novelist who draws extensively on his own immigrant/diasporic background to craft narratives that foreground Afghan culture and illuminate the struggles of refugees. His internationally acclaimed debut, *The Kite Runner*, examines themes of family, identity, and historical trauma while offering a textured portrayal of Muslim identity in the diaspora. As Adhikary (2021) notes, the novel captures the dilemmas of characters caught between Afghan heritage and diasporic realities, engaging with questions of acceptance, ethnic diversity, and belonging. In the contemporary globalized and migratory context, religious and cultural identity have become increasingly complex, particularly for Muslim communities in diaspora. Their identity negotiations often involve reconciling cultural traditions and religious values with the assimilative demands of host societies. Contemporary diasporic literature, exemplified by Hosseini's work, powerfully articulates these tensions, shedding light on the lived realities of displacement, marginalization, and the fragmentation of identity.

> *The Kite Runner* remains relevant today because of its insight into Afghan culture and the history of the Taliban. This Islamic fundamentalist group was responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Towers on September 11, 2001, the event that sparked America's invasion of Afghanistan and the beginning of the war on terror.(Adhikary, 2021**,** p. 181)

Hosseini (2003) brings a deeply personal lens to these issues in his debut novel *The Kite Runner*. Set against the backdrop of a turbulent Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora in the United States, the novel traces the emotional and psychological journey of its protagonist, Amir, as he confronts his past and grapples with questions of belonging, guilt, and cultural identity. It throws light on the challenges of Muslim identity through characters who are torn between their Afghan heritage and their lives in exile. It depicts both the internal conflicts — such as Amir's enduring guilt, moral uncertainty, and quest for redemption — and the external pressures, including the marginalization faced by Hassan as a Hazara Muslim. Through these intertwined experiences, the story of the novel reveals the layered processes of identity negotiation in diaspora, where religious and cultural values endure despite geographical and cultural rupture. By engaging with themes of atonement, intergenerational tension, and resilience, the paper situates *The Kite Runner* within broader discussions of Muslim identity formation in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural world.

Literature Review

The term "diaspora" is derived from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, where *dia* means "through" and *speirein* means "to scatter." Historically, it was first used in reference to the forced exile of the Jewish population from Judea by the Babylonians in 586 BCE (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Since then, the concept has evolved to include a wide range of ethnic, religious, and national communities living outside their ancestral homelands. As such, the term "diaspora" inherently evokes themes of displacement, dispersion, and cultural dislocation. Clifford (1994) describes diasporas as "dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement [and] adaptation" (p. 309). Furthermore, Clifford (1994) describes "diaspora discourses" as "experiences of displacement, of constructing homes away from home, while remaining rooted in specific, discrete histories" (p. 302). Ang (2005) argues that diasporas are "transnational, spatially, and temporally sprawling socio-cultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original homeland" (p. 25). Longley (2021) explains that diaspora takes multiple forms shaped by different historical and social contexts. Some arise from colonialism or forced displacement due to

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conflict, while others result from voluntary migration for education, work, or personal growth. Unlike coerced groups, voluntary diasporas usually do not seek repatriation but instead build collective identities and solidarity. Today, large diaspora communities significantly influence national policies, including foreign relations, economic strategies, and immigration.

Hall and Rutherford (1990) argue that diaspora should not be framed in terms of cultural essence or purity but must instead be understood through its inherent heterogeneity and diversity. Central to their argument is the concept of hybridity — the idea that cultures are not monolithic, but rather constructed through the interaction of numerous influences and identities. This framework challenges the possibility of identifying any singular or "authentic" cultural identity. According to Saqib et al. (2022, p. 525), diasporic identity occupies a central position in postcolonial theory, as it gives rise to a constellation of interrelated issues such as identity crises, otherness, stereotyping, mimicry, religious and class distinctions, geographic displacement, ethnic differentiation, and cultural hybridity. "Cultural hybridity in diasporic literature challenges traditional notions of authenticity and purity in cultural representation. Many authors reject the idea of a monolithic or essentialized identity, instead embracing the complexities and contradictions inherent in multicultural experiences" (Bah 2024, p. 109).

Jare (2021) contends that diaspora enables the interaction of languages, cultures, and ideologies, giving rise to what Homi Bhabha famously terms "hybridity." This notion of hybrid identity is a recurring theme in the works of prominent diasporic writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, and Kiran Desai. Diasporic individuals often begin by striving to preserve their native cultural identities within their close-knit communities. However, beyond these familiar boundaries, they frequently encounter challenges to their social identities, brought about by their displacement from their homelands and integration into foreign environments. As a result, they are compelled to negotiate new identities shaped by their intellectual, physical, and political experiences. These individuals are variously labeled as expatriates, immigrants, or transnationals — terms that, while denoting nuanced distinctions, are often used interchangeably to describe those living outside their countries of origin. Diasporic literature thus becomes a space for articulating the dual existence of being both rooted in a homeland and displaced from it, navigating the tensions between belonging and alienation.

> Diasporic Literature is written by authors who live outside their homeland; and is characterized by alienation, nostalgia, loneliness, search for identity and constant displacement of the self. It deals with emigrant sensibility and focuses on the lives of immigrants and their internal and external conflicts in an alien land. (Samuel & Pulizala, 2023, p. 136)

Hossain (2016) argues that Muslim characters in diasporic narratives frequently experience identity crises due to their exposure to multiple cultural frameworks. Tensions emerge as they attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture of their host societies while simultaneously striving to uphold their religious beliefs and practices. This struggle is further intensified by the influence of cultural hedonism in Western contexts, which often stands in contrast to Islamic values, thereby deepening the sense of dislocation and internal conflict among Muslims living abroad. "Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to synthesis or disintegration of cultures, as they are torn between the two places, cultures and often languages" (Samuel & Pulizala, 2023, p. 137). Azeem et al., (2020) examine the theme of identity crisis in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, with a focus on the protagonist Karim and the multicultural milieu of London. They investigate how postcolonial dynamics,

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cultural hybridity, and popular culture influence the characters' processes of identity formation. Through close textual analysis, the authors reveal how issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality contribute to a deep sense of dislocation. Their work offers meaningful insights into postcolonial literature and multicultural identity, enhancing understanding of how individuals negotiate personal identity within complex cultural landscapes.

Elahi (2014) observes that tensions often arise within Muslim families when the cultural and religious values of the older generation come into conflict with the perspectives of the younger generation, who are shaped by the norms of their host society. These intergenerational differences underscore the difficulties in forming a cohesive Muslim identity within the diaspora, revealing the complexities of negotiating faith, tradition, and modernity across generational lines. Al-Shamahi (2020) asserts that diasporic literature frequently addresses themes of trauma and displacement in its exploration of Muslim identity crises. Such narratives often center on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, highlighting the psychological and emotional struggles involved in rebuilding lives in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. They illuminate the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and identity formation, offering critical insights into the challenges of sustaining a Muslim identity within the context of forced migration and cultural dislocation. "The changing designation of home and accompanying nervousness about homelessness and unfeasibility of going back are recurrent themes in diasporic literature. Nostalgia, loss, betrayal and duty are the foundations of new homes as diasporic protagonist adjust to new countries" (Samuel & Pulizala, 2023, p. 137).

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research paper adopts a qualitative, hermeneutic-interpretive approach to examine the Muslim identity crisis in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* through a diasporic lens. By employing hermeneutics and close textual analysis, the research paper explores themes such as cultural hybridity, displacement, trauma, and the tension between tradition and modernity. Grounded in postcolonial and diaspora theory, the paper focuses on the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the narrative. Rather than seeking generalizations, it aims to interpret the complex and nuanced portrayals of Muslim identity in diaspora literature.

According to Lazarus (2004), the label 'postcolonial' was created first "to identify the period immediately after decolonization. It was a periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonized were just postcolonial states" (p. 9). Postcolonial theory explores and critiques the social histories, cultural divisions, and political injustices that have emerged from colonial and imperial domination (Jabeen et al., 2024). It basically criticizes colonial structures and the ongoing effects of imperial domination, particularly as experienced by marginalized communities grappling with poverty, displacement, and cultural disintegration. Postcolonial theory throws light on the challenges "encountered by marginalized communities subjected to poverty and cultural upheaval due to colonial domination" (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 600). Ashcroft et al., (2007) define the term postcolonial as encompassing all societies and cultures that have been shaped by the historical processes of colonization, extending from the colonial era into the present. Ashcroft (2001) notes that postcolonial theory emerged in part due to the limitations of Western critical frameworks, which often fail to adequately address the cultural heterogeneity and socio-political complexities depicted in postcolonial literature. Bhabha (1994) further elaborates that postcolonial critique interrogates the unequal structures of cultural representation in the modern global order, highlighting the ongoing contestations over identity, power, and belonging. As Acheraïou (2011) observes, "Cultural hybridity has received a great deal of critical attention in both cultural and postcolonial studies" (p. 17), with contemporary perspectives generally

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recognizing that cultural purity is a myth and that all cultures are, to varying degrees, hybrid formations.

> Identity crisis/hybrid identity is a dominant theme of literature in the rapidly growing globalized society. It has become a highly debatable issue. In the postcolonial world, cultural hybridity is an ever-present phenomenon, characterized by the constant blending of cultures (Mortaza et al., 2024, p. 4177)

Among the key theoretical contributions to this discourse are Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of cultural and identity hybridity, which have significantly influenced scholarship in the field. Bhabha's notion of *hybridity* encourages critical inquiry into the dichotomies and power structures that underpin cultural encounters, including binaries, hierarchies, and asymmetries (Saqib et al., 2022). "Cultural identity is always present in this space of contradiction and ambivalence, which, for Bhabha, makes the hierarchical claim of "purity" of cultures untenable" (Umar & Lawan, 2024, p. 17). Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes hybridity not as a simple amalgamation of two cultural entities but as a dynamic and complex site of cultural negotiation that arises from the unequal power relations between colonizers and the colonized. He argues that identity and culture are not fixed or essentialist categories but are instead shaped through ongoing processes of interaction, contestation, and mutual dependency. Hybridity, in Bhabha's (1994) view, emerges from these intersecting cultural forces and challenges the rigid binaries often imposed by colonial discourse. Rather than viewing hybridity as a neutral fusion, Bhabha (1994) emphasizes its critical function in subverting dominant narratives and revealing the constructed nature of identity. "Bhabha also comes up with the notion of the "third space," which implies the inbetween, liminal space where overriding accounts and identities are undermined and novel likelihoods arise" (Al-Qassab, 2025, p. 313). Bhabha (1994) asserts that all social and cultural collectives — including nation-states, ethnic groups, and diasporic communities — are inherently hybrid, formed through historical processes of cultural exchange, negotiation, and resistance. Hybridity, thus, exists within the Third Space, a liminal zone that rejects the authority of hegemonic ideologies and discourses by divulging their internal contradictions. Bhabha (1994) frames hybridity as a form of resistance, rejecting the claims of cultural purity. In this way, hybridity becomes an inssstrument for deconstructing colonial ideologies and affirming pluralistic and evolving forms of identity.

Textual Analysis

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* engages critically with the Muslim identity crisis through a diasporic lens, foregrounding the persistent tensions between cultural continuity and the demands of assimilation. Charting Amir's trajectory from Kabul to the United States, the narrative explores the layered psychological, moral, and cultural challenges encountered by Muslims in exile as they negotiate shifting social landscapes, unresolved trauma, and ethical reckonings. Baba and Hassan emerge as contrasting embodiments of diasporic response: Baba's guarded resistance to assimilation reflects a clinging to inherited traditions, whereas Hassan's steadfast faith represents resilience rooted in spiritual conviction. Amir's eventual return to Afghanistan and his guardianship of Sohrab serve as acts of both personal atonement and identity reconstruction, signaling a synthesis of past and present selves. Informed by Stuart Hall's conceptualization of identity as a process and enriched by postcolonial theory, the novel presents Muslim identity as inherently fluid, continuously reshaped by the interplay of memory, hybridity, and structural marginalization.

Set against a diasporic backdrop, *The Kite Runner* offers a compelling investigation into the complexities surrounding Muslim identity. Through the lives of central characters such as Amir and Hassan, the narrative delves into the multifaceted challenges faced by Muslims living in

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exile — particularly the tension between preserving cultural and religious heritage and assimilating into a foreign society. By tracing their individual journeys, the novel prompts reflection on universal themes such as the human desire for belonging, the enduring influence of historical and familial legacies on identity formation, and the transformative power of introspection, guilt, and forgiveness. Amir's internal conflict, as he grapples with reconciling his Western upbringing and his Afghan Muslim heritage, exemplifies the theme of cultural hybridity in *The Kite Runner*. His reflection —"I always felt like Baba despised me a bit... Of course not! After all, I was the one who murdered his lovely wife, his princess" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 70) — underscores his deep-seated feelings of guilt and inadequacy. This introspection reveals the psychological tension Amir experiences in attempting to meet the cultural and moral expectations of his Afghan roots while living in the West. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*, Amir's identity conflict can be seen as a product of the dissonance between his diasporic experiences and the traditional values of his native culture. Bhabha's idea of the *"third space"*—a liminal zone where cultures interact, overlap, and create new meanings—helps illuminate how Amir's identity is continually negotiated rather than fixed.

> The novel's portrayal of diasporic life provides a fresh angle on the Muslim community's dilemma of belonging. Uprooted from their own country, Amir and his father Baba must adjust to life in the United States, a place where neither of them speaks the language and neither of them has any experience with the culture. They came to the United States in search of a better life, but now they find themselves profoundly uprooted and confused about their new culture. They experience bias, preconceptions, and a conflict of values that challenges their sense of who they are and where they fit in the world. (Koser et al., 2023, p. 1542)

Moreover, the novel foregrounds the significance of historical trauma and cultural memory in shaping diasporic Muslim identity. In Chapter 13, Amir recounts the Soviet invasion and its devastating impact, stating, "For months thereafter, the air reeked of blood" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 112). This vivid portrayal of violence highlights the enduring psychological scars left by political upheaval, which continue to affect characters long after their displacement. From a Bhabhaian perspective, such memories contribute to the *ambivalence* of diasporic identity, where belonging is simultaneously tied to both loss and longing.

The narrative also illustrates how personal agency plays a pivotal role in addressing identity crises. In Chapter 22, as Amir embarks on a perilous journey to rescue Sohrab, he reflects on his past inaction: "I ran" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 278). This moment of self-awareness marks a turning point in his personal growth and signifies a conscious effort to confront the ethical and spiritual dimensions of his Muslim identity. Within Bhabha's framework, this act of return and redemption can be seen as an engagement with the *third space*, where Amir begins to rearticulate his hybrid identity by embracing both responsibility and cultural memory. Additionally, the novel's engagement with transnational relationships highlights the complexities of diasporic belonging. When Amir reconnects with Rahim Khan in Chapter 16, he is told, "There is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 192 and Khan et al., 2025). This pivotal encounter not only prompts Amir's return to Afghanistan but also underscores the emotional and moral ties that persist across borders. In light of Bhabha's theory, these cross-cultural and cross-border interactions reflect the ongoing negotiation of identity within the *interstitial spaces* of diaspora, where selfhood is formed not through binary oppositions but through fluid, hybrid positions.

Hassan's identity in *The Kite Runner* embodies the fluid and complex nature of diasporic subjectivity. Amir reflects in Chapter 8, "Hassan had loved me once, loved me in a manner that

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no one ever had or ever would again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 73). This memory emphasizes not only Hassan's unwavering loyalty but also his role as a figure shaped by deep-rooted social inequalities and quiet resilience. Through the lens of Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, Hassan represents a character who exists within a liminal space—straddling multiple cultural and social identities as both a Hazara and a devout Muslim. His silence and perseverance become expressions of a hybrid identity formed in the "third space," where cultural meanings are negotiated, resisted, and redefined.

Bhabha's notion of hybridity further challenges fixed notions of identity by suggesting that diaspora produces new cultural expressions formed from the interplay of opposing influences. In this way, characters like Hassan, and later Amir, are not simply carriers of cultural tradition or victims of exile but active participants in the reshaping of identity. This process becomes especially visible through the negotiation of memory. In Chapter 3, Baba nostalgically recalls Afghanistan: "I wasn't going to allow the harshness of this world ruin you... I want you to realise that good, true good, was created out of your father's regret" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 24). Baba's reflection illustrates Bhabha's idea of ambivalence — where past cultural values are both idealized and problematized in the face of new realities. The disjunction between the remembered homeland and the lived experience in exile complicates identity, leading to emotional and moral conflict across generations.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how Islamic identity, particularly within a diasporic context, is not monolithic but varied, contested, and reconstructed. In Chapter 7, Baba states, "God declares... the faithful of Islam will win… [But] God has given you something neither Hassan nor I had: a unique viewpoint" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 91). This moment points to the internal diversity of belief and practice within the Muslim identity spectrum, especially when characters are forced to navigate their religiosity in a Western, secular environment. Through Bhabha's framework, this reflects the third space where religion itself becomes a site of negotiation — neither wholly preserved nor entirely abandoned, but transformed through the diasporic experience.

The Kite Runner, read through Bhabha's postcolonial lens, reveals the intricacies of diasporic Muslim identity as it is shaped by memory, trauma, hybridity, and the ongoing tension between tradition and assimilation. The characters' inner struggles illustrate how identity in diaspora is not static or singular, but rather a continuous process of reinvention influenced by both cultural heritage and the pressures of displacement. Baba, as a first-generation immigrant, exemplifies the complex struggle of cultural adaptation within a diasporic setting. Amir's remark that "My father is still adjusting to life in America" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 107) underscores the friction between deeply rooted traditional values and the pressures of assimilation within a new sociocultural context. This observation encapsulates the emotional and psychological struggles experienced by many immigrants as they negotiate the coexistence of inherited cultural frameworks with the normative demands of their host society. For Baba, this process of adjustment becomes emblematic of the broader identity challenges confronting the diasporic Muslim subject, in which religious and cultural heritage frequently stand at odds with Western ideological and social paradigms. Similarly, the assertion that "Baba loved the idea of America" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 105) further illuminates this crisis, revealing an aspirational engagement with the symbolic promise of America that coexists uneasily with the difficulty of fully embracing its lived realities. Together, these moments capture the paradox of diaspora: the simultaneous attraction to and alienation from the cultural space of the adopted homeland. His fascination with the American Dream symbolizes a yearning for autonomy, success, and reinvention — aspirations that contrast sharply with the socio-political instability of his native

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Afghanistan. Within the framework of diasporic analysis, this line reveals how the idea of America represents not only material opportunity but also a psychological escape from the burdens of tradition. However, such admiration may also signal the beginnings of cultural dislocation, as individuals like Baba struggle to maintain their religious and cultural identity while embracing aspects of a foreign worldview.

Baba's actions in America, such as visiting a bar, drinking alcohol, and engaging in casual acts of generosity, reflect a shift from traditional Muslim norms. These moments —"After dinner, Baba took me to a bar across the street from the restaurant," "Baba lit a cigarette and ordered us beers," and "Baba loosened his tie and gave the old man a handful of quarters" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 110) — highlight his gradual accommodation to Western cultural practices. These behaviors are emblematic of the cultural hybridity that Homi Bhabha describes, wherein the diasporic subject occupies an ambivalent space between two cultures. Baba's departure from strict religious observance underscores the tension between cultural preservation and the pressures of assimilation—a tension that defines much of the immigrant experience in the West. These scenes not only reflect individual acts of assimilation but also reveal the psychological burden of navigating conflicting value systems. Baba's identity, shaped by his past in Kabul and redefined in America, illustrates the dissonance experienced by many diasporic Muslims who find themselves caught between religious obligations and secular freedoms. His struggle thus becomes a site of identity negotiation, in which cultural authenticity is continually contested and reimagined.

Amir's remark — "Michigan! He's American, a lot more American than you and I will ever be" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 131) — further illuminates the generational divide in identity formation. Here, Amir asserts a sense of belonging rooted in geography and social integration, distancing himself from the traditional Afghan-Muslim identity of his father's generation. The line underscores the complexity of identity in diaspora, where younger generations often seek to assert their place within the host nation, even at the cost of cultural disconnection. It reveals the multifaceted nature of diasporic identity, where notions of home, belonging, and self are constantly negotiated and redefined.

The Kite Runner uses Baba and Amir's experiences to explore the Muslim identity crisis within the diasporic context. Through the lens of postcolonial theory and cultural hybridity, these characters exemplify the psychological and cultural challenges of living between worlds, offering valuable insight into the fluid and often contested nature of diasporic Muslim identity. The line "There are only three real men in this world, Amir" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 105), spoken by Baba, reflects a layered perspective on masculinity, power, and admiration for Western dominance. Baba's naming of America, Britain, and Israel as symbols of strength underscores his internalization of hegemonic power structures and reveals an ideological shift. This admiration simultaneously signals a departure from traditional Islamic values and a complicated attraction to Western ideals of nationhood, dominance, and modernity. In the context of diaspora, this statement foregrounds the internal conflicts experienced by Muslim individuals who, while preserving aspects of their heritage, are also drawn to the cultural, political, and economic values of their host countries. Amir, in contrast to Baba, appears more fully assimilated into American culture. His declaration that "for me, America was a place to bury my memories" (p. 129) reveals how the diasporic subject may use spatial displacement as a means of emotional detachment from traumatic histories. America, for Amir, functions not only as a geographic escape but also as a symbolic space of erasure and reinvention. This gesture of forgetting, however, is not merely personal—it reflects a broader diasporic condition

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in which cultural memory is contested and selectively silenced in pursuit of integration and emotional survival.

Further reinforcing this perception is Amir's idealization of America: "America was different. America was a river, roaring along… I embraced America" (p. 114). This metaphor of the river suggests a sense of dynamism, freedom, and forward motion. Amir sees America as a source of regeneration and possibility, a stark contrast to the burdened emotional landscape of Afghanistan. His conversation with Rahim Khan —"I see America has infused you with the optimism that has made her so great. We're a melancholic people, we Afghans, aren't we?" (p. 173) — reinforces the dichotomy between American hopefulness and Afghan fatalism. Here, the text emphasizes the transformation of identity through geographical and ideological realignment, while also pointing to a sense of cultural rupture and ambivalence. When Amir responds to a call to return to his homeland with the statement, "I have a wife in America, a home, a career, and a family" (p. 188), it becomes evident that his identity has been thoroughly reshaped by his diasporic experience. The pull of personal stability and Western constructs of success outweighs his connection to the homeland. This moment reflects the identity fragmentation central to Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory, wherein identity is not fixed but fluid — negotiated between memory and forgetting, tradition and modernity, home and hostland.

As Adhikary (2021) observes, both Amir and other Muslim characters in the novel grapple with the loss or dilution of native identities in the face of migration and minority status. The pressures of adaptation push these characters to either assimilate, resist, or oscillate between cultural paradigms. Amir himself acknowledges this duality when he states, "I have always seen myself as an American Muslim" (p. 8). This self-definition captures the hybrid nature of diasporic identity, situated in what Bhabha describes as the "third space" — a site of cultural negotiation, hybridity, and transformation. This in-betweenness complicates the notion of a pure or stable identity, suggesting instead a constantly evolving sense of self shaped by cross-cultural encounters.

The hybrid nature of identity is further illustrated by minor characters like Farid, who expresses skepticism toward traditional remedies by comparing them unfavorably with Western medicine: "It's not fancy like American medicine, I know, just an old remedy my mother taught me" (p. 195). This remark highlights the internalization of Western superiority and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems within diasporic and postcolonial consciousness. Similarly, Amir's description of American consumer culture —"in America you could step into a grocery store and buy any of fifteen or twenty different types of cereal" (p. 227) — exemplifies the material abundance and individual choice associated with the West, which starkly contrasts with the scarcity and limitations of life in Afghanistan. This contrast not only signals economic disparity but also speaks to the cultural reorientation that shapes diasporic identities.

Another revealing moment occurs in Omar's statement: "I grew up in the U.S., Amir. If America taught me anything, it's that quitting is right up there with pissing in the Girl Scouts' lemonade jar" (p. 299). The crude analogy conveys the intensity with which American cultural values —particularly perseverance and individualism — are internalized by those raised in the diaspora. Omar's remark illustrates how American ideals can come to dominate personal ethics and behavior, contributing to the reconfiguration of Muslim identity within a Western cultural framework. This transformation is emblematic of the identity crisis experienced by many Muslim immigrants and their descendants, as they seek to reconcile inherited cultural norms with the ideological and moral systems of the West.

Conclusion

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The Kite Runner offers a deeply reflective portrayal of the Muslim identity crisis within the context of diaspora. Through the lives of central figures such as Baba and Amir, the novel examines the psychological, cultural, and spiritual dissonance that emerges from migration and resettlement. The diasporic milieu operates as a contested space in which individuals must navigate the tensions between their inherited Afghan-Muslim traditions and the social, moral, and ideological frameworks of the West. In light of Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and the "third space," the text demonstrates that identity is not static but rather a fluid construct, shaped by cross-cultural encounters, personal and collective memory, trauma, and the process of adaptation. Baba's selective assimilation and moral ambiguities, Amir's efforts to distance himself from his past while crafting a new American selfhood, and the community's broader struggle to preserve cultural continuity all highlight the complexities of Muslim identity in flux. From this diasporic perspective, *The Kite Runner* suggests that the challenges facing Muslim identity extend beyond religious displacement, encompassing the legacies of postcolonial history, the dynamics of cultural hybridity, and the pressures of contemporary global belonging. Ultimately, the novel presents the diaspora as both a site of estrangement and a catalyst for transformation, where notions of self, community, and faith are continuously reconstructed.

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