


Return to Humanity – Sense of Redemption in *The Kite Runner*

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ABSTRACT

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist is best known for his debut novel *The Kite Runner*. Hassan's loyalty stirred the readers they got stunned and enraged by Amir's betrayal. It is believed from various studies that the protagonist Amir's behavior like shame, betrayal, and redemption is strongly intertwined with his psychological transformations. Diversified psychological states lead to different emotional strains and deeds, ranging from mistrust to uncertainty, culpability to inferiority, self-accusation to confusion, and inclination of love to devotion. The two concepts of redemption and reparation are vital in developing the thread to connect the characters. Amir admits that the entire psychological progression is a learning experience for him.

This novel is not only about salvation but also about the return to humanity. This paper pursues to reveal Amir's inner world by examining his psychological shift at different phases to have a better understanding of the reasons behind Amir's wickedness and cowardice.

Keywords: *The Kite Runner*, redemption, culpability, psychological progression, cowardice.

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The Kite Runner, published in 2003, set in both Afghanistan and the United States, is one of the best works of Afghan American novelist Khaled Hosseini, mainly considered with the tinges of autobiographical work. *The Kite Runner*, a worldwide bestseller has received great acclaim as an extensive tale of family, love and friendship, set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's history and is also an uncommon and powerful novel. Through the lives of the two Afghan boys, Amir and Hassan, many issues like the Soviet invasion, the Taliban regime

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in the history of Afghan, and many other significant events in the Afghan monarchy have been discussed.

The Kite Runner is a coming-of-age story about finding one's place in a chaotic and changing world. It examines the challenges of growing into an adult relationship with the parents while also examining concepts such as the existence of good and evil, as well as the connection between sin, atonement, and forgiveness. The fact that it takes place in both Afghanistan and the United States demonstrates how universal its themes and people are and also focuses on social consciousness, religion, and philosophy.

There are many areas to be explored in this novel. To mention a few, the ethical discrimination in Afghanistan, the issues raised due to the Taliban regime, and the conflict and consideration of the social and moral responsibilities of the characters in the novel. The conflict between Pashtun and Hazara is a long-time issue in the history of Afghanistan which results in several class conflicts and bloodshed. The high-positioned Pashtuns forced Hazaras to face wars and displacements.

Initially, the Taliban regime enjoyed great appreciation as they fought against corruption and brutality, but later their cruelty caused restlessness among the citizens. Hosseini exemplified one such character through Assef. The social and moral responsibility of the individuals in the society has been portrayed effectively through the characters of Amir and Hassan. Amir is afraid to be Hassan's friend, jealous of his father's love for Hassan, and dreams to possess the courage of Hassan one day. Rebecca Stuhr makes the following observation when studying Khaled Hosseini's books in terms of conflict:

The books of Hosseini reflect a wide range of significant contemporary and current events. The wars in Afghanistan are certainly all part of both novels in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini offers western readers with a history of the thirty years of conflict and instability in the nation and gives an intimate insight into the culture and people of Afghanistan. (65-66)

This paper explores both the return to humanity and salvation. To better comprehend the causes of Amir's wickedness and cowardice, this article also aims to shed light on Amir's inner world by analyzing his psychological evolution over time.

The Return to Humanity

Amir, the protagonist, hails from an affluent Pashtun family, and Ali, Hassan's father who works as a servant in Amir's house, is from a Hazara family. Amir and Hassan grow up together as friends.

Throughout the story, Hassan repeatedly expresses his love for Amir by defending him from many possible attacks. He is amused and told stories by Amir, and as a servant, he is quite submissive, faithfully obeying orders. Amir loves Hassan but stays away from him to appease other Pashtun men who would otherwise punch him in the ribs for hanging out with an outcast. When Amir once enquired about Hassan's willingness to consume sand on behalf of his friend, Hassan confessed that if Amir had desired it, surely he would do it. He frequently showed Amir how devoted he was. Hassan shielded Amir from the threats and jeers of the neighborhood kids, waving a slingshot at one of them for being disrespectful to Amir. For every assistance Amir thanks Hassan but does so with a haughty air and starts to see Hassan as a rival. He finds Baba Jan's choice repulsive and decides to defeat him in a kite-flying contest to gain Baba Jan's respect. This rivalry between the two pals turns into a conflict between loyalty and betrayal.

They spend their leisure in playing many games including running kites. Both Amir and Hassan are motherless, nursed, and fed by the same nurse. It is mentioned in the words of Amir, "But we were kids who had learned to crawl together and no history, ethnicity, society or religion was going to change that either" (24). They enjoyed great childhood with unforgettable memories. Amir adds:

Sometimes my entire childhood seems like one long hazy summer day with Hassan, chasing each other between tangles of trees in my father's yard, playing hide and seek, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, insert torture, with our crowning achievements undeniable the time we plucked the stinger off a bee and tied a sting around the poor thing to yank it back every time it took flight. (24)

The interesting fact is that Amir has never admitted Hassan as his friend. Though both learned cycling together, played, and even flew kites together, caste discrimination is strongly imprinted in the mind of Amir. Thinking himself superior, he humiliates and ill-treats Hassan wantonly and mostly unknowingly. Being the servant in Amir's house, Hassan enjoys almost all the privileges of Amir in his childhood. Hassan wants to be with Amir in every moment but Amir chooses to be away from him when he has the company of his relatives.

Amir and Hassan, together stroll around the stingy bazaars of Kabul and enjoy each other's company. Amir used to read poems and explain various peculiar stories to the illiterate Hassan.

While reading Hassan's favorite book, *Shahnameh*, the tenth-century epic of Persian heroes, Amir translates every word for Hassan Amir teases Hassan's ignorance but he feels guilty about it. In order to escape from his guilt, he offers his old shirts or toys to please him.

Assef, half Afgan and half German is the real villain who intrudes into the friendship and with his cruel and disdainful nature fuel the fire of superior self in the mind of Amir. Assef is an older boy who desires violence and gets sadistic pleasure from others' sufferings and every boy in the village is afraid of him. Once, Amir and Hassan meet Assef when they are trekking to a barren land that leads to a hill. Assef ridicules Amir for accompanying Hassan. He says, "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns, it always has been. We are the true Afghans, not this flat-nosed here. His people pollute our homeland, our Watan. They dirty our blood" (38). Assef confronts them and Hassan holds his slingshot directly at him and warns him to leave their way before he shoots his head. Hassan is very firm in protecting Amir. Assef gets scared of Hassan's threat and swears to revenge on him one day. He says, "You should know about me, Hazara, I am a very patient person. This doesn't end for you either. Amir, someday I'll make you face me one in one. Your Hazara made a big mistake today Amir." (40)

On the kite fighting day, with the help of Hassan, Amir wins the tournament and gets the appreciation of his father. After the tournament Hassan wants to gift Amir with the lost kite, so he runs for it, telling it might be a great trophy for Amir. Hassan encounters Assef after collecting the kite in the alleyway. Assef tells that he is ready to forgive Hassan. He claims that his forgiveness will be on the demand of the blue kite as a price for his gratitude. But Hassan is not ready to lose his gift for Amir and so denies it and runs away from there. Assef gets irritated and allows Hassan to keep the kite but instead, he beats him rudely and rapes him cruelly which Hassan can never forget in his entire life. As a symbol of a loyal friend, Hassan tolerates Assef's humiliation and sacrifices his life for Amir. On the other hand, Amir witnesses the obscene and cruel act but being afraid to intervene, runs away as he wants to get his Baba's praise.

He himself tells, "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 is 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 is free in this world. May be Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba." (72,73).

As Amir does not have loyal friendship with Hassan, he ruins the life of Hassan. He does not help him to escape from the shameful deed of Assef and escapes from the spot. Hassan is loyal and trustworthy and always defends Amir, never mind how critical the situation might be. He protects and helps him and loves him more than anything on earth. After the shameful incident, Amir wants to move away from Hassan, as he believes that he may lead a happy and peaceful life if Hassan is not around him. So he keeps his costly watch and some cash under Hassan's mattress with the hope that after finding this his Baba will send Hassan out of the house.

When Ali comes to know about it, though Hassan is innocent of this incident, he confesses the stealing to protect Amir. Hassan understands Amir's betrayal and disloyalty. He assumes the name of liar, cheat, and thief for the happiness of Amir. On the other hand, Amir is glad to end up his friendship with Hassan and wishes his father to dismiss Hassan and Ali from their house. Thus they part and Ali and Hassan leave for their homeland, Hazarat.

The Sense of Redemption

Amir's life is the central focus of the novel's major events, followed by Afghanistan's transformations. In Amir's memories of his youth, Kabul's tranquillity is witnessed under the monarchy, and the establishment of the republic, and then is viewed as an object of Soviet invasion and intra-Afghanistan strife devastating the nation. These occurrences play a role in shaping the novel's plot and have a big impact on the lives of the characters. Assef has a chance to torment Amir, that the republic has been established because his father knows the new leader. Later, the devastation of Kabul compels Baba and Amir to leave for California.

Assef is even given a position that permits him to enjoy his sadism and sexual needs without consequences and when the Taliban takes entire control after that murdering Hassan becomes an easy job for him. Both of these incidents play a role in Amir's quest to save Sohrab and his eventual redemption through his confrontation with Assef, indirectly suggesting that Afghanistan will also experience salvation in the future.

When Hassan and Ali left home heavy-hearted, Amir outwardly feels relaxed by their departure but inwardly he begins to suffer from guilt. His sense of guilt for not saving Hassan from Assef cringes whenever he thinks of Hassan. This guilt becomes the central force for his sense of redemption which ultimately changes the life of Amir to lead a better life. Amir says,

“I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek.

That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can buy it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years." (1)

These opening lines give the bottom line of the story. On the surface, Amir seems to be carefree and a son of the rich and socially acclaimed father, but he is filled with the guilt of his sins at his heart's core. He is constantly driven by these guilt feelings and his every step in life is an attempt to redeem his sins. The young Amir believes that he is fully responsible for the death of his mother during his birth. He longs for love and cares from his father. He is uncertain about his space in his life, and a sense of belonging to his father and lacks satisfaction in realizing his intimacy with his father. He says, "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 lease I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him. But I didn't turn out like him. Not at all" (17)

Baba Jan criticized Amir's passion for poetry and literature but desired him to possess the same bravery and sincerity as Hassan. Throughout the book, Baba's personality battles with him. In an effort to mitigate and atone for his unending guilt, he makes every effort to act morally, and in return, he makes an effort to maintain as much goodwill in the eyes of his readers. Baba might be characterized as the novel's rebellious character who battles prejudices of the society. Once Baba was telling about Amir in total frustration that Amir cannot stand for anything as he is unable to stand for himself.

He knows his cowardice of Amir and tries a lot to make him true in his love for Hassan. His prestige in society and position to retain, make him ignore blindly the cruelty of Amir toward Hassan. Though he desires of keeping Hassan and Ali with him, he is helpless and curses himself.

Rahim Khan, Amir's father's best friend, and business partner has been a positive guide for Amir. He cares about Amir's growth as well as attempts to prune his character. Though he knows Amir's sin, he does not reveal it to his father but waits till Amir to understand it on his own. When he becomes sick, he shares every fact with Amir and believes that Amir will bear them. He said, "A man who has no conscience, no goodness, does not suffer. I hope your suffering comes to an end with this journey to Afghanistan..." (118).

Hosseini, illuminates the storyline with an idea of redemption. Rahim Khan insists that Amir must understand that his father's courage and philanthropy are the way to redemption. Thus Amir finds a sense of resemblance in his father. Amir's motivation to betray in his childhood is deeply rooted in his insecurity regarding his relationship with his father. Theft is the most serious sin in the world, according to Amir's father, but he was a thief himself. Hiding the truth that Hassan is his own blood and treachery to Ali makes Amir's father live with the guilt. Rahim Khan ignites the light of redemption in Amir by inducing him to meet and rescue Hassan's son Sohrab. In his phone call to an adult Amir, Rahim Khan demonstrates his morality by saying that "there is a chance to be decent again." Rahim offers Amir a chance to end the cycle' of lies and secrets as a friend.

The characterization of Amir and Hassan, Hosseini emphasizes the value of friendship. The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini explores human ties while presenting various father-son interactions. In order to clarify the role of fathers in families, he depicts the love, tension, and challenges that exist between father and son. For instance, Hassan's relationship with his son Sohrab is completely different from Baba's relationship with Amir in the book. While Hassan and Sohrab's relationship is filled with trust and affection, Baba and Amir's is devoid of love and built on indifference.

Winkler comments that Hosseini presents a world where redemption has little chance. The novelist makes the characters act instead of being inactive, express bravery instead of being cowardly, and care for the victim instead of being self-centered. As atonement, Amir returns to Kabul and takes his fullest efforts to save Hassan's son Sohrab. In that process, he meets Assef again as an evil-built man, who brutally challenges Amir. Initially, Amir is taken aback and decides to withdraw but his guilt insists he stay on and accepts the challenge.

Sohrab's skill in slingshot while protecting Amir is a heart-touching incident that Hosseini very beautifully portrayed to make his readers recall how Hassan rescued Amir from the same culprit. Amir's victory gives him contentment which is the very first experience of peace in Amir's life since childhood. When Amir is ruthlessly beaten by Assef, he feels calm at heart, though he is seriously hurt. He feels his complete self-redemption. "My body was broken-just how badly I wouldn't find out until later – but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed." (201). This is the point, he completed his self-redemption, as Hosseini rightly says, "There is a way to be good again" (2).

Soraya, Amir's wife plays the key figure in his self-redemption. With her care and assistance, he rewinds his past and paves the way for his self-salvation. Her confession about her relationship with a drug man before her marriage creates a sense of envy in Amir for her courage and her spirit of outspoken nature. He laments how his cowardice has shattered the forty-long years of relationship between his father and Ali. His admission of his fault and guilt lead him to go in search of Sohrab. After his success, he reveals everything to Soraya but she never gets disgusted or hatred towards Amir but admits him as such.

Amir is influenced by the places where he resided. In Kabul, he was worshipped as a man of the upper class and proved his superiority with his father's reputation. After the war broke up, he escaped to America with his father. His education in America, marrying the girl with whom he was in love, and becoming a successful writer is exemplary but still, he feels a sense of void in him. He enters into a realm of perfection only after correcting his past mistakes by means of bringing Sohrab to his home and embracing him as his own.

Amir, who is narrating the story as an adult, notices a few traits in himself that he did not see when he was still a youngster. He realizes that he was self-centered and did not want Hassan to be as excellent as him since he wanted to be everything. The young Amir honestly believed that Hassan was beneath him due to his deformity, poverty, race, and religion. Every time Hassan does something to win Baba's affection and respect, Amir snaps at him in his head.

Amir makes fun of Hassan when he lacks knowledge of something that Amir has, such as vocabulary words. Each time, Amir only realizes what he is doing after the fact and feels bad about it. But the story gives the impression that whatever happened to alter Amir's life cannot be undone, and as a result, shame has followed him into adulthood. The development of Amir's character and his fervent desire to please his father, both of which we have seen throughout the novel, are key factors to be studied with keen notice.

Amir acknowledges that his main motivation for not intervening is selfishness, even though when he witnesses what is occurring, he is immobilized by terror. As a little boy, Baba won a kite-fighting competition. Amir had consistently performed well in the tournament, even reaching the final stage, but he had never taken home the prize. Amir believes that in order to finally win Baba over, he must triumph in the competition and take home the kite of his last foe. Baba won't pardon Amir for killing the woman, on his delivery, who was both Baba's wife

and Amir's mother till that time. First and foremost, Amir does not intervene to stop Assef from raping Hassan because he wants to bring the kite to Baba and Hassan is the price he must pay.

When Assef violently beats Amir for trying to save Sohrab, the novel's climax and Amir's inner anguish are put to rest. The beating that Amir was afraid to undergo decades earlier to defend Hassan is being delivered by Assef with brass knuckles. Amir laughs uncontrollably throughout the battle because it feels so fantastic to be 'healed at last', and Hosseini makes no bones about the significance of this moment. Although the plot's culmination is this battle of atonement, the story is not over because it just covers a portion of Amir's betrayal of Hassan. Amir fights to bring Sohrab to America because he understands that he needs to atone for not helping Hassan after the rape. However, by the time Amir carelessly chases a kite with a smile as wide as the Valley of Panjshir at the end of *The Kite Runner*, it is clear that Amir is moving forward with responsibility and compassion, and there is cause for optimism for these characters' futures. Hosseini never promises that Amir's problems will be resolved or that Sohrab will fully recover.

His writings mostly highlight the links of love between father and son, mother and daughter, woman and woman, and man and man. The strong links of love are shown in his books. The relationship between Amir and Hassan in *The Kite Runner* is one of man-to-man. In Hosseini's depiction of human connections, the characters' experiences become closer during times of persecution and violence in Afghanistan are shown.

In the world, there are numerous ways to connect with others. As a result, the book is one way for a person to share their life story, whether it be about friendship, anger, love, loneliness, or grief. Whether it's about interpersonal connections or something else, a book is a type of literary work that illustrates human connection. The bond that all humans have is the main topic of Hosseini's works. In general, we may dwell in different life domains, yet our essential emotions are the same.

We all experience love, hate, and wrath, as well as the ambivalence that goes along with that affection. Beyond the necessities, a person seeks friendship with like-minded individuals. As the book says, this is more than just a social need or a need to be by oneself; it almost has a spiritual quality. Amir's connection to the characters is amply demonstrated by Hosseini throughout the book.

This paper focuses on the bonds between fathers and sons, as well as those between friends and brothers. Baba's relationship with Amir and Hassan turns into parental responsibility. In light

of the aforementioned information, the friendship in the novel is aimed in three directions: Baba and Hassan revealed a friendship between a man who detested religion and a young boy who practiced it; Amir and Hassan revealed a genuine friendship between a Pashtun and a Hazara, and Amir and Sohrab revealed a friendship between a troubled adult who is privy to all the secrets and a young child. Each character represents a different story of adversity, determination, and perseverance.

He probes the depths of the characters' romantic affections for one another in trying circumstances. Hosseini has masterfully and captivatingly braided all of the tales together. Hosseini incorporates elements of Afghanistan's history, culture, and way of life into his stories, according to Rebecca Stuhr. The majority of the issues in his books are well-known to readers, but the ones involving relationships between men is particularly strong and will undoubtedly catch the interest of every reader.

Hosseini, thus excellently portrays the power of self-redemption and proves that no outward contended life will give self-satisfaction other than internal peace which is the prime need of everyone's life. Amir finds his completeness when he joins Sohrab in the kite-running ceremony in America and soulfully connects to him. Amir's entirety results from his self-redemption.

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