

Analysing Transgenerational Trauma through the lenses of  
Contemporary Texts by Anne Frank, Markus Zusak and Khaled  
Hosseini

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Masters in English

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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## Approval

“Analysing Transgenerational Trauma through the lenses of Contemporary Texts by Anne Frank, Markus Zusak and Khaled Hosseini ” submitted by Tasneem Habib Aniqua (ID No. 21363001) of Summer 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master’s in English on September 10, 2023.

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**Abstract:**

Transgenerational trauma can be compared to chemical bombs that seep poison and rot a human being from the inside out. While bombs are initiated on targeted individuals, groups or places, the triggers of transgenerational trauma can never be seen as isolated events. The right kind of betrayal, a moment of weakness, and the opportunity to attack or take advantage all trigger the poison of distrust, suspicion, and deliberation to scar a human being for life. The environment, actions and influence that create transgenerational trauma play an integral role in how a person experiences and deals with their traumatic past or history. Living with the guilt of experiencing one's powerless situation can severely affect how an individual generates self-hatred within oneself. Violence, conflict and war of all kinds create innumerable sensitive psychological triggers that leave lingering poison of trauma, pain and vulnerability in the lives it touches. This research paper argues on specific violent and death-related narrations that prove how trauma is passed from generation to generation through both community and family, resulting in wounds invisible to the eyes. It looks at four contemporary texts, namely, *Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini that shed light on the two different events of chaos, namely the Afghan Wars and the Holocaust. It focuses on how certain actions instigate transgenerational trauma and how the characters navigate through them. It discusses the process of trauma lodging itself within the people of the community and how, in return, it silently follows the younger generations as shackles, bounding them to anguish and misery.

**Keywords:** Transgenerational Trauma, War, Psychological conflict, Survivor's Guilt, Neglect, Abandonment.

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## Chapter -1

### Introduction

Humans and literature have an embedded relationship that spans across fields of research, history, discovery, and creativity. Emotions, the most intangible essence of human psychology, can be expressed more distinctively through literature. Words have a unique ability to induce diverse emotions in readers, providing them with a chance to experience characters. Millions of such stories, built on creativity and inspiration, evoke emotions of anger, love, admiration, awe, sadness, despair, loss, and many more within readers without ever having to meet the characters. Writers can successfully enlighten people and also convey messages, ideas, inspiration, emotions, creativity, awareness of issues, and criticism from one reader to another as long as they have literature as a platform. If emotions can travel through words, do experiences also do the same? Both good and bad experiences can travel through words and emotions, as they are ingrained within human beings and have the power to influence their behaviour. When it comes to emotions, to what extent do traumatic experiences play a role in both transversal and transgenerational senses? Can the misery of people be experienced by others?

Looking back on a summer evening, my mother watched the trailer of the movie "*The Swimmers*", a movie depicting the true story of two Syrian sisters who travelled from a war-stricken country in Syria to Europe and the difficulties they faced as refugees in a foreign land. The turbulence of emotions rooted in trauma and desperation created emotional and psychological distance among the siblings. Their goals, ambitions, and direction started to diverge from survival and supporting each other. These little snippets of the story intrigued my mother. However, having watched the movie before, my sister warned her of the emotional stress that the movie created, leaving the audience sad and heartbroken. The



conversation seemed insignificant until we observed that our mother had been feeling down and sad for a few days after watching the movie. Although the movie depicted a true story of struggle and success, it does not reflect the millions of people who were not as fortunate as the Mardini Sisters. The stories of these individuals having to stay behind for reasons like poverty, lack of financial support, family members, and emotions. As examples, we can look at the massacre of Rohingyas in Myanmar, trapped citizens under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Palatines in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Holocaust of the Jews, and many more that can be traced across the dark violence of human history. These particular groups of people experience trauma so horrific that it leaves a psychological wound, festering in their minds and relationships with others. Only a few stories of harsh survival, success, and prosperity come alive in front of the audience, showing the peace that comes after such harsh conditions. However, most stories of people struggling, seeking asylum, or fleeing never end so happily. Their losses come in leaps and bounds, leaving wounds that never fade.

Topics related to trauma have been well-researched and discussed for the past few decades. Most of the well-known topics related to trauma and its effects on populations are always connected to events of war, conflict, genocide, and murder. It is a common assumption that trauma is connected to conditions that depend on how people within such conflicts, accidents, and situations react to and take advantage of the chaotic scenario. Researchers use this opportunity to understand how human lives are reshaped by drastic and turbulent circumstances. In addition, it allows them to understand how trauma evokes conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder and handicapped individuals, who are unable to overcome the impenetrable wall of horrific memories. These memories can be related to incidents of rape, domestic violence, natural disasters, severe illness or injury, the death of a

loved one, witnessing violence, or doing coercive actions under threat, which are among the most common types of traumatic incidents experienced by people.

Morals and humanity become useless when death is imminent and violent, and survival is traumatic and unforgiving. Such psychological trauma can be deemed a subtle type of trauma, where anguish remains undetected, as people fight to move on with their lives. How do people navigate through morals and their lives when they have been affected by an invisible wound of trauma? While some succumb to the horrors they experienced, some build resilience and motivation to deal with their reality, making trauma an unpredictable reality. It is an injury that is unseen and requires treatment with delicacy and efficiency, making sure that it does not affect the day-to-day lives of people. Even a small incident in childhood can have a major impact on how people grow up as adults. In a research article published in *Promises Behavioral Health* looks at early trauma or childhood trauma and relates it to domestic violence, sexual abuse, loss, and neglect which are usually accompanied by major events, catastrophes, accidents, or crimes. However, different kinds of trauma affect people differently, and neglecting the signs of subtle trauma can result in major consequences in the future (“What Are the Subtle Trauma Effects?” 2020).

This research paper looks at how the characters and narrators in the *Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner* inherit and suffer through transgenerational trauma. These come in the form of being ignored as a child, not accepted as a legitimate individual in society, or either overlooked or overshadowed by siblings, peers, or friends. In such cases, situations arise where the basic emotional and psychological needs of that particular young individual are not met (“What Are the Subtle Trauma Effects?” 2020). As a result, they either retaliate or become isolated, submissive, or mean to the people around them and themselves. These signs can manifest themselves

through words, actions, behaviour, and reactions, which result in isolation if the individual's behaviour is not accepted or understood by the people around them.

Natural disasters are also traumatic to people, such as floods and drowning, weather-related events like lightning, the feeling of helplessness in the dark, earthquakes, claustrophobic reactions to tight spaces, and many more. In such circumstances, people have an underlying acceptance of how nature is far more powerful than themselves and that it may be their luck or fate that led them to experience natural disasters. They understand the inevitability of their powerlessness in the face of nature and its catastrophic realities. However, man-made disasters like war and genocide, conflicts, and ethnic and religious cleansing are caused by people who are powerful and have assets, money, and people to fight their war for them. Witnessing or experiencing situations like suicide bombing, robbery, rape, murder, human trafficking, torture and psychological attacks through fear, point-blank execution in front of people and children, suffocation through poisonous chemicals, etc. are all connected to how people behave and the choices they make. It instigates problems like drug addiction, gambling, generating debts and prostitution. The rising population in poor countries leads to kidnapping and human trafficking, using both children and women as prey. Generating millions through smuggling arms, and using conflicts and war as a business venture seems never-ending.

In addition, religious and ethnic cleansing of minorities is used as an excuse to execute people who do not support and rebel against the powerful. Victims of man-made disasters suffer from more PTSD and psychological disorders than people who are affected by natural disasters<sup>1</sup>. The trauma created by man-made circumstances generated a deeper psychological wound that forced people to question their reality and become suspicious of

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<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of PTSD in disaster-focused studies on direct victims is estimated to be 5–60% for natural disasters and 25–75% for man-made disasters (Lee 100).

people and the surroundings around them. Not only do the victims tend to get suspicious, but they also start believing that the world is a very dangerous place, forcing them to stay home or be isolated to be protected. Furthermore, they also fear being alone or travelling alone because of the trauma inflicted on them. Despite being victims, these individuals tend to blame themselves for the circumstances, making them feel more broken and helpless about themselves (Gillihan, PhD, *Psychology Today*). Furthermore, the people in the support system for handling such trauma-inflicted individuals are also impacted by the way the patients/victims tend to view the world.

This research paper will discuss the trauma generated by man-made disasters such as the Holocaust of the Jews during World War II and the Afghan War in the Middle East, focusing on transgenerational trauma and traumatic disorder among young adolescents and children. While the Holocaust was based on genocide and racial and ethnic cleansing, the Afghan War was based on religious radicalism and gender discrimination. These violent historical events are decades apart from one another, but trauma is still a condition, powerful enough to cause invisible ripples through generations. The Holocaust is a thing of the past, yet it still affects both the perpetrators and the persecuted, while the Afghan Wars reflect the dangers of the radical ideologies that still pose a dangerous threat to the young Afghans in the country.

The trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors is still widely discussed and studied today. However, the study based on different emotions—nightmares, fear, anxiety, and phobias—found that the second or third generation of the survivor generation is divergent and distinct. No one has the same reaction or experiences as their peers, whoever they are, rooted in the stories they have heard from their previous generations. One of the major issues in the problems faced by second or third generation survivors is the category of personality

changes and challenges and the dark and generalised approach to life, which is not an acute feature focused on in a stress-related study (Levav, Kohn, & Schwartz 1998). There is no doubt that no one can compete with the atrocities experienced in the Holocaust in terms of intensity, consequences, and magnitude. However, the second generation of Holocaust survivors is confronted with certain challenges that were not experienced by the survivors. Despite not being part of the group of survivors; whose reactions and behaviours can be connected to what they experienced, the second or third generations also face different psychological issues that are not easy to overcome or master. As a result, the treatment of the Holocaust survivors and the generations can be said to be paradoxical to the least (Juni 3–4). In May 2022, Marsha Lederman published a memoir titled *Kiss the Red Stairs: The Holocaust, Once Removed* depicting her life as a child of a Holocaust survivor. In an interview to *CBC News*, she said that "I'm not supposed to be here. I'm a miracle. I was not supposed to be born, according to the Nazi ideology and the Nazi practice of genocide" (Stroh). It was hard for the generations of Holocaust survivors to feel either grateful to be alive or depressed with what they had to go through. By the end of World War II in 1945, more than 5 million Jews had been persecuted, and almost 1.5 million of them were children. The Nazis raised and followed a racist ideology that deemed the Jews "parasitic vermin" and carried out one of the biggest genocides and ethnic cleansings recorded to date. No Jews were safe within Europe during the reign of Hitler, as people from all walks of life, ages, and states of health were targets of the eradication.

Despite the execution of the majority of the race, thousands of Jewish children were able to survive the Holocaust due to a pure streak of luck, fate, and disguise or with the help

of people like Paul Grüninger<sup>2</sup>, Oskar Schindler<sup>3</sup>, Sister Denise Bergon<sup>4</sup>, Sir Nicholas George Winton<sup>5</sup>. Identities of these Jewish children and individuals were concealed or falsified to smuggle them out of danger and provide them with care and support in other countries. The children were in constant fear, dreading the danger of being discovered and the consequences to those who hid them. For years, these children have been forced to live in the shadows and darkness, facing danger from even the careless remarks, indications, or whispering of neighbours that would lead them to discovery and death (*Holocaust Encyclopedia*). The Holocaust became a psychological wound whose impact extended beyond the boundaries of family or an individual. Rather, it transformed into a second-hand trauma or vicarious trauma that was transmitted to the younger generation who witnessed the struggles of the actual victims and experienced a certain level of similar pain to those who went through the Holocaust. It can be seen as an invisible trauma that seems to become a psychological imprint that people have difficulty understanding and dealing with (Kaur *TIME*). While adults were sent to concentration camps and gas chambers, thousands of children were also victims in other situations and platforms. They were sent to killing centres, or have been killed immediately after birth or in the post-natal institutions or mass shootings that were conducted by Einsatzgruppen<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Grüninger saved around 3,600 Jewish refugees by falsifying their visas other official documents to show that their visa dates were and entry to Switzerland was legal ad before the time when refugee entry became illegal and difficult.

<sup>3</sup> In the World War II, Schindler was a German factory owner who saved hundreds of Jewish. He saw a way to make money by buying a factory and using Jews as slave labour, sparing thousands from the death of gas chambers.

<sup>4</sup> A young mother superior of a named “Convent of Notre Dame de Massip” in Capdenac who saved hid and saved 83 Jewish children from persecution.

<sup>5</sup> Winton assisted in the rescue of 669 Jewish children from Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II. He also tried to provide financial support and home for these children in Britain.

<sup>6</sup> The Einsatzgruppen was a special action group, part of the Security Police and SD (the SS intelligence service) that followed the German army as it invaded and occupied countries in Europe. Best known as “mobile killing squads,” they are famous for their role in the systematic murder of Jews in mass shooting operations on Soviet territory (*Holocaust Encyclopedia*).

Some survived in the ghettos and camps because the prisoners risked their lives hiding them. Moreover, children, over the age of 12 were either thrown into forced labour or became guinea pigs in medical experiments or reprisal operations (*Holocaust Encyclopaedia*). Being a Jewish child in the land of Nazi reign did not give any chance of actual survival, rather death might have been a better option to the torture that these children might have been through. The suicide rates among the Holocaust survivors skyrocketed as they were unable to get back to their lives after experiencing horrors that left them physically and psychologically damaged. Their sufferings were also seen and experienced by their loved ones and children, who were helpless in understanding the pain of the victims, wishing to take some of the burdens of the victims. *Diary of Anne Frank* is as the title holds, a diary written by Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl during the time of the Holocaust. Focusing on her narration, her accounts of the past, the frustration and fear, pushing and drowning her and her family in a slow, silent and suffocating wait. Many studies and interviews have been conducted with survivors of the Holocaust, but the *Diary of Anne Frank* may be the only physical record that provides raw exposure to the time during the Holocaust. The emotions, questions, and insecurities recorded on the pages reflect the hope and desperation experienced by every Jew during that period.

*The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak portrays the story of a young protagonist named Liesel Meminger and her adopted family, the Hubermanns who navigate their lives amidst war and endangers themselves by hiding Max Vandenburg, a Jewish man who has escaped from Nazi soldiers. The punishment faced by Jewish sympathizers was extreme during the Holocaust. Since the Nazis propagated the idea that Jews were criminals and carriers of contagious diseases, sympathisers were also ostracized in the same way. Using Death as an omnipresent character and narrator indirectly indicates how the relationship between Liesel Meminger and Max Vandenburg would end, making it a postmodern contemporary fiction of

the Holocaust. As Death is a personified character narrator in the story, its presence provides a unique approach to the narration, a mix of both historical facts and fantasy, irony, and dark humour, which is completely different from modern fiction.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* also use a postmodern contemporary style of writing and shift to a modern world conflict, the Afghan War. Afghanistan has been titled the "graveyard of empires" since its history is riddled with power struggles, internally, regionally, and internationally. The geopolitics and conflicts of radical ideologies imposed by different volatile groups make Afghanistan a difficult and oppressive place to live and strive in. Historically, the Soviet and British empires attempted to dominate and rule Afghanistan. While the Afghan war was mainly against the invading empires of the Soviet Union and Britain, the Afghanistan war was a targeted international attack against the Taliban centred around Afghanistan. The objectives of both bloody conflicts gradually changed over time; however, the fact that civilians and innocents ended up in the crossfire never changed.

With the disasters of the First Afghan War (1839-1842) and Second Afghan War (1878-1880) against the British Empire, along with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from late 1979 to early 1989 (Boot *Hoover Institute*), the idea of political stability within the country seemed like an impossible dream. Then came the Afghanistan War against the Taliban after the September 11, 2001, terror attack in the USA, resulting in the start of one of the deadliest wars of the 21st century. The number of deaths during this war spans across the world as troops from different countries have taken part in the conflict against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda groups of terrorists. It has been estimated that between 2001 and 2016, 30,000 Afghan troops and police, along with 31,000 Afghan civilians, were killed during the chaos. Furthermore, more than 3,500 troops from the NATO-led coalition were killed throughout the conflict, with soldiers from 29 countries among the dead. Moreover, almost 30,000 Pakistani



government forces and civilians were killed by the Pakistani Taliban (Ray *Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Stephanie Savell's report, "How Death Outlives War: The Reverberating Impact of the Post-9/11 Wars on Human Health", published by the Costs of War project in Brown University's Watson Institute, shows that the total number of deaths post-9/11 in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia has risen exponentially from numbers like 937,000 to at least 4.5 million, of which 3.6–3.7 million were "indirect deaths" (2). These numbers on the scale grow over time, and after the US-led invasion in Afghanistan in 2001 ended in 2021, indirect death and health-related issues have been on the rise dramatically (Tisdall *The Guardian*).

Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* showcase the anguish and hopelessness revolving around the geo-political conflicts in Afghanistan. It reflects the stories and realities of a generation who both enjoyed the progress of Afghanistan and its downfall. In an interview with *The Guardian*, the writer expressed misery and grievance on how Afghanistan has been more than was portrayed through Western media in the context of death and destruction (Harris). Whenever an individual looks up Afghanistan or its history on the Internet, it is always related to the uprisings, turbulence, and conflicts in the region. Hosseini wanted to show that the news headlines on Afghanistan show very little about the precious lives and customs of Afghan culture and its people. In his novels, he tried to portray Afghanistan before the conflicts and how people have been surviving under the oppression. The backdrop of both of the texts is set during the turbulent times of the Afghan War and the Soviet invasion, which focuses on the strain on relationships between people and how trauma has affected the reality of their lives.

While the stories of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* focus on the events faced by the children during the Holocaust, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* construct stories of children who grow up to be wounded adults due to the Afghan War. There is a presence of guilt and redemption in both of the narrations, as hope provides an escape from oppressive lives. However, the psychological effects of their wounds remain as they remember how the innocence of their childhood was tainted because of the incidents, discrimination, and injustice they have seen and experienced. Even though they are works of fiction, these texts are filled with fear and guilt, nightmares, and trauma that remained ingrained in their subconscious and led them to make decisions that would alter their perspectives on life. However, their experiences, emotions, sadness, helplessness, and desperation are not isolated incidents. These emotions and actions are influenced by the events and consequences witnessed by the characters. It has an impact on the actions taken by the protagonists about the customs, beliefs, and morals that have been imposed on them.

Transgenerational trauma refers to a condition or type of trauma that does not end with the individual. It lingers and taints the minds of one generation after another. This particular kind of trauma does not always have to be from a mother or father to a child, it can vary across the people living with the traumatized individual. In *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini portrays how some of the actions are controlled by guilt and aggression, while others are repressed by nightmares and isolation. The intangible feelings of emotions and burdens spread to people who feel the need to reduce the burden experienced by those who are hurt. In that case, to what extent do transgenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder among children and adolescents play a role in how the characters navigate themselves within the selected books?

The limits of analysing transgenerational trauma are that it cannot be easily pinpointed or targeted because it often is silent, covert, and undefined, and these subtle symptoms are obscured in the subconscious. As individuals grow into adults, these symptoms surface through isolating or disrupting behavioural patterns in the form of anxiety, mistrust, depression, issues with self-confidence, self-esteem, and other various negative coping mechanisms. This research paper is divided into 6 different chapters, each part will examine and analyse the transgenerational trauma experienced by the children in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*. The protagonists of these texts reflect the presence of trauma within their actions and behaviour, despite whether they are aware of it or not. The objective of this research is to analyse the role of transgenerational trauma as the cause of the post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by the protagonist and how it influences the actions and decisions of the protagonists as adults.

## Chapter - 2

### Theories and Methodology

#### **Theories:**

Trauma studies have been working with research related to feminism, psychoanalysis, and postmodernism as writers and researchers delve into the concept and its influence on narrative, memories, historical gaps and psychology. Trauma studies have the space to be paired with different theoretical frameworks and allow spaces like post-structural, socio-structural and colonial theories to deconstruct and analyse experiences and their effects on memories, personalities and decisions (Mambrol *Literary Theory and Criticism*). This research paper will look at the aspect of transgenerational trauma and its effect on the individuals portrayed in the texts of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner*. The traumas experienced by the protagonists in their childhood have played a role in instigating inferiority complexes, guilt, internal confusion, physiological imbalance, internally demeaning self and many more. Traumas they experience often occur at a young age and are mostly related to events or circumstances of war, treachery, betrayal, suicide and sexual abuse.

However, different people react to trauma differently as different elements come into play in triggering certain emotions and actions. Factors like surrounding environment, people, parents, culture, belief system, obligations, preserving reputation and support system play an integral role in how different people react to similar traumas. That is why, trauma studies provide a platform for discussions related to fields like “psychology, sociology, history, war, politics, and significantly literature” (Heidarizadeh 789). This research paper will focus on transgenerational trauma and how childhood shock, pain, distress or unsolved issues influence the actions and decisions of growing adults. Using trauma theory, this paper looks

at how trauma is initially created in conflict situations and how the wounds and psychological abuse are aggravated, unresolved and thus transferred from one generation to the next.

**Methodology:**

The analysis of transgenerational trauma based on the characters will provide insight into how these lingering effects can transfer from one generation or community to another. This will be done by utilizing the knowledge and insight while investigating the primary texts discussed in the light of veteran researchers and theories through quantitative research methods. The paper will focus on the protagonists within the selected pieces of literature, which highlights two different kinds of persecution and chaos: the Holocaust and the Afghan War.

The first chapter focuses on the initial introduction of the topic and the concepts of trauma and transgenerational trauma in children. Most importantly, this chapter looks briefly at the conditions and situations that were persistent during the Holocaust and the Afghan war through a historical research method. The two events occurred decades apart from each other, however, the consequences suffered by millions of innocent civilians resulted in severe psychological effects on the families as well as the children. As a result, the children grew up to be adults having a very distorted or grim perspective of life and people. This chapter provides a brief discussion of the characters from the chosen literary texts of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner* with which the research paper will discuss and showcase the arguments of transgenerational trauma and how the ambiguous feelings of conflict flowing from one generation or people the community to another may have a deep psychological effect on the living descendants and survivors of such life-threatening realities. The chapter includes questions related to the main aspect of trauma

which would be followed by the thesis statement. It will also include the limits experienced and obstacles faced while conducting and analysing the research.

The second chapter charts the outline of the paper and the information, arguments and discussion that is used in each chapter. It will provide a brief idea or summary of what has been discussed within the analysis chapters as well as the other supporting aspects of the research paper through journals and diverse trauma and psychological-related research papers. In addition, this chapter will also include an introduction to the theories used within the paper and the aspects that have been included in the analysis of the topic.

The third chapter presents a comprehensive survey of already published journals that supports the idea related to the lingering effects of transgenerational trauma. This chapter explores research journals spanning from historical, anthropological and psychological research done around trauma on children as well as consequences of untreated psychological triggers and memory distortion. Furthermore, this chapter also investigates scholarly journals related to trauma from a literary point of view and how literature can become a platform for accepting and facing the realities of anguish and ordeal.

The fourth chapter is a critically content analysis of children during the Holocaust through *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. This chapter demonstrates that despite differences, the two main protagonists, Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger experience trauma that is the consequence of being at war. It provides an insight on how trauma is not segmented, but rather a trigger formed from forces out of their control. The paper will look at the events and circumstances that evoked the symptoms of trauma in the characters and how it was followed by various moments of self-reflection in terms of being ousted, ostracised and isolated in methods of opinion, manners and thoughts. It also includes the integral role of texts, reading and writing within their daily routine; providing a

recluse for comfort, determination and overcoming trauma. In addition, the psychological aspects related to the danger of being caught being a Jew or a Jew sympathiser within Nazi Germany. While Anne Frank plays the main role of the narrator of her story, Death takes upon the omnipresent aspect of the story as well as the narrator, which provides us with a multiple-perspective view of the traumas that have been experienced by the other characters within the story of *The Book Thief*.

The fifth chapter examines Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner* and the psychological damage experienced by the protagonists and their surrounding characters. The anguish experienced by the people within the texts reflects what millions of Afghan civilians have been experiencing throughout their lifetimes. Conflict, war and chaos have become a common backdrop of these individuals, as they pray that they do not become the victim of the next bomb, mine, missile or rogue bullet. However, through a critical close-text analysis or content analysis of the transgenerational trauma experienced by the protagonists of the literary texts, this chapter is divided into three separate segments that initially focus on the common aspect of neglect observed within the two texts. The type of neglect experienced is slightly different within the two texts but it impacted the protagonists in similar ways. The second section focuses on how all the characters experienced the guilt of being alive and how it affected the characters in different ways. It also looks at how the parents played a great role in influencing the way the characters developed. Issues related to survivor's guilt, parental neglect, rejection and striving for acceptance, and dealing with the reality of being abandoned- all have stemmed from the actions taken by the parents or elders around the characters. The events that moulded the individuals are all initiated by the parents who were helpless in their situations; shackled by the customs of their country and community. Their situations are not an uncommon scenario as most of the Afghan people have been bound and trapped by the rules and regulations imposed on them by extremists and

radicals. Lastly, the third segment of the chapter examines and evaluates how the characters made an effort to stop the trauma that has been passed down to them. Interestingly, there is an aspect of redemption within the texts as the characters attempt to rectify their beliefs and actions in the past to make peace with themselves, after years of torment and guilt burdening their consciousness. The guilt rooted in diverse consequences leaves the characters with a long-term negative impact on their psychology. The actions spurred by their influenced behaviour result in a lifetime of internal conflict and moral pressure to rectify their mistakes and regrets.

The sixth and final chapter concludes the entire discussion of the four texts and their relation to transgenerational trauma. There is no doubt about the fact that these literary texts focus on the trauma experienced by individuals in their dire circumstances. However, to what extent their reality and personality are related to the trauma they experienced and the hardship they faced by the people around them is another matter. Traumatic events can happen to anyone at any point in their lives. It lives with them and it also becomes their duty to deal with it. In light of such circumstances, what had evoked those experiences and how it has moulded their decisions and personalities plays an integral role in analysing trauma within a person. Focusing on the limits of literary devices when it comes to dealing with or narrating trauma, this chapter suggests a different approach when it comes to textual analysis of characters that can very much reflect the realities of the people still living in such conditions.



## **Chapter - 3**

### **Literature Review**

It is hard to define trauma as its effects and symptoms are intangible and deeply connected to the psychology of human subconsciousness and the brain. There has been numerous research and discussion conducted around the effects and consequences of trauma and how it needs to be engaged and dealt with. Judd and Redfern discuss the difficulty of defining trauma from its ancient description as its origin intersects with symptoms and situations studied in clinical and social science research (359-360). While clinical research focuses on trauma that harms the human body in terms of functions and stability, trauma in the field of social science focuses mainly on the changes in the psychological behaviour of individuals and the consequences of such invisible yet persistent anomalies (Judd & Redfern 360). So, when it comes to transgenerational trauma or intergenerational trauma, the concept of trauma and its diverse consequences among individuals needs to be briefly discussed and assessed to understand the effects on people and those around them. Payrhuber in “In the Realm of the Undead: Transgenerational Transference and its Enactments” focuses on both intergenerational trauma and transgenerational trauma and argues that they are deeply connected. They also give rise to another form of trauma studies that focuses on the group of people having a connection to both intergenerational trauma and transgenerational trauma from their community and families (27). Exposure to any kind of trauma that can affect an individual, family, community or country can spread across the globe. Usually, these traumas are carried by people who move away from the source of their misery. Majority of the adults across the world are assumed to have or will have experienced a traumatic event at some point in their lives based on the data collected from the population indication of different countries (K.M Magruder et al. 1).

Among the data collected by Hatch and Dohrenwend, their research shows that both men and women experience different types of traumas throughout their lives. That is to say, the trauma experiences are different for both men and women and they rarely face the same experiences or trauma. The data focused on the socio-demographic predictors within the USA in terms of gender, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, age, and location. It was seen that men had more reports of trauma related to injuries, accidents, and physical assaults whereas women had more cases of sexual assaults and robbery. It was also seen that such traumatic events varied and young adults with low socio-economic status, and racial/ethnic minority positions in the society were more prone to being victims of trauma (Hatch & Dohrenwend 2007).

Another important aspect of people with a history of trauma or traumatic events/experiences has been exposure to multiple incidents. However, it is not clear whether these incidents are related to having any “casual associations between exposure to initial TEs and risk of subsequent exposure” (Benjet et al. 328-329). There is a possibility that such individuals can have “accident-prone” personalities that make them targets of victimization. Furthermore, such exposure to multiple traumas or experiences may also indicate behaviour that is consistent with child abuse or exposure to “interpersonal violence and sexual assault” that results in creating a vulnerable personality and thus increases the chances of being exposed to more trauma and crimes (Benjet et al. 328). Most of these children who witness violence, murder and crimes in conflict zones tend to become orphans or are kidnapped, raped, or recruited as child soldiers. Being more psychologically and physically vulnerable, children tend to experience their trauma more acutely than adults (K. M. Magruder et al. 2). Trauma exposure in children and young adults is a common phenomenon around the world. Being a part of a vulnerable group of people with little to no monetary or powerful support, the children have a high tendency to become victims of horrific incidents, addiction, and

smuggling operations. A considerable percentage of children are exposed to trauma and chaos such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises

In trauma-related cases, there are important aspects as to how one can help the victim deal with the incident through various tests, segments, and therapy. These components include the incident itself, the people who have been exposed to similar kinds of trauma, and their relationship with the people and the surrounding environment among a few important ones. These factors play an integral role in shaping the results and consequences of trauma exposure along with aspects like “societal factors, attitudes, and characteristics that influence trauma likelihood and intervention” (K. M. Magruder et al. 3). The term “trauma” has a concerning casual application to certain or various kinds of incidents. Not all kinds of unfortunate events can be related to trauma. The term is now seemingly used to describe emotional uncertainty or stress to different kinds of events or experiences. The term needs to be used to emphasize extremely, acute and isolated situations along with the incidents and events that are less harmful but are applied for an extended period. Neglect can be seen as a less harmful incident or of immediate danger, however, if such behaviour is experienced over a long period, there are high chances of influencing behavioural aspects towards isolation and acts of violence for attention. The impact of neglect from an early stage can be more extensive and prevalent than physical abuse and thus can negatively impact the emotional and psychological development of a child involved (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 5).

Some research studies tend to use the term “trauma” for circumstances of both abuse and neglect. However, the adversity and consequences of both situations are vastly different from one another. Even though both direct abuse and neglect can have negative development factors for the growing child, it does not help if the term “trauma” is used to categorise both

events under the same umbrella as the effects of both situations, physically and mentally are different from each other (Bath 5). Traumatic events include a vast category of both psychological and physical negligence, torment, and torture that consists of abuse, loss, accidents, disasters, murder, war, and other harmful and life-threatening experiences (American Psychiatric Association 2000). The consequences of being exposed to such events lead to conditions like attention deficit, hyperactive disorder (ADHD), depression, anxiety, and personality disorder with an extensive and pervasive effect on cognitive, social, and emotional development and increased risk of chronic diseases in both children and adults. Trauma experienced in childhood can persist through adulthood, making the individual prone to more physical and psychological problems later in life (Dye 1).

So, when it comes to war, modern conflicts that occur at the heart of civilian locations drastically change the lives of people and children in that region. Since there is no clear and neutral space for a battlefield, these armed conflicts target the most vulnerable places for civilians, children, communities, and “traditional safe havens”. There have been several medical, social, and psychological reviews on how political conflict, war, and terrorism affect a child’s mental health. There have been various thought-provoking information and facts dating back to as early as World War II, that focus on the psychological and behaviour of children during war-time exposure and its severity on their lives post-war. It is observed that the psychological changes and the severity of trauma depend on age-wise categories, such as, the implication of violence on older children are seen to result in severe mental and functional disability or affliction (Slone & Mann 1).

Drastic and rapid changes in complex psychological, functional, and emotional changes may influence how a young child perceives life and how to cope with their experience with a traumatic event. As the concept of self-blame, magical thinking and

confusion, and delay in the development of thinking and emotional response and recognition in processing trauma. It results in, “Cognitive and verbal immaturity and self-oriented perception of cause-effect relations may lead to misunderstanding of the causality of events difficulties in comprehension of potentially traumatic events and limited communication of emotions regarding these events” (Slone & Mann 1-2). The year 2021 has seen a deadly rise in a drastic escalation of conflict, military coups, takeovers, and assassination as well as the violation of international laws that resulted in the devastating repercussions on the protection of children across the world.

In 2021, 5,242 girls and 13,663 boys were victims of grave violations<sup>7</sup> across 21 countries in the world. In addition, 1,600 of those children have been victims of multiple violations and torture as the report highlights that over 23,982 cases of grave violations against children have been verified, and more have yet to surface (Vinet Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict). Research and observation show that traumatized children have a high tendency to express rigid control behavioural patterns that may include strict and rigid routines, habits, eating patterns, beliefs, and many more. If any of the routines or habits fall outside their pattern of movement, these children tend to become aggressive, self-injurious, selectively mute, and even have frozen reactions and avoid confrontation when they have an emotional outburst (Van Der Kolk 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> The Six Grave Violation serves as a basis to gather information and reporting on the violence against children. They include 1) Killing and maiming children 2) Recruitment or use of children as soldiers, 3) Sexual violence against children, 4) Abduction of children, 5) Attacks against schools or hospitals, 6) Denial of humanitarian access for children. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>

Psychiatric traumatic experiences based on their nature and their dependability have been a matter of discussion and controversy for more than a century. Being hard for victims to remember the trauma and the negative emotion that it evokes along with the risk of forming post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) makes it difficult to record in laboratory settings. If the trauma is extremely stressful, it overwhelms peoples' coping mechanisms and has become a questionable variable of memory distortion of the circumstances before and after the event; making it difficult to become a guide to understand traumatic experiences objectively. (Van Der Kolk 52). According to the modern study of traumatic experience, the environment affects psychopathology and past research shows that such factors play an integral role in putting younger people at great risk of developing mental health problems. It provides information on the consequences incurred by childhood abuse or exposure to violence or trauma is partially dependent on the timing of the trauma.

Age matters in such situations because the memories of the trauma manipulate the personality pattern of the victim. For example, younger and less mentally developed infants and children are at high risk for post-trauma harm as they come to "...lack social, emotional, cognitive, and neurobiological capacities associated with understanding and healthy coping with stressful events" (Price et al. 653). The rising cycle of abuse and neglect in children in both urban and rural communities plays a role in the deterioration of public education, urban violence, and social disintegration among children (Perry 3). When it comes to the long-term after-effects of Holocaust traumatization, the nightmares have been far-reaching for both the survivors and their descendants. Like an atomic bomb, the Holocaust continues to contaminate the lives of the survivors and those who came after them despite its tainted and bloody history being closed for more than half a century. Ageing and retiring survivors are seen to have terrifying nightmares and flashbacks after keeping themselves extremely busy to forget those memories. Child survivors struggle with the sense of insecurities and lack of

social and cognitive reaction to situations and keep mourning for the parents whose faces gradually faded with time or never have ever met. The offspring of these both categories of people become more aware of the suppressed pain and terror of their ancestors indirectly seen to have observed the burdens carried by their parents. To trace the ancestral roots, the third generation delves into their history to understand the broken links and gaps within their family tree. The information might leave them becoming emotionally damaged and heartbroken; feeling helpless, and unable to find ways to help or cope with their conflicted emotions. In this way, the survivor's guilt or bystander guilt experienced by the relatives, children, close friends, and caretakers shows that trauma can infest and infect people in different manners and travel despite time (Kellermann 197).

In addition, offspring of Holocaust survivors have been the central focus of many researchers and clinical trials. It was assumed that the trauma experienced by the parents had hurt their children as well. However, when it comes to trauma, different factors based on the surroundings of the individual come into play. It usually takes ethnographical data or anthropological research to interview and gather data related to trauma-inflicted victims to analyse trauma. Yet, each of the cases needs to be dealt with in an isolated manner and look at its similarities. This is where literature comes in and brings light to issues that normally would take time to gather and analyse through research. While individual stories are narrated, the conditions around the characters allow the readers to look at their situation objectively and understand how practices and beliefs influence decisions and actions. From this angle, we can observe how transgenerational trauma is instigated and transferred from one being to another because community plays a role in how trauma can be imposed and go unpunished. The importance of the surroundings, parents and elderlies, beliefs and culture play an integral role in how trauma can be inflicted in the name of normalcy. Although scientifically DNA traits can be modified and passed down through blood, not all practices and beliefs are passed

down in the same way. Each element influences the next and is imposed on people and children through power, force, religion and fear just because it has been practised or believed for generations. If such evidence was found then the existence of trauma travelling lines of generation may open a new area of trauma study (Kellermann b. 36).

In the initial years (late 1960s – early 1970s) of trauma research, the victims of the Holocaust were presented as participants in observation trials. The notes of these clinical trials began with a note related to the large number of children within the trials. The initial observation expressed concern about the risk of forming links between the psychological vulnerabilities of the children of the survivors and the Holocaust experienced by their parents. By the 1980s, the psychoanalytical papers started with how the experiences of Holocaust victims had dire consequences on their offspring in terms of psychological stability (Gomolin 464). A dramatic change in the language used for analysing trauma experiences of Holocaust survivors has been observed within the initial years of psychoanalytic research papers. As an example, it was observed that abstracts of the papers were replaced by small excerpts and anecdotes from the books published by the survivors or quotes by researchers famous in this line of research like Job or Kierkegaard (Auerhahn and Prelinger 1983). However, a shift has been made by the new generation of researchers who were replaced with questions called upon by new generations of researchers that allowed researchers to look at the events from another angle and theory. According to Gomolin:

The central assumption that memories of extreme trauma remain inaccessible to consciousness, writers claim that survivors are unable to symbolize their traumatic Holocaust experiences. Because these experiences cannot be represented through secondary processes without overwhelming the survivors' psychic equilibrium, the survivor is unable to "work through" the trauma. Transmission to the next generation



is a vicissitude of this failure: the offspring of the survivors unwittingly enact scenes from their parents' Holocaust experiences. (469)

In an empirical study, a worldwide recruitment process was used to acquire the participants of Holocaust survivors. It was seen that the demographic variables assessed during the study showed that these individuals were not only powerful predictors of their psychological health but also had a strong influence on shaping the psychological health of their children and descendants. Even with two generations of lineage removed, the Holocaust legacy still leaves its mark that is yet to be removed (Lurie-Beck iii).

While this event has been and always will be a dark reality of World War II, people would think that humans would learn from their mistakes and avoid conflicts. However, human beings are unfortunate creatures with forgetful memories, trapped in the cycle of greed and chaos, never to remember the pains from the past. Looking back at history and its present situation, Afghanistan is shrouded with darkness, death, conflict and chaos that never seems to end. There has been rarely any peace for the civilians in Afghanistan for decades as their history is filled with wars, starting from internal political coups to war against the British and Soviet Empire, the conflicts between radical groups in the Afghan War, the international attack on the Taliban in the Afghanistan War, and again with the overtake of Kabul by Taliban on 15 August 2021(*The Indian Express* 2021).

Refugees and immigrants from Afghanistan have been among the top three countries<sup>8</sup> in the past four decades. Because of the continuous conflict experienced by people in the region, it has become difficult for civilians to live a peaceful life in their homeland. Numerous studies on the children of Afghanistan have indicated a high percentage of

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<sup>8</sup> According to UNHCR, the top three countries that create the most refugees around the world is the Syrian Arab Republic (6.8 million), Ukraine (5.7 million) and Afghanistan (5.7 million).

children experiencing some trauma related to war, massacres, assassinations, torture, loss of loved ones and destruction of safe havens and family homes. The same report focuses on the violence that happens outside military conflicts, which include being physically abused, beaten with objects, verbally abused, threatened, burned, having hair pulled and cut off, being bullied, pushed around, belittled or ridiculed (Bronstein, Montgomery & Ott 286).

Furthermore, during the journey for asylum, it has been observed that the children experience situations that include, “sleeping rough, living in cramped and unsanitary conditions, physical abuse by smugglers and government officials, witnessing the death of friends, and living in near-constant privation” (Bronstein, Montgomery & Ott 286). A research study conducted on the families living in Kandahar shows that the percentage of parents in Afghanistan to have experienced the loss of one child or more evokes the rise of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) among the parents. As a result, due to emotional and guilt related trauma, the silent suffering quickly embeds the sense of loss among siblings and parents, thus creating gaps and lack of communication among the family members. The study showed that the parents who have lost their children or children in an armed conflict were highly susceptible (90.72%) to probable PTSD (Rahimi, Wafa, Stanikzai et al. 430). Conflict and chaos have become a daily part of the life of an Afghan child. For violence to become a typical backdrop of childhood shows all kinds of wrong happening in a country because of power conflicts. Furthermore, when it comes to childhood trauma, children can also face different kinds of shock depending on their gender, circumstances and how their trust and insecurities are taken advantage of. Atkinson, Judy et al. in "Addressing Individual and Community Transgenerational Trauma" argue that childhood trauma infringes upon the child's aspect of safety and trust in the people and the world around them. It aggravates their level of emotional damage and instigates high levels of agony, anxiety, grief, shame and also provokes “behaviours in the child's normal repertoire” – which includes substance use,

physical inactivity, smoking and obesity and many more health-related degradations. Furthermore, these victims are seen to have extreme difficulty in developing intimate relationships with people as well as maintaining respectable relationships with their caregivers or guardians, peers and marital partners. They are seen to become secretive and unable to share their thoughts, emotions and distress with their partners to generate trust or lean on any kind of support system (Atkinson, Judy et al. 292-293).

In 2018, a cross-sectional survey study revealed that 71% of the children in Afghanistan have experienced physical violence in their lives, which is mostly sourced from their own homes. Due to decades of economic instability and lack of security, the mental health of Afghan kids has been in danger as parents and guardians enforce frustrations in the form of violence. The steep rise in conflicts has resulted in the families and children of Afghanistan experiencing food shortage, malnutrition, displacement, death of family, poverty, and an uncertain future (Shoib, Sheikh et al. 1046). Intergenerational trauma among the Afghan population and transgenerational trauma among the community has a big impact on the children, grandchildren, and following generations, who became more susceptible to psychological impairment due to poor physical and mental health. Along with the decades of conflict and war, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased suffering by tenfold, making children more susceptible to intergenerational trauma among Afghan families (Shaeen, Rahmat, & Essar 2). Even after coming to a safer country after innumerable and turbulent journeys and sacrifices, Afghan children and families have much difficulty in settling into their new and safer lives. The body instinctively and immediately does not return to its unsettled and relaxed state from the condition of constant anxiety. The expectation of settling into a non-chaotic environment as soon as they are out of a stressful one creates physical and psychological problems for future generations (Diwakar 2022).

The stress and scars inflicted both mentally and physically on displaced families and children before or during migration make them more vulnerable to transgenerational trauma. The factors that contribute to such a crisis among the Afghans are the lack of psychiatrists and inadequate resources for mental health facilities and it plays a role in the repressive behaviour of trauma. Furthermore, the stigma around mental health within society makes it difficult for people to search for mental health services without backlash from the people around them. It also increases the chances of intergenerational trauma among the Afghan population (Shaeen, Rahmat, & Essar 2).

As this discussion reveals, there is no doubt that the aggressive or eluding trait of an individual's personality can stem from past trauma or witnessing people who had suffered because of trauma. It can generate harmful habits or actions to distract themselves and may result in consequences that could harm them and others around them. As an example, in *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, we could see protagonists like Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger generating certain symptoms of trauma because of violence they have heard about or witnessed. Their young minds could not process the greed for power and authority of the German people and army. Even though there were certain people who were against the ways the Jews were treated, the majority of people discriminated against anyone who was Jewish or who helped the Jews. The terror of impending doom after discovery and the punishment after leading them to lead a conflicted and frustrating life.

Furthermore, it is also important to understand how the customs and practices of the community, beliefs and judgments of people and the behaviour of others, especially parents, relatives, and friends affect and influence the actions of the particular individual. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, we observe abuse and neglect affect the victims because of certain traditional and stereotyped practices they have

come to believe and follow as children and adults. Their survivor's guilt or standby guilt, even memories of the consequences of the violence inflicted will have a pervasive effect on their mental health. We see trauma stems from diverse conditions, however, treating the situation as an isolated incident would not provide enough information or provide space for understanding their reactions towards the incident that triggered the anguish. It also does not provide the perception of how the victim's personal or witnessed trauma can influence their actions along pass them down to the younger generation of their family or community. Transgenerational trauma includes those aspects of the world and society that seem essential to building a community, but it also shows how those particular elements, practices and people can also become the triggers of a recurring and never-ending nightmare.

## Chapter - 4

### ***The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak: The Traumatized Youth of World War II**

I was introduced to both *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* when I started to acquire an interest in books as a young reader. *The Diary of Anne Frank* felt like ongoing an internal monologue, which was an absolute delight in trying to relate to Anne's views and opinions as she observed her family and peers. This written monologue has a way of making young readers feel that they are not the only ones in the world who faced similar situations of arguments and reprimands from their elder siblings, parents, and relatives. Although her story was initially just a diary published, I could never put it down, thinking about what else was similar in our lives despite being born so far apart from each other. On the other hand, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak came as a birthday gift and I was fascinated with the idea of Death being a character and narrating the story or stories it saw. I never gave much thought to the grim reality of his presence and felt like it was just another person narrating a story of a life that they had seen from afar. As a young reader Death meant nothing more than a narrator to me. Only after learning about World War II at school, I decided to read the two texts again. It was both exciting and intriguing to be able to relate or compare the stories with the facts of history. The horror was yet to touch me with its slithering tendrils as I was more curious and fascinated with how stories could be written by using information from the past.

Every time I read the books, it felt different, as if it was not something that I remembered. Each reading reflected differently as I grew up, starting to understand the complex relationships and chaos that seemed to infuse itself with the history of mankind. Each reading was done through a different lens as if watching the same story through a kaleidoscope. These two texts have been a part of my reading experience while growing up

and each read inflicted different emotions. From excitement, curiosity and interest, which slowly changed to realization and horror, both *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* prove that books can be read from numerous angles, changing the readers' experience each time. The little moments of self-reflection, the fears and the experiences that the protagonists live through can be taken as signs and symptoms that could or already have generated post-traumatic stress disorder. It also focuses on how their moral compasses get distorted as they witness millions of innocent civilians being persecuted in the name of ethnic cleansing.

#### **4.1 Swastika's Evolving Symbolism from Prosperity to Adversity**

The emotions and meanings attached to certain historical objects, symbols, and places gradually change with time. These artefacts lose their value with fading memories and people, while some of them get stuck with a dark history of ideologies, acts of violence and victims. The historical value of the symbol of Swastika, unfortunately, became a part of the changing times and emotions of human beings. From something that was considered a token or representation of protection, later became corrupted with the repulsive greed of human beings. Dating back to its pre-historic times, this symbol was widely known as an auspicious sign of well-being, prosperity, and luck across different religions, art, and cultures all across the world. It had been used for more than 3,000 years, which even predates the ankh<sup>9</sup> the most primordial Egyptian symbol recorded in history. Objects, artefacts, and coins discovered from ancient Troy have been assumed to commonly use the swastika mark on places and things, dating back to 1000 BCE (Rosenburg *ThoughtCo*). Unfortunately, this prosperous symbol was hijacked and appropriated for atrocity and resulted in becoming the graphic

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<sup>9</sup> An Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol for "life" or "breath of life" (nh = ankh), considered to be one of the oldest symbols of ancient Egypt. The Egyptians believed that one's earthly journey was only part of an eternal life, the ankh symbolizes both mortal existence and the afterlife.

embodiment of violence, discrimination, hate, and, intolerance (Sunder *BCC Culture*) across the globe. While the people of the so-called German Aryan race supported the fatherland, their flag, the symbol and the ideology behind it, the Jews were segregated, painted as abominations, and herded like cattle to be shipped off to gas chambers and other monstrous machinery and experiments to cleanse the land of their filth and presence. Although there have been innumerable historical data and records that prove that ethnic cleansing has been a part of mankind from the beginning of their time, the abhorrent meaning and ideology behind the term became somewhat official after the Holocaust. People were forced to flee, hide and change their identities illegally, attempting to discard the assumed supposed stench of their Jewish background. The ideology spread across Germany like an epidemic, convincing people that mingling with Jews was a sign of treachery and that such low-born empathy was a contamination and an insult to their German blood. It even convinced Jews that they were nothing but animals to be slaughtered because they were ousted by a doctrine that separated them from the rest of the world. So, there is no doubt in answering the question of who is the easiest to convince that they do not belong somewhere. The most innocent and simple-minded beings that have yet to be tainted by the cruelties of life and the world - the children.

The children of the Jews population, at the time of Nazi persecution, have been among the unluckiest lot with no idea of how the painted targets on their backs would change the course of history in the world. Not being the target of annihilation did not mean that the rest of the world became sheltered and protected from its atrocities. The repercussions of what had happened to the Jewish population all across Europe experience its effects till today. May it be the descendants of the perpetrators or the victims, all of them are still facing the consequences of what happened in the past.



## **4.2 Two Sides of the Holocaust through Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger**

*The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak and *The Diary of Anne Frank* show two sides of the Holocaust; the danger of being a Jew and the danger of Germans hiding and sympathising with Jews. Both of the texts present two very different sides of the Holocaust, one that shows what it is like to be living in hiding, while the other shows what it is like to sympathise and hide the ousted Jews. However, the two texts have a child or children at the centre of their narration. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is an intimate approach to how a young girl sees life and gives us access to all her deepest thoughts. Sometimes even analysing the text, which is, in reality, a diary of a young girl can feel somewhat like an invasion of privacy even though the writer died a long time ago. However, objectively, the diary can be considered a text, a valuable record that shows real-life scenarios of Jewish families in hiding, suffering the repercussions of rules that had nothing to do with them. *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak on the other hand, uses a more unique approach to narrate the story of Liesel Meminger. By making Death an omnipresent narrator, the writer leaves no space for the readers to believe that the story will have a happy ending. The presence of Death as a narrator proves that ultimately, there will be a terrible loss of lives, and love with a gut-wrenching depiction of the repercussions of war.

## **4.3 Generated Trauma through the Eyes of Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger**

Anne Frank's diary mirrors most of all the internal reflections that we have as individuals; sometimes we share our thoughts with others, have an internal monologue with ourselves, or like Anne; jot it down in the most secure place possible, a diary. While the readers are allowed to see her everyday life hidden from the Germans, it also allows us to see her growth as a teenager, one of the most emotionally, psychologically and physiologically turbulent phases of human lives. Qualitative research on diaries has become a crucial element

for research because it challenges the very narrative and analysis constructed through questionnaires, and face-to-face interviews that might make participants conscious of their opinions and may alter them due to social or self-repercussions (Hyers 20). It also allows researchers to observe the human personality in a certain state or condition that can be used as a trait of the person itself. It evokes curiosity and to understand the bare confessions and thoughts that people would entrust to paper. In controversial social and political situations, a diary may provide more reliable information as the person may never intend to voice out their deepest thoughts and usually is very open with their ideas and opinions of things happening around them.

There are several letters, notes, diaries, and stories that have been written by individuals during the Holocaust period in Nazi Germany, and many of them are published in anthologies like Boas's (1995) *We Are Witnesses* in 1995, Filipovic and Challenger's *Stolen Voices* in 2006 and Zapruder's *Salvaged Pages* published in 2002 and are exhibited all across the world (Walmer 16). However, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is one of the most famous dairies that has been published and widely read all across the world. Hyers states, "A diary written during a particular sociopolitical crisis is like a time capsule, revealing the lived experience of a historical epoch..." (21) – proving that the unmediated opinions within the diaries provide a direct link to the writers and the situations because them would assess the situation by writing about the event that they would have seen themselves (Hyers 21). Anne Frank started her diary by naming it "Kitty" and used to write each entry starting with "Dearest Kitty" as if she was writing to a friend or can be assumed to have internal monologues, psychologically mirroring her identity and personality through "Kitty". Even the last entry in her diary on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 was a reflection of how she grew up living in hiding and how her ideas and opinions have evolved, allowing her to develop an individual personality that wanted more from life and herself than trying to please everyone with silence, patience, and submission. In

one of her entries, Anne writes on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1944, “Deep down, the young are lonelier than the old” (224)– which she had read in a book somewhere and the idea called to her because it showed how “Kitty” was able to house her thoughts and rants without complain, while actual living beings refused her opinions and pushed her aside saying that she knows too much. In one of her last entries, we eventually get to understand how helpless Anne feels about her situation as she writes on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1994,

It’s utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death, I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one, will destroy us too, I feel the sufferings of millions (244)

One of the memories and events jotted down by Anne Frank was how she experienced those events emotionally. During numerous interviews for her book on the children of the Holocaust, Wolf says:

Not surprisingly, children’s memories of the Occupation vary greatly depending on their age. Most respondents who were young children at the time do not recall this period, even if it was full of radical life changes. Some childhood memories are strong and clear; others are vague and shadowy but still created enough of an impression that respondents were able to describe their feelings about an event. (127)

Anne’s entries were written with emotions to record the days of her life. The documentation of children’s lives during the Holocaust is fragmented at best and diaries like Anne Frank are very rare because it was very dangerous to keep and record everyday activities in a journal. If it were to ever get discovered and confiscated during the arrest or raid, it could reveal all the people who may have helped the Jews in hiding.

Similarly, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak is a unique and peculiar work of literature when it comes to writing fiction in light of the Holocaust. Set in a small town in Nazi Germany, Zusak did not shy away from showing the consequences, desperation, helplessness and horrors that the people during that period felt. Although the text was written focusing on the life of Liesel Meminger, she is not the narrator of the stories. She is just a part of a bigger picture; a picture that shows how both Jews and Germans, albeit less in comparison, had to deal with their conflicted moral compasses to help individuals and save themselves. Death speaks to the readers as if he is watching them, saying, “Here it is. One of a handful. *The Book Thief*. If you feel like it, come with me. I will tell you a story. I’ll show you something (14).

Although Death is the immortal entity in the text, the readers get access to Liesel’s thoughts, which are not just limited to her. The readers get to follow the thoughts, events, and emotions of people around Liesel, keeping her at the centre of the story (Timothy 25). Liesel Meminger’s sense of self-reflection is something that may be of an entirely different category. Her trauma is related more to the loss of life and abandonment. Despite being a German, the war had cost her brother to die in the freezing temperature and snow, she was left with a foster family by her mother, and separated from her father because he was targeted as a Communist and many more. Liesel is a classic example of someone who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as she used to wake up from nightmares in the middle of the night. However, Liesel did not have nightmares because she was haunted by the dead body of her younger brother, rather she was suffering through survivor’s guilt because was helpless and weak, unable to protect her brother. We can assume that she was guilty of surviving the cold and was heartbroken that she was taking all the love, attention, and care from her foster family which was meant to be shared with her brother (Peng & Hua 786).

*The Book Thief* is one of the very few books that provide a different narrative, giving a new perspective of people and groups different from the dominant group that is usually in focus: the Jews during the Holocaust. Unlike most of the characters within the book, Liesel is introduced and the trauma is laid bare from the very beginning of the narration. Her identity is formed around the death of her younger brother, being sent away from her mother, and the dangerous political affiliation of her unknown father. With Death as a narrator, the writer introduces Liesel through Death as it narrates how difficult it is to look at the survivors or the people who are left behind. Death says:

“I witness the ones who are left behind, crumbling among the jigsaw puzzle of realization, despair, and surprise. They have punctured hearts. They have beaten lungs. This in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color. It’s the story of one of those perpetual survivors—an expert at being left behind” (9).

Liesel’s biggest trauma stems from her uncanny ability to survive, while everyone she loved was dead from exposure, war casualties or poverty. Her self-hatred starts from the root of existence; her family and her foster family as each of the members leaves her alone with only memories of love and care. She blames herself for either having good health or good luck which instigates self-hate. The tragedies shrouded her life with death and darkness only instigated her more to believe that her existence was the reason for everyone dying or abandoning her. If self-hatred stems from the survivor’s guilt, then Liesel Meminger and Otto Frank (Anne Frank’s father) share the same intensity of loss, death, and helplessness hammered in their memories and souls. While Otto Frank tried to lighten his guilt by trying to spread the stories in her daughter’s diary all across the world, Liesel Meminger faced a far more perilous journey for being a child of Nazi German. Along with survivor’s guilt, she

also had to carry the weight of her country's atrocities with her identity till death. The memories, and primitive sense of fear, and distress can never be settled and can very easily transfer to the younger generation who watch their parents, relatives, siblings, and friends wake up crying and screaming in the middle of the time.

#### **4.4 Rekindling Hope through Words**

One of the common aspects of both Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger is their love for books and writing. While Anne Frank resumed her studies after settling down in the secret annexe in Holland with her secular Jewish family, her love for books gave a sense of escapism that provided her with a brief relief from the suffocating reality of her situation. Her books sharpened her memory and skills and provided her with enough logic and ideas on how to deal with her realities instead of lashing out against everyone due to their precarious situation. Her dependency on books and her comfort in her diary became one of the main reasons how she conducted herself despite her young age. Weeks before her family went into hiding, her initial diary entries are filled with laughter and curiosity, friends and boys, confidence, and child-like imagination. Even the entry regarding the move to the room within the Annex is seen to be filled with dread, curiosity, and excitement, which may be typical of a girl at her age. Being in the first phases of teen hood, she was already experiencing the psychological, physical, and emotional stages of change in her body. Her emotional dependency on the diary shows in her first entry, "I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support" (4). These diary entries take the form of a letter to "Kitty" who can be seen as an imaginary friend that she may have believed to read her stories and anecdotes one day. Furthermore, Anne had many stories and anecdotes ready and intended to publish them when the war was over. The inspiration to write the stories, her fascination with reading

history, Greek and Roman mythology, and genealogical charts highlights the interest that Anne has in the world, myths, and ancestry. It allowed her to momentarily distract herself from the dire situation she and her family were dragged into just because they were Jews.

The importance of books, writing stories, and narrating them in *The Book Thief* has more to do with the self-development that Liesel Meminger wanted to achieve. Unable to study in the same class with peers of her age, she was pulled back to study in a class with younger students. However, her ability to recall paragraphs from *THE GRAVE DIGGER'S HANDBOOK: A Twelve-Step Guide to Grave-Digging Success*, during the reading presentation, the readers get to see that she has a spectacular memory. In a way, being able to recall everything from the grave digger's handbook might be the emotional attachment to her dead brother. It was as if the pages of the guidebook reflected the end of the brother's life and how he was buried. To be able to read and understand the handbook can be said to allow Liesel to connect with her brother during his last moments.

### **“THE BOOK’S MEANING**

#### **1. The last time she saw her brother.**

#### **2. The last time she saw her mother” (Zusak 31)**

The helplessness and inability to protect her brother were already heavy in her consciousness; to be unable to understand the text that she stole to remember him was an insult to his memory and her powerlessness. Although the guidebook to grave digging was Liesel's first theft, her primary career as a book thief started with the large bonfire to celebrate the Führer's long life. The book that Liesel scavenged from the embers of the bonfire turned out to be *The Shoulder Shrug* which, “Papa studied the title, probably wondering exactly what kind of threat this book posed to the hearts and minds of the German

people” (Zusak 95)- proving that these bonfires burned books that the Nazi Armies thought would corrupt the Germans’ minds and soul and tempt them to sympathise with Jewish filth.

In a way, such books became a powerful influence in Liesel’s life as she tried to navigate the treacherous waters of being a German and hiding a Jew. Her relationship with Max Vandenburg became stronger as they connected and accompanied each other through words and books. In addition, with her continuous reading, words became a force strong enough to calm people during a calamity, to mysteriously call back people from the brink of death, and to coax people to move on in life. Reading and writing gave Liesel a power she never could have imagined possessing, the ability to move people with words. Liesel was never keen on writing, but Max Vandenburg had inspired her to write her own story. He believed the little stories of her days and life could do more than just lighten up the burdens of their turbulent time. This budding activity of being able to jot down her own story was the only thing that saved her life on Himmel Street when the Allies made a surprise attack on Stuttgart (Zusak 394).

Although Death was the narrator of Liesel’s tragic childhood, many of the Holocaust survivors wrote their experiences through fiction and poetry, “utilizing literary and imaginative strategies to render their inner experience and to convey to reader’s elements of atrocity that evaded more chronological or historical narratives” (Mukhamedova 567). Such literary works dealt with aspects of philosophical, psychological, and cultural implications regarding the events of the Holocaust, which were not readily available in history books and interviews. Questions arose on various works written by men that pushed women to the sidelines of their narratives on how they dealt with the Holocaust nightmare. However, works that surround women also looked at the experiences of Jewish women and their sufferings with no one to support them, no protection, and family safety (Mukhamedova 567). *The Book*



*Thief* showcases the lives of German people and children who were affected by World War II. Millions of people were forced to go to the front lines of conflict, while thousands died from illness, lack of care, weakness, and starvation. There is hardly any literary research done on the people of the perpetrating countries due to the mainstream thinking of them being perpetrators and thus obstacles develop in the name of ethical problems. In such a conflict of interest, researchers barely have information on how children from such countries suffered the consequence of things they never have been part of (Peng & Hua 785).

#### **4.5 Anxiety and Psychological Terror**

As a process of character development, the readers can see Anne's change when her diary starts becoming filled with opinions regarding different social, philosophical, and ideological aspects. Her diary reflects how Anne used her time, skills, knowledge, and observations to search for her own identity during the entire period in hiding. However, the readers also see how Anne knew that her journal was a very dangerous artefact to own. Despite the fact she was getting older, Anne was still a teenage girl who had hopes and dreams for her future. Her dwindling hope persists through entries like,

I've asked myself again and again whether it wouldn't have been better if we hadn't gone into hiding if we were dead now and didn't have to go through this misery, especially so that the others could be spared the burden. But we all shrink from this thought. We still love life, we haven't yet forgotten the voice of nature, and we keep hoping, hoping for . . . everything. (FRIDAY, MAY 26, 1944), (*The Diary of Anne Frank* 225)

This entry reflects how depressed and exhausted she started to become from living with fear and horror, unable to breathe, wash, talk, or walk properly, living lives as silent as mice invading a house. The diary entries during the initial few months of hiding showed that Anne had a busy life, settling into a routine that was to be silent, unseen, and to stay unheard and

invisible to the outside world. The idea seems very grim and daunting when considered in a generally open space and accepting environment, but Anne lived at a time when her identity as a Jew had targeted her and her family for persecution with no repercussions against the preparators. Living in the dark for more than two years, waiting to be caught or to be freed without doing anything but staying alive and hidden.

The emotional outbursts of fights, clashes, distance, affection, support, and understanding gradually decreased with each passing day. Although there are German friends like Miep and Mr. Kugler helping them get supplies and necessary support to stay hidden, it was becoming increasingly hard for Anne and everyone else to live so pathetically. In many of her entries, Anne's frustrations are reflected in entries like, "How much longer will this increasingly oppressive, unbearable weight press I down on us?" (226) – While this shows frustration, Anne's fear starts to reflect in passages like,

The world's been turned upside down. The most decent people are being sent to concentration camps, prisons and lonely cells, while the lowest of the low rule over young and old, rich and poor. One gets caught for black marketeering, another for hiding Jews or other unfortunate souls. Unless you're a Nazi, you don't know what's going to happen to you from one day to the next. (225)

Every time the door was knocked or if there was any sound coming from below the Annex during the day or night would instinctively terrify her into believing that the German police had come to catch them at last. While Anne's family went into hiding when their names were called up by the German authorities, by the span of two years, the German authorities no longer called but rather activated night raids and caught any Jew they had in sight. As a result, the Jews no longer slept in fear of being caught and of death as bullets, planes, and bombs were being dropped on the unsuspecting people. The Jews feared that the Nazi soldier

could come and arrest them anywhere and at any time of the day. Everyone was on guard which made them irritable and more prone to making mistakes that cost them their lives. It seemed like hiding from the soldiers and police was as dangerous as fighting on the front lines of a battlefield. The Jews were the living dead, trying to survive between the monsters and the piling bodies and insanity stemming from fear and anxiousness (Regmi 47). Regmi states that "...the Germans deported 110,000 Jews out of Holland. Only some 5,000 people survived the war. All in all, 35,000 Jews in Holland survived the war. More than 70% of all Jews in Holland were lost in the Holocaust" (48)- and Anne's entries about the dangers of her hidden family are a reflection of the situation of those Jews who were in hiding in Holland during the German occupation.

The constant fear of death becomes embedded within their psychology, while children have a difficult time adjusting to their reality. Those who survived ended up suffering from the deeply ingrained anxiety, depression, and fear affecting those around them and their descendants. At a time, when trauma therapy was nothing more than a stigma for mental instability, the consequences resulted in creating a generation of broken souls and terrible guides to life.

Reading and writing fiction have played a significant role as a coping mechanism for Anne's perilous environment, providing her with a sacred space to speak and breathe. Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief* experienced the same kind of adrenaline as literature gave voice to the powerless and suppressed people, who are too weak to against the superior ideology of Nazi Germany. It gave her a voice, a way to adjust and cope with her emotional trauma of being abandoned, and left, and her way of defying the Nazi culture in Molching (Lee 9). Trauma for Liesel started before she even stepped on Himmel Street. The nightmares that

kept her up all night gripped her consciousness, unable to live with the guilt of having a better immunity system and surviving:

She would wake up swimming in her bed, screaming, and drowning in the flood of sheets. On the other side of the room, the bed that was meant for her brother floated boat-like in the darkness. Slowly, with the arrival of consciousness, it sank, seemingly into the floor. This vision didn't help matters, and it would usually be quite a while before the screaming stopped. (Zusak 30)

Her nightmares had become the warped version of the sad memories of her brother and mother, indicating one of the many signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She imagines herself digging the cold and lifeless body of her brother out of the numbing snow until her fingers bled. Another sign of PTSD is her mortifying bed-wetting experience when she starts to live with the Hubermanns. However, that symptom quickly starts to improve when Hans Hubermann starts to soothe her with his accordion ((Burakova 42). Hubermann calmed her nightmares with his soothing presence and their night-time reading allowed Liesel to come to terms with her trauma. Unable to cope with the unfair death of her poor brother, gave rise to the compulsive obsession to steal books (Burakova 41-42). All the books she stole have a memory attached to them. From the cold body of her brother to the heat of the bonfire and the clear difference between the wealth of the mayor's house; all the memories are an attempt for Liesel to move forward in her life as an individual. Although the recurring nightmares decreased, it did not mean that her trauma was completely healed. In a way, her terrifying nightmares motivated her to learn to read and write so that she could be distracted from the bone-chilling reaction of her body. It gave her something to do, something to look forward to. Her illustrious career as a book thief stemmed from her initial desire to overcome her nightmares.

However, Liesel's improving condition starts to take a nose dive when she witnesses the violence of both Jews and sympathizing Germans. The different perspectives shown in *The Book Thief* allow readers to look at the other side of the Holocaust, the Germans who sympathised with the Jews and the families who were forced to send their men to war. Through *Death*, the readers witness the traumatic stories behind Liesel and other characters, who are suffering from the Nazi cause, showing that different traumatic experiences can also connect a young German book thief with the Jewish fist-fighter hiding in her basement. Furthermore, *Death's* interest and intrigue is how Liesel leads her life, which also indicates a grim premonition about the events ahead. Despite attempting to process the death of her brother, her mother's insistence to go to Molching makes it hard for Liesel to adjust to her new life. In a few months, her family was separated, reduced to become poverty-stricken conditions, starting her new life after her brother's death, Liesel finds herself alone, in a strange new place, full of unknown people (Lee 11).

Through self-resilience and resolution, Liesel tries to overcome her weakness and attempts to empower herself with words. Even the fear of hiding Max Vandenburg was like walking on a thin line that might get cut off at any given moment, books soothed her fears and calmed her down. The march of thousands of Jews to the death camps, passing through the town into Dachau shows the physical manifestation of the nightmare of fear, dread, and poverty for Liesel (Aparna & Vijayalakshmi 9084). She could not help but stare at the nightmare in front of her:

When they arrived in full, the noise of their feet throbbed on top of the road. Their eyes were enormous in their starving skulls. And the dirt. The dirt was molded to them. Their legs staggered as they were pushed by soldiers' hands —a few wayward steps of forced running before the slow return to a malnourished walk. (Zusak 294)

It was after watching the march of Jews that her nightmares became more turbulent. She has dreams of Max dying like her brother from the bitter winter. She also imagines Max's soulless eyes reflecting her own in a march through the town, which eventually turns out to be true.

Lastly, the bombing in Himmel Street was no doubt the most heart-wrenching tragedy as Liesel Meminger stared at the bodies of Rudy Steiner, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, shocked to silence and unable to process their tragic death. She kept looking at the empty husks of the people who brought light and happiness to her life, and provided support and friendships, only to die under the rubble of a war that never belonged to them. The trauma from this memory alone would have destroyed her sanity for the coming days. Although we do see that Death comes to her at the end of her own life, the readers are scarcely given information about her adult life nor know about the repercussions of the memories of the dead bodies and trauma that might have affected Liesel. It can be only assumed that she pushed herself never to recall those memories again because trauma like these, if left untreated can never let a person move on with their lives and guilt.

## Chapter 5

### *A Thousand Splendid Suns and The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini:

#### Children of Afghanistan

From the very beginning of our lives, we are made to learn about the conquests and the conquered as they were just mere details that have brought the world to where it stands now. When it has always been said that man is the most intelligent creature to walk on earth, how is it possible that those same entities become the very reason for millions of sufferings and deaths? All wars, genocides, ethnic cleansing, massacres, injustice, crimes and deaths can be taken as examples of how we, as human beings tend to do things and take power. If it does not hurt us directly, we tend to forget things very quickly and the present condition of Afghanistan is just another result of our ignorance.

People usually confuse the timeline and reasons behind the Afghan War with the Afghanistan War. Afghan wars were rooted in internal conflicts within Afghan regions along with the invasion by both the British and Soviet empires for control and conquest. The Afghanistan War, on the other hand, was an armed conflict and invasion by the United States waged for 20 years from 2001 to 2021 to overthrow the Taliban after the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York. Each period of the conflicts occurred back-to-back, blurring the lines between the hardship of the Afghans and the facade of momentary peace that came along with it. However, the results remained the same. Children became orphans, innocent civilians caught in the crossfire, thousands killed and displaced, kidnapped, trafficked, and forced to become disposable victims with no repercussions against the perpetrators. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini portray a unique style of writing that focuses on two different individuals during the Afghan Wars.

Children growing up during these particular times did not have guns, bombs, mines, and death as their background sound. Despite the rebellion against the British and Soviet empires, these children had some aspects of a good childhood filled with friends, playgrounds, school, and games. However, during the internal conflict between radical parties, curfews started to be imposed, and practices became stricter and more regulated, leaving no space for people, or even children, to breathe and enjoy their lives as innocents. When the most crucial aspect of the day's goals is to stay alive and avoid soldiers and police, the very perspective of life becomes distorted, leaving children with a traumatized past and difficulty in moving forward with their lives. Suppose the story of Marium and Laila reflects the lives of those who have been left behind in the trenches and gutters of a war-torn Afghanistan. In that case, the story of Amir and Sohrab is the story of those who were forced to leave behind their lives, identities, and homes. When comparing the two narratives, we can find numerous differences between the two stories of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*. Even though the narratives portray the same image—the broken people of Afghanistan who have been ignored and stuffed away like old clothes in the attic; only to be remembered once in a while, like airing closeted stories once in a while. When it comes to transgenerational trauma, this kind of psychological effect is not bound to the familial or genetic relationship of one generation to another. This kind of psychological wound can affect individuals laterally as well as vertically downward in terms of effects. Most of these effects stem from the environment, which, in the case of Khaled Hosseini's texts, forms around the Afghan war and the repercussions experienced by the civilians after the region's tyranny transferred from one powerhouse to another. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*, most of the characters have trauma that has shaped their perspectives, lives, and personalities as growing individuals, which could also be seen through their actions and behaviours towards others.



One of the distinct elements within both texts is the divide between people born in different tribes and regions of Afghanistan. Marium's accent stemmed from living in Hezarat, while Hassan and Sohrab were discriminated against because they were Hazaras. There is also a distinct pride in being Pashtun<sup>10</sup> and anything other than being a part of a major tribe may cause people to lose their lives. For example, the massacre of the Hazaras in 1989 would have been known as ethnic cleansing, if the world had called on the atrocities of killing innocents in the name of religion, similar to how the Rohingyas were persecuted in Myanmar to drive the filth out of the pure country. The divisions of religious practices, ethnic backgrounds, and regions have created factions of beliefs that have ripped the people apart, infecting them with suspicion and bitterness towards each other. In such a precarious situation, there is no doubt that both adults and children have been left with psychological scars that will never fade away with time.

### **5.1 Signs and Effects of Neglect in Children**

The stories of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* could not be more different from each other. Although there is a commonality of the place, language, and historical background, the characters come from very different backgrounds and circumstances. Most probably, there would be a chance that, despite being in the same region, these characters or protagonists would never come across each other or know of their experiences or calamities. One might travel the roads in cars, guardians and guards, while the other would be walking from one place to another. Such is the story of Mariam and Laila, with Amir and Hassan. But all these characters had one tragedy in common, namely, the loss of a parent or parents at a young age and neglect from the ones that remained alive.

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<sup>10</sup> Pashtuns make up about half the population in Afghanistan and have traditionally been the dominant ethnic group (Mghir & Raskin, 90).

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* starts with, "Mariam was five years old the first time she heard the word harami<sup>11</sup>" (Hosseini 6)—a consequence of breaking the heirloom Chinese tea set. It may have been an unknown word for Mariam then, but by the time she realised it's shameful and dishonourable truth, the burden was destined to stay with her till death. Mariam's reality as an illegitimate child kept her isolated, waiting for the days when she could spend with her father, Jalil. However, when it comes to Mariam being bitter and antagonistic as an adult, both Nana and Jalil have been equally responsible for wounding her innocent soul. The affair between Nana and Jalil resulted in the birth of Mariam, a product of their infidelity, an act that is frowned upon severely in many places and within Afghan society. The child born from such a union is prone to face discrimination for not being legitimate and thus lives on the periphery of society, as Nana and Mariam did. That is why, Nana's anger and bitterness against Jalil were reasonable. He was the individual who treated her as a mistress and isolated her and his unborn child in the kola<sup>12</sup> on the outskirts of Herat. He left them to fend for themselves and away from the prowling eyes of the community to hide his lustful mistake. In addition, Nana was also betrayed by her father, who banished her and left her without any support or help while she was pregnant. Mariam, who had no fault whatsoever, became the victim of the verbal abuse through which Nana had misdirected the frustration and anger she felt towards her life and circumstances.

Although Mariam did not know the meaning behind the word, she understood that it was meant to demean and disrespect her, as Nana comments, "You are a clumsy little harami. This is my reward for everything I've endured. An heirloom breaking, clumsy little harami" (Hosseini 7). Brennan argues that the concept of verbal abuse is a weapon of language aimed to cause emotional pain to the intended target (15). Nana believed that Mariam was the reason for her ill fortune. The degrading meaning of harami is a form of verbal abuse that was

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<sup>11</sup> (Islam) A person who has done something haram; a sinner.

<sup>12</sup> A small shack made of mud in which Nana and Mariam used to live in.

meant to hurt Mariam, piercing her psychological protective barrier against such emotional trauma, which resulted in Mariam believing that her existence was wrong from the beginning. Jalil also made Mariam truly feel like an outsider and a dirty secret when he intentionally ignored her when she was waiting outside his house in Herat. This image of an unwanted being that Mariam created for herself affected her muted personality and helplessness in her marriage with Rasheed. Childhood verbal abuse and blaming also result in the individual being prone to other forms of maltreatment (Rose & Abramson 1992), for example, the verbal, sexual, and domestic abuse by Rasheed throughout the years of their marriage. Nana's and Jalil's neglect did affect Mariam negatively, as she grew up as an adult, resulting in her being a silent, submissive, obedient, and bitter individual.

Neglect towards Laila stemmed from two phantoms or ghosts in her family, the two older brothers Ahmad and Noor. Never being able to meet them in her life, she knew them through the words and whispers of friends and family, "Ahmed and Noor had always been like lore to her. Like characters in a fable. Kings in a history book" (Hosseini 86) Laila had a difficult time feeling much sorrow or grief for the people she never met in her life, only to hear their stories, "It was hard to feel, really feel, Mammy's loss. It is hard to summon sorrow, to grieve the deaths of people Laila had never really thought of as alive in the first place" (Hosseini 86). She could only feel sad and mourn for the sufferings that Hakim and Fariba were going through as parents. Many child protection agencies argue that the consequences that result from child neglect are just as important as those for those who are victims of more active forms of abuse and maltreatment (Stoltenborgh, Marian J. & Ijzendoorn 345). Laila had already matured a lot at her young age, and it was mainly because of her mother, who had fallen into severe depression after her two brothers left and died in the war. Fariba had completely shut out Laila and spent her days in bed and darkness, neglecting Laila, who had been forced to take over all the household activities from her

mother. Denying the existence of Laila would have severely affected the child if not for Hakim, who had attempted to provide both paternal and maternal love to her. We could see the sadness engulfing Laila as she stated:

Laila lay there and listened, wishing Mammy would notice that she, Laila, hadn't become shaheed, that she was alive, here, in bed with her, that she had hopes and a future. But Laila knew that her future was no match for her brothers' past. They had overshadowed her in life. They would obliterate her in death. Mammy was now the curator of their lives museum and she, Laila, a mere visitor. (Hosseini 87)

When it comes to neglect, there are many types, and the neglect that Laila had to experience because of a heartbroken Fariba was more related to the emotional and psychological aspects of support. Emotional neglect is the failure to meet emotional needs, nurturing, affection, and acceptance and not allowing or providing the proper care for the psychological wounds inflicted by such neglect (Stoltenborgh, Marian J. & Ijzendoorn 346). Laila's physical and emotional needs were covered by Hakim, who was still unable to provide her with the mother's care that she always longed for. Akenhurst argues the neglect of children can stem from the parents' insensitivity to the child's physical and emotional requirements and putting unrealistic expectations of survival on them to sustain their personal needs, which reflects how Laila starts to do all the work at home. Laila had to shoulder more and more of the chores. If she didn't tend to the house, she was apt to find clothes, shoes, open rice bags, cans of beans, and dirty dishes strewn about everywhere. Laila washed Mammy's dresses and changed her sheets. She coaxed her out of bed for baths and meals. She was the one who ironed Babi's shirts and folded his pants. Increasingly, she was the cook" (Hosseini 87). However, Laila tried her best to provide love, care, and attention to both of her

children, making sure that none would suffer like she had. However, despite the consequences of travelling alone, she tries her best to visit Aziza in the orphanage so that Aziza does not feel neglected or abandoned.

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir's Father, *Baba* plays an integral role in how Amir reacts to Hassan and has an assumption that his father would rather have Hassan as his son than Amir. It is only during the last segment of the text, the readers come to realize that Hassan turned out to be the half-brother of Amir and the adult Amir was able to understand after these long years why *Baba* behaved more affectionately and proudly towards Hassan than himself:

I looked at the photo. Your father was a man torn between two halves, Rahim Khan had said in his letter. I had been the entitled half, the society-approved, legitimate half, the unwitting embodiment of Baba's guilt. I looked at Hassan, showing those two missing front teeth, sunlight slanting on his face. Baba's other half. The unentitled, unprivileged half. The half who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba. the half that, maybe, in the most secret recesses of his heart, Baba had thought of as his true son. (Hosseini 319)

Amir's relationship with his father had been complicated, to say the least, filled with fear, detachment, and hate. Amir's father can be observed to be emotionally distant and detached from Amir since the time he was born. Amir believed that his father had seen him as responsible for losing the love of his life, his wife. "I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess, hadn't I? The least I could have done was to have had the decency to turn out a little more like him. But I hadn't turned out like him. Not at all" (Hosseini 14). The most interesting part was that neither Amir nor his father had the kind of relationship that would allow them to have an

emotional conversation regarding his mother or his insecurity. In a way, Amir felt guilty about being alive instead of his mother. This kind of emotional neglect by the guardian tends to create issues related to child development, and cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. These are considered among the different kinds of maltreatment that are difficult to surface within an individual's personality because of the lack of physical injuries or ailments (Hildyard & Wolf 680). Moreover, the distinct affection given to Hassan by Baba made Amir feel neglected and in need of the same attention and love he had seen Hassan receive.

## **5.2 Living with Survivor's Guilt**

In Khaled Hossieni's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*, the main protagonists have a unique form of conflict, the guilt of existing. For example, In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam was both emotionally and psychologically traumatised by the death of her mother, Nana. Nana's life was already difficult from the beginning, as she suffered from seizures that were deemed to be caused by being possessed by Jinn. Her marriage, her life, her work, and her integrity also fall into shambles when she conceives Mariam with Jalil, a married man with three wives. Mariam always knew that her mother despised Jalil for what he had reduced her to, as she constantly warned Mariam about the real personality Jalil housed. In a way, we can assume that her mother was also slightly jealous of the love and affection that Jalil showered on Mariam when she used to visit them weekly. Her decision to go to Herat and visit Jalil in his house was the last straw of betrayal felt by Nana. Mariam was already heartbroken and wounded by the clear rejection that Jalil had given her, ignoring her calls and letting her stay and sleep on the doorsteps of her house. Instead of having a chance to be consoled or at least scolded by Nana, she was left with what she felt, the consequences of leaving Nana and going to Jalil. To spite the world and the people who left her, Nana left the world and Mariam with an image that haunted her existence, "Mariam caught a glimpse of what was beneath the tree: the straight-backed chair, overturned. The

rope dropped from a high branch. Nana dangling at the end of it" (Hosseini 24). Furthermore, although there have been elders who have tried to console her, Jalil is never seen to personally interact with Mariam over this matter. It was as if he were trying to erase the fact that his mistress or Mariam's mother had killed herself. It left Mariam wallowing in guilt, believing that Nana died because Mariam had betrayed Nana's trust and gone to her father, Jalil. According to Cain, the need for honest communication between the surviving parent and the child who witnessed the death is of utmost importance. It had been observed that the parents who avoided talking about or discussing the situation around the suicide with the children usually resulted in "...the distortion of an already compromised mourning process and generational of development interferences" (125-126).

Similarly, Laila also suffers from survivor's guilt for the first few months after her family's death due to a rogue missile falling on their house on the day of their move. However, Laila's emotional grievance had to be short-lived because she was pregnant with Tariq's child and standing at the crossroads of decisions related to the unborn child and her life. Laila's emotional wounds were healed or recovered at a faster rate because she had a strong personality and her father's love to remember. Furthermore, the precarious state of her body and life forced her to focus on how to survive without any family in the war-torn patriarchal country of Afghanistan. As a result, there is a high chance that Laila's survivor's guilt was short-lived, instead of wallowing in misery as most would have experienced in such circumstances. In terms of different reactions and experiences of children, Belsky and de Haan argue that "Not to be forgotten is that children vary in the extent to which they prove resilient to adversity, whether it takes the Parenting and children's brain development form of poverty, community violence, parental abuse and neglect, or harsh discipline (413-414). So, while Fariba (or Mammy) somewhat made Laila feel like she was not important, Hakim did his best to love, care and teach Laila to become a strong individual.

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir and Hassan had a more distinct trauma indirectly inflicted by their parents. Amir was a young child with no mother, and he used to crave his father's affection, which he observed that Hassan used to get from time to time. Growing up in Afghanistan, Baba was brought up with a distinct set of rules and principles that make a man. Amir remembers snippets of what Baba thought about principles and morals: "When you kill a man, you steal a life," Baba said. "You steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. Do you see?" (Hosseini, 14) Amir used to feel insecure because he did not have the qualities that Baba wanted in his son. Amir's suspicions were confirmed when he overheard Baba talking to Rahim Khan as he said, "... he's always buried in those books or shuffling around the house like he's lost in some dream" (16) - Baba also attempted to compare Amir to how he was as a child; as he argued that, "I wasn't like that at all, and neither were any of the kids I grew up with" (17). It was almost as if Baba was dissatisfied with how Amir grew up, as he said, "Something is missing in that boy" (17). Although Baba could be assumed to have been worried about Amir's future when he ponders to Rahim Khan, "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (18) - the damage had already been done because it confirmed what Amir has suspected all the time; he was a disappointment to his father. This has heavily affected how Amir behaved with Hassan from then on, with little virtue and full of vice. Even as an adult, Amir felt a sense of longing for Hassan.

Furthermore, he also felt apologetic about being alive as his mother died in childbirth, "The least I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him. But I hadn't turned out like him. Not at all" (Hosseini 14). – The gravity of the situation can be understood through this particular line because Amir did not feel anger or hatred towards his father for it. Rather, he accepted the fact that he was the reason for her death and



that would never change nor he would be able to be anything but the reason for her death and also be a disappointment in his father's eyes. Amir's father failed to provide the reassurance Amir needed as a child who believed that he murdered his mother. With no conversation about his mother, Amir came to assume that his father hated him for taking his beloved wife or princess away and it had affected his psyche deeply. Kai-fu argues Amir's reason for self-detest was mainly because, "...his father was indifferent to Amir and did not make him feel fatherly love or care, which led Amir sometimes to blame himself for causing his mother's death. In his opinion, his father's indifference to him is because of his loss of wife, and he was the killer for killing his father's princess" (191).

In the entire novel, we barely have access to Hassan's thoughts and experiences. However, there is no doubt that he was seen as an unwanted child who was left by his mother. Children like Assef, Kamal, and Wali used to call out Hassan with slang words like "motherless Hazara ", "slant-eyed donkey", "flat nose", and many more. Hassan's mother, Sanaubar, the fair and blue-eyed woman from Bamiyan, ran away from Ali and joined a troupe of dancers and singers. Her immoral and infamous story was all over the Wazir Akbar Khan district, which left Hassan to deal with being called motherless, unwanted, and demeaned as a slow-witted Hazara child, showing the cruelty that he experienced. Although, as readers, we get to see the secret behind Hassan's birth, it also gives clarity and a reason as to why Sanaubar left. In a way, Ali was extremely loyal to Baba, and to have his child and still see Ali following Amir's father around and also knowing the discrimination that Hassan will experience as a child out of wedlock may have triggered or instigated Sanaubar to leave. However, her decision affected Hassan in a deeply psychological manner, as there may have been instances when he felt that his mother hated him and did not want to give birth to him. We could feel the detachment when we saw how the midwife narrated the birth of Hassan by saying:

Sanaubar had taken one glance at the baby in Ali's arms, seen the cleft lip, and barked a bitter laughter. "There," she had said. "Now you have your idiot child to do all your smiling for you!" She had refused to even hold Hassan, and just five days later, she was gone. (Hosseini 8)

This particular incident inflects the bitterness that might have made Hassan believe that he was an unwelcome addition to the family, and it may have severely affected how he viewed himself as a person. Although the readers are not told directly, there is an underlying possibility that Amir's Father may have had physical relations with Sanaubar or assaulted her and did not want to make the unborn child his legitimate son as it would affect his reputation and status in the community.

### **5.3 Overcoming Transgenerational Trauma**

Redemption plays a significant role in how the protagonists of both *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*, become the redeeming factor for the readers who harboured frustration towards them. Mariam, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, has been neglected in terms of identity, legitimacy, and acceptance by both her family and society. Her parents, Jalil and Nana wrecked Mariam's sense of identity and acceptance, confidence, and affection to the point that Mariam believed that she was an unwanted individual, hiding behind the blue burqa, playing the role of an obedient and submissive wife in the eyes of the world. Her reaction to Laila's sudden invasion of her hard-built life was a wake-up call, in which she reacted cruelly towards Laila, who was a danger to her self-made legitimacy as Rasheed's wife. Mariam also believed that she had suffered through seven miscarriages because she was not a legitimate child herself. Furthermore, she also came to believe that God was punishing her for pushing Nana to kill herself. In a way, Mariam felt that she was destined to become as lonely as her Nana, who cursed her when young Mariam went off to Herat to look for her father. Nana cursed Mariam with a self-inflicted death as if stating, "I'm

all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I'm gone, you'll have nothing. You'll have nothing. You are nothing! (Hosseini 27).

There is no doubt about the fact that Mariam's mother was suffering from depression that resulted from the betrayals she had faced in life as a woman as well as an individual. Moreover, when it came to abuse, Nana's abuse was more of a psychological attack of guilt than physical violence or neglect. She used to make sure that Mariam felt guilty when she felt happy spending time with Jalil. She made sure that Mariam realised that she was the reason why Nana was unhappy, "Of all the daughters I could have had, why did God give me an ungrateful one like you? Everything I endured for you! How dare you! How dare you abandon me like this, you treacherous little harami?" (Hosseini 18)—in this way, Nana is evoking guilt within Mariam so that she will not be so attached to the parent who abandoned her in the eyes of society. No matter how much Mariam tried to love and soothe Nana, she would always believe that Mariam was an ungrateful child who did not value her sacrificing love. In a way, Mariam could perceive that her mother had been damaged by the betrayal of the world and tried her best to support and heal the wounds inflicted upon Nana. Lotterman claims that children will always feel the guilt of just existing due to the sadness experienced by their parents. He indicates that the mother sometimes cannot be satisfied, no matter how much love, affection, and attention are provided by her offspring. Furthermore, he argues:

In her child's eyes she thus remains damaged, and this damage is experienced as if it were caused by the child's anaclitic draining of her finite life energy. The child will come to despair of ever being able to repay her for the gift of life and sustenance. She may be perceived as angrily blaming the child for her suffering. (Lotterman 563)

In addition to Lotterman, Champagne also emphasises that the maternal care provided in the early life of an infant evokes changes in the neural development system that regulates response as well as response to "novelty and social behaviour" (386). In a way, when children are treated in a particular way from a very young age, its effect can be seen in their behaviour as grown adults. In addition to such points, Champagne also states that the transmission of such behavioural effects can also influence the reproductive behaviour of the offspring, and these results can also transfer from mothers to daughters and granddaughters (386). Looking from such an angle, the transgenerational trauma that was inflicted on Mariam may have resulted in the miscarriages of her seven unborn children. Nana's way of rearing Mariam during her childhood may have been considered tough love, but all the memories might have been overshadowed by how Nana killed herself in front of their house. In a way, Nana's suicide might have been a desperate revenge against all the people who had left her behind. In a way, she was psychologically afraid that she would turn out the same as her mother, bitter and suicidal, leaving her child under the cruelty of Rasheed.

In the text, Mariam doubted herself, "Wasn't it true that she might as well have slipped that noose around her mother's neck herself? Treacherous daughters did not deserve to be mothers, and this was just punishment..." (Hosseini 57). Furthermore, Mariam had seen how Nana had suffered from seizures and how it was seen as a jinn possessing her body, thus a shameful reality to witness. That memory had transformed itself into her nightmare, "She had fitful dreams, of Nana's Jinn sneaking into her room at night, burrowing its claws into her womb, and stealing her baby. In these dreams, Nana cackled with delight and vindication" (Hosseini 57). Furthermore, Mariam may have also been convinced that if her child survived, and if it was a female, Rasheed would have neglected her or would have given her away to orphanages, claiming that he did not have enough to feed so many mouths. Rasheed's decisions on how to deal with Laila's daughter, Aziza, might have further cemented the cruel

assumption Mariam already had about him. It was only when Mariam saw that Rasheed threatened to revoke Aziza's legitimacy that she became aware of the danger Aziza would face as an illegitimate child. Experiencing it herself, Mariam felt the desperate need to protect Aziza and Laila's family against Rasheed's domestic violence. As a result, when it came time to choose between running and being executed for killing Rasheed, Mariam gladly accepted execution, believing that she had done something she chose to do with her life.

*The Kite Runner* is eventually a story about redemption, a story where guilt overshadows how Amir perceives life. The memories that haunted him from childhood, did not fade away even when he left Afghanistan. The entire text seems to focus on the character development of Amir as he struggles with his inferiority complex and guilt, looking for ways to redeem himself as he grows up, only to find out that the person he wanted acceptance from and the reason that deprived him of it were both dead. While learning to forgive himself, he also learns to accept the fact that he is dealing with the ghosts of his past and needs to look forward to the future, at least for Sohrab. Emotions stemming from guilt and mistrust, doubt and inferiority, self-deprecating confusion, and secrets influenced him to make certain decisions and choices that can be considered normal for someone with a fragile personality. Something that both worried and disappointed his Baba. Looking past the mistakes made by Amir, his sense of mistrust and doubt stems from his father, a man whose manganous reputation and fame overshadowed Amir. Afghanistan had been a patriarchal community, where the mother commonly raised the children and the father protected and provided. Amir's father did not know how to deal with a newborn baby, the infant that had taken his beloved princess from him. Eventually, he hired a nurse for both Hassan and Amir to provide the necessities for the infant's survival. However, the necessities did not include affection for the child or at least the physical affection needed to reassure the child. Amir mostly suffered from emotional neglect and the burden of expectations that fell on him as his father's son.

According to the theory of parental acceptance and rejection, it has been observed that if the child does not feel accepted or rejected by their parents or guardians, they become prone to exhibiting or externalising behavioural problems (Rothenburg & Rohner).

Parental emotional neglect indicates the lack or failure of emotional and psychological support required by a child. Sometimes such emotional negligence and lack of support tend to become traumatic for the children, who may then turn to follow certain deviant behaviours or actions that would catch the parent's attention (Yang, Xiong, & Huang 5). When Amir was eleven years old, he won the "Battle of Poems" or *Sherjangi* against his whole class. When he proudly talked about his achievements to his father that very night, his father, '...just nodded, muttered, "Good"' (Hosseini 26). In a way, winning a poetry competition did not seem as important to Baba as winning a football game or a kite competition. Amir used to escape the misery experienced by his father's detachment by immersing himself in the books of his deceased mother. Amir's love for novels, poems, and epics came from his mother's collection, the only thing that connected him to his mother.

However, to enjoy words more than physical altercations and playing rough was something his father would have never approved of, "Real men didn't read poetry- and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young" (Hosseini 26). Furthermore, Amir's father and Ali were also brought up in the same house and had been companions since their childhood. Hassan was also seen taking up the role of a companion to Amir as they were nursed by the same woman. In all of the childhood stories that Baba used to reminisce about, he never referred to Ali as his friend. As a result, Amir also never thought of Hassan as his friend or his close companion:

Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to build a fully functional homemade camera out of a cardboard box. Never mind that we spent

entire winters flying kites, running kites. (Hosseini 32)

Amir had already learned the divide between him and Hassan as he observed between Ali and his father. He already accepted the fact that Hassan was different or of lower status than him:

Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing. (Hosseini 32)

Amir was already suffering from PTSD after being woken up by the noise of guns and bombs in the middle of the night. He was the generation that was born before the guns, blood, and chaos, but Amir was not lucky enough to avoid it. He had seen violence that shook him to the very core, and his decision to walk away tortured him even more. We can say that Amir's behaviour, actions, and decisions are based on the intergenerational trauma that has been passed down from the elders around him. What Amir witnessed was violence that tended to demoralise and demean the victims in terms of their mental and physical capacity to overcome their perpetrator. Assef raped Hassan to take revenge for the verbal threat that Hassan made to protect Amir from the Assef group. Assef hated and demeaned Hassan, who is a Hazara and used physical violence to dominate him to prove that Pashtuns are the pure Afghans and rightful rulers of Afghanistan.

During the entirety of the Afghan Wars and conflicts between the Soviets, the Mujahedeen, the local warlords, the Taliban, and other factions have been guilty of sexual violence that was seen as a common scenario in Afghanistan and was executed upon the members and women of the Hazara community. According to Banita in her paper "Ask him where his shame is: War and sexual violence in *The Kite Runner*", "Sexual violence during

armed conflict serves purposes linked to the conduct of the hostilities themselves, such as torture or the humiliation of the opponent" (69). In such a scenario, Amir decided to flee from the scene, refusing to help the person who had been his partner since they were babies.

While we can assume that Amir left because he knew that he would not be able to overpower Assef and his two friends, there is also the concept of male rape, which may have been non-existent during that time. Rather there is a cultural practice of "boy play" or "*bacha bazi*" that is considered a luxurious experience for the wealthy people of Afghanistan<sup>13</sup>. These pedophilic cultural practices were usually done to boys coming from very poor families or communities and had no power to retaliate. From both sides of the scenario, Amir would have been psychologically traumatised; in one aspect, if he were to help Hassan in his humiliating situation, there would be a probable chance that Assef would also rape Amir, knowing that he would never be able to reveal it to his father. Subconsciously, he knew that Baba would be more ashamed of him and disgusted by the atrocity that happened to him. In another scenario, that Amir eventually took, he would not utter anything regarding the situation and forever keep his mouth shut about the incident. Amir was well aware of his physical inferiority and thus chose to do something that haunted and ate away at his consciousness. He knew that he would never be able to face anyone in the community, and his father would be more dejected than he ever was. He feared that whatever manliness he had acquired throughout his young years would be diminished if it were ever to come out that he had been raped or that he walked away from someone who was being raped.

*The Kite Runner* is a unique novel that focuses on the depiction of sexual violence among boys. Banita argues that "The bulk of statistical and academic research on sexual violence focuses, of course, on violence against women, because gender has often been

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<sup>13</sup> Also known as Chai Boys or Tea Boys, this custom is based on the sexual relationship between powerful men of high status in Afghanistan and adolescent boys. One of 1990s outrage practices dissolved by the Taliban was this sexual pedophilic practice (Mondlock, *Foreign Policy*)



conflated with women and girls. Consequently, sexual violence experienced by men and boys has been under-analyzed" (73). Moreover, When Amir discovered that Hassan was his half-brother, he was able to understand all the incidents that led him to be jealous of Hassan. The love and affection that Hassan received from Baba, how Baba wept when Ali and Hassan decided to leave them, "... Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us" (Hosseini 214).

That is why, it was a climactic experience of healing, punishment, and peace for Amir when he was almost plummeted to death by Assef after coming back to Afghanistan for Sohrab. It was the release of his guilty conscience, his insecurity, and his inferiority that led him to become someone who could not emotionally connect to anyone, even his wife. It was the release of the silent burden of a façade he had to carry for so many years; a good and moral man. For Amir, Sohrab became the saving grace, the sign of repentance and redemption for the mistakes, lies and secrets he had held for so long. While Amir had already internally degraded himself for his actions, some of them had been rooted in how he perceived his father and desired his approval. Saving Sohrab from the sexual assaults, which reflected the mistake of his past became a symbolic and spiritual journey for Amir to remove himself from his father's shadow.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The textual representation of trauma significantly centres around the author's perspective on it, and this often leads to complications related to the interpretation of trauma in fiction.

There have always been complications and complexities in how people's or children's trauma is represented by writers, mostly because of how the writers use narrative techniques related to the experiences. There can only be so much emotion and detail included in a story when the ideas and facts are taken from historical facts and descriptions. The stories of Anne Frank, Liesel Meminger, Mariam, Laila, Ali, and Hassan are entirely based on how they attempted to navigate their young lives amid calamity and conflict. As readers, we gradually see the change in their behaviour, personalities, and perspectives as they come to witness the actions and decisions of people around them.

Trauma survivors often regret that they lost their innocence or that a part of their souls has been destroyed because of their trauma. They rely on the fact that their trauma has inconceivably left them broken and continue to chip away at whatever they believe to be good and pure (Kalsched 475). This is how it can be understood: the psychological wounds fester if not treated properly, tainting very new encounters, meetings, and events with their shadows. The history and development of civilizations consist of untold, undiscovered, or undocumented trauma and violence. These traumas are imposed by those with power and authority, who use their violence to infiltrate and break up communities, break relationships apart, and disintegrate the values of rituals and celebrations in the affected areas (Korn, Leslie & Susan Griffin 2002). As an example, the entire history of colonialism in non-European countries and regions is also a part of the development of the trauma process, as it was with the Holocaust and the Afghan Wars. The psychological trauma that is generated by families

and communities connected with a bloody and violent history never ends. It is always carried out in some way or another, through one person or a group, through one family or community, and it hurts the children most, who are unable to differentiate between right and wrong. Thus, these children are abused, violated, neglected, or abandoned due to the terror, brutality, and destruction experienced by the people around them. As a result, these children, unaware of the gravity of their situations and realities, grow up distorted by the twisted conditions they see their peers, elders, and community suffer in. As a result, when they experience incidents that they are unable to process, they fall back on the distorted rules and regulations out of fear of punishment. It is very important to look at how the people and community around the children operate to understand the realities and perspectives of the children that become twisted through shock and distress.

When we look at all the texts discussed within the texts in this research paper, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Book Thief*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Kite Runner* all have writers who have experienced trauma at certain points in their lives. Although Anne Frank died in the Jewish concentration camps because of no treatment, Markus Zusak saw and experienced the danger of being in Nazi Germany and was able to portray the conflicts and dangers that Jew-sympathetic Germans who had endangered themselves in the name of humanity. Similarly, Khaled Hosseini was born and brought up in Kabul, Afghanistan, and his family eventually had to seek asylum due to the seizure of power and conflict within the country. He has seen the rise and fall of Kabul, and we could see some of his life reflected in the stories as well. He belongs to the generation that witnessed the progress and destruction of Afghanistan; he is a part of the generation that was never able to return to its homeland. All the characters that have been discussed in the previous chapters have no doubt experienced traumatic events that will never fade from their memory. It has changed their perspectives, their views of life, and the direction in which they want to take their goals and

ambitions. Although Anne Frank, we see her life was cut short, Liesel Meminger, Mariam, Laila, Ali, and Hassan, who had the chance to grow up as adults, made decisions, took actions, and carved their personalities through the trauma they experienced as children. Laila and Hassan were seen to embrace a more positive aspect of life, while Mariam and Ali from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* suffered from self-judgement for the way they were born and the decisions that they have taken in their lives. There can be no doubt about how their childhood traumas and betrayals silently and intricately carved their presence into every action the protagonists took and the way they decided to live their lives. All of these characters have been seen to exhibit symptoms of depression, self-deprivation, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and isolation and have dealt with pessimistic mechanisms to survive.

In *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, we cannot assume much about how Anne Frank would have led her life or how Liesel Meminger was able to do so in Australia. However, the symptoms that were already being generated or had been triggered during their lives during the time of the Holocaust would leave no reason for doubt that they would have suffered severe psychological and physiological issues as after-effects of the situations they encountered, the horrific incidents they experienced, and the terror they lived with through that time. Both Anne Frank and Liesel Meminger experienced difficulties in dealing with the changes they were experiencing because of the Holocaust and World War II. The decisions of their parents, their internal conflicts of self-preservation, and the trauma and nightmares they experienced because of the death and eminent danger around them can be seen as the triggers of transitional trauma being ingrained in their subconscious, despite one being a Jew and the other being a German. Both of the characters experienced the casualties of war and discrimination, to which they inherently never belonged. They were dragged through the mud of danger and terror because of the greed of adults.

Similarly, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini portrayed two stories of four young children and how the conflicts of the Afghan War and the imposition of radical forces affected their lives fundamentally. Mariam and Laila of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Ali and Hassan of *The Kite Runner* portray very complex situations and stories of a changing Afghanistan. These children were part of the generation that did not wake up to the sounds of bombs, guns, and violence. They were a part of the generation that started to see Afghanistan deteriorating and were completely helpless to its radical transformation. Through the protagonists, Khaled Hosseini reflects on gender expectations, discrimination, and reality amid the brimming political instability of the Afghan War. With the help of trauma theory, researchers can delve into the roles "...played by memory, both in shielding victims and in aiding healing, it shows how literary works can reflect on the relationship between the memorialization of past events and the formation of current national identities" (Bayer 222). It also helps to understand transgenerational trauma that is passed down to the younger generation by their elders or the people of their community. It does not necessarily mean that the burden of expectations and discrimination is passed down from blood relations, but rather the regulations that have been cemented within the very fabric of their community. That is why it is important to look at literary works that focus on the self rather than being portrayed as a media spectacle for people who would never go through such dire situations. I believe there is more to trauma than what is seen as an isolated incident within the community, the region, or the person's life. The reactions to the violence they experience, the loss of confidence and esteem in themselves, the customs of the community, and the way children's parents and peers behave indefinitely affect how the trauma victim faces, processes, and deals with their trauma.

Both transgenerational trauma and intergenerational trauma have been observed separately because of the relationships and circumstances in which trauma is passed down to

a younger generation. However, looking objectively, transgenerational trauma that is experienced through the community and groups of specific gender roles, religion, race, and background plays an influential role in how intergenerational trauma is triggered and ingrained so innately that it can be passed down through genetic traits and habits. In a way, I believe that intergenerational trauma in children is triggered by the transgenerational trauma that people, peers, and elders indirectly impose on them without understanding the consequences. Through literary texts like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, the stories and the protagonist create a space that would allow us to look at transgenerational trauma as an interconnected phenomenon, instigated by the people and customs we are born into. The specific actions, beliefs, or decisions seem so normal or absolute that the former generation might not be able to assess the damage their absolute reality could cause to children or the younger generation.

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