

1. Ashu Yadav, 2. Dr. Jyoti Sharma

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Research Article

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE SENSE OF LOYALTY IN KHALID HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER

1. Ashu Yadav

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English

Manav Rachna Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad (Haryana)

2. Dr. Jyoti Sharma

Ph.D. Supervisor, Department of English

Manav Rachna Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad (Haryana)

Abstract: The Paper deals with different deconstructing mainly father-son relationships of the novel *The Kite Runner* and how it affected the protagonist of the novel and his actions. The theme of the novel is hardship and the struggles of the people of Afghanistan. The research paper intends to find the convergence between humans and conflicts. The research paper will provide perspective into the complex dynamics of human relations and conflict.

Keywords: Human Relations, Conflicts, Cowardice, Struggles, Protagonist.

Introduction: The novel *The Kite Runner* by Khalid Hosseini is set in a time when the Taliban governed the country of Afghanistan. The novel deals with the painful journey of Amir who is the protagonist of the novel. Amir's character undergoes several changes throughout the novel but it is the expiration of his innocence when he watched his friend Hassan getting raped and his incompetency to do something to save his friend. It is the rape of his friend that constantly reminds Amir of his cowardice.

Amir belonged to an influential Pashutan family while his friend Hassan belonged to the Hazara tribe. As a result of the political disorder in Afghanistan and the rise of Taliban, Amir had to leave Afghanistan along with his father. He and his father were provided asylum by the state of California, USA. After twenty years Amir gets an invitation from his childhood guide to come to visit Afghanistan. On the call, Rahim Khan (Amir's childhood mentor) said, "Come there is a way to be good again" (177). *The Kite Runner* talks about the brutal lives of the people of Afghanistan and how they were being persecuted by The Taliban. Amir getting a chance to visit his childhood back is also the beginning of his journey of redemption. *The Kite Runner* is a Bildungsroman as the readers witness a development in the protagonist.

As Pearson wrote in a book review to *The Kite Runner*:

This is an emotionally painful novel to read. It is powerfully descriptive on all interpersonal levels, including the father-son relationship between Amir and his Baba, the childhood friendship between Amir and

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Hassan, and the various relationships detailed in the book. The novel reads similarly to a memoir, and Hosseini brings us into the politically chaotic but beautiful world of Afghanistan and one man's journey through guilt and trauma from his childhood. (66)

Sanctimony, self-immolation, absolution, and sin are some of the themes that *The Kite Runner* revolves around. The story begins with a young boy fleeing his country, leaving everything behind while at the same time carrying the burden of his sins and culpability.

The article "Theme of Identity and Redemption in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" written by Niraja Saraswat states:

The Kite Runner, written by Khaled Hosseini, is a famous novel for its devastating and painfully honest depiction of identity, betrayal, deception, and atonement. The narrative portrays the journey of a boy escaping from his haunted childhood while torturing himself with his own contrition. These two concepts of identity and redemption play a vital role in creating the string that binds the characters together. As a reader of *The Kite Runner*, one 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. Most importantly, however, one encounters face-to-face the good and evil that comes out when these two very distinct lives are intertwined. Amir's —unatoned sins, as they are described in the novel's opening chapter, have plagued his conscience and cast an oppressive shadow over his joys and triumphs. (166)

The Kite Runner successfully provides details of a world where terrorism prevailed as well as the morals and heritage of the land. The novel successfully narrates the complexities of the lives of the people of Afghanistan during the reign of Taliban. It puts forward the reality of human misery and affliction that the people had to go through in those times. Rebecca Stuhr said: "He interweaves into the action of his stories the details of history, culture, and daily life in Afghanistan" (77). Similar concerns were also raised by Amir's childhood mentor about the row and falling out of the different groups in Afghanistan. He said:

The infighting between the factions was fierce and no one knew if they would live to see the end of the day. Our ears became accustomed to the whistle of falling shells, to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days, Amir jan, was as close as you could get to that proverbial hell on earth. (*The Kite Runner* 196)

The Kite Runner examines many relationships between different characters and all these played an important role in the text. One such relationship is the one that Amir shared with Hassan, his best friend. Hassan being a true friend proved his allegiance and devotion to Amir several times in the novel. However, Amir failed to do the same and did not try to protect and defend his friend Hassan when he was raped by Assef. The introduction of Assef's character represents all the inhumane and barbaric things happening in Afghanistan.

Hosseini has also related certain incidents from his life that inspired him to write his book. More specifically, he remembers a family cook he befriended when he was a young boy. Hosseini found out that the cook could not read or write, as prejudice against the Hazara left most uneducated, with no access to schooling. (qtd. In Bloom 13)

The relationship between Amir and Baba also affects the direction of the text. Rebecca Stuhr states in her book *Reading Khaled Hosseini*,

There are many ways to describe this novel, but Hosseini calls it a love story. It is not a conventional love story, however. It is the story of love between two friends who are also servant and master; the sins of

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commission and omission that tear the friendship apart; and the loyalty and altruistic love that survives in spite of everything. It is also the story of the love between father and son, husband and wife, and parent and child. The novel takes place across generations and continents, offers adventure, and provides a fresh look at the country and culture of Afghanistan. (25)

Amir and his father both shared a complex relationship. Baba maintained a distance from Amir, even though he loved Amir a lot. This results in Amir feeling abandoned as he believed he believed that he will always have an absentee father. Baba once told Rahim that he has only seen Amir at the time of his birth. He says:

Look, I know there's a fondness between you and him and I'm happy about that. Envious, but happy. I mean that. He needs someone who . . . understands him, because God knows I don't. But something about Amir troubles me in a way that I can't express. It's like . . . If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son. (The Kite Runner 22)

Amir's father did not try to build a relationship with his son which led to Amir feeling neglected and unwanted. Even after multiple attempts to get to know his father better and form a bond, he failed.

Sometimes I asked Baba if I could sit with them, but Baba would stand in the doorway. —Go on, now, he'd say. —This is grown-ups time. Why don't you go read one of those books of yours? He'd close the door, leave me to wonder why it was always grown-ups time with him. I set by the door, knees drawn to my chest. Sometimes I sat there for an hour, sometimes two, listening to their laughter, their chatter. (The Kite Runner 4-5)

Having already lost his mother he has even stripped off the idea of having a father. He had an absentee father who was negligent of Amir. Baba always wished for Amir to be like him but Amir's incapability to do so is now one of the reasons why Baba always maintained a distance from him. According to Baba, Amir should be courageous but Amir's cowardice and lack of empathy is also the result of a lack of paternal support, love and care. This results in Amir harbouring insecurities which is evident from the following thought: —Baba hardly ever used the term of endearment when he addressed me (30). His young mind is convinced of the fact that he neither is he the son his father wanted nor can he ever be that boy whom his father will deem worthy of affection.

Because the truth of it was, 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 have turned out a little more like him. But I hadn't turned out like him. Not at all. (The Kite Runner 18)

The relationship that Hassan shares with his son is in complete contrast with the relationship that Amir shared with his own father. Unlike Baba, Hassan is always ever so present in his son Sohrab's life. Both Hassan and Sohrab share a deep connection. Where Amir struggles to get validation from his father throughout his childhood? The compassion between Hassan and his son results in Sohrab being a moralist's kid. Hassan is more accepting of his son than Baba ever was. Even the relationship between Baba and Hassan is intricate. Baba and Hassan's father were once as close as Amir and Hassan were. They were inseparable as kids. Baba shared a close but affectionate relationship with Hassan and even used to get presents for him on his birthday. The strength of their relationship was truly examined when Amir suggested that Hassan and Ali need to be replaced as the households. This enrages Baba and he says:

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I grew up with Ali . . . My father took him in, he loved Ali like his own son. For forty years Ali's been with my family. Forty goddamn years. And you think I'm just going to throw him out? He turned to me now, his face as red as a tulip. —I've never laid a hand on you, Amir, but you ever say that again! . . . You bring me shame. And Hassan . . . Hassan's not going anywhere, do you understand? . . . He's staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we're his family. Don't you ever ask me that question again! (The Kite Runner 84)

The novel deals with lies, treachery, love, lack of love, etc between different characters of the text. While examining all these relationships of the novel Stuhr comments:

In The Kite Runner, Hosseini's story of a troubled father-and-son relationship and friendship, betrayal, and reconciliation takes place within a deeper and more balanced view of a country of which few Americans had much knowledge. Usually, in a time of war, countries vilify and dehumanize their enemies. But Hosseini takes his readers beyond the terrorist camps and madrassas to show a country where children fly kites and go to the cinema to see American Westerns. (The Kite Runner 66-67)

Amir and Hassan were childhood best friends despite a massive ethnic and economic gap. The relationship between Hassan and Amir is taxing and dingy for the most of part of the book. Hassan belonging to the Hazara community (Hazara community is considered as lower community) while Amir belonged to the Pashtun community (higher community) was one of the reasons for their stressful relationship. The novelist drew Hazaras to be illiterate in the text. The difference in class has forced people to clash among themselves. As Frank A. Clements states in his book *Conflict in Afghanistan A Historical Encyclopedia*, —The historical, linguistic, and cultural differences between the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan have also led to an unstable political situation, with the civil war (xv). Stuhr also tries to examine and portray the social conflicts in Afghanistan and states:

Hosseini does not just present an idyllic Afghanistan. The crises presented by Hosseini in the novel stem from inherent weaknesses in Afghanistan's social structure and its cultural prejudices. Amir and his father are Pashtun and Sunni Muslims, and their servants are Hazara and Shi'a Muslims. This is a typical servant-master arrangement. Hazaras were often illiterate because they lacked education opportunities. They were seen as ethnically and religiously inferior to the Sunni Pashtuns. Although Baba loves Hassan and Ali, they will always be servants. Ali and Baba and Amir and Hassan might be like brothers, "but a power dynamic makes it possible for Amir to treat Hassan as an inferior, and that allows him to humiliate Hassan without fearing retribution. This same power structure allows Assef to rape Hassan without fear of reprisal, and assures him that he is unlikely to be stopped by casual observers. (42)

Although Amir and Hassan were childhood friends. Amir was envious of Hassan for qualities that he himself did not possess. As supported by his own statement —I wasn't just slower than Hassan but clumsier too, I'd always envied his natural athleticism! (The Kite Runner 50). Hassan who truly considered Amir his friend was obvious of the fact that Amir does not feel the same way. They would spend time together. Play games as kids but Amir never truly considered Hassan his friend. In fact he did see Hassan as a person of lower birth. He did not try to educate Hassan in fact Amir would mock Hassan for not knowing how to read. Both the boys were nurtured by a hired Hazara woman. Hence, Ali had to once remind Amir of the bond of brotherhood that they share despite the fact that both Hassan and Amir had different mothers.

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Then he would remind us that there was a brotherhood between people who had fed from the same breast, a kinship that not even time could break. Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir my name. (The Kite Runner 10-11)

The Kite flying tournament is an important day for the people of Afghanistan. Amir as usual is determined to win so that he can find some fraction of affection in his father's eye and as usual Hassan was there with him to support him. According to Amir if he wins the kite flying tournament he'd be able to win his father's love.

Baba's casual little comment had planted a seed in my head: the resolution that I would win that winter's tournament. I was going to win. There was no other viable option. I was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. Then maybe my life as a ghost in this house would finally be over. (The Kite Runner 52)

During this very tournament, the most baffling thing happens which changes the course of Hassan's and Amir's friendship forever. After Amir clipped the last kite Hassan ran after it to catch it and was later molested and raped by Assef while Amir stood there and was merely a spectator of the injustice that befell Hassan. Amir's only focus was to get validation from his father which resulted in his failure to protect his friend.

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan—the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past—and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. 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. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (The Kite Runner 72-73)

However, right after the incident Amir felt what a coward he was and a sense of guilt rushed to his head. Amir's lack of intervention did do Hassan a lot of harm and later Amir does try to reconcile with his friend but ends up trying to avoid him and tries to remove Hassan from his life. Just the sight of Hassan would make Amir realise of his cowardice and betrayal. He says,

Hassan milled about the periphery of my life after that. I made sure our paths crossed as little as possible, planned my day that way. Because when he was around, the oxygen seeped out of the room. My chest tightened and I couldn't draw enough air; I'd stand there, gasping in my own little airless bubble of atmosphere. But even when he wasn't around, he was. He was there in the hand-washed and ironed clothes on the cane-seat chair, in the warm slippers left outside my door, in the wood already burning in the stove when I came down for breakfast. Everywhere I turned, I saw signs of his loyalty, his goddamn unwavering loyalty. (The Kite Runner 83)

Khalid Hosseini discussed several human relations in details in *The Kite Runner*. All of these relationships and the conflicts among characters are being drawn in reference to incidents that happened in Afghanistan. As maintained by Hiqma Nur in *The Kite Runner: My Passion of Literature*,

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The novel is also a tool from the author to reflect the state of Afghan society that will be a witness of the times. Hosseini tried to document the tumultuous era, sectarian and ethnic strife and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The novel is interpreted as a message to be conveyed to the world even though he himself did not stay in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion; there is a sense of longing that he wants to convey in writing. (45)

The author wrote about the conditions of Afghanistan and how life is there for people. He puts forward the true image of Afghanistan which is full of destitution.

The underlying theme of loyalty and friendship is admirable in the novel. Amir and Hassan both grew up together. Where Amir always felt the need to seek validation from Baba, Hassan was lucky enough to get presents from Baba on his birthday. Hassan's life was not just ruined because of Assef but Amir too played a vital role in that as he stood there and watched his friend getting raped, he betrayed Hassan's trust and the sanctity of true friendship. All this demonstrates how lovelessness can drive people to do unspeakable things just like what Amir did to win his father's love.

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