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1. Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns: A Female Saga of Love, Friendship, Female Subjugation, Sacrifice, Redemption and Hope

Dr. Sameer Naim

Dr. M. K. Umathe College, Nagpur

Page No: 1-8

[DOI:16.10089.SPJMR.2020.V10I10.16.3649](#)


2. Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner: A Male World of Love, Friendship, Betrayal, Redemption and Hope

Dr. Sameer Naim

Dr. M. K. Umathe College, Nagpur

Page No: 9-15

[DOI:16.10089.SPJMR.2020.V10I10.16.3650](#)


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Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner: A Male World of Love, Friendship, Betrayal, Redemption and Hope

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Abstract:

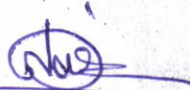
Hosseini published *The Kite Runner* in 2003 which acclaimed worldwide recognition in due course of time. While *The Kite Runner* was gaining vast following, Hosseini returned to Afghanistan for the first time in twenty-seven years. He was disturbed to discover just how terrible the situation there had become, even though he had already written a very graphic fictional account of it. Hosseini felt estranged from the devastation in Afghanistan, but his separation from his homeland and his 'Western Sensibility' combined in his fiction to bring America's and the World's attention to the faces of Afghanistan. His devotion to Afghanistan can be seen not only in his writings but also in his activism.

Here in this research paper an earnest attempt has been made to analyze the themes of love, friendship, redemption and hope as portrayed by Khaled Hosseini in his debut novel *The Kite Runner* from different perspectives and to arrive at conclusion based on evidences of the same in the novel itself.

Keywords: Love, Friendship, Redemption, Betrayal, Hope, *Kite Runner*.

Introduction:

The Kite Runner is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed. It is about the power of friendship, the price of betrayal and the possibility of redemption. Hosseini manages to provide an educational and eye opening account of a country's political turmoil, while also developing characters whose heart-breaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers long after the last page has been turned over. Khaled Hosseini identifies a number of themes in *The Kite Runner*. Commenting on its themes, he remarked, "Because of its themes of friendship, betrayal, guilt, redemption and the uneasy love between fathers and sons, are universal themes, and not specifically Afghan, the book has been able to reach across cultural, social, religious and gender gaps to resonate with readers of varying backgrounds." *The Kite Runner* is an unforgettable and heart-wrenching story of the unlikely


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friendship between Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970's, the boys are inseparable who spend idyllic days running Kites, telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted.

In Quest of Father's Love and Care:

Amir's life as a child was essentially one enormous call for attention. As a child, Amir desires to be alone with his father and resorts to lying in order to get what he wants. This is a characteristic of a desperate child. Amir, the narrator, while talking about his childhood days, explains how as a child he always struggled to win his father's love, which was not at all easy to extract. At the beginning of the novel we get a very clear understanding of this father-son relationship. Amir tries to get close to his father but is always turned back by his awe-inspiring and indifferent father. When he tries to enter his father's study, his father would stand in the doorway and deny him the permission to enter into the room as it was grown ups' time. Denied the pleasures of his Baba's company, Amir would sit by the door, knees drawn to his chest—a foetal posture—indicative of his sense of insecurity and loneliness, and his craving for that security and warmth that a child gets in the mother's womb. But unfortunately his mother died while giving birth to him. He is not only a motherless child, completely deprived of motherly love and affection, but is also living with a sense of guilt that he is the cause of her death. He thinks he has robbed his father of his most prized possession. And perhaps, this is the reason of his father's indifferent attitude and half-hearted affection for him. A self-made, confident and dashing man, who likes to see a man, exudes manliness in whatever he does, and who hates to see any display of physical and emotional weakness on a man's part. And on the other hand, we have Amir, his son, who exhibits exactly the same shortcomings that his father hates to see in him.

We find a complete mismatch between a father's expectations of his son and a son's personal choices, interests and leanings. Whatever the reason of this uneasy relationship; be it the death of Amir's mother or Amir's inability to meet his father's expectations, a child's craving for parental love is natural—something every child is born with and doesn't depend on the fulfillment of conditions. It is pure and unconditional. It is a child's natural right. It stands him in good stead and help shape his personality. In case of Amir, that source of love and care is already halved;


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his mother had died while giving birth to him, and the only source of that much needed love and security now available to him, is his father. Only his father can compensate for, though not fully, for his mother's love. Amir constantly looks for that love in his father's eyes, always eager to hear a word of love and appreciation from him, waiting for a hug, a pat on the back and some precious little moments with him. It pains him to see his father showering his love on Hassan, his servant's son. Amir tries his best to crack the code to his Baba's heart, but in vain. His father's aloofness forces him to take refuge in his mother's books. He has never seen his mother and knows nothing about her except a few things like, she was a beautiful woman, highly educated, of royal lineage, a great woman, nothing personal or intimate. When Amir comes back to his home land, after twenty-six years to rescue Hassan's son Sohrab, and meets an old beggar in the street of Kabul, who turns out to be Dr. Rasul, his mother's colleague at the University, Amir, even at this mature age wants to know about his mother, wants to emotionally connect to her which he couldn't do in his childhood for lack of sufficient knowledge of her personality. His curiosity to know his mother hasn't subsided even after so many years.

The annual Kite fighting tournament offers him a glimmer of hope. Amir's father casually says to him, "I think maybe you'll win the tournament this year. What do you think?" (KR: 49) this casual remark implies his father's wish to see his son win this prestigious tournament. Amir sees the truth behind this casual remark, sense the opportunity embedded in it and the prize it carries if he wins the tournament. May be his father has just slipped him the key to his heart. Amir not only wins the tournament but also wins the key to his father's heart. He proves that he is a worthy son who earns his father's praise and accolades that makes him proud at last. But Amir pays a heavy price for it. He betrays his most ardent supporter and admirer, a selfless and loyal friend Hassan for whom his Amir Agha is his world. He commits a sin that haunts him for years, loses his sleep, his peace of mind, bears the pangs of conscience, and belittles himself in his own eyes. It changes his life forever.

For You, a Thousand Times Over:


As stated earlier, The Kite Runner is the story of Amir and Hassan, "the Sultans of Kabul" (24). Irrespective of their class distinction and ethnic background, the boys form a deep emotional bonding. They both are mindful of their different social status and behave accordingly, especially Hassan, when others are around, but when they are all by themselves they go about playing innocent games and doing things that children all over the world usually do. They are


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inseparable. But there is a big difference between how Amir perceives this friendship and how Hassan perceives it. When Amir and Hassan encounter the local bully, Assef threatens them and rebukes Amir for befriending a Hazara. When Amir provides comfort to Hassan in the theatre, it is important to recognize that a darkened theatre is not the same as a lighted public place. Privately, Amir is able to treat Hassan with the compassion and dignity Hassan deserves as a human being and as a friend. Yet, Hassan's status in life is below Amir's, and publically Amir is less likely willing or able to treat Hassan as anything other than a servant. This clearly shows how Amir perceives his friendship with Hassan. From the onset of his life, Amir is focused on Baba, and from the onset of his life, Hassan is focused on Amir. He is Amir's most ardent supporter, the admirer, the most loyal and steadfast friend, his companion, his follower and is prepared to do anything for Amir. Love is there on both sides undoubtedly, but in Amir's case it is love of convenience and in Hassan's case it is pure and unconditional. Hassan epitomizes true and unwavering friendship. Winning his Baba's love, care and attention was Amir's priority. He was prepared to go to any length to win his father's love and was ready to sacrifice and let go anyone and anything for that. But Hassan's world as a child revolves round Amir.

Amir and Hassan's story replicates the story that took place a generation earlier between Amir's father and Hassan's father. Ali and Baba were playmates, a situation that is repeated and paralleled by Hassan and Amir in the next generation. Amir metaphorically follows his father's footsteps as he fails to call Hassan his friend. Because both Ali and Hassan are Hazara, they are distinctly below Baba and Amir. The Sunni and the Shia don't mix. The effect of religious and cultural differences is explored throughout *The Kite Runner* but is extremely apparent in these relationships. Both these stories have the same script but different characters. They are stories of unlikely friendship between a master and a servant: stories of deep emotional bonding; stories of unwavering friendship, unconditional love and loyalty—in both cases by the servants; stories of betrayal, guilt and redemption—in both cases by the masters.

The annual kite fighting tournament changes the nature of this friendship forever. Amir, a motherless child, like Hassan, wants to win this tournament as it carries the prize Amir has always been craving for—his father's love. For Amir, his father's love is at stake, but for Hassan, the sheer joy of seeing his friend win. Like a true and selfless friend, and a loyal lieutenant, Hassan stands by Amir. He holds his spool, claps and whistles when Amir's kite flies in the sky. When Amir cuts the last kite, 'the Blue kite' and wins the tournament, there is jubilation all


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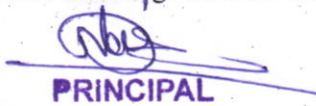
around. Amir finally wins the key to his Baba's heart and proves his worth as a son. His father is ecstatic and proud of his son at last. Hassan's joy knows no bound. He suddenly leaves these scenes of jubilation to run the last cut kite.

When Hassan doesn't return for quite some time, Amir goes in search of him. He sees Hassan standing at the blind end of the alley, blocked and cornered by Assef and his friends—Kamal and Wali. Behind him, lies on the pile of scrap and rubble, the blue kite, his key to his father's heart. Assef wanted to take revenge for the humiliation he once suffered at the hands of Hassan. He is ready to forgive Hassan but his pardon is not free and that price is the blue kite. Hassan could have easily saved himself by accepting Assef's offer but his unwavering friendship, immense love and unflinching loyalty for Amir prevents him from doing so. He outrightly rejects Assef's offer. Amir again stands as a mute spectator, unable to muster courage to intervene and save Hassan who is going through this painful humiliation for Amir's happiness. Amir runs from there, leaving his selfless, all sacrificing and loyal friend to his fate.

Hassan who has recently been betrayed by the friend for whom he was prepared to do anything, "for you, a thousand times over," and went through a horrible experience, is again ready to do "anything" for him. Amir feels guilty and suffocated. The burden of guilt is too heavy for him to bear. When you cannot get rid of the sense of the guilt, you try to rid yourself of people and circumstances that constantly remind you of your guilt. Amir does exactly that, he decides to get rid of Hassan. He plants some money and his wrist watch in Hassan's room, knowing full well that for his Baba theft is the biggest sin, something that should never be pardoned. Hassan's exit from the house is all but certain. When asked if he had stolen the money and the watch, Hassan replies in the affirmative. As always, he again comes to the rescue of his Amir Agha. If he had denied the charge, it would have landed Amir into trouble and would have exposed him before his father. This is Hassan's final sacrifice for Amir. Even after being cheated and betrayed by Amir, he still gives Amir's honour preference over his own, and saves him from certain humiliation and his Baba's life-long hatred. Hassan keeps his side of friendship spotless and unblemished.

There is a Way to be Good Again:

Amir, the protagonist, is living a successful and comfortable life in The United States, thousands of miles away from the troubled country of his birth. The metaphor Amir chooses to describe America is a river. Here, the metaphor has two meanings that are related but separate.



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First, a river always moves forward. In other words, it is always moving toward the future and never toward the past. Second, the river is a common symbol for washing away sin. In Christianity, for instance, Baptism symbolizes purification and regeneration. Amir similarly wants a new birth, free of the sins he committed in letting Hassan be raped and lying to force Hassan and Ali to leave out of Baba's house. His physical separation from his homeland is almost complete. And emotionally also he has successfully withdrawn himself from his past, but for one sin that continuously haunts him. His new life and his new homeland have showered on him all that is needed to lead a successful and happy life, but there is one thing missing, and it is something only his land of birth can give him: Redemption. He is destined to return to his country of birth to atone for not only his sin but for his father's sin as well.

This father-son duo betrays the people who are prepared to sacrifice even their lives for them; who are ready to do anything for their happiness; perfect examples of loyalty, devotion and selfless service. Amir's father betrays his childhood friend and faithful servant, Ali, in the worst possible manner that a friend can betray a friend. Amir comes to know about his father's immoral and shameful act. His father establishes illicit-relationship with Ali's wife Sanaubar which results in his illegitimate child, Hassan. Ali, who is sterile, knows about this relationship. He remains loyal to his master even after being humiliated and dishonoured by him. He adopts Hassan as his own. Instead of showing anger and bitterness towards Hassan, he showers him with genuine fatherly love and care. His act of betrayal towards Ali and his injustice towards his own illegitimate son cannot be condoned or justified. Realization of one's wrongdoings, genuine remorse for it, is what it takes a man to achieve Salvation. He never tries to justify his betrayal. Lives with the sense of guilt and the pain of seeing his own son grow like a servant. He regrets for his sins and tries to redeem himself by helping the poor, the orphans and his own friends in need.

Conclusion:

Amir's uneasy relationship with his father, his constant endeavors to prove his worth as a son and win back his father's undiluted love compels him to betray his selfless and all-sacrificing friend, Hassan. This act of selfishness and cowardice makes him suffer from an all-consuming guilt that haunts him for twenty-six years till he finally redeems himself through the rescue of Hassan's son, Sohrab and provide him the hope of a better and brighter future. The novel offers different layers of loyalty and devotion: Rahim Khan's steadfast and unwavering friendship with


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Amir's father; Ali's loyalty and devotion towards his master; Hassan's selfless and all-sacrificing friendship and love for Amir, and Rahim Khans help and motivation to Amir to redeem himself and get rid of the guilt he has been living with.

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