

# Theme of Guilt and Redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

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## **Abstract**

“For you a thousand times over”

The lines once said by Hassan to Amir went on haunting the conscience of Amir throughout his life in the story. Hassan, a Hazara boy, was Amir's family servant and his closest companion, where as Amir was a Pashtun. Amir could not accept it by heart, as the two belonging to two different ethnic group. And the subdued indignation of Amir for Hassan got expressed when Hassan was abused by Assef in Amir's presence and Amir ignored it. The guilt, what he did to Hassan in return to his loyalty, was always a dark secret of his life. He used to envy everyone; envy Hassan for being a daredevil; to Ali for being so relaxed with his daily life-activities; to Baba for being so outspoken; and utterly to Soraya also for not hiding her secret of eloping with a man. He envied the purity of their hearts which concealed no sin. Amir's nature had always been of an escapist and cowardice. Rahim Khan told what Baba thought of him and once spoke to Rahim Khan: “Rahim, a boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up for anything”.

## **Key Words**

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taliban, USSR, US, Pashtun, Hazara, Kite-flying, Rape, Conscience, Guilt, Redemption.

The basic theme of the novel is guilt and redemption where as the proceeding of the story is based on the hatred between Pashtuns and Hazaras or Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The Pashtuns had precluded and oppressed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, buried their homes and sold their women. The reason of Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras that Pashtuns is Sunni Muslim, while Hazaras is Shia”. (*The Kite Runner*, 2003, 8).

Hassan and Ali belonging to the Hazaras, were often subjected to the lenition of people because they were living in a place of Pashtuns. They were already servants to Amir and Baba, but the society could not bear to see them walking free or sometimes holding their head high. This was making life difficult for them. Kite-flying was one of the popular and old winter traditions in Afghanistan. Hassan was the greatest kite runner of his locality and was very fast in kite catching. Many of the boys used to envy him. With his inborn skill he got very close to Baba. Baba always had a feeling of admiration and happiness for Hassan. He loved Hassan and this made Amir very jealous. Baba knew that Hassan was a blessed boy. He had many inborn talents which made him extraordinary. He was always ready to take risk for his master, for his only friend Amir. He was so faithful towards Amir that he was ready to go to any extent to make him happy and Baba knew it very well. Amir always felt that Hassan held a special place in Baba's heart. Baba being himself an extrovert and risk-taker, he always made his own rules for life, wanted Amir also to be more extrovert and confident; but Amir always disappointed him. On the other hand, Hassan almost always managed to be in his heart by his performance and loyalty. This kept Amir distant from Baba; though he always wanted to be perfect and praise worthy for Baba. on the other hand, Hassan got all attention from everyone specially from Baba; it was very difficult to digest for Amir.

This winter Amir wished and attempted to exhibit his greatest ability before Baba in order to win his accolades.

Every winter district in Kabul held a kite flying tournament, and if you are boy living in Kabul, the day of tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season. (*The Kite Runner, 2003, 43-44*).

However, in the winter 1975, the internal conflict, which Amir was going through had proved far more dangerous and competitive than anything else. By the passing time Amir also developed the feeling that Hassan is just a servant to him and nothing else. He had, out of jealousy, forgotten the relation he had with his loyal childhood friend Hassan. Now he was nothing for Amir but a Hazara, who was meant to serve him since his birth. Amir was very well aware of his kite-flying skills. He knew very well that if defeated this time he would again be going to lose in Baba's eyes and Hassan would again prove to be a hero.

I kept stealing glances at Baba sitting with Rahim Khan on the roof, wondered what he was thinking, was he cheering for me? Or did a part of him enjoy watching me fail"? (*The Kite Runner, 2003, 60*).

Amir was so self-conscious and worried that what his Baba would think of him if he lost. He was so negative with his thoughts that sometimes he imagined that Baba always wished Hassan to win and feel proud of; if he deliberately wanted Amir to lose and again prove him worthless compared to Hassan.

All I smelled was victory, salvation, redemption. If Baba was wrong and there was a god like they say in the school, then he'd let him win. I didn't know what was the other guy was playing for. But this was my one chance to become someone who was looked at not seen, listed to, not heard. If there was god, he'd guide the winds, let them blow for me, so that, with a tug of my string, I'd cut lose my pain, my longing. I'd endured too much, come too far. (*The Kite Runner, 2003, 62*).

Amir wanted to prove himself. He felt a huge pressure to win, to be good, to finish all the pain of ignorance which he had been receiving from his father. He was succumbed in the feeling of victory, that he found it to be the only hope to come out with his everyday suffering for identity crises. He wanted to be better, better than Hassan, better than everybody. He wanted to be somebody. By coming near the victory, he was feeling himself free, light, happy. And finally, with the help of Hassan he won.

You won Amir Agha! You won!

We won! We won! Was all I should say. (*The Kite Runner, 2003, 63*)

This was the last time Amir admitted that this victory belonged to Hassan. His heart knew that it was impossible for him to win the tournament without Hassan but the denial was greater than acceptance and Amir refused to accept the reality afterward. Hassan ran after the blue kite to catch and finally got it; the kite was cut by Amir. Hassan was so happy by Amir's victory that he was jumping with joy and excitement. He forgot the difference between him and Amir which certainly made Amir embarrassed.

"For you a thousand times over!" He said, then he smiled his Hassan smile and disappeared around the corner. The next time I saw him smile unabashedly like that twenty-six years later, in a faded Polaroid photograph". (*The Kite Runner, 2003, 63*).

This is the turning point of the novel. Every situation and the assessment described by the novelist become clear. Hassan was a Hazara boy with a history of his mothers' story of loping and romancing with men. He was very well aware of the social behaviour and his own condition in society due to his ethnicity and also for his mother's doings. Pashtun boys were always ready to harass and abuse him. On that fateful day of the annual kite-flying ceremony when he was joyously returning with the winning kite of Amir, he was caught all alone by a Pashtun boy Assef. Assef was a bully and an ardent follower of Hitler. His activities were brutal and

insensitive since his childhood itself. He was full of hatred for the Hazaras. He possessed his own definition of religion which had made him a fanatic. He downgraded Hassan and raped him as he treated him to be his subject and a commodity because Hassan was a Hazara. Hassan had a fight with Assef in the past in order to protect Amir; in this fight Hassan had injured Assef's eye with his sling shot. Assef's hatred towards Hassan and the Hazaras were evident as he portrayed himself as a religiously powerful man who was descendent of a true Muslim. To take his revenge and to show Hassan his real place Assef raped Hassan brutally. Amir witnessed it all silently:

I could stop 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. I ran because I was a coward".  
(*The Kite Runner* 2003,72)

Amir witnessed everything what had happened to Hassan. Hassan was humiliated and then abused just for Amir. His loyalty was so true for his only friend that he gave up his everything just to be good and faithful to Amir. Hassan had to keep his promise to Amir. And he did; for that he had to pay a huge price. Amir refused to help Hassan. Amir became so selfish that Hassan's rape became one easy price to be paid for what he wanted - his victory and appreciation by his Baba:

Nothing was free in this world. May be Hassan was the price he 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 want it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he"? (*The Kite Runner*, 2003,73).

Rape of Hassan left a huge impact on both the kids, Hassan and Amir. Amir witnessed Assef's act to Hassan and kept mum; it started developing a feeling of guilt within him which he refused to admit. In order to get his father's love, he got conflicted. To make it worse for Hassan and to avoid his glance he put his money and watch in Hassan's house and played to make him culprit in Baba's eyes. He said that Hassan stole it. The acceptance of Hassan about the stealing was again his sacrifice for Amir; and it was final:

Baba came right out and asked, "Did you steal that money? Did you steal that watch, Hassan?" Hassan's reply was a single word, delivered in a thin, raspy voice: "Yes".

I flinched like I would be slapped. My heart sank and I blurted out the truth. Then I understood: this was Hassan's final sacrifice for me. Hassan and Ali had left the place after the incident. They did not stop after Baba's pleadings. Ali was adamant on his decision that he had to leave the place and go to 'Hazarat' to his cousins.

Baba's heart was crying, he tried to stop them both but it was of no use. Amir was also feeling sorry for everything. Deep down he wanted to say everything, he wanted to confess but he did not; that again proved him coward and selfish. Hassan was gone, he was gone out of Amir's life. That was the last day Amir saw Hassan.

I was sorry, but I did not cry and I did not chase the car. I watched Baba's car pull away from the curb, taking with it the person who's first spoken word had been my name. I caught one final glimpse of Hassan slumped in the back seat before Baba turned left at the street corner where we'd played marbles so many times.

Baba knew what Amir was and Amir also knew what Baba and Rahim Khan thought about him. To escape from what he did to Hassan, he plotted a theft scene and indulged Hassan in it. He attempted to make him a culprit before Baba as theft was the biggest sin in Baba's opinion. But to his utter surprise Baba had forgiven Hassan and Baba's ignorance to this act of fabricated theft made him more jealous to Hassan, because Baba had once told Amir:

Forgive? But theft was the one unforgivable sin, the common denominator of life. When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a further. When you tell a lie,

you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. There is no act more wretched than stealing. (*The Kite Runner*, 98).

Amir never understood why Hassan was so important to Baba. Though the versatile qualities and undeterred personality of Hassan were known to everybody; still the appreciation and longing for him by Baba was unbearable to Amir. Though Hassan had become aware of this notion of Amir, he was Amir's loyal friend and he had always been ready rather eager to make sacrifices for Amir: "For you a thousand times over". Hassan had lived up to this proclamation made by himself for Amir and Amir knew it very well. That is why his behavior for Hassan always traumatized him. But Amir proved blessed as he was granted with an opportunity for redemption, the situation had been waiting ahead - in the garb of future.

As if, rape had been an accepted practice for subjugation or merriment in Afghanistan, irrespective of gender and age; women were taken as commodities and children also, that too young boys, fell victim to this anti-humanistic and illegal practice; it was shocking. Hosseini has skillfully but silently thrown a light on it which leaves a powerful impact on the readers. Sohrab, the only son of Hassan, became a captive of Taliban. Rahim Khan had got this information and he desired the safe escape for him from the cruel hands of Taliban. Sohrab was a blessed boy like his father and the only surviving member in the next generation of their family. Rahim Khan wished Amir to take Sohrab away from Taliban, at the same time he was very well aware of Amir's cowardice nature and his escapism. He knew that Sohrab was dying and there was no one to protect Sohrab from Taliban's grip. It was a difficult moment when Rahim Khan revealed this truth to Amir, and also his wish to take Sohrab freed from the Taliban. Amir too was offended to learn this; he attempted to offer money and showed him different ways to do this which made Rahim Khan puzzled. Amir thought that he had a very good and safe life in America; why should he indulge himself into such a trouble. He could manage someone with money to do this but why should he be doing so and risk himself. Rahim Khan wished to confirm his plan of Sohrab's rescue. He wished that Amir must come forward to rescue Sohrab. He also wished that Amir should not only rescue Sohrab rather Amir should take Sohrab to America with himself. When all his appeals and logics to Amir made no effect, Rahim Khan played his last card finally. This was the greatest truth of life of all those involved. Rahim Khan disclosed which was concealed till date:

But there is something you don't know.

Please Rahim Khan

Sanauber wasn't Ali's first wife.

He was married once before, to a Hazara woman from the Laghari born. They were married for three years.

What does this have to do with anything?

She left him children and married a man in Khost. She bore him three daughters. That's what I am trying to tell you.

...

I began to see him where he was going. But I didn't want to hear the rest of it. I had a good life in California, pretty Victorian home with a peaked roof, a good marriage, a promising writing career, in-laws who loved me. I didn't need any of this shit.

Ali was sterile, Rahim Khan said.

No, he wasn't. He and Sanauber had Hassan, didn't they?

They had Hassan---

No, they didn't, Rahim Khan said.

Yes, they did!

No, they didn't, Amir.

Then who--

I think you know, who.

I felt like a man sliding down a steep cliff, clutching at shrubs and tangles of brambles and coming up empty handed. The room was swooping up and down, swaging side to side.

Did Hassan know? I said through lips that didn't feel like my own. Rahim Khan closed his eyes, shook his head. (*The Kite Runner*, 205-206)

The final truth was spoken. The spell was broken. Hassan was Amir's own brother; Hassan was Baba's son. This made Amir shattered deep down, though simultaneously he felt happy. He felt happy to know that Hassan belonged to him. He felt happy to know that he was not the only one who had hidden the truth. He felt happy to learn that Rahim Khan acknowledged Amir's sin towards Hassan. The peace was eternal. Amir felt relieved after a point of time. Now when Amir had known the truth that Hassan was his half-brother, he decided: "There is a way to be good again". He decided to get Hassan's son Sohrab free from the clutches of the tormentors.

Rahim Khan meant it and he called Amir to perform which was long due from Amir's side. Sohrab was the only one left from their blood stream and he needed to be free from Taliban by any means. He was a captive of Taliban under Assef. After Amir and Baba's departure for America and later Hassan's death, Assef had joined Taliban. He had become one of the heads of Taliban. As an act of revenge from Hassan who had once blinded him of one eye from his sling shot, he imprisoned his young son Sohrab and regularly raped him. Assef was a sadist and his character were really depressing. While Amir fought Assef in course of rescuing Sohrab from him, Sohrab blinded Assef with his slingshot as his father had done, and managed to escape himself and Amir from his captive.

Amir finally succeeded in doing that and somehow it became the only redemption on his part towards Hassan. "The moral cycle starts with the elder generation, between Baba and Ali, who were respectively Amir's father and Hassan's nominal father".

Baba's love for Hassan was Baba's prerogative but unsaid and unrevealed. He always wanted Hassan to keep close to him; he admired him; he praised his honesty, his bravery. Baba had very well learnt that the courage Hassan owns is from nowhere else but from his own gene. Above all Baba was proud of Hassan. Amir's initial indifference for Baba which he had been nourishing since his childhood, vanished to some extent and he got relief in true sense when he learnt that Hassan was his half-brother. Hassan's loyalty and goodness had always disturbed Amir but when he knew the truth of their relation he understood the reason of the attachment that Baba had with him. Though it took time for him to admit and adjust with the truth about Hassan and moreover about Baba.

Baba had a child with Sanauber and the child was none else but Hassan. He and Rahim Khan both kept the secret to themselves for ever. Ali too, knew the truth as well but never said anything. Baba's loyalty and affection towards both - Ali and Hassan was nothing but the redemption of his own guilt. Sometimes Amir used to think that Baba was affectionate to Hassan because his mother had died while giving birth to him, and thus Baba might never leave them alone. That is why his eagerness to redeeming himself was so high that he slays Hassan for that.

When Amir came to know that his wife Soraya was not able to bear a child, he again accepted the truth by thinking that God is taking His own revenge and this happened because it was meant to happen. He accepts his deprivation from fatherhood as his fate's punishment for his injustice, inhumanity and cruelty towards Hassan. This acceptance was again his redemption for Hassan. But when he discovered about Baba and Hassan, he felt cheated. He understood why Baba made enormous efforts to keep Ali and Hassan in the family. This was again Baba's redemption towards them. Amir remembered Baba crying for the first time when Ali said he

wanted to leave. The pain and suffering of Baba had a reason and Amir understood it very late, when all had departed. He was left with no choice but to realize and correct; he was never at all in a position to confess.

Amir's final redemption to his guilt was achieved when he knew his relation with Hassan that made him even closer to Hassan, was to take Sohrab with him. He finally succeeded in it, he could be able to overcome his guilt by his deeds; he could console him and take a reprieve. Amir, Hassan and Baba's interweaving traces of life left Sohrab as an outcome; in the last it was accepted and done by Amir and Soraya happily. As the result, Sohrab became an integral part of 'Amir and Soraya family'.

Work Cited:

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