

An Analysis of “The Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract: In “The Kite Runner” by Khalid Hosseini, the readers are exposed to the realities of war-torn Afghanistan. The book shows the two sides of Afghanistan: the one before the Russians arrived and the one after. Not only that but also how it affected the lives of the Afghans residing there before the war came. The story takes the readers on a journey filled with mixed emotions like joy, sorrow, heart-break and so on. There are multiple times in the book where the readers shed tears. Tears of joy as well as tears of sorrow. This shows how emotionally attached the readers become with the characters and with the story. The readers dive deep into the lives of the characters and learn more about them with every chapter and every page. It is seen that the readers become engrossed with the story. So much so that the story is the only thing on their minds for the time they spend on reading the novel. The author, through the story, has focused on various important aspects which are applicable in the real-world as well. The author has used the characters, in a coherent way, to portray such aspects in order to connect with the readers. This research paper will focus on the many themes and sub-themes that the author has portrayed in the novel. This research paper will dive deep into understanding the various aspects of the novel using the qualitative method of research. The research objective of this paper is to understand and easily comprehend the social and cultural aspects of the novel with the help of various examples.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Betrayal, Atonement and Emotional Turmoil

1. Introduction

About the Author

Just as the protagonist of the novel, Amir, Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 1980, he moved to the United States of America. Being the author of three New York Times Bestsellers “The Kite Runner”, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” and “And the Mountains Echoed”, he is one of the most recognised writers in the world today. Apart from that, he is also a Goodwill Envoy to the UNHCR and the UN Refugee Agency. He is also the founder of the not-for-profit organisation, “The Khalid Hosseini Foundation” which provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

About the Novel

In “The Kite Runner”, the story of two friends, Amir and Hassan, has been highlighted. The story takes shape in the winter of 1975 when Amir and Hassan compete in the local kite fighting tournament, which was a usual sight in Afghanistan. But none of the two friends could foresee what would happen to Hassan that day which would change their lives forever. When the Russians invade their homeland, the family is forced to leave Afghanistan and flee to the United States of America. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Amir returns to Afghanistan with a hope to atone his sins from the past.

The Social Aspect:

In the novel, there are various parts where the social aspect can be seen. The social aspect comes in the form of various themes which can be connected to the real world. These themes will be thoroughly analysed in the later stage of this research paper.

Betrayal is one of the major themes of “The Kite Runner”. The word ‘betrayal’ has been used multiple times in the novel as well. In the story, one of the major plot twists has

betrayal written all over it. One of the major events of the novel, after which the book takes shape, can be considered as betrayal as well.

Atonement is another major theme of the story. When the story moves into its second half, we see that Amir returns to Afghanistan to atone for his sins from his childhood. It is the major, if not the only, reason why Amir returns to Afghanistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that atonement is one of the major themes of the story.

Emotional Turmoil is another theme which deals, majorly, with the lives of Amir and his father, Baba. Amir, who saw a horrifying event in his childhood which changed his life, went through an emotional turmoil for the rest of his life. He would question himself at every step that he took in life and it all went back to that event. Baba, who had to keep a life-changing secret from Amir and Hassan, also went through an emotional turmoil. Although the novel does not highlight much about the emotional turmoil of Baba, it is evident when the secret is out in the open. It is agreed that Hassan went through an emotional turmoil as well but as the novel does not focus much on that, this research paper will not include Hassan’s and Baba’s emotional turmoil and will only focus on Amir’s emotional turmoil.

The Cultural Aspect:

A major part of “The Kite Runner” talks about Afghans and the culture of Afghanistan. It can be seen that even after the war came to Afghanistan and a lot of Afghans had to flee, like Amir and Baba, the culture was still followed. The culture is in the blood of the Afghans. Therefore, this research paper will discuss the culture of Afghanistan that has been portrayed by Khaled Hosseini in “The Kite Runner”.

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2. Research Methodology

The researcher has conducted the research in a qualitative manner using secondary sources like journal articles, websites and books for reference. The research methodology also includes critical analysis and in-depth reading of “*The Kite Runner*” by Khaled Hosseini. The researcher has identified and thoroughly analysed the various themes and aspects that have been highlighted in the novel.

3. Literature Review

The literature that was pertinent to the present paper is as follows:

1) “*The Kite Runner*” by Khaled Hosseini:

The researcher has included the novel itself as a part of the literature as the novel was key to understanding the story and the lives of the characters. The researcher has also used the novel as a base for comparison and interpretations to identify the various themes and aspects.

2) “Superego Guilt, Redemption and Atonement in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*” by Hesham Khadawardi:

The researcher has used the above journal article to understand the themes that have been highlighted in the present research paper. Furthermore, this journal article has provided the researcher with some insight on the story.

3) Khaled Hosseini’s Website:

The researcher has used the author’s website to attain some background information about the author which has been included in the present research paper.

4) “Analysis of Hassan’s Tragedy in the *Kite Runner* from the Three-dimensional Ethical Perspective” by Peng Yuan-yuan:

The researcher has used the above journal to understand the mindset of Amir and his emotions towards Hassan in the novel.

4. Analysis

The analysis of the various themes surrounding “*The Kite Runner*” has been divided into two parts. The first part will discuss [1] **the Social Aspect** which has been highlighted in the novel and the second part will discuss the [2] **the Cultural Aspect** of the novel.

[1] The Social Aspect

The social aspect of the novel consists of various themes which the author has highlighted in the novel. All the themes which will be discussed are major themes which the story revolves around. The Social Aspect of the novel is divided into three parts: [1.1] **Betrayal**, [1.2] **Atonement** and [1.3] **Emotional Turmoil**.

[1.1] Betrayal

In “*The Kite Runner*”, betrayal has been portrayed as a major theme of the story. There are many instances in the novel where the theme of betrayal can be pointed out. According to the researcher, betrayal, in the novel, was

committed by Amir and Baba against Hassan and Ali, respectively. Not altogether but in separate instances. For further convenience, this observation has been divided into two parts: [1.1.1] **Amir’s Betrayal** and [1.1.2] **Baba’s Betrayal**.

[1.1.1] Amir’s Betrayal

In the novel, the friendship between Amir and Hassan has been portrayed as a ‘one-sided relationship’ where Hassan was ready to do anything for Amir but from the perspective of Amir, it was a different story. The researcher is not suggesting that Amir had no love for Hassan. The researcher is stating that Amir did not consider Hassan as an equal to him. He did not try to teach him how to read or write. Instead, Amir used to mock him because he could not read (Khadawardi, 2017). But Amir did have love for Hassan. At one point in the novel, Amir gave him a kiss and said that, “You’re a prince, Hassan, you’re a prince and I love you” (Hosseini, 2013).

The story takes shape after Hassan is molested by Assef and his friends. The incident took place after the kite running tournament had come to an end. Amir had won that tournament with Hassan who ran after the final kite to catch it. Hassan found the kite but was stopped by Assef and his friends. They had cornered him in a dark alleyway but he stood up to them. They wanted the kite but Hassan refused to let them have the kite. At this point, Amir was standing close by and was anxiously watching the entire scene. After refusing to give the kite up, the boys held him down and Assef raped him. Amir did nothing but stand by and watch as Assef raped Hassan. This incident also marks the beginning of the emotional turmoil of Amir, which is another theme that will be discussed later on. Amir did not defend Hassan. He did not save Hassan. He betrayed their friendship. He betrayed Hassan’s trust. Most importantly, he betrayed Hassan. Even though Amir did an awful thing, he did realise his mistake and felt sorry for Hassan. He felt the guilt for many years after that incident until he atoned for his sins. This is how Amir betrayed Hassan in the novel, “*The Kite Runner*”.

[1.1.2] Baba’s Betrayal

Amir, the protagonist, is the son of Baba. Similarly, Hassan is the son of Ali who is the servant of Baba. Hassan and Ali lived in a shed which was inside the compound of Baba’s mansion. Throughout the eighteen years that Amir lived in that big mansion, he was always jealous of how Baba used to treat Hassan. Amir felt that Baba favoured Hassan more than him because Amir could not live up to Baba’s expectations. It was later on in the story that the readers get to know about Baba’s betrayal.

Baba and Ali’s relationship is similar to that of Amir and Hassan’s relationship. Baba and Ali grew up together, just like Amir and Hassan. They had a forty-year-old relationship.

Rahim Khan, a dear friend and partner of Baba, had called Amir to Pakistan in 2001. He revealed to Amir that Baba was the real father of Hassan. Baba had slept with Ali’s wife, Sanaubar, who was Hassan’s mother. By doing this, not only did Baba betray his long time friend, Ali, but also

betrayed Amir because at that time, Amir could not understand why Baba would treat Hassan in such a loving way (Yuan-yuan, 2018). Amir assumed that Baba favoured Hassan because Amir did not live up to the expectations of Baba. This led to a major emotional conflict within Amir.

It could be said that if Amir would have known that Hassan was his half-brother, he would not have mocked him or taunted him. He would not have condescended him. It could also be said that Hassan would not have been raped if Baba had come out with the truth. But Baba did not tell the truth to anyone. His betrayal of Ali and Amir not only destroyed the relationship between him and Ali but also between Amir and Hassan. It is also ironic how the father-son duo of Baba and Amir betrayed their childhood friends Ali and Hassan, respectively.

[1.2] Atonement

In "*The Kite Runner*", the theme of atonement can be seen in the second half of the novel when Amir receives an opportunity to atone for his sins. When the Taliban invaded Afghanistan, a lot of Afghans fled from their homes, including Baba and Amir. Their journey from Afghanistan took them to the United States of America.

Now residing in San Francisco, California, Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan asking him to come to Pakistan. Rahim Khan gave Amir an opportunity to atone for his sins by requesting him to go back to Kabul and bring Sohrab, Hassan's son, to Pakistan and away from the Taliban.

After going to Kabul, Amir found out that Sohrab was made to dance in front of a few Taliban leaders in his old mansion which he grew up in. He was confronted by Assef, now a Taliban leader, who challenged him to a duel. Assef mercilessly beat Amir in front of Sohrab. But Amir did not fight back. He had been wanting this beating for all the sins that he had committed against Hassan in his childhood. He had felt healed. During the beating, Amir said that, "What was so funny was that, for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in a corner of my mind, I had been looking forward to this." (Hosseini, 2013) In the end, Sohrab saved Amir's life by using his slingshot against Assef.

To fully atone for his sins, Amir decided to take Sohrab to San Francisco with him to raise him as his own. By doing this, Amir atoned for the sins of his childhood.

[1.3] Emotional Turmoil

In "*The Kite Runner*", it can be seen that Amir goes through emotional turmoil almost throughout the novel from viewing certain incidents of his childhood. This observation is further divided into two parts: [1.3.1] Amir's Insecurities and [1.3.2] The Rape Incident.

[1.3.1] Amir's Insecurities

Amir felt very insecure about Baba's feelings towards him and how Baba would favour Hassan over him. He always felt that he did not live up to the expectations of Baba. Baba wanted Amir to be more athletic but Amir was always interested in reading and writing. On the other hand, Hassan was an athletic and brave boy. Amir felt very insecure about

this and would occasionally make fun of Hassan for not knowing certain words of the English language. He always tried to earn Baba's approval. In the opinion of the researcher, the insecurities of Amir were one of the reasons behind the destruction of the relationship between Amir and Hassan.

[1.3.2] The Rape Incident

The rape incident has been highlighted earlier in the research paper under [1.1.1]. Hassan was raped by Assef while Amir stood by and did nothing. He did not save Hassan. This incident filled Amir with guilt. Guilt that he did not stand up for Hassan when Hassan had stood up for him countless times. He knew that if Hassan were in his position, he would do anything to save his Amir *gha*. Amir and Hassan did not talk to each other for months. Amir tried to avoid Hassan as much as he could because he did not have the courage to face him. In a cowardly attempt to get rid of the guilt, Amir planted his watch and some money under Hassan's pillow to show that he had committed theft. Even though Baba forgave Hassan, it was Hassan who insisted on leaving. Amir never saw him again after that day.

The guilt followed Amir all the way to the United States of America. He would have flashbacks of the incident and would see Hassan's face in that dark alleyway. Eventually, he became an insomniac. However, Amir felt at peace after atoning for his sins by adopting Sohrab and raising him as his own in San Francisco.

[2] The Cultural Aspect

In "*The Kite Runner*", the culture of Afghanistan has been vastly highlighted through the eyes of Amir. The major part of the novel is set in Afghanistan. Specifically, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Even that part of the novel which is set in the United States of America shows the Afghan-American community and how the culture of Afghanistan lives within the Afghans and not just Afghanistan as a whole.

In the novel, it has been portrayed that a major characteristic of the culture of Afghanistan is kite flying. Before the Taliban and the Russians invaded Afghanistan, there were several kite flying tournaments held which were looked upon enthusiastically by the people. The excitement of Amir for the local kite flying tournament shows that kite flying is a part of their culture and traditions. Even at the end of the novel, kite flying brought a smile to face of Amir and all the Afghani pedestrians nearby. Kite flying brings Afghans together.

5. Conclusion

"You can take Afghans out of Paghman, but you can't take Paghman out of Afghan" (Hosseini, 2013). This quote from the novel shows that the people of Afghan cherish their culture. Present Afghanistan might not look like anything close to how it used to be before the Taliban and the Russians arrived. We are only left with the stories of the past. The only thing one can do is picture how Afghanistan used to look like through the eyes of the author. The various themes and aspects that the author has highlighted in the novel is coherent with the lives of the characters. Even though it is a work of fiction, there is still some reality in the story that

cannot be denied. By reading and reviewing this novel, the researcher has realised the beauty of Afghanistan, the Afghani people and their culture and traditions.

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