



THEME OF REDEMPTION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER

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Redemption is defined as reconciliation and expiation of sin. It is considered as a way of seeking justice. Atonement gives some relief and peace especially when it is believed strongly. Redemption is “the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil.” The literal definition of the word ‘redemption’ is the act, process, or an instance of redeeming. It allows one to become free from the sins, harms or distresses and helps to make changes for the better. And it cannot be accomplished in a single day. The novel, *The Kite Runner* revolves around several themes and one could notice the dominant themes such as Betrayal, Redemption, Friendship and Guilt. The novel also portrays about the individual’s search for redemption, for the crimes committed in the past.

Khaled Hosseini (1965-), Afghan-born American novelist who is known for his vivid depictions of Afghanistan, most notably in *The Kite Runner* (2003). Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His mother was a Persian Teacher and his father was a diplomat. The family relocated to Iran, where his father worked for the Embassy of Afghanistan in Tehran. In 1976, when Hosseini was 11 years old, his father secured a job in Paris, France, and moved the family there. In 1980, shortly after the start of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, they sought political asylum in the US and made their residence in San Jose, California. Hosseini did not return to Afghanistan until 2001 at the age of 36, where he felt like a tourist in his own country. In interviews about the experience, he admitted that he had a feeling of survivor’s guilt as he had to leave the country before the Soviet invasion and subsequent wars.

The Kite Runner is a powerful story about two boys whose friendship is threatened by deception and betrayal yet withstands the pressures of cultural barriers and legal boundaries. The novel is mainly concerned about atonement and redemption. Every betrayal contains a perfect moment, a coin stamped head or tail with salvation on the other side”. Hosseini begins his novel with a flashback technique and says, “One day last summer, my friend Rahim Khan called from Pakistan. He asked me to come see him. Standing in the kitchen with the receiver to my ear, I knew it wasn’t just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my unatoned sins” (KR 1).

Hosseini in an Interview, when asked about the common themes in his two novels, says,

Both novels are multigenerational, and so the relationship between parent and child, with all its manifest complexities and contradictions, is a prominent theme. I did not intend this, but I am keenly interested, it appears, in the way parents and children love, disappoint and in the end honor each other. In one way, the two novels are corollaries: *The Kite Runner* was a father-son story, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as a mother-daughter story (Web Hosseini Interview).

Amir narrates the incident, who takes back to his childhood, in the final decades of monarchy in Afghanistan. The novel is primarily about Amir and Hassan, two close friends, as good as brothers, who are well equipped in the art of kite flying. The two boys, belong to two different classes: Amir, the son of Baba, a wealthy man in Kabul and Hassan, the son of Ali, a servant to Baba’s family. Hassan defines the theme of the novel *The Kite Runner* as one of true friendship. Hassan would do anything for Amir. “Hassan never denied me anything” (KR 4). The story develops with the friendship of two boys growing up in Kabul. But Amir and Hassan brought up in a different life style by their fathers. Amir, being brought up by his wealthy father, Baba and Hassan by Ali, a Hazara man. The Hazaras are an ethnic group native to the region of Hazarajat in central Afghanistan. Despite the difference in social status, Amir and Hassan remain good friends. Both spend their days engaging themselves in kite fighting in the city of Kabul. Hassan is a successful kite runner for Amir and he knows where the kite will land even without watching it. Amir’s mother dies right after giving birth to Amir and Hassan’s mother simply abandons him. Amir’s father, Baba, loves each of them and cares Hassan in a way he cares for Amir.



Hassan is a great devotee, performing all his duties to serve his master and his son. He is loyal towards his friend even when Amir does not consider him as a friend. Amir always has a thought that Hassan is a son of his servant and is jealous of Hassan who has many characteristics, adored by Baba. But Hassan is quite contradictory to the character of Amir. Hassan never let Amir feel down or disappointed and always stands for Amir. Hassan is highly ill-treated and humiliated by Assef, a bully in the neighborhood and also the primary villain of the novel. He is the son of one of Baba's friends, who was born to a German mother and Afghan father. He is a kind of perverted person and is notorious. He often mocks at Amir for socializing with a Hazara. One day Hassan defends Amir when Assef tries to attack him. Hassan says,

You are right, Agha. But perhaps you didn't notice that I'm the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move, they'll have to change your nickname from Assef 'the Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef,' because I have this rock pointed at your left eye. (KR 39-40).

Everything is changed one day during the kite-flying contest, where Amir wins and Hassan runs off to get the kite and finally he got it. Unfortunately, Hassan is blocked by Assef and his friends in the alley. Assef demands the kite from Hassan but he refuses and says "Amir agha won the tournament and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite." (KR 68). When he refuses to give up the kite, Assef beats him and rapes him brutally. Amir witnesses the scene but does not have the courage to stand for Hassan and does not make any effort to stop it. This is considered as the first betrayal of Amir towards Hassan. Amir is filled with guilt and is unaware of his mistake. He ends up with a plan of sending Hassan and Ali away from Kabul.

Amir and Baba forced to leave Afghanistan after the Russian invasion of the country. So they move to America and get settled in life there. Amir pursues a major in English, and both father and son spend the weekend selling items at the local flea market. Amir meets a girl named, Soraya Taheri, who is a fellow refugee and he falls in love with her. Baba suffers from cancer and yet he is capable of fulfilling the wish of his son, that is, he tries to convince Soraya's father, to accept the marriage proposal. They got married with the consent of their family but shortly Baba dies.

Amir and Soraya settled down, happily married, but to their shock, the couple learn that they cannot have a child. The couple has undergone several tests and the results are not positive. One day Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan, his father's friend from Afghanistan, asking him to come and see him. He tells Amir: "There is a way to be good again" (KR 2). Amir finds out Hassan and his wife were living in his old house and had a son named Sohrab. Unfortunately, they were killed by Taliban, which leads their son to be an orphan. Rahim, further reveals the truth that Hassan is Amir's half brother. Amir is completely dejected to know the deeds of his father and feels that he and his father had betrayed the people who remain loyal till their last breath.

After knowing that Sohrab is the son of his half brother, Amir decides to find Sohrab and he wants to redeem himself by saving Sohrab. He heads to Afghanistan to search Sohrab, with the help of an Afghan taxi driver. When they find the orphanage, they learn from Zaman, the director that Sohrab is taken by a Taliban official who comes once every month, usually for a girl and sometimes a little boy to use them for their sick pleasure. Amir meets the Taliban official who has Sohrab under his control and got shocked because the Taliban whom he wants to meet is Assef. Even Amir Requests Assef to hand over Sohrab, he mercilessly denied to give him. Assef agrees to relinquish Sohrab only if Amir wins in a duel. In the duel, Assef cruelly beats him, breaking several bones and wants to quench his thirst of revenge. Sohrab attacks Assef with his slingshot. Then Amir and Sohrab escape immediately and rushed to Pakistan.

Amir takes Soraya and Sohrab to 'Lake Elizabeth Park' for a gathering of Afghans and notices people flying kites in the sky. He bought one kite and went over to Sohrab and tells him that Hassan was the best kite runner he had ever known. He asks him if he wants to fly the kite then, Sohrab follows Amir as he launches the kite into the air. When Amir shows off some of Hassan's tricks, Sohrab gives a lopsided smile. Amir says, "For you, a thousand times over" (KR 340). And he runs the kite for Sohrab.



Betrayal is the core theme that one can notice throughout the novel. “We have almost all the major characters who have sinned in one way or the other. They have a guilty conscience and in order to overcome this sense of guilt or sin, they offer penance as atonement” (Web Bhat). Amir often betrays his best friend, Hassan. Also, one can see the betrayal from another important character, Baba, the father of Amir. He betrays his own friend and servant, Ali by fathering a child (Hassan) with Ali's wife, Sanaubar. When this thing comes to Amir's knowledge, he gets disappointed as he always seen his father as a hero and is shocked to know about the flaws of his father, which is considered to be the worst example of betrayal in the novel. This remains a major betrayal done by a father to his son in the novel as Baba never acknowledges Hassan as his own son.

The main reason for Amir's betrayal of Hassan is nothing but, trying to please his father and living up to his expectations, which ultimately leads Amir betraying Hassan several times. All trust involves vulnerability and risk, and nothing would count as trust if there were no possibility of betrayal. Amir always wants to get his father's attention and so he remains selfish even at the crucial moment. He chooses not to help Hassan as he wanted to show the kite to his father that he had captured in the competition. He ignores helping Hassan from the critical situation where Hassan has been cornered by Assef, who is sexually assaulting him. Amir witnesses the act but feels scared and threatened to intervene. He feels that Baba would not feel praised if he fails to bring home the kite. “It always hurts more to have and lose than to not have in the first place” (KR 211). At any cost, Amir doesn't want to lose his father's approval.

Though Amir had an opportunity to rescue Hassan, he did not do that, and watches Hassan being raped and chooses to do nothing rather he brings the kite back to his father just for the sake of his father's approval. Just for the few appraisal words from his father, he ignores Hassan thereby ignoring his own conscience. This is the first betrayal done by Amir to Hassan which Amir narrates his point of view as,

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 could run. In the end, I ran (KR 72).

After the incident, Amir is wholly occupied by guilt. He feels suffocated by the presence of Hassan and he reminds Amir the constant reminders of the loyalty of Hassan and Amir's own betrayal. He begins to believe that life would be easier if Hassan is not with him. So, Amir thought of leading a life without his presence. After witnessing the rape scene of Hassan, Amir couldn't stand being around him since both Amir and Hassan lives in the same household. Amir then worsens the act of betrayal by driving Hassan and Ali away from the household.

Amir goes to Hassan's room and hides his watch and money under the mattress of Hassan. "Then I knocked on Baba's door and told what I hoped would be the last in a long line of shameful lies"(KR 97). Amir tells Baba that Hassan stole them. And when Baba inquires Hassan directly whether he had stolen the money. To Amir's surprise, Hassan says, that he did, by telling a single word, “Yes” (KR 97). Amir understands everything and only then he realizes the fact that Hassan has seen him in the alley and realizes that Hassan is making one last sacrifice for him, despite his great betrayal. “I loved him in that moment, loved him more than I'd ever loved anyone, and I wanted to tell them all that I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake”(KR 98). Amir feels the horror of his guilt and feels himself like a monster.

These incidents in the lives of Amir and Baba create a sense of tension and guilt throughout the novel. The feeling of guilt becomes a dominant feel for Amir. The betrayals of both Amir and Baba also leads to the quests for redemption, which actually resulted good in the end as one can notice the transformations of both the characters, Amir and Baba.

Their quests for redemption resulted in a well optimistic way as Baba leads a charitable life and Amir on the other hand; he rescues Sohrab, the son of Hassan. When Amir is ready to confront what he has done, then he can look at himself from a realistic perspective. With utmost realization, Amir needs redemption by seeking Sohrab and ultimately saves him. This is where one could sense the feeling of redemption through the deeds of Amir. Amir's guilt is put at rest and he has finally found a way of becoming good again.



In the novel, sin and guilt are so enduring that redemption becomes a prominent one. Amir tries to atone for the sins committed by him and his father. Rahim Khan says,

"Sometimes, I think everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. And that, I believe, in what true redemption is Amir Jan, when guilt leads to good "(KR 277).

Amir is wholly obsessed with reveries of his sins and the consequences he faced by it. Still he finds many ways to overcome his feeling of guilt. Also, he is occupied with the feeling of guilt, regret, and his inability to confess his sin. He does not have the courage to accept Hassan as his brother. Though, he adopts Sohrab, the son of Hassan. The act of becoming a father to Sohrab is only his own final conjectured atonement for his sin. The paper has examined the effects of Redemption on the main character, Amir in *The Kite Runner*. The relations between the protagonist Amir and Hassan changes from a mutual one to that of adversity while the former makes every effort to get an atonement to escape vilification. Amir shows great commitment to be exonerated from past sin. Atonement, redemption and forgiveness took a long time to be achieved. The expectations always related to the logical relationship between the accused and the accuser. Thus in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini depicts the paradox of searching for truth and peace in a world of chaos.

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