



## The Portrayal of Love and Friendship in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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### ABSTRACT:

*The Kite Runner* (2003), written by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American, and physician turned novelist, is his debut novel. Also, he is an activist, humanitarian and goodwill ambassador of UNHCR. He has produced three more fictions: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *And the Mountains Echoed* and *Sea Prayer*. All his four novels are best sellers. *The Kite Runner* pictures human relationship graphically. The ideas like complexity of relationship, depth of friendship, transformation of Kabul, Taliban's atrocities, and Afghan culture are vividly portrayed in the scintillating novel. The story is about friendship between Amir, a rich boy, and Hassan, a poor boy. Hazara is an ethnic minority in Afghanistan. The two boys are seen engaged in chatting and making sling shots and flying kites. Once on kite running tournament, Hassan is raped by Assef, a bully local boy when he goes to get the kite, as he is from poor ethnicity. Here Amir ignores his friend and does not come to help Hassan. More over the selfish Amir betrays Hassan and leaves him alone. However, after some years, he feels guilt for what he had caused to Hassan. When he gets chance he tries to make up for his betrayal, and he does so risking his life in the process, hoping to find peace at last in saving Hassan's son Shorab and adopts him. The main purpose of this present paper is to study how Hosseini delineates the human relationship and importance of it in this stunning novel.

**Key words:** Human relation, love, betrayal, guilt, friendship, redemption, atonement, self-realization, transcendence.

- Phastun is a language spoken in Eastern Afkanisthan to which Amir belongs. Amir is the son of Baba. Hazara is a Persian language spoken in Central Afkanisthan to which Hasan belongs who is the son of Ali. Hassan is a servant in Baba's house. Amir and Hassan are close friends. They play together making slingshot and kite running. Baba treats both Amir and Hassan as equals. He makes it sure that he gives fair importance to both the boys without any bias. In the later part of the novel, readers come to know that Baba is the real father of Hassan. He buys things exactly same for the two boys. Baba spends Hassan's cleft lip to be repaired surgically. His interest in Hasan annoys the mind of Amir who develops grudges and jealous towards Hassan. Hassan is a courageous boy while Amir is weak. Because of being a submissive person, he is criticized by his father. Baba is worried about Amir's fearsome and soft nature. He expresses saying: "And where he is headed? A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (TKR 221). **Amir** – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Amir is a wealthy boy who grows up in Kabul, Afghanistan with a sense of entitlement. Amir manipulates his privileged upbringing over his servant and loyal best friend, Hassan, whose aid he fails to come to when Hassan is being raped by older boys after a kite-fighting tournament. After Hassan is raped, the book focuses on Amir being driven by his feelings of guilt, his personal growth (as he and Baba move to the U.S.), and his quest for a way to redeem himself. Throughout the novel, his character ultimately changes from him being a selfish child to a selfless adult. He eventually marries Soraya, who cannot birth children, and they adopt Hassan's son, Sohrab.

Hassan's affection towards Amir is pure and remains the same. The pure magic of his undying hope does not change. **Hassan** – Amir's loyal childhood playmate/best friend/unknown half-brother/servant of Baba's, Hassan is a Hazara boy with a cleft lip — a symbol of his poor status in society. Hassan is an excellent kite runner, and is naturally intelligent, but because of his social class as a poor ethnic Hazara, is illiterate and seen as inferior in Afghan society. He becomes the victim of racism, rape, oppression, and murder over the course of his relatively short life, yet always remains loyal, forgiving, and good natured (especially to Amir) throughout the novel. Although he is not present for a majority of the novel, Hassan's plays a major role in the character development of Amir, Baba, and even Sohrab.

Hassan is ready to do anything for Amir. "Hassan never denied me anything, says Amir" (TKR 4). Hassan's affection and gratitude to Amir is limitless. At the time of kite running tournament, Hassan tells Amir, "for you a thousand times over" (TKR 4). In the second chapter of the novel, Amir asks Hassan to hit the German shepherd:

Sometimes up in those trees, I talked Hassan into firing walnuts with his slingshot at the neighbour's one-eyed German shepherd. Hassan never wanted to, but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything. (TKR 4)

The first word Hassan uttered, as a little child, was Amir (TKR 11). Hassan excels Amir in many things, like playing games, forbearance, etc. The author beautifully presents the unconditional love of a boy to his master's son. In the later part of the novel readers come to know that Hassan is none other but Amir's half-brother. After several years he comes back to Afghanistan from Kabul, when Amir saw a pair of kites. The kites reminded him of his life when he was twelve years old boy in Kabul. The Kite also reminded Amir about his betrayal he did to Hassan in winter 1975. As Hassan muses:

December 2001 I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975.... I glanced up and saw a pair of kites...San Francisco, the city I now call home.... I thought about Hassan. Thought about Baba. Ali. Kabul. (TKR 1-2)

Hassan and Amir have some abnormalities, a bond that connects them together. Hassan is born with a cleft lip; it stands for his poverty and a boy of lower-class community. As Hassan's father doesn't have money for surgery. Baba pays it to compensate his guilt, and his affection for Hassan. Baba is not able to accept him as his son because of the fear of insult he would face from the society. Amir understands the fact about his father through Rahimkhan. Amir's father wishes Amir to be strong and brave like him. Once Baba had wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan, he had scars still to prove his bravery. As Amir is ingressive, Hassan comes in rescue of Amir when kids had beaten him up. Amir feels sometimes that Baba likes Hassan more than himself. **Baba** – Father of Amir and also secretly to Hassan, Baba is a larger-than-life figure who works hard and doesn't let anyone's doubts stop him from accomplishing his goals, but stands by his own strict moral principles and is often tough on Amir. Baba's great sin is committing adultery with Ali's wife, a Hazara woman, and that he hides the fact that he is Hassan's real father. Baba's many works of charity, including the orphanage he builds, are part of his attempts to redeem himself from the guilty feeling of not being able to acknowledge Hassan as his son; however, his guilt does not diminish until him and Amir move to America and he is able to connect finally with at least one of his sons. Baba goes from a wealthy and well-respected, but unhappy, businessman in Afghanistan to a much happier gas station worker making little money in America.

Assef, a local bully and elderly boy mocks Amir for socializing with a Hazara. According to him, Hazaras are inferior race. One day he gets ready to assault Amir with brass knuckles, but Hassan comes to rescue Amir, by frightening to shoot out Assef's eye with slingshot, as Hassan is skillful person in it. The writer has made Assef, the villain of the novel, the mouthpiece of the Islamo-fascist agenda. Assef is a notorious boy. He is one of the children who mock Ali's limping and calls him names. He also carries a set of brass knuckles, wherever he goes. In *The Kite Runner*, the villain Assef is in the habit of calling the minority Hazara Hassan as flat-nosed boy. *NBC News* labels it as the reflection of Afghanistan culture by saying: "One of the great strengths of *The Kite Runner* is its sympathetic portrayal of Afghans and Afghan culture. Hosseini writes with warmth and enviable familiarity about Afghanistan and its people... a descriptive and easily readable account" (Italie 2012).

As it mentioned in the beauty and rich culture of Afghanistan serve as a backdrop for the action of "The Kite Runner." Its volatile history not only helps move the plot forward, but also mirrors the personal drama at the heart of the story. Kite running tournament is a popular national festival of Afghanistan. On one successful day, Amir wins kite fighting trophy. Hassan runs for the last cut; he is encountered by Assef. Hassan refuses to give the kite to him. Assef does sodomization of Hassan. Amir witnesses the act but out of fear he does not interfere. Amir as a fearful person feels that he is too coward to save Hassan from Assef. So he prefers to run away from the alley. As he confesses: "In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt" (TKR 68). He knows very well that if he does not take back the kite to home, Baba his father will not appreciate him. Amir feels guilty of his act. He stops talking to Hassan and starts maintaining a distance from him. Amir has the urge to cut other kites and fly the kite high just to win father's heart forever. Hassan's love towards Amir is infinite. At the time of kite running festival, Hassan told Amir "for you a thousand times over" (TKR 51). The unconditional pure love of a boy to his master's son is well portrayed by the admirable novelist. Those words are filled with love, brotherhood and friendship, and readers need to be more than just alive and breathing to feel and experience them. "For you, a thousand times over" make a person to cry for his sheer honesty. It would make a reader to fall in love with the character Hassan.

Amir believes that his life will be easier if he is not surrounded by Hassan. He remains aloof and plans to trap Hassan in order drive him away so he keeps a wristwatch and some amount of cash under Hassan's pillow. The machination works out and Hassan is caught for stealing. Hassan and Ali leave the place forever. Baba believes the false act and says thus:

There is one sin, only one. And that is theft. when you kill a man, you steal a life...you steal his wife's right to have a husband, rob his children of a father, when you tell a lie, you steal some one right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness (TKR 18).

According to him there is no act worse than stealing. Reader can understand that Baba is, to an extent, a hypocrite. He preaches morality to children, but he does not follow it in his real life. He makes his friend cuckolded by intercourse with his friend's wife, and becomes father of an illegitimate son and never gives Hassan a rightful position in the family.

Franz Spiegel, in his review of the fiction, describes the novel as a modern novel, which talks about life, love, brotherhood and courage. He blends the political and cultural issues wonderfully with his witty description of the pre-war condition of Afghanistan. He appreciates Hosseini for describing such complex political and social events with ease. Hosseini surprises the readers with his simple language and deep underlying meaning. The protagonist may be a coward one, but the novel is about full of courage, which proves it as an inspirational novel. Amelia Hill's review of the laudable fiction is:

Though the book *The Kite Runner* is the work of other land, people would like to read it because of the basic human values and emotions the work preaches. Unlike many author Khaled Hosseini uses simple language and simple settings which attracts the readers to read and feel. He doesn't need flamboyance and flashy writing. He succeeds in drawing the reader attention into the character world and creates a humane profound story. It is a high reward in writing and storytelling. (Web)

In order to get a better understanding of the good and bad times of Afghanistan, one should read the novel *The Kite Runner*, says Hill. The book is a journey of Afghanistan. Hassan and his son Shorab faced so many consequences. But Hassan remains the same. The novel focuses how good one is

facing tough times. Hassan and his wife were killed after Hassan refused to allow the Taliban to confiscate Baba and Amir house in Kabul. As the narrator puts it:

We crossed the border and the signs of poverty were everywhere. On either side of the road, I saw chains of little villages sprouting here and there, like discarded toys among the rocks, broken mud houses and huts consisting of little more than four wooden poles and a tattered cloth as a roof. I saw children dressed in rags chasing a soccer ball outside the huts. A few miles later, I spotted a cluster of men sitting on their haunches, like a row of crows, on the carcass of an old burned-out Soviet tank, the wind fluttering the edges of the blankets thrown around them. Behind them, a woman in a brown *burqa* carried a large clay pot on her shoulder, down a rutted path toward a string of mud houses. (TKR 231)

Finally, he decides to face Assef's challenge. Luckily, he rescues Shorab safely from the clutches of Assef. He feels peace at his mind for the first time. He laughed while he was beaten up by Assef, as his sins are being washed away. Even though he was hurt badly, Assef experienced a kind of satisfaction in his mind. He recollected the day on the hill he had pelted Hassan with pomegranates and tried to instigate him: Hassan just stood there, doing nothing, red juice soaking through his shirt like blood. Then he'd taken the pomegranates from Amir's hand, crushed it against his forehead. "Are you satisfied now?" Hassan hissed, "Do you feel better?" Though Amir was assaulted severely by Assef, he felt healed finally. "My body was broken- just how badly I wouldn't find until later- but I felt healed at last. I laughed" (TKR 201).

*The Kite Runner* plays the role of moral science lesson that teaches human values. The novel takes the readers to the world of Afghanistan. The author beautifully emphasizes of on the human relations. The novel covers the aspects of friendship, betrayal, guilt and redemption. The moral of the story is that love is the only thing that can make people to cross seven seas. Through Rahim Khan, Baba's best friend, Amir gets the information about the death of Hassan and Ali. In addition, he tells Amir to save Shorab from an orphanage in Kabul. Rahim Khan is Baba's closest friend, business partner, and confidant. He is the only one who knows all of Baba's secrets (about his affair with Sanaubar and about Hassan). He serves as a friend and a father figure for Amir by giving him the attention and affection that Baba deprives him of, and by filling the void left by Baba's emotional distance. For Sohrab, he serves as a Godsend by directing Amir to return to Afghanistan to adopt Sohrab after Hassan and Farzana are murdered by the Taliban. Following the Hassan's death in the clutches of Taliban, Amir plans to save Hassan's son Shorab. "There is a way to be good again." (TKR 2). Hosseini tries to create a kind of poetic justice. As soon as he gets a chance to make everything right, he utilizes the chance given to him. He thinks twice and does what is right. According to Morris' "Theory about Motive" (1999:416), motive is an inner direction forcing a need which direct behaviour toward a goal. The goal might be something that a person wants to get, but it can also be a problem, he or she tries to overcome. For most characters, it seems sacrifice is necessary to truly appreciate and understand love's reality. Throughout the novel, we find the characters have long search for an existing but absent love, eventually one gets after paying a heavy cost.

Hosseini says in interview in *The Guardian*: "The book is kind of like a fairytale turned on its head. You have a very painful rupture at the beginning and then this tearful reconciliation at the end, except the revelations and the reconciliations you're granted aren't the ones you're expecting. Which is how life is, really."

*The Kite Runner* is about the devastating and painfully honest depiction of identity, betrayal, deception and atonement. The narrative depicts the journey of a boy who ran away from his haunted childhood while torturing himself with his own contrition. These two concepts of identity and redemption play a major role in creating the string that binds the characters together. *The Kite Runner* embarks on a journey that leads through the life of the glamorous prosperous Afghans, as well as the treacherous horrific life of those less fortunate.

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