

# RECONCEPTUALIZING RACISM IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER* AND J. M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

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## ABSTRACT

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**Received:** 1 July 2024  
**Revised:** 9 October 2024  
**Accepted:** 30 October 2024  
**Published:** 25 December 2024

**Citation:**  
Ghimire, S. P. (2024).  
Reconceptualizing racism in  
Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite  
Runner* and J. M. Coetzee's  
*Disgrace*. *Humanities, Arts and  
Social Sciences Studies*, 24(3),  
815–824.

This study reports how Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* depict racism in different contexts and how racially victimized people understand and interpret racism based on their diverse racial perceptions and experiences. In this study, Sally Haslanger's notion of racism as a social construction and Ali Rattansi's idea of racism as a social prejudice are utilized as theoretical perspectives to analyze the both novels. The findings reveal that racially victimized people in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* conceptualize racism as the social exclusion of minority ethnic groups by depriving them of receiving the essential requirements of their lives, and the findings further identify that racism is interconnected with religion and creates an overarching impact in human relations by creating social division. Moreover, the study uncovers the fact that racially victimized people in Coetzee's *Disgrace* interpret racism as the exploitation of mainly non-whites and a form of revenge for the white treatment of non-whites in the colonial period. In addition, the study reveals that the realization of racism is based on individual perception and power dynamics in local contexts instead of universally homogenizing perceptions and experiences of victimized people. This study has great significance as it reconceptualizes racism from victimized perspectives and provides a clear direction for further exploration of racism in novels and daily social activities.

**Keywords:** Discrimination; homogenized; marginalization; post-apartheid; racism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) depicts social injustices such as discrimination based on religion, gender, class, and nationality in the context of Afghanistan, incorporating the communist revolution of 1978 and then the succeeding Soviet intervention of 1979 (O'Brien, 2018). Further, studies (Handayani, 2016; Hosseini & Zohdi, 2016; Poudel, 2023) have reported that *The Kite Runner* shows racism by depicting Pashtuns' superiority in terms of social, religious, and cultural perspectives over Hazaras. Thus, Pashtun's perceived superiority over Hazaras creates social discrimination, particularly against Hazaras, by refusing to accept human differences and othering them based on religion, ethnicity, and nationality in the context of Afghanistan. On the other hand, J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* questions the South African post-apartheid democratic system by uncovering tremendous social injustices, racial discrimination, and social contradictions (Head, 2009). The post-apartheid period in South Africa indicated the ending of the apartheid system and the period of overcoming racial discrimination and suppression; however, in reality, the social discrimination, mainly

between whites and non-whites, was not terminated as it was expected (Ray, 2023). Therefore, studies (Beyad & Keramatfar, 2018; Mehigan, 2014; Poudel, 2023) have reported that Coetzee's *Disgrace* shows the social turmoil, insecurity, injustices and racism after the political transformation and democratic election in South Africa. Thus, both novels have shown racial injustices and disparities among people rooted in their historical, social, political, and cultural backgrounds by exposing the various human categories and discriminatory systems in their narratives. However, previous studies have mostly ignored how Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* depicted racism in different contexts and how racially victimized people understand and conceptualize racism differently in their novels. Exploring racism in the different contexts as depicted in the both novels and discovering racially victimized people's perception and understanding of racism have significance as these support reconceptualizing racism in different contexts as well as on personal levels. Therefore, this study explores both novels to answer the research question of how racism is depicted in different contexts and how racially victimized people understand and interpret racism. The rationale behind selecting Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* for this study is that these novels reveal racial discrimination in diverse contexts, respectively, in Afghanistan and South Africa. Although both novels were published in almost similar periods, they depict varied experiences of racially victimized people; thereby, exploring these novels not only supports understanding of racism in diversified contexts but also provides ample space to investigate racially victimized people's perspectives on racism.

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND CONCEPTUALIZING RACISM

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* portrays Afghan social discrimination and injustices resulting from ethnic conflicts, particularly between Hazaras and Pashtuns, patriarchal social norms, foreign intervention, and the Taliban's brutal treatment to women and Hazaras. For instance, Shah et al. (2021) have depicted the brutal Afghan social condition due to power relationships among ethnic groups, mainly Pashtun and Hazara, which created social exclusion of the minority group of Hazaras. Furthermore, Ghimire (2023) and Sarma (2015) claim that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* reveals the long-term perpetuated patriarchal social norms that make Afghan social discrimination worse by exploiting and victimizing women. Likewise, Sri Prasanna and David (2020) reported that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* reflects social discrimination and inequality in Afghanistan by revealing Soviet intervention, ethnic conflicts, and brutal treatment of the Taliban, particularly against Hazaras and women. However, Aubry (2009) argues that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* narrates the story from the perspective of America by showing the Taliban as brutal and inhuman, which indicates that America's intervention against Afghanistan was appropriate. Nevertheless, the above studies focus on social discrimination and injustices they ignore exploring how racially victimized people understand and interpret racism.

Exploring Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Rohmatullah and Permatasari (2021) have identified ethnocentrism as the leading cause of human disparity in Afghanistan. Matta (2019) argues that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* depicts the Afghan social reality, incorporating major incidents from 1970 to 2000, such as missing family members, poverty, and traumatic events due to the Afghan conflict. Likewise, Dayekh (2020) has claimed that the result of the Afghan conflict was pervasive and impacted all who were not directly involved in the fights and made them voiceless in their society. In addition, Ghafoor and Farooq (2020) have argued that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* reflects the voices of Afghanistan's voiceless people by exposing social injustices and disparities.

Shah et al. (2022) report that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* depicted the victimization and dehumanization of Hazaras due to racial discrimination based on their differences with Pashtuns in terms of the historical, religious, and economic background in Afghanistan. Focusing on racism and its impact in *The Kite Runner*, Akter et al. (2023) show despotic Afghan social reality due to racial discrimination between Pashtuns and Hazaras, where Pashtuns had a sense of superiority to Hazaras, which made Hazaras helpless in their society, suffered from depression, fear, and anxiety, and realized their low self-esteem. In addition, Suryani and Praptawati (2019) have shown racial discrimination between Pashtuns and Hazaras based on Pashtuns' belief that they had a distinct status to Hazaras, and they victimized Hazaras by limiting their opportunities and torturing and mass killing them in Afghanistan. Likewise, Gajamer (2023) claim that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* uncovered the racial discrimination against Hazaras by depicting Pashtuns' superiority based on their religion, ethnicity, and language to Hazaras and showing victimization of the Hazara minority and their miserable condition because of racial discrimination against them by the Pashtun majority. However, this study focuses on racially victimized people's understanding of racism as depicted in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

Conversely, J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* depicts the social discrimination and victimization of people in South Africa by various kinds of injustices and inequalities, such as gender inequality, rape, and domestic

violence. For example, the novel shows the tremendous social injustices and marginalization of people, mainly women, who were victimized by gender, class, sexual harassment, and rape (Ghimire, 2022). However, exploring Lucy Lurie's rape, studies (Melkner Moser, 2012; Sharma, 2016) reflect that the white woman, Lucy, remains silent after being raped, which indicates that she understands how the power dynamic changed from white to black and that her rape is a revenge of black over white. However, Mardorossian (2011) questions the traditional understanding of rape, which is related to gender, and claims that rape is a discursive subject as it is related to politics, power, class, and race. These previous studies have focused on social discrimination and victimization of marginalized people, particularly women.

Shobha Tiwari Ray (2023) argues that Coetzee's *Disgrace* depicted racism in post-apartheid South African society by showing white superiority over non-whites, which promoted conflicts between whites and non-whites. However, Abootalebi (2020) claims that white supremacy ended in the post-apartheid period in South Africa by showing the physical and mental suffering of white characters David Lurie and his daughter Lucy Lurie and the empowerment of black people. Further, Kalkman (2015) argues that blacks developed a consciousness of injustices against them, which led to their rejection of social disparities in South Africa. Conversely, Beyad and Keramatfar (2018) reveal that Coetzee's *Disgrace* depicted racial discrimination, dehumanization, and a bleak picture of South Africa in a post-apartheid context instead of sharing national aspirations of constructing a non-racial democratic system in South Africa. Further, the study of Attridge (2002) claims that focusing on Cape Town and the Eastern Cape of South Africa in the post-apartheid context, Coetzee's *Disgrace* portrays the brutal picture of blacks as thieves and rapists and the failure of police to protect people's lives.

Furthermore, a study by Sarkar (2012) reports that Coetzee's *Disgrace* depicts women, such as whites and non-whites, as having similar social status in South African post-apartheid society by exposing the exploitation and injustices against white and non-white women. In addition, studies (Stolarek, 2015; Subedi, 2021) show that although Coetzee's *Disgrace* was written in the post-colonial context of South Africa, it uncovers racial segregation, disparity, and social marginalization by categorizing the two groups of characters, such as white and non-white, and depicting non-whites from the perspective of whites as uncivilized, rapists, and looters. Further, exploring the language used in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Mózes (2019) claims that colonial racialized language, which constructed binaries such as civilization vs. barbarism, nature vs. culture, and reproduced social hierarchy between white and non-white, was visible in the language of white characters in the post-apartheid context of South Africa. Conversely, Poyner (2000) argues that Coetzee's *Disgrace* shows how whites and non-whites can live harmoniously in post-apartheid South African society by showing David Lurie's sense of guilt about what he did to Melanie Isaacs, Lucy Lurie's decision not to report her rape to police and give birth to a child fathered by one of the rapists, and her marriage with Petrus. Nevertheless, the above studies have reported racism and social injustice in South Africa, as depicted in Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

On the other hand, scholars and critics have conceptualized racism from various perspectives, for example, Haslanger (2019) defines racism as a social construction. Further, Haslanger (2014) argues that racism is a social category that establishes a hierarchical social order, where privileged social groups oppress and subordinate underprivileged groups in society. Such social categories are constructed and naturalized to control others by creating division and hierarchy among the people. Moreover, Haslanger has clarified that "human difference has resulted in human division . . . when we speak of race, we are participating in a tradition of attempts to make sense of the apparent physical-geographical-cultural differences that divide us" (Haslanger, 2009, p. 7). In the same way, human divisions are created based on profit by separating humans in society, creating binary opposition that reinforces the exercise of power and control over others, such as males have power over females, the rich have power over the poor, and whites have power over blacks (Lorde, 2021). In the same way, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* exhibit racially victimized people, creating various social layers based on religion, the colour of skin, and class; therefore, Haslanger's notion of racism provides a theoretical perspective to explore how racially victimized people understand racism in both novels.

Exploring racism, Rattansi (2020) argues that racism is connected with issues such as ethnicity, religion, nation, gender, class, and the latest developmental concepts. Rattansi (2020) further claims that racism is a prejudice based on biology, culture, the colour of skin, facial features, and religion, and such prejudice has been exercised with the support of power, which has an overarching impact on human relations. As a result, racially victimized people have been marginalized and ignored in their society and have become invisible and voiceless. On the other hand, Jeffers (2013) claims that racism has been a cultural construction. Spencer (2019) argues that racism is a biological construction; thus, people have been racially discriminated against based on their biological differences. Likewise, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* show the victimization of people due to racism and their unique experiences of their racial victimization; thus, Rattansi's notion of racism assists to explore how racially victimized people understand and experience racism in the different contexts as depicted in the novels.

In addition, Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectional concept provides a comprehensive perspective to understand racism by arguing that racism has intersected with gender, age, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 2013). Further, Crenshaw's intersectionality clearly shows the reasons for social discrimination and subordination of marginalized people (Crenshaw, 2021). Cho et al. (2013) claim that focusing on a single aspect of racism, class, ethnicity, and gender has become inadequate for understanding the social discrimination and injustices against marginalized people. Therefore, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides an additional theoretical lens to explore how racially victimized people experience racism in different social contexts in both novels.

Previous studies have identified that Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* have shown racism, social discrimination, injustices, gender inequality, sexual harassment, and disparity based on religion, class, and ethnicity. Despite the textual evidence of how racially victimized people have various perceptions and understandings of racism in both novels, previous studies have almost failed to explore this. Thus, this study examines how racially victimized people understand and conceptualize racism differently in their novels by adopting mainly Haslanger (2019) and Rattansi's (2020) ideas of racism, particularly racism as a social construction and social prejudice, as theoretical perspectives. It is hoped that the findings of this study add significant value to understanding racism in society and provide insightful information regarding how racially victimized people differently interpret and conceptualize racism.

### 3. METHODS

This article is based on an interpretative research design. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* were purposefully selected as primary texts for this study and secondary information for this study from various resources, such as books, book chapters, theses, and journal articles were also researched. Moreover, this study explored how racially victimized people understand and conceptualize racism in diversified contexts, as depicted in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Coetzee's *Disgrace*, to which previous studies have paid little attention. In doing so, all the primary data was extracted related to the research questions of this study from both novels. Then, they were analyzed by utilizing the concepts of racism discussed by Sally Haslanger (2019) and Ali Rattansi (2020) as theoretical perspectives. Haslanger and Rattansi's idea of racism were chosen, as they assisted me in exploring the diverse perceptions and experiences of racially victimized people in both novels.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* to find out how racially victimized people understand and interpret racism, adopting the idea of racism as discussed above. Primarily, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is analyzed with two sub-themes, namely racism as exclusion, and racism based on religion, based on how racially victimized people conceptualized racism; then, Coetzee's *Disgrace* is explored under the two sub-themes, namely racism as exploitation and racism as revenge.

#### 4.1 Racism in *The Kite Runner*

**Racism as Exclusion:** The recurrent theme in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* shows that racism is the exclusion of minority ethnic groups, particularly Hazaras, from their own country of Afghanistan. For instance, Amir belongs to the Pashtun ethnic group, whereas his childhood friend Hassan belongs to the Hazara. However, the friendship between Amir and Hassan is hampered by their diverse ethnic backgrounds. Further, as Rattansi (2020) claims, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* exhibits racism by exposing ethnic conflicts, mainly between Pashtuns and Hazaras. For example, Pashtuns consider Hazaras are not natives of Afghanistan as "Hazaras . . . were Mogul descendants . . . school textbooks barely mentioned them and referred to their ancestry" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9). This indicates how Hazaras are excluded from their homeland because of the Pashtuns' racial perspective by differentiating Hazaras from them in terms of ethnicity and ancestry. Further, Amir explored about Hazaras in his "mother's old history books . . . An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 14). Moreover, Hazaras had racial consciousness, which made them aware that they were excluded and exploited; therefore, "Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had quelled them with unspeakable violence . . . driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9). This not only reveals the Pashtuns' discriminatory perspectives against minority Hazaras but also Hazaras' conceptualization of racism as exclusion from their homeland. Likewise, Pashtuns understand that "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been and always will be. We are

the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this flat-nosed here. His people pollute our homeland . . . they dirty out blood"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 40). Pashtuns' rejection to accept Hazaras as true Afghans shows their racist perspective against Hazaras. Likewise, Assef, who belongs to the Pashtun ethnic community, believes that "Afghanistan is like a beautiful big house that was filled with garbage"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 284). Here, the term "garbage" indicates Hazara ethnic people. Thus, Pashtuns want to clean Afghanistan by removing the Hazaras from the nation. Such racist conceptualization of the Pashtuns makes clear how racism becomes for Hazaras as their exclusion from their homeland. In addition, Assef loves "ethnic cleansing. I like it"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 285). As a result, Pashtuns victimized many Hazaras and enslaved them. For instance, Ali and his wife, Sanaubar, work in Amir's house. Therefore, racism between two ethnic groups, namely Pashtun and Hazara, depicted racism for Hazaras as exclusion from their homeland.

The Hazaras' understanding of racism as exclusion from their homeland is a direct result of the Pashtuns' racist perspectives based on their skin colour, facial features, and behaviours. Rattansi (2020) claims that racism is associated with prejudice based on biology, the colour of skin, facial features, and behaviour; Hazaras are racially discriminated against and insulted because of their physical structure, the colour of their skin, and their food. For instance, Amir narrates that "people called Hazaras mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys. I had heard some of the kids in the neighbourhood yell those names to Hassan"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 9). This not only insults the Hazaras but also highlights the Pashtuns' discriminatory perspective towards Hazaras based on how they appear to them, which excludes Hazaras from their homeland. Hazaras are discriminated against as "they looked a little like Chinese people" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9). This indicates how Hazaras are excluded by creating differences based on physical appearance; therefore, racism has been conceptualized as exclusion from the nation simply because of being physically different from the majority of Pashtuns. The previous studies (Ghafoor & Farooq, 2020; Hakim, 2022; Shah et al., 2021) report similar findings, as minority Hazaras have been discriminated against based on their physical differences.

Furthermore, understanding racism is based on the situation of racial victimizers and victims. For example, Amir often becomes reluctant to support Hassan before knowing Hassan is his "half-brother" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 237). For instance, Assef raped Hassan as he "knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks . . . he unzipped his jeans" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 75). Amir saw this; however, he remained reluctant to help Hassan. Further, Amir wants to remove Hassan from his house; thus, to create such a situation, he "entered Ali and Hassan's quarters . . . lifted Hassan's mattress and planted . . . new watch and a handful of Afghani bills under it"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 104). In doing so, Amir creates an unfavourable situation for Hassan. As Amir's Baba asked, "Did you steal Amir's watch, Hassan? Hassan replied . . . "Yes"..... It was Hassan's final sacrifice for me"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 105). As a result, Hassan's father, Ali, informs Amir's Baba, "We do not work for you anymore"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 107). Amir's purpose of excluding Hassan from his house became successful as Ali and Hassan left. Amir said, "I never thought of Hassan and me as friends" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 25). He further added that "history is not easy to overcome . . . I was a Pashtun, and he was a Hazara"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 25). However, Amir's racist perspectives towards Hassan are over when Rahim Khan, Amir's Baba's friend, informs him of his father's secret that Hassan is his "half-brother"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 237). Hassan was born with an extramarital relationship between Amir's father and Sanaubar, wife of Ali, servants of Baba's house. Amir realizes that he finds out his "whole life in one big fucking lie"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 223). This changes Amir's previous racial perspective on Hassan; thus, he thinks that "Baba would have brought them along to America. Maybe Hassan would have had a home of his own now, a job, a family, a life in a country"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 226). Rahim Khan informed Amir that the Taliban killed Hassan and his wife, and their son, Sohrab, "is in an orphanage"(Hosseini, 2003, p. 220). Later, he rescues Hassan's son, Sohrab, keeping his life at risk, from Afghanistan, in the area under Taliban rule, and takes him to California, America and makes his family perfect, receiving Sohrab as his son. Amir regrets realizing his mistake of not saving Hassan from the brutality of rape and his discriminatory behaviour against him, only knowing that Hassan is his half-brother. This shows how the personal situation of both racial victimizers and victims reconceptualize racism by changing previous racial perspective. Therefore, racism is based on personal perception and understanding, which previous studies (Rohmatullah & Permatasari, 2021; Saikal, 2012; Shah et al., 2021) have rarely discussed. Amir's reconceptualization of racism crafted the issue of how racism is based on personal conceptualization, which provided new insights into the study of racism.

**Racism Based on Religion:** Racism based on religion is an overreaching theme in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, as it reveals discrimination based on religion, particularly between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. For instance, Amir and Hassan are childhood friends; however, racial discrimination based on religion has become an obstacle in their friendship. Amir understands that "history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. . . I was Sunni and he was Shi'a and nothing was ever going to change that" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 25). Amir's understanding of racism reveals how racism based on religion is deeply rooted in the minds of ordinary people and hampers their relations. As Crenshaw (2013) discusses intersectional relations of racism with religion,



class, and ethnicity, Amir's understanding of racism towards Hassan intersects with religion and ethnicity. For example, Pashtun has a discriminatory perspective towards the minority Hazara where apart from ethnicity, religion also becomes a crucial component to shape Pashtun's notion of racial discrimination against Hazara as "Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9). By addressing Amir's question about Shi'a, Muslim, his school teacher "wrinkled his nose as he said the word Shi'a as if it were a disease" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 10). Amir's school teacher's perspective and facial expression provide enough space to understand how Pashtuns have racist perspectives based on religion against Shi'a Muslims. Therefore, as Rattansi (2020) suggests, racism is associated with religion, namely Sunni and Shi'a and creates categories of people based on their religions. In addition, this study reveals that understanding of racism is based on religion and such a racial perspective is historically rooted in the racist's mind and causes a devastating impact on human relations.

The Taliban discriminates against Hazaras as "Hazaras are Shia" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9) Muslim. Afghan people expressed their happiness by "greeting the Taliban in the streets, climbing their tanks, and posing for pictures with them" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 200) as "they [The Taliban] kicked the Alliance out of Kabul" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 200); however, "The Taliban discriminated against and tortured Hazaras and 'they massacred the Hazaras'" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 213). For example, Farzana, the wife of Hassan, was tortured by the Taliban as she was a Hazara woman and Shi'a Muslim. Farzana and Hassan were in the market. "She asked the vendor how much the potatoes cost, but he did not hear her . . . she asked louder, and suddenly, a young Talib ran over and hit her on the thighs with his wooden stick. He struck her so hard she fell down" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 216). This shows the racist perspective of the Taliban towards Hazara women, as they are not allowed to speak louder. Further, her husband Hassan could not protect his wife as he thought that "if I fought, that dog would have surely put a bullet in me" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 216). Hassan's remark reveals that his understanding of the Taliban's discriminatory perspective and their victimization against his wife is cruel, and it is the outcome of religious and ethnic conflicts between Sunni and Shi'a and Pashtun and Hazara. These discriminatory perspectives, based on religion and ethnicity, made mainly minority Hazaras' lives problematic and insecure. For instance, the Taliban attacked Hassan, and Farzana wanted to protect Hassan, so she "came screaming and attacked them . . . shot her too. Self-defense, they claimed later" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 219). This indicates how the Taliban's racist perspective towards Hazaras based on their religion and ethnicity fueled the marginalization and victimization of Hazaras, which took many Hazara's lives. Hazaras became helpless and without protection and support in their society. This further shows that racism and the result of its consequences are individual concerns and are based on a personal understanding of victimizers instead of homogenizing ideas and perspectives, which previous studies (Dayekh, 2020; Matta, 2019; Sri Prasanna & David, 2020) have not been reported.

#### 4.2 Racism in *Disgrace*

**Racism as Exploitation:** The recurring theme in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is racism as the exploitation mainly of non-whites by whites. Coetzee's *Disgrace* has manifested such exploitation in various forms, such as rape, misuse of economic power, and victimization of students by their white professors. For example, Professor David Lurie (white) has physical relations with Soraya, a non-white woman. Lurie "strokes her honey-brown body, unmarked by the sun; he stretches her out, kisses her breasts; they make love" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 1). In doing so, Lurie, "for a ninety-minute session, he pays her R 400" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 2). However, "she is not a professional at all. She may work for the agency only one or two afternoons a week" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 3). Thus, Lurie's relationship with Soraya cannot be long-lasting, as she remains reluctant to respond him after several visits. Despite knowing that Soraya has her own family, he attempts to continue his relations with her as he finds she is "entirely satisfactory" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 1) for him. Due to this, Lurie finds Soraya's "real name, her address, her telephone number. He telephones at nine in the morning, when the husband and children will be out" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 9). He speaks with her on the telephone, "'Soraya?' he said. This is David. How are you? When can I see you again? 'A long silence before she speaks. 'I don't know who you are,' she says. 'You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you never phone me here again never'" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 9). Soraya's remarks indicate that Lurie's racist intention to have a physical relationship with her, paying her a certain amount of charge to fulfill his lust and ignoring her family and social norms and values, is exploitative. This further reveals that Lurie develops racist notions against Soraya by differentiating her from him in terms of his economic power. As Lorde (2021) claims, Lurie's intention to use his economic power to fulfill his lust with Soraya indicates how his economic status allows him to control her and discriminate against her by conceptualizing her as a docile, submissive woman without status in the family and society. She understands Lurie's racist perspective towards her as exploitative; thus, she warns him not to call her again, which previous studies (Poudel, 2023; Poyner, 2000) have not discussed.

Melanie Isaacs interprets racism as her exploitation. For instance, Melanie's college professor David Lurie raped her time and again as she could not resist at the onset because "she is a student, his student, under

his tutelage"(Coetzee, 2000, p. 12). Melanie might have thought that she was inferior as he was her professor. Further, Lurie was white, aged and intellectual; conversely, Melanie was "the dark one" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 18). Lurie, by misusing his power and his position, raped, and psychologically tortured Melanie, due to which she suffered from family conflict and her boyfriend rejected her. For example, Melanie said to Lurie, "You have cut me off from everyone . . . you have made me bear your secret" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 34). Her remarks indicate that because of Lurie's discriminatory act against her by "othering" in terms of gender, colour, and power, which she understands as exploitation against her. Furthermore, "he [Lurie] could not find wit in Melanie. But plenty of beauty" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 78); with the abuse of his power as a white male, and a professor of hers, he raped and victimized her. In addition, Lurie misuses the college records to find Melanie's personal address and contact information. For instance, Lurie "drives to the empty campus and lets himself into the department office . . . copies down her [Melanie's] personal details: home address, Cape Town address, telephone number" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 18). Then Lurie began to take advantage of Melanie, even going to her flat as Coetzee wrote: "At four o'clock the next afternoon he is at her flat . . . 'No, not now!' she says, struggling. 'My cousin will be back!' But nothing will stop him . . . kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she evokes" (Coetzee, 2000, pp. 24–25). Lurie did not care about what sort of problem she should face due to his sexual exploitation. He was interested in fulfilling his only personal sexual desire. As Haslanger (2019) claims that, Melanie's rape indicates that whites have power over non-whites, so that non-whites would be the subject of racism, thereby suppressed and victimized. In addition, previous studies (Attridge, 2002; Beyad & Keramatfar, 2018; Ghimire, 2022) have reported almost similar findings that blacks have racially been victimized.

However, the understanding of racism as exploitation is based on the context of victimizers; for example, after decolonization in South Africa, as depicted in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, earlier racial victimizers mainly non-white people, gradually empowered themselves. For instance, "On campus, it is Rape Awareness Week. Women Against Rape, WAR, announces a twenty-four-hour vigil in solidarity with 'recent victims'" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 43). Non-whites developed their racial consciousness and became aware of various kinds of injustices against them. As a result, Melanie registers her case file against Professor Lurie in the office of the rector; thus, Lurie is notified that "a complaint has been lodged against him under article 3.1 of the university's Code of Conduct" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 38). Further, Lurie's daughter Lucy informs him that "Petrus is my new assistant. In fact, since March, co-proprietor" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 62). Later on, Petrus is going to be the owner of the land as he "has invited us to a party," he [Lurie] tells Lucy, "why is he throwing a party?" "Because of the land transfer . . . goes through officially on the first of next month" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 124). Lurie realizes that he is not safe in South Africa, particularly when he observes black empowerment and the rape of his daughter Lucy by three black men. Thus, he believes that as a professor of communication, his knowledge of languages, such as "he speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 95). Further, he thinks that his daughter, Lucy, will not be safe in South Africa. As he advises Lucy, "pay Petrus (black man) to guard it. Take a break for six months or a year until things have improved in this country. Go overseas. Go to Holland. I'll pay" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 157). He further suggests that "It is too much, Lucy. Sell up. Sell the farm to Petrus and come away" . . . They do rape" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 159). Nevertheless, the developing racial awareness of non-whites, their empowerment, and their resistance against racial exploitation changed the perception and understanding of racial victimizers on racism. The above remarks further indicate that racially victimized people resist and question the discrimination prevailing in their societies.

**Racism as Revenge:** Racism as revenge is another repeated theme in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*; for instance, the daughter of Professor David Lurie, Lucy, was raped by three black men in her farmhouse in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. As a consequence of such an event, she was traumatized and remained silent for a long time. For example, "Lucy is not improving. She stays up all night, claiming she cannot sleep . . . she has lost interest in food" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 121). In the beginning, she has taken her rape as exploitation and has taken it as shame. For instance, "she [Lucy] would hide her face, and he [Lurie] knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 115). However, Lucy understands that her rape and the racist notions of black people towards whites are embedded in the historical situation of racism in South Africa, as whites victimize blacks and rape them; however, due to a change in the power dynamic, blacks rape and traumatize whites as a form of revenge. Further, Lurie experiences that such events are rampant almost everywhere in South Africa, particularly in the post-apartheid period. He realizes that "[it] happens every day, every hour, every minute, he tells himself, in every quarter of the country. Count yourself lucky to have escaped with your life" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 98). Lucy thinks that there will not be a solution to taking action on such events; thus, she responds to Lurie's idea of reporting her rape case to the police as: "that I [Lurie] fail to understand why you did not lay real charges against them . . . David, This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours . . . there is one right I have, it is the right not to be put on trial like this" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 133). Lucy's refusal to take action against her rape and her

intention of normalizing blacks' racial injustices against whites in the post-apartheid period, as depicted in the novel, shows a unique understanding of racism as a form of revenge of blacks over whites, and this further reveals how an understanding of racism transforms with the changing context of racial victimizers.

David Lurie understands racism as a revenge of black people against whites because of their previous racist notion against non-whites when he becomes a victim of racism from non-whites, mainly by blacks in South Africa, who victimize him and his daughter Lucy. For instance, Lurie answers Lucy's question: "Why did they hate me [Lucy] so? I had never set eyes on them. He [Lurie] waits for more, but there is no more, for the moment. 'It was history speaking through them,' he offers at last. 'A history of wrong . . . It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors'" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 156). Lurie's remark clearly shows his understanding of racism as a form of revenge, which is connected with the social and historical development of South Africa. As Haslanger (2019) defines racism as a social construction, likewise Lurie's perception of racism is based on his social context, where he experiences being a racial victimizer to victimized. On the other hand, his daughter, Lucy, decides not to charge her rape case at the police station and resists black people's racial injustices against whites; instead, she wants to assimilate with them to exist in South Africa. Further, Lucy wants to marry Petrus for her social protection. She clarifies with her father Lurie: "Petrus is not offering me a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wild Coast. He is offering an alliance . . . I am allowed to creep in under his wing. . . otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection" (Coetzee, 2000, p. 203). Lucy's remarks clearly show how black people become racists against whites, and Lucy's clear understating of racism as a social construction reinforces her to establish relations with black people as the supremacy of whites over non-whites almost ends in the post-apartheid context of South Africa; thus, the power dynamic shifts from whites to non-whites. Non-whites develop their racial consciousness and become aware of various kinds of injustices against them, which Lucy experiences in South Africa. Further, her above remarks clarify that racism is based on local context and its historical and social relation rather than the universal and homogenizing idea of racial victimization. Previous studies (Mehigan, 2014; Poudel, 2023) have not explored these findings as they have focused on racism instead of the individual perception of racism.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above discussion has identified that racially victimized people in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* interpret and understand racism as the exclusion of minority ethnic groups, mainly Hazara, and the interlink of racism with religion and that in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, racially victimized people perceive and conceptualize racism as the exploitation of mainly non-whites and a form of revenge for the white treatment of blacks during the colonial period. This study questions the traditional understanding of racism by introducing an intellectual discussion by reconceptualizing racism that should not be just understood as human division; however, it relies on power dynamics and the context of racially victimized people. The study has introduced a scholarly discussion on racism, depicting how racism is based on personal conceptualization and interpretation instead of homogenizing and universalizing the racial experiences of victims and how the concept of racism transforms with the changing context of racially victimized people. Further, the study shows that racial experience and perception are deeply rooted in the victims' minds and create an overarching impact, most fundamentally, in human relations. However, this study has limitations, racism was discussed based on a limited number of racially victimized characters from both novels; thus, the study almost failed to analyze minor events and characters from both novels; nevertheless, they provide ample evidence to analyze how racially victimized people interpret and conceptualize racism in diverse contexts as depicted in novels. The study has significance as it reconceptualizes racism from victimized perspectives and provides a clear direction for further exploration of racism in novels and everyday social events.

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