Thematic Study of Khaled Hosseini’s Novel The Kite Runner

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ABSTRACT

The Kite Runner is Khaled Hosseini’s debut novel, which not only exhibits a person’s growth, but also the history of the soul of nation and of outdoor sufferings. It is a well known novel for it’s decimate and painfully true depiction of identity, betrayal, deception and atonement. It is a novel of salvation and return of humanity. The story describes the journey of a boy escaping from his haunted childhood while torturing with his own contrition. These two notions of redemption and atonement play a crucial role in creating the line that ties the characters together. Amir’s ‘unatoned sins’, as they are described in the novels opening chapter, have played his conscience and cast an oppressive shadow over joys and triumphs. The present paper investigates guilt and cowardice of the protagonist as the motivation for an individual to seek redemption and attain salvation from what he has done to his best friend Hassan, who has obtained the power of pursuit of love, loyalty, responsibility, dignity and courage. The Kite Runner is a journey of self discovery while admitting the past through the analysis of the experiences of Amir from childhood to maturity, from betrayal to redemption. Amir’s return to homeland, tarnished and tattered by war, and the turbulence of a Taliban led regime unfolds his journey towards self identity and redemption. Amir faces no sense of identity crisis in the adopted homeland, rather he feels himself a stranger when he returns to Kabul.

1. Introduction

The Kite Runner is one of the best novels of the Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini. The novel is set both in Afghanistan and in America. Published in 2003 The Kite Runner achieved a great recognition, a sweeping story of family, love and friendship told against the backdrop of the history of Afghanistan over the last thirty years, and an unusual and powerful novel that has become a popular novel all around the world. Although Hosseini refers to it as a pure love story, The Kite Runner has been interpreted, mostly autobiographical. It is essentially a love story about two friends who happen to be a master and servant. Many socio-political events such as the all of Afghan monarchy, the Soviet invasion, the Taliban regime in Afghan history are given through the life of Amir and Hassan, two Afghan boys. The protagonist Amir, who is from a wealthy Pashtun family and Hassan, who is from a Hazara family and whose father, Ali works as a servant in Ami’s house grow up together in Kabul and playing many games such as running kites in the old days of Afghanistan. The story also portrays the love between a father and a son, husband and wife and parent and child. The canvas of the novel extends across generations and continents, exploring the ethnic ideological realities of Afghanistan. The unforgettable and heartbreaking story is set in a country that is in the process of destruction. With its amazing plot and beautiful characters, the novel draws considerable publicity and comments from the critical world after its publication. Tony Sims from Wired Magazine wrote that the book, “reveals the beauty and agony of a tormented nation as it tells the story of an improbable friendship between two boys from opposite ends of society.”

2. Friendship and Betrayal

Throughout the novel the idea of friendship of the two boys Amir and Hassan is addressed. Amir is a upper class boy and Hassan a lower class boy. Both are grown and brought up in the same family from their childhood. Amir himself says, “When we were children, Hassan and I used to climb the popular trees in the driveway of my father’s house and annoy our neighbours by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror.” (Hosseini, p. 3). Amir’s mother died in childbirth and Hassan’s mother abandoned him and his father. As a result Amir and Hassan are nursed by the same woman. Amir says, “Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard, and under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir, My name.” (Hosseini, p. 10, 11) Nursed by the same breasts, the two boys are brought and grown up under the same roof. Both are deprived from the mother’s love and care and were thus nourished by their father’s. The two boys had a great childhood and some notable anecdotes that are pathetic and terrible.

The curious thing is Amir had never thought Hassan as his friend. Not in usual sense. Never mind that he Hassan taught each other to ride bicycle, and never mind they spent entire winters flying kites. After all Hassan was a Hazara and Amir a Pashtun. Hassan a Shia and Amir a Sunni. Amir says, “But we were kids who had learned to crawl together and no history, ethnicity, society or religion was going to change that either. I spend most of the first twelve years of my life playing with Hassan. Sometimes my entire childhood seems like one long hazy summer day with Hassan, chasing each other between tangles of trees in my father’s yard, playing hide and seek, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, insert torture, with our crowning achievements undeniable the time we plucked the stinger off a bee and tied a sting around the poor thing to yank it back every time it took flight.”(Hosseini, p. 24).

Despite their different races and classes the life of each one cannot be recounted without the other. Hassan though a
servant in Amir’s house enjoyed almost what Amir had enjoyed in his childhood. Hassan remained with Amir in every moment, but Amir sometimes didn’t accompany him when he had guests and relatives around him. But what is important, both, Amir and Hassan took strolls in the musty smelling bazaars of the Kabul and or the New City. Also after Amir’s schooling, they used to grab a book and trotted up to a bowl-shaped hill just north of Wazir Akbar Khan village. Amir used to read poems and stories for Hassan, who was illiterate and can not read himself. Hassan’s favourite book was Shahnamah, the tenth century epic of ancient Persian heroes. Amir used to translate words for Hassan, he didn’t know. He used to tease him, expose his ignorance. But Amir would always feel guilty about it later. He would then try to make up for it by giving him one of his old shirts or a broken toy, in order to make him happy.

Everything is good about the friendship of the two boys, until we come across Assef, the half Afghan half German boy. He is a sociopath and all the neighbouring boys of the village were afraid of him. He is an older boy with a sadistic taste of violence, who mocks Amir for socialising with a Hazara, which according to him, is an inferior race. With his cruel and disdain nature to Hassan, he ruins their friendship. Once Amir and Hassan were trekking to a barren patch of rough land that led to hill, they met Assef. In their first confrontation Assef says to Amir, “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns, it always has been. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this flat-nosed here. His people pollute our homeland, our Watan. They dirty our blood.” (Hosseini, p. 38)Assef then haits their way and in a confrontation Hassan held his slingshot and points directly at Assef and requested him to leave before he shot him to his head. Hassan stands firmly and defends Amir. Assef backs off but swears to get revenge one day. Assef says, “You should know about me. Hazara, I am a very patient person. This doesn’t end for you either, Amir, someday I’ll make you face me one in one. Your Hazara made a big mistake today Amir.” (Hosseini, p. 40).

On the kite fighting day, Amir wins the local kite tournament and finally earns Baba’s praise. Hassan helps Amir in kite fighting. During the end of the tournament, Hassan runs for the last kite, a great trophy saying to Amir, “For you a thousand times over.” (Hosseini, p. 66). However after finding the kite Hassan encounters Assef in an alleyway. Assef first forgives Hassan by waving his dismissive hand over Hassan’s head, Bakhshida, forgiven. But then says to him, nothing is free in this world, my pardon comes with a small price. Just give me the blue kite and I will let you go. Hassan denied to give him the blue kite that he ran for Amir. This made Assef angry and he changes his mind to forgive Hassan. He lets him to keep the kite but instead he did such a shameful and obscene act to him that Hassan can never forget. He beats him severely and rapes him. Hassan is the symbol of true and loyal friend to Amir. He sacrifices his own life for Amir. Amir on the other hand witnesses the act but is too scared to intervene. Amir ran because he wanted to gain Baba’s praise, but before he runs, he himself says, “I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That is what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing is free in this world.

Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba.” (Hosseini, p. 72, 73).

Amir ruined the life of Hassan by not helping him from the shameful act of Assef. He doesn’t posses any quality of being a real friend to Hassan. He is disloyal, untrustworthy and a coward. Hassan on the other hand is loyal, trustworthy and courageous who defends Amir in every difficult situation he faced. After the incident Amir kept distance from Hassan. He believes that life would be easier for him if Hassan were not around him, so he plants a watch and some money under Hassan’s mattress in hope that Baba will make him leave. Amir himself says, “I took a couple of the envelopes of cash from the pile of gifts and my watch, and then tiptoed out. I went downstairs, crossed the yard, and entered Ali and Hassan’s living quarter by the loquat tree. I lifted Hassan’s mattress and planted my new watch and a handful of Afghani bills under it.”

Although Hassan didn’t steal the watch and money but he innocently confesses the stealing. This was another favour of Hassan to Amir. Hassan knew that he was betrayed by Amir yet he was rescuing him. Amir was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake and wasn’t worthy of any sacrifice Hassan had done to him. He was a liar, a cheat and a thief. He was glad to end his friendship soon with Hassan and wishes Baba to dismiss them from their house. The two boys finally part when Ali and Hassan left for their homeland, Hazarat.

3. Atonement and Redemption

From the first page we learn that redemption is the major theme in the novel. As a child Amir fails to save Hassan in an act of cowardice and afterwards suffers from all consuming guilt. For most of the novel Amir tries to deal with his guilt by avoiding it. But doing this does nothing towards himself and thus his guilt endures. He cringes every time when Hassan’s name is mentioned. Neither feeling of betrayal nor punishment is enough to redeem him. The Kite Runner portrays guilt as a major force in the personality of the protagonist, Amir. This guilt entirely changes his life and he began to seek redemption from the consuming guilt which leads him to a better life. Amir says, “I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it’s wrong what they say about the past, I’ve learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been pecking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.” (Hosseini, p. 1)

The opening paragraph expresses one of the main themes of the novel. Amir, the main character, is perpetually confronted by guilt. While on the surface, he seems to be a carefree child of a rich and popular father, but he bears the guilt of his sins deep within his heart. This guilt begins to haunt him throughout his whole life, reappearing as vivid flashbacks in which he relives his sins. While he tries to bury his past and forget about it, but he cringes every time when Hassan’s name is mentioned. Amir is driven by these feelings of guilt, and every action he takes and every decision he makes is an attempt to attain redemption.
Amir is a very complicated character whose guilt runs deeper than that of which most children of his age experience. Amir compounds the guilt of three main things: killing his mother during childbirth, not being the strong and athletically inclined son his father wanted, and the final and most pertinent - his betrayal to Hassan. The young Amir takes full responsibility for his mother's death, blaming himself on being the sole reason of her death. His father blames him for his wife's death and shows little attention towards him. Amir himself begins to believe that Baba also blames him for the fatal outcome of his birth. Amir says, "I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess, hadn't I? The least I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him. But I didn't turned out like him. Not at all." (Hosseini, p. 17).

Amir never sees his mother, so it is clear that he feels a great lack of mother's love in his life. In addition to it, Baba's strict behaviour also becomes troublesome for him. Love and self-reliance in the early years of a child are two highly related subjects which profoundly affect the whole life. Amir wants love, care and affection from his father. However, Baba always shows less affection towards Amir, so an unpleasant feeling begins to develop in his character. He is unable to develop a sense of security or being precious and satisfaction in the realization of having a place in his father's life. Amir was so desperate to win Baba's love that he always dreams that, "Maybe Baba would even read one of my stories. I'd write him a hundre d if I thought he'd read one. Maybe he'd call me Amir Jan like Rahim khan did. And maybe, just maybe, I would finally be pardoned for killing my mother." (Hosseini, p. 49) Amir begins to feel so because of his father's indifferent attitude. Baba finds that some manlike qualities are missing in Amir's character and in order to develop those qualities he treats him that way. The attitude of Baba towards Amir greatly affects his psyche and he begins to believe that Baba does not love him. Human beings feel the need to belong to a family, group and community. As children grow up, they desire to be a part of the peer group and feel one with them. The need for love results in strong bonds among individuals. Amir also desires to be loved and recognized by Baba but because of the absence of such love, there was no strong bond between father and son relationship. Amir not only harbours the guilt of his mother's death, but also the strong devotion for his father who, for most part, acts as though Amir is a large gaping crevice on his pristine highway of life, and turns him away with just a grumble. Baba is almost confused by Amir that how can his son is not like violent Afghan sports. "Why does Amir not stand up for himself? Baba says to Rahim Khan, "You know what always happens when the neighbourhood boys tease him? Hassan steps in and fends them off. I've seen it with my own eyes. And when they come home, I say to him, 'how did Hassan get that scrape on his face? And he says, He fell down.' I'm telling you, Rahim, there is something missing in that boy." (Hosseini, p. 20).

Baba thinks so because he is afraid that Amir is not manly enough and he always depends on Hassan for protection. Baba and Amir knew that they are very different people. Often it disappoints both of them that Amir is not the son that Baba has hoped for. Amir, not being the physical specimen his father was when he was younger, cannot live up to his father's expectations. He fears that his love of reading and writing over sports really disappoints his father. Amir, being the more scholarly, literary type that he is, is not big on fighting either. So of course, he is afraid when it comes to confrontation and he is afraid of getting beaten up. The combination of these fears takes control of him. They control the way in which he acts, bringing out him cowardice.

During the beginning years of his childhood in Kabul, there was a strong sense of friendship between him and Hassan. The bond between two young Afghan boys, one being a servant, Hassan and the other, a wealthy man's son, Amir, prove to be a difficult yet a beneficial companionship. Amir and Hassan were best friends; however, the relationship was not reciprocal. Although the two boys cannot hurdle their way through class differences, their feelings towards each other, although not clear, are undoubtedly that of friends. However, it is clear from their birth that the friendship between them is one sided. No doubt, the two were fed from the same breast and live under the same roof but their first spoken words clearly indicate that Hassan is most loyal from his birth than Amir. Amir says, "Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first step on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir. My name." (Hosseini, p. 10) This shows that Hassan admires Amir in the same way as Amir admires his father.

Amir, unlike his father, is unable to forgive himself that easily. No doubt after marrying Soraya, Amir is able to achieve the level of love and belonging and for sometime forget about his past, about his betrayal and guilt. With soraya in his life, Amir finally feels that he has a purpose and a sense of belonging but he still is dealing with the crippling guilt from childhood sins that prevent him to achieve the level of esteem. Amir struggles with daily flashbacks, reminding him of what a good friend Hassan was and how he betrayed him, "The bear roars, or maybe it's Baba. Spittle and blood fly; claw and hand swipe. They fall to the ground with a loud thud and Baba is sitting on the bear's chest, his fingers in his snout. He looks up at me and I see. He's me. I am wresting the bear." (Hosseini, p. 256). The bear in Amir's dream symbolizes his guilt of betrayal to Hassan which he witnesses himself and can prevent from happening. Now that Baba is gone, Amir is left to wrestle the bear on his own and hopefully come out on top. Amir says, "Now he was gone. Baba couldn't show me the way anymore; I'd have to find it on my own" (Hosseini, p. 152). Amir is utterly alone on his quest and he must continue to fight to make things right or fear being clawed to pieces and thrown into insanity by his own guilt. Amir's life is marked by his guilt and trying to fill the emptiness, he feels from his childhood. This emptiness is not resolved until Rahim Kahn, Baba's old friend and a man Amir admired as a boy, calls Amir and asks him to come to Pakistan. Rahim is dying and it is his wish to speak with Amir before he dies. He ends the phone call by telling Amir there was a way to be good again, revealing he has additional intentions for Amir's visit to Pakistan. "Come. There is a way to be good again, Rahim Khan said on the phone just before hanging up. Said it in passing, almost as an after-thought. A way to be good again." (Hosseini, p. 168). Rahim gives him letters Hassan wrote to him, speaking of his life and how he will always be a faithful friend to him. He tells him of Hassan and his wife.
being murdered by the Taliban. This knowledge hits Amir hard, knowing that he can never apologize to Hassan for what he had done and redeem himself by being a better person to him.

He came to realize that he is not much different from his father, that both of them sinned and committed grievous sins against those whom they loved — "Baba and I were more alike than I’d ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us. And with that came this realization: that Rahim Khan had summoned me here to atone not just for my sins but for Baba's too.” (Hosseini, p. 226). Amir also learns of Hassan’s son, Sohrab who is now an orphan. Rahim now presents Amir with a task that will possibly rid Amir of his guilt and regret; he asks him to get Sohrab and bring him back to him. He refuses to do so until he learns that Baba was Hassan’s father, thus making Sohrab his blood and responsibility. Amir’s one last shot at redemption is to rescue Hassan’s son, Sohrab, from an orphanage in Afghanistan. Amir realizes that this is his one last gift that Hassan has placed before, is his one last shot at redemption and he accepts the offer. He believes it is the only way to pay back to Hassan and to wash out his sins.

In order to rescue Sohrab Amir went to the house of a leading Taliban, Assef where Sohrab had to dance for Taliban leaders. Assef threatened to kill Amir or charge or treason. Assef asked Amir if he really came back from America to Kabul for a Hazara. Then, Assef challenges Amir and advised his guards when it’s all done, only one of us will walk out of this room alive … If it’s him [Amir], then he's earned his freedom and you let him pass.”(Hosseini, p. 285,86,87). After verbal altercation with Amir, Assef decides to have a duel with Amir, declaring that only one winner can leave the room. Assef brutally assaults Amir and the latter bleeds heavily and suffers serious injuries but he never fought Assef back. In the same way, Hassan did not fight him back when he was hitting him with pomegranates on the hill. Hassan felt at peace receiving Assef's blows and swears and he never fought back; he was even laughing. But, Sohrab came to the rescue of Amir and shot Assef with his slingshot.

The benefits of redemption include eternal life, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and freedom from the law’s curse, adoption into God’s family, deliverance from sin’s bondage, peace with God. Amir was ready to give himself as a ransom to Assef for the release of Sohrab. Sohrab is like a mirror of Hassan to Amir. He sees everything that he once saw in Hassan within Sohrab. The boy had his father’s round moon face, his pointy stub of a chin, his twisted, seashell ears, and the same slight frame. It was the Chinese doll face of my childhood, the face peering above fanned-out playing cards all those winter days, the face behind the mosquito net when we slept on the roof of my father’s house in the summer. (Hosseini, p. 244).

This resemblance opens up for Amir a flood of emotions as he sees the Hassan from his childhood. He immediately feels committed to Sohrab, feels it is his duty to give him the better life he deserves. The fact that Sohrab is Hassan’s son makes Amir’s devotion to him unbreakable, as Hassan’s was for him. Amir views Sohrab as his second chance to serve the friendship he and Hassan once had. Amir goes to great heights to get Sohrab from the Talibs. He must fight Assef, the event he had avoided his whole life, which resulted in the terrible occurrence he failed to stop. This in itself is a drastic change that Amir is making. He is remembering what he did in his past versus what he should have done, and is acting on this realization. This sudden change in Amir’s character is like a second coming of age. He has reached a level where he is beyond reproach; he is untouchable and unwavering in his decision. When Assef suggests a fight to death to get back Sohrab, it is what Amir has been waiting for, pain and the redemption that comes with it. Assef badly beats Amir, and in this Amir feels healed although he is ironically being beaten terribly. As the first punch lands, the first bones break, and the first drop of blood falls, all Amir can think about is that this is the redemption he has been waiting for; this is what redemption feels like. For the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in the corner of my mind, I’d even been looking forward to this. … My body was broken- just how badly I wouldn’t find out until later- but I felt healed. Healed at last. (Hosseini, p. 252-253).

Amir laughs at his realization that this is the worst Assef would have done to him. If he stood, up for Hassan, that day in the alley the worst he would have prevented Hassan from being severely beaten and raped by Assef and then things could have been different. The wounds he received from Assef will heal in time, but the pain he felt by doing nothing for his friend has plagued him a lifetime. Now by giving his body willingly to Assef, like a lamb to the slaughter, he is portraying altruism and redeeming himself of his self - centred choice. Amir is finally being punished and getting what he deserved for many years. This gives Amir some clarity and redemption from his guilt.

The monumental happening during the fight is the end: Sohrab stands up for Amir just like his father. He hits Assef in the left eye with a slingshot, just as Hassan had threatened so many years ago when Assef harassed Amir. They run out and escape the Talibs, escaping the oppression and control they had upon Sohrab. This event shows the changes Amir is going through deep inside. He stood up for and fought for Sohrab, like he should have for Hassan. Amir finally shows his devotion to Hassan’s legacy through his journey to rescue Sohrab.

After Sohrab agrees to live with him in America, Amir faces various legal obstacles before returning. Once he promises Sohrab, he will never have to go back to an orphanage, lawyers’ advice Amir that remaining in the orphanage is required in order to gain permission for the move to the United States. Breaking this promise is one of the hardest things Amir has to do. Once he finds out there is a way without the orphanage, it is too late. Sohrab had already attempted suicide. This is a reality that Amir cannot escape. He feels constant guilt as he is in the hospital waiting to hear news from the doctors, grasping for a strand of hope. “My hands are stained with Hassan’s blood; I pray God doesn’t let them get stained with the blood of his boy too … I pray that my sins have not caught up with me the way I’d always feared they would” (Hosseini, p. 302). Constant guilt and responsibility for what has happened now and in the past stays with him in this moment, and it is something he cannot run away from like he did before. He prays and begs for Sohrab, hoping
that he is not reliving his dark past. Once Sohrab recovers physically and Amir safely brings him to America, there is a fear deep inside him that Sohrab will never recover mentally or emotionally.

Amir’s wife Soraya attempts to bring Sohrab happiness, but Amir stays dedicated to fixing what he has caused all of his life. A sense of hope is finally found for Amir one day at an Afghan gathering at a park. Amir sees a man selling kites, and immediately is back in the kite flying days of his childhood. He buys one and asks Sohrab to join him, and to his surprise, Sohrab accepts the offer. Amir and Sohrab cut another kite and Amir is brought back into that day in the winter of 1975 before the rape: the triumph, victory, happiness, and glory. He is brought back to the day that changed the course of his entire life. Sohrab smiles, which means everything to Amir. He now has the choice of what to do: he can redeem himself of his previous actions or be the person he was. He decides to be the person he should have been. He runs the kite for Sohrab, telling him, “for you a thousand times over.” (Hosseini, p. 323). Amir says, the words which Hassan had said to Amir before he was raped, but despite the fact that those were the circumstances the last time these words appeared in the book, the hopeful tone suggests Amir has paid his penance and found his redemption. Amir says, It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn’t make everything all right. It didn’t make anything all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird’s flight. But I’ll take it with open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting. (Hosseini, p. 324)

Without the sense of guilt that Baba and Amir felt, they would not have been determined to achieve what they did in their lives. Baba would not have tried to be the best, attempting to hide his mortal sin under the extravagance of his good deeds, and Amir would not have gone back into Afghanistan to save a young boy that he did not know. Without guilt, there would have been no reason for these two men to go up against the odds, to help others less fortunate than themselves, and to put their lives on the line for the well-being of others. “And this is what I want you to understand, that good, real good, was born out of your father’s remorse. Sometimes I think that 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 is what true redemption is, Amir Jan, when guilt leads to good.” (Hosseini, p. 263).

Baba also had redeemed his sins. Early in the story, maybe due to a guilty state of mind he had, hired the same nursing Hazara woman who fed Amir and Hassan, “Hassan and I fed from the same breasts.” (Hosseini, p. 10). Baba used to buy birthday gifts for Hassan, and Amir: —Baba never missed Hassan’s birthday.” (Hosseini, p. 44). On one occasion, 1979, Baba brought an India plastic-surgeon to fix Hassan’s upper lip. In one of the few junctures that Baba showed direct kindness towards Hassan, Baba patted Hassan on the back. Even he put his arm around his shoulder.” (Hosseini, p.14). Baba built an orphanage for homeless and poor children. Amir describes how his father worked hard during the construction of the building; as he wanted to repent his sins of having an illegal relationship with Ali’s wife (Sanaubar). Again, in the final act of benevolence before leaving Afghanistan, Baba risked his life to save the honour of an Afghani woman whom a Russian soldier wanted to rape in exchange for allowing them to pass the Afghan-Pakistani borders. Baba interfered telling Karim to ask the Russian soldier to stop but the soldier replies that — “This is war. There is no shame in war.”(Hosseini, p. 115) The soldier pulled the trigger and threatened to kill Baba but a senior officer interfered and saved Baba. In America, when Amir passed his high school exams and was ready to join university next year, his father was so happy and they celebrated his birthday. Baba said, “I wish Hassan had been with us today (Hosseini, p.133). Amir’s father was suffering; he was torn between his love for Amir and Hassan. Amir lived in his father’s house and enjoyed a luxurious life. But Hassan, on the other hand, lived in the shed with poor Ali. What is more is that Hassan served as a servant for Amir, preparing his food, clearing his shoes and ironing his clothes for him. That is why Amir’s father was always tough on Amir and kind towards Hassan. Baba was torn between his life for Hassan and Amir and that is why he built an orphanage to help the poor.

4. Mental Development of Amir through Psychological Approach

The psychological approach studies the human mind and behaviour. By the critical survey of The Kite Runner, one gets an insight into the psychological domain of various characters, and the collective psyche of Amir, the protagonist of the novel. The psychological impressions and manipulations portray the pro forma of the characters in the text taken here, “What they are at present, what their past was and what in future they could be.” After Baba recognizes incapability’s in his son he becomes so angry with Amir that he once told Rahim Khan, “If I hadn’t seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I’d never believe he is my son”(Hosseini 20). When Amir hears these words of his father, he begins to believe that his father really hates him. According to Beran, “The hated child, who never experiences the warmth of father’s love, remains an enemy of the society which he never understood. We find him in later life, a criminal, a pervert, a trouble-maker, and always an isolated outcast” (W. Beran Wolfe 66). Same is the case with Amir, he never get the true affection from his father in his childhood and that is why in his life, we find him as trouble-maker for Hassan, his most loyal friend. He creates troubles in Hassan’s life only to win his father’s love. To win Baba’s affection becomes so important for him that he forgets all other relations including his friendship with Hassan. Wendell White says, “Children find satisfaction in the realization of having a place in the home. Identification of themselves with the family name or their use of the pronouns “we” and “our” furthers their feeling of belonging. Yet the child’s sense of security, or of being precious, comes mainly from receiving affection. Tenderness also gives meaning to belongingness.” (Psychology in living 95).

The indifference of Baba towards Amir greatly affects his personality and his relationship with Baba and this becomes the basic source of Amir’s tension. Amir begins to feel that at times, it seems like Baba prefers Hassan and says, “And besides, one time at Ghargha Lake, Hassan and I were skipping stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed
was five. Baba was there, watching, and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder” (Hosseini 12)

In relation to this psychologists says, “No two children are alike in intelligence, physique and characters (except, possibly, identical twins), and comparisons between brothers and sisters are odious and harmful” (Psychology: the Study of Man’s Mind 80). Amir and Hassan are also not alike in any activity but both have their own plus points. If Hassan is good in physical activities, Amir is good in reading and writing. However, his father never appreciates his writing quality because he wants his son to become violent like other Afghan boys. This type of Baba’s behaviour discourages Amir and he is not able to develop confidence in him because before doing any activity, the first question that comes in his mind is that what will be Baba’s attitude if I am not able to do this activity. That is why he always chooses the path of running away. After running from the situation Amir always sits in isolation and feels guilty. Although this comparison of Amir to Hassan by Baba plays a role in Amir’s guilt driven actions, most of the guilt that Amir has bottled up inside all pertains to his friend, Hassan.

As cowardice is one of the major feature of Amir’s personality and he is not physically as strong as Hassan, that is why he was not able to stand up for himself and accept Hassan as his friend. “Our attitude toward the task of creative self-sculpture is largely determined by the emotional attitudes our parents, guardians, and teachers expressed toward us when we were young. “Whether we go at our task courageously or whether we cringe and hesitate” (W. Beran Wolfe 63). Since the emotional attitude of Baba towards Amir is not so good, Baba never appreciates any task done by Amir because he is not ready to accept his son to remain buried in books and found him shuffling around the house. Amir is not encouraged by his father to remould himself, that is why he is not able to stand up himself and always hesitates to do anything. Amir demonstrates the grip that emotions hold on the choices we make and how we live our lives. Some prominent emotions Amir felt in the novel are, fear, guilt, love, and desire. All of these manipulate the way in which Amir acts. Everybody has fears. The common fear that constrict Amir’s life are the fear of disappointing his father. Amir, not being the physical specimen of what his father was when he was young, cannot live up to his father’s expectations. He fears that his love of reading and writing over sports really disappoints his father.

Love and self reliance in the early years, two highly related subjects profoundly affect the whole life. Children need love that they recognise as such, tender care and affection. It awakens them to their existence as individual of human race and gives them special recognition – a pleasant feeling at any age. The hunger for love is not lessened by perfunctory expression of it. The more personal the care of the child – the greater the satisfaction. In Amir’s life such personal care from his father is missing which entirely affects his entire life. The child’s sense of security or being precious comes mainly from receiving affection. The reason that Amir is so desperate to win the kite tournament is because he feels it is his only way to receive his father’s love. He seeks throughout his childhood to do things that will make his father love him.

Due to his father’s attitude and indifference, Amir is so afraid of his father that he many times wishes Rahim Khan to be his father and wishes to open his veins and drain all his father’s blood from his body. Amir throughout his childhood made efforts to win his father’s love and affection which becomes for him a personal battle. During this fight, he becomes a selfish person who every time thinks about the ways, which help him in gaining his father’s love. His father’s behaviour greatly effects his psychic development, due to which he is unable to make out the difference between right and wrong. To gain his father’s approval became so important for him that he betrays his most loyal friend, Hassan, which ultimately changed his entire life and after that, he begins to develop a kind of guilt for deceiving his friend. After that Amir never finds peace of mind in life because guilt haunts him time to time and he wants to attain redemption for his sins.

5. Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini’s ‘The Kite Runner’ bears a typical theme of growth of the protagonist, Amir and his friend, Hassan from childhood to maturity. Amir finally completed his salvation by saving Sohrab from Assef’s captivity. After suffering from psychological torment he realized that he cannot go back and change what he has done as a child but saving Sohrab from Assef’s captivity would bring him peace of mind. Amir’s self actualization is the process of return of the bright side of humanity. Hosseini himself says, “Behind every dusty face has a soul, and determined to flick over ordinary Afghan’s face’s dust, which will be displayed behind the ‘soul’ to the world.”

Throughout the novel the theme of friendship is addressed between Amir and Hassan. They are nursed by the same woman and grew up together under the same roof. But several times in his childhood Amir is confronted with people who ask him if Hassan is his friend, and he never answers in affirmative. Amir destroyed the life of Hassan, and he has had more than one opportunity to redeem himself of his guilt. Amir keeps this guilt within him until he was told by Rahim Khan that there is a way to be good again. After saving Sohrab, Amir no longer felt like a coward. Amir realized that the past could not be changed or altered. He now understood his goal in life and that was to take care of Sohrab. He needed to repay Hassan back for all the good that he had done for him.

References
