



**THE TRAUMA AND THE RECUPERATION IN *THE KITE RUNNER* BY
KHALED HOSSEINI**

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Abstract

The famous adage goes, Literature is the mirror of Life, as literature usually depicts the background of the society. Indeed it is true in case of the first Afghan English writer Khaled Hosseini, who in his debut novel *The Kite Runner* presents us the social background of the country he hails from. In all his novels Khaled Hosseini takes a stance to portray the social condition of Afghanistan. In *The Kite Runner* also he attempts to establish the prevailing societal hierarchy in Afghanistan. This well developed novel presents us the life story of two young boys who experience multiple emotions throughout the novel. This paper aims to bring out the traumatic experience of the protagonist and his attempts to redeem himself.

KEYWORDS: Betrayal, Cultural indifference, Trauma, Guilt, Redemption

INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini's 2003 novel *The Kite Runner* is his magnum opus which received him critical acclaim and worldwide recognition. This coming of age novel depicts the life of two boys in Kabul in early 1970's and is intertwined with cultural conflicts between two social

groups Pashtun and Hazara in Afghanistan. This novel not only revolves around a single theme but a multiple themes of universality. According to Rebecca Stuhr *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 the two friends who are also servant and master; the sins of commission and omission that tears the friendship apart; and the loyalty and altruistic love that survives in spite of everything. (Stuhr, 25)

Most of the novel's events are the experience of Khaled Hosseini himself like his life in Afghanistan, his immigration to America, his encounter of the rise of Soviet Invasion and the Taliban rule. He highlights the universal themes of loyalty, betrayal, friendship and guilt through the major characters of the novel. That is how the characters of the novel are intertwined with their traumatic past and putting their efforts to redeem themselves.

FRIENDSHIP AND BETRAYAL

The central theme of the novel is friendship. The two boys in the novel epitomize the concept of friendship. Hassan is the one who outstand the other one, Amir in every aspect like audacity, benignity and loyalty but in social status which restrained him to reach out not only education but also freedom. In fact these boys are half brothers which will be disclosed to the readers only at the end of the novel. Hassan is a very faithful friend who is always available to the call of Amir. Even though Hassan is a servant

boy in Amir's house, Hassan always considers Amir as a brother and calls him Amir Agha. "Hassan never denied me anything"(4). Amir usually read out his stories to Hassan, they play together and every time Hassan defends him. At one point even Amir starts to think that he cannot reciprocate his love towards Hassan. But Hassan without any expectation gives his unconditional love for him which later affects him very much. Hassan is ever there for Amir and states, "For you, a thousand times over"(1). The inability of

Amir to requite the love to Hassan turns into a betrayal. The first incident in the novel when he did not defend Hassan against the Pashtun boys,

But he's not my friend! I almost blurted. He's my servant! Had I really thought that? Of course I hadn't. I hadn't. I treated Hassan well, just like a friend, better even, more like a brother. But if so, then why, when Baba's friends came to visit with their kids, didn't I ever include Hassan in our games? Why did I play with Hassan only when no one else was around? (Hosseini 36)

In order to gain a place in Baba's heart Amir wanted to win the Kite game. During which Hassan helped him to get the last kite and that was when he was

sexually abused by Assef, a pashtun. Even though Amir was witnessing all these things he could not do anything rather he ran away and pretended like he never existed. Later Hassan came with the kite as he promised Amir that he would bring him one. Amir was stupefied by Hassan's loyalty. That was the incident which penetrated Amir's heart there he stood guilty, defenseless. That guilt later turned into trauma. "It may be unfair, but what happens in a few days, sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime..."(142). In order to relieve himself from that incident Amir stops seeing Hassan even though Hassan does his part in the best of his abilities. Later Baba throws Amir a huge birthday party in which Hassan is serving everyone even his victimizers. This really wrenches Amir's heart and decides not to see Hassan ever after. He places one of his birthday present under Hassan's mattress when Ali and Hassan go out for shopping. Later Hassan produces the present to Baba claiming that he stole the present and thereby saving Amir. This has affected Amir even more. He just wonders at Hassan for being so faithful. Ali after coming to know the incident decides to leave Kabul and go to Hazarajat with Hassan. After knowing this Baba tries to strongly prevent them from going but in vain. Amir thinks that this is

going to free himself but the topsy turvy happens.

TRAUMA IN *THE KITE RUNNER* (PTSD)

When it comes to Freudian theory of dealing trauma, the researchers usually associate trauma with certain sexual encounters during childhood. In Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he states "We describe as "traumatic" any excitation from outside which is powerful enough to break through the protective shield."(23). Here in this novel, Amir is not only affected by this incident and the first thing is that he is deprived of his father's love. Hoping to impress Baba, he goes to the kite game and there happens the root cause of his trauma. His traumatic memory is dominated by certain intrusive images in his mind. This is the first symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This in course of time changes into anxiety, to reduce the anxiety he dissociates himself from others. This is why he wants both Ali and Hassan to leave the place and thereby putting his plea to Baba. The second thing in PTSD is Avoidance. He starts to isolate himself from Hassan as much as possible. Because once he starts to see Hassan all his dormant memories of that event will flashes across the mind and traumatizes him. "Children can be exposed to many kinds of trauma, including inflicted

trauma, unintentional trauma, natural disasters, war”(2). In this case Amir is subjected to unintentional trauma. He was traumatized by an accident. The third trait is the growth of negative changes in thinking and mood. This has affected Amir so much that he suffers insomnia and fears future. He even attempts to tell Baba about everything but eventually fail because of the fear of losing Baba’s love. “It should have been just the two of us that was the way, I wanted it but by Wednesday night, Baba had managed to invite another two dozen people” (72). The fourth trait is the change in physical and emotional reactions. Amir wonders why Hassan gives him so much love without expecting in return. Even the thought of this makes him sick. “Everywhere I turned, I saw signs of his loyalty, his goddamn unwavering loyalty”(78). After they leave he finds solace in his father’s company from whom he derives pleasure and now he lives without any anxiety and without the feeling that his father is going to share his affection among the other one. But his happiness does not last long. They are forced to leave Afghanistan to US via Pakistan because of the Soviet Invasion. This guilt does not only affect Amir but also Baba. He is the father of both the boys Amir and Hassan. But he does not tell them because of his social status. But he anyhow tries to recompensate his fault by

taking care of Hassan very much like Amir, celebrating his birthday, take efforts to repair his harelip by plastic surgery, building an orphanage, always standing up for Hassan by hoping all these would redeem his sin.

REDEMPTION

After settling in US Baba finds it difficult for him to adapt in a complete different country. But his thoughts mostly revolve around Kabul, Rahim Khan, Ali and most importantly Hassan “I wish Hassan had been with us today. That would make him happy”(140). Eventually Amir also loves and marries Soraya Taheri. But the couple is not blessed with children. This does not have anything to do with Hassan but deep down Amir feels that this is the reward for his betrayal. After the death of Baba he receives a call from Rahim Khan saying “Come, There is a way to be good again”(2). Hoping to redeem himself Amir ventures to Kabul once again. That is where he receives many revelations. The one with Hassan’s mother, Hassan’s letter and the secret behind Hassan’s birth. After knowing that Hassan is his half brother Amir yells “You bastards,” I muttered. Stood up. “You goddamn bastards!” I screamed. “All of you, you bunch of lying goddamn bastards!”(195). Realizing that he has betrayed his own brother his burden

doubles and he desperately wants to atone his sin. After reading Hassan's letter and realizing his death by the Talibans, he was left with no choice but to save his nephew Sohrab who is now living in an orphanage in Peshawar. Risking his own life he goes to Peshawar and after finding Sohrab, he tries to take him home. But during the sudden Taliban intervention, he meets Assef who now has become a Taliban. Sohrab saves Amir with a slingshot aiming Assef's eyes damaging his vision. He cannot stop wondering the goodness of both Hassan and his son Sohrab. He is fuming with rage over Baba who did not reveal the secret and for making him deprived of his sibling's love. He also feels bad for Hassan's disgrace because of the social status because of Baba's mistake. He also worries even though they both are borne out of same father they received a different treatment where Amir enjoys a sophisticated life with Baba and Hassan living a miserable life in a shackled hut. There he thinks the only way to atone not only his sins but also his father's he has to take Hassan's child with him and giving him the place he deserves.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on the hamartia of the major characters in the novel, we can see the universal themes of betrayal, guilt, trauma, atonement and redemption. This

novel may be fictionalization, but if we see the effects and the social political changes in the novel we shall say this novel embodies the late 20th century setback and the prevailing social status in Afghanistan. Finally Amir partially achieves in redeeming himself by taking his nephew to live with him.

“It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn't make everything all right. It didn't make ANYTHING all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight. But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting”(324).

But the guilt of Amir is not completely his fault but the fault of society on the whole who frames these social hierarchies. Hence the whole society must try to make atonement by abolishing the societal hierarchy and the wars.

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