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Exploring Dimensions of Relationships in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

It is appropriately designated man as a social animal. For this reason, there a compulsion before human beings to live in society and be reliant on the functionality of others for his existence and livelihood. There are varieties of ties and bonds to be maintained with society, family and above all God with the help of connections and communication among individuals and masses.

There are emotional bonds although human beings come from numerous cultures, ethnicities, races, nations, and social classes. There are internal and external connections which human beings keeps on dealing at every step. Internal and intimate bonds are maintained among the family members while external connections are maintained among friends, companions, relatives and so many others. Some relations are linked through blood but some are there based on emotions, trust, devotion, faith and needs. One of the most substantial human connections is that between a man and a woman. Therefore, the man-woman connection remains the pivotal point of any civilised society. Literature and literary texts capture the concrete and abstract image of human existence, relations, pleasures and pains. The present article brings out the different shades of relationships in the works of Khaled Hosseini. There are themes of expatriate literature in his works as an Afghan based writer having the concerns of diaspora. Most of his protagonists and other characters uphold their conviction in love and humanity although having the situations of adversity. Hope remained the prime concern of his creations.

Keywords: Relationship, Trauma, Existence, Trust, Redemption, Morality, Culture, War

Khaled Hosseini is well-known diasporic Afghan-American author. He is famous for three phenomenal books, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Mountains Echoed*. These books are set against the backdrop of the Afghan war and traumatic experiences of the protagonist. He has tackled the hard realities of today's world in these writings. Hosseini has addressed themes that are critical in the twenty-first century. His characters are mostly independent and unprejudiced. His characters maintain relationships without caring for social classes, statuses, races and ages. There is trust, mutual understanding, caring, and sacrifice. In some of his works we can also observe the theme of conflict and its impact on human relations. He has depicted the turmoil in different ways. Most of his works are set in Afghanistan and reflect the country's history, culture, values, social structure and political situations. There are expressions related to various issues, sufferings, traumatic experiences, ravaging of natural disasters and terribly distressing situations which are prevalent in contemporary Afghanistan; one of the badly affected combat zones.

The Kite Runner is divided into three parts, the first of which takes place in Kabul. The childhood of Amir has been chronicled in this section. It presents the situations which seem occurring during the early and mid-1970s. This section focuses on the development of Amir

and Hassan's connection. The second half begins in 1981, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. This incident forces Amir and his father to flee the country and settle in California as members of the immigrant Afghan community. The section also provides details of the marriage of Amir and Soraya and the death of Amir's father in 1989. The third and final section of the narrative begins in 2001. It provides details of the Amir's return to Afghanistan via Pakistan.

The Kite Runner is a work of historic fiction. It is set against the backdrop of historical activities in Afghanistan, from the autumn of the monarchy through the rise and fall of the Taliban. It specializes in a specific location and the social situations of the time period. The entrance of the Soviets compels the protagonist Amir and his father Baba to transport to America, and the Taliban's reign consequences in Hassan's execution and the orphaning of Sohrab. These two violent actions provide the essential action to write *The Kite Runner's* story forward. Hosseini has incorporated various smaller-scale aspects of Afghanistan to create an accurate portrayal of his homeland. Different kinds of occasions and descriptions have been made to make it worth realising the real like descriptions. The "musty-smelling bazaars," of Kabul, kite-fighting tournaments in winter, and the "bloodred pomegranate" trees give vivid views into a mostly foreign place and period for a predominantly Western audience. The following observation of Rebeca Stuhr is worth quoting here to make it more concerned:

Hosseini writes compelling stories through which he questions assumptions and breaks apart stereotypes through the strengths and weaknesses of his characters. He interweaves into the action of his stories the details of history, culture, and daily life in Afghanistan. He challenges his readers to reflect on discrimination and political abuse within their own experience in light of instances of such abuses in a different and unfamiliar country. (Rebecca Stuhr 77-78)

There are elements of bildungsroman in *The Kite Runner*. It provides a chronicle to Amir's growth from childhood to maturity in the matter of moral and psychological aspects. Most of the incidents have been described through flashback technique. It reveals from the start that Hassan's rape had a major impact on twelve-year-old Amir's life. Amir struggles with his fiasco to hinder in that moment for the most part of the story. There is matter of atone for his inactivity. When Rahim Khan, his childhood teacher calls Amir who is adult now and tells him "there is a way to be good again" (*The Kite Runner* 177). Amir decides to leave his life and

business in America to return to Afghanistan and atone for his previous actions by saving Hassan's child, Sohrab. Amir remarks that he is "healed at last."

The novel provides the paradoxical state of human affairs. It depicts both the affluent lives of the Afghans and the horrible as well as the deplorable conditions of life of the hapless and ill-fated victims of the Taliban. It also provides us an inside look at the Taliban's society and analyses the Afghan people's beliefs and customs. Amir's phone call from Rahim Khan requesting his return is actually a journey for Amir's redemption and salvation from his previous crimes. The story of the novel has been told in first person and is divided into a succession of recollections of the protagonist Amir, who is always filled with remorse and blames himself for leaving his faithful boyhood friend, Hassan. B. Charlie's remark in this regard is worth quoting:

A gripping and emotional story of betrayal and redemption, *The Kite Runner* had me thrilled and moved, both at the same time. It tells the story of Amir and Hassan, the closest of friends, as good as brothers, and also experts in the art of kite flying. The two young boys live in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and this year they are going to try harder than ever to win the local kite-fighting tournament—a popular Afghan pastime, and this is Amir's one hope of winning his father's love. But just like the kites battling in the sky, war comes to Afghanistan, and the country becomes an extremely dangerous place. (Charlie, B)

The central theme and aspect of the novel is Amir's desire and longing for redemption and refurbishing the previous deeds. Amir has got a great sense to perform his duties diligently and sincerely. He always wanted to receive Baba's clemency with the sense of forgiveness. It has been concerned to him since the death of his mother while giving birth to him. For this and for everything he has great sense of guilt for which wanted redemption. For maintaining the relations and coming to good terms with Baba, Amir thinks over the issue to win the kite-tournament surely and deliver the lost kite to him. Both of these aspirations are rabble-rousing and stirring deeds that keep the plot of the novel at good pace from beginning to the end. However, Amir's penitence over Hassan is the source of the spirit of his quest for atonement. The concluding actions of the novels involves Amir's journey from Kabul to find Sohrab and his meeting with Assef, are driven by his remorse and sense of guilt. Baba explains early in the novel that a youngster who does not stand up and work for himself becomes a man who cannot stand up and help to anything. This inspirational idea and words set the moral paths for Amir's

thoughts of reaching the destinations to earn his redemption. As a child, Amir is unable of standing up for himself. He can only redeem himself as an adult by demonstrating that he has the fortitude to stand up for what is right.

The actions, descriptions and incidents of novel are full of numerous types of deep and shallow relations that emerge among the characters such as Amir and Hassan, Baba and Amir, Baba and Hassan, and others. All of these relations play a significant and pivotal role in the novel's plot. Every relationship a reader encounters is significant in its own manner. Amir and Hassan's father, Baba, is a rich businessman. He is sceptical of religious extremism, yet he lives by his own moral code and conducts. He acts with great courage and confidence. He hides the fact that Hassan is his own blood clotting in human shape throughout his life since he was born to a Hazara lady with whom he had an unlawful affair. Baba cannot publicly adore Hassan, therefore he keeps Hassan at proper distance from Amir, despite his complete love for him. Ali is Hassan's acting father and a servant at Baba's house. He is recognised for his modesty more than anything else as Baba's servant who works tirelessly. Hassan is both Amir's best friend and half-brother.

Hassan displays his faithfulness to Amir throughout the narrative by defending him anytime when he is threatened. Sanaubar is Hassan's mother and, Ali's wife. She is known for her immorality in her youth and abandons Hassan shortly after his birth, but when she emerges later in the narrative, she shows to be a compassionate grandmother to Sohrab, son of Hassan. Amir's wife, Soraya, has been portrayed as an ideal wife who is always there for him when he needs her. Another character of the novel is Rahim Khan who is a fatherly figure to Amir. He constantly provides Amir the attention he desires and fills the emotional void created in his life by Baba's gap from Amir. In Hassan and Sohrab's lives, Assef, the novel's antagonist, plays the role of a rapist. He is a symbol for all the negativities and injustice that have occurred in Afghanistan.

In this novel, Hosseini has employed a complicated network of father-son relationship. The relation of loving and loved has been successfully woven throughout the story of the novel. Amir, throughout the novel longs for the love and attention of his father but is always ignored by him. He wanted to spend time with his father who always ignore him and gives priority in spending time with his friend. The plot and incidents of the novel are profoundly influenced by this connection to which Rebecca Stuhr in her book *Reading Khaled Hosseini*, writes:

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 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. (Rebecca Stuhr 25)

Another complex relationship portrayed in the novel is that of Baba and Hassan that becomes more so as the narrative unfolds. Baba does not divulge the truth he holds in his heart until Rahim Khan reveals this later in the novel. Hassan and his father Ali are more than servants to Baba. Ali and Baba have grown up together and, like Amir and Hassan, they are playmates. Ali has known Baba since he was a toddler. Hassan was highly regarded by Baba, who lavished him with gifts and toys. He even arranged for Hassan to get surgery to remove his harelip. Amir was often jealous when his father used to treat Hassan with same concern and equality. He says:

Baba would buy us each three identical kites and spools of glass string. If I changed my mind and asked for a bigger and fancier kite, Baba would buy it for me--but then he'd buy it for Hassan too. Sometimes I wished he wouldn't do that. Wished he'd let me be the favorite. (*The Kite Runner* 40)

Despite their socioeconomic and cultural contrasts, each of their lives cannot be told without the other. Despite the fact that Hassan was a servant in Amir's home, he relished every moment spent with him. When Amir returned home from school, they would both walk to a hill and sit and chat to each other:

After school, Hassan and I met up, grabbed a book, and trotted up a bowl-shaped hill just north of my father's property in Wazir Akbar Khan... There was a pomegranate tree near the entrance to the cemetery. One summer day, I used one of Ali's kitchen knives to carve our names on it: "Amir and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul." (*The Kite Runner* 26)

Amir used to read Hassan a lot of stories. Hassan had a powerful and positive impact on Amir's literary career. Hassan appreciates the books that Amir reads to him. But in most of the novel we find the dominance of Amir and the relationship rather appears like that of a master and slave instead of a friendship. Once Amir wrote a story on his own and he was so

anxious to read it to Hassan, that he woke him up in the middle of the night and Hassan being an obedient friend woke up to listen the story. Amir says:

I shook Hassan awake and asked him if he wanted to hear a story, He rubbed his sleep-clogged eyes and stretched. “Now? What time is it?” “Never mind the time. This story’s special. I wrote it myself,” I whispered, hoping not to wake Ali. Hassan’s face brightened. “Then I have to hear it,” he said, already pulling the blanket off him. (*The Kite Runner* 25)

In the narrative, a catastrophic event occurs during the kite competition, which alters the direction of Amir and Hassan’s friendship. Amir’s need to please his father takes precedence over his capacity to be a loyal friend, leading him to ignore the problem and betray Hassan. Amir betrayed the one who had always stood by him and was willing to go to any length to remain faithful to him. When the contest was over, Amir clipped the final kite, and Hassan dashed over to retrieve it for Amir. Amir went seeking for Hassan after being unable to locate him at home. He wandered around the streets of his hometown, asking passers-by whether they had seen a Hazara youngster running with a blue kite.

Relationships are an essential component of life. Those with whom we engage and surround ourselves, bring us delight. But at times relationships might hinder our way and force us to rethink about our bonds with others. The protagonist, Amir, learns in the novel *The Kite Runner* that relationships are not always beneficial. Through Amir’s interactions with Hassan, Baba, and Sohrab, Hosseini depicts how treachery and distrust can break relationships. We too have perspectives of doing things our way and we hold sole right to judge certain decisions that we make in life but there are times when such decisions proves to be fatal.

The novel establishes the idea that friendship is unaffected by race, position, age, and religion. It recalls the friendships of several generations, such as Baba’s and Hassan’s, Amir’s and Hassan’s, and Amir’s and Sohrab’s. When reading the novel, one thing that stands out is how Baba– a powerful and wealthy man – can be overly kind to the son of his servant, which makes the reader think about it and portrays “true humanism” until the secrets are revealed that Baba is Hassan’s biological father, and Hassan and Amir are brothers. Baba and Hassan are two very different persons in terms of age, religion, and social rank, yet these differences cannot stand in the way of their mutual understanding. Baba belongs to an honourable ethnic group, Pashtun, whereas Hassan is related to the lowest rank of their society, Hazara; Baba does not

practise religion, whereas Hassan does; Baba belongs to an honourable ethnic group, Pashtun; Baba belongs to an honourable ethnic group, Pashtun.

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