

Strained Male Relationships in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* revolves around the complex emotional male relationships between fathers and sons as well as between male friends. The secrets that the principal characters carry along their life creates the tension in the novel. The betrayal of Baba and Amir which directly connect with the readers light up the plot. Though it is set in unfamiliar places far from the land of readers, it deals with the most common themes like friendship, loyalty, betrayal, guilt, family and redemption that make the readers empathize. Hosseini carves the leading characters with flaws and vulnerabilities which creates inner turmoil that make the story sensible. And the guilt the protagonist faces shapes the entire story. Amir is the narrator of the story. He jumps back in time to his childhood and tells the readers about what makes him feel a tremendous sense of guilt.

Keywords: Betrayal, father, friendship, relationship, son

An Afghan-American novelist, Khaled Hosseini deals exclusively with strained male relationships in *The Kite Runner*. The relationship between father and son as well as male friendship is also important to the novel. It is the story of the guilt and forgiveness dealt by the two boys Amir and Hassan who live in Afghanistan. A major feature of Hosseini's novels is the vivid picturization of his native country, Afghanistan. His voice is regarded as the representation of Afghan culture and society. There are many words that are in Dari in the novel, as it is one of the official languages of Afghanistan. Hosseini's writing style in *The Kite Runner* is easy to understand but has a sophisticated meaning. Hosseini uses a plethora of literary devices in his writing such as metaphor, simile, foreshadowing, irony, imagery, allusion and motif. The novel opens in December 2001 as the narrator recollects memories of his childhood in Afghanistan.

A Greek philosopher born in the Classical period, explains the intensity of male friends through his quote, "The love of man to woman is a thing common and of course, and at first partakes more of instinct and passion than of choice; but true friendship between man and man is infinite and immortal" (Plato). But as he says not all friends are true to their words and actions. Friendship between Duryodhanan and Karnan in the famous Indian epic, *Mahabharata* is the obvious example of Amir's relationship with Hassan in *The Kite Runner*. Hassan is a loyal friend like Karnan. According to Amir, his friendship with Hassan is complex and filled with tension. Amir is jealous of Hassan, as he is the type of boy that his father values, in contrast he also loves and values Hassan because he knows that Hassan is the only person who has a genuine concern for him. In *The Kite Runner* though Amir and Hassan are constant companions, Amir's superior social status, that is Pashtun, causes a power difference between them, which gets more

and more complicated when Amir knows that Hassan is actually his half-brother. Amir's pride of being superior in social status is inferred through the line which Amir recalls,

The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. . . . Because history isn't easy to overcome, Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing. (Hosseini 24)

Amir's powerful status makes him to prey on his trustful friend Hassan for his own selfish cause. Similar to how Duryodhanan uses his loyal friend Karnan to destroy Pandavas. Baba shows favour to Hassan is the obvious way that a father shows to his son. At this point, Amir is unaware that Hassan is also his father's son; he finds this out only in the second half of the book. Without realizing that Hassan is Amir's half-brother, he reflects on the way and lets his jealousy corrupt his friendship with Hassan. Despite this, Hassan is clearly a loyal friend. This is demonstrated by his willingness to support and protect Amir from Assef, even when it is difficult or dangerous to do so. Assef is a violent, racist child who tries to beat Amir with his brass knuckles but Hassan saves him. Hassan's kite-running, and his refusal to give Assef the kite he runs for Amir is the evidence of Hassan's loyalty. His loyalty to his friend, makes him face serious repercussion that is Assef rapes Hassan as punishment and let him to keep the kite. The friendship is further put into strain when Amir observes Hassan's rape and does nothing to stop it and later does not unveil what he has seen. As a result, Amir suffers from guilt that creates an insurmountable wall between them. Rahim Khan is another principal character for understanding male friendship in the novel. He is a friend to both Baba and Amir, but there is no strain in his relationship with them. Rahim Khan knows the innermost secrets of both Baba and Hassan. He helps to end the cycle of secrets and betrayals and calls them back to goodness.

Though Amir has a very complex relationship with Baba, he loves him the most, and he feels Baba barely loves him back as much as he does. Amir's desire to win his Baba's love results him in not to stop Hassan's rape which happens right before his eyes. Baba faces his own difficulty to connect with Amir, because he feels guilty for treating Amir well when he can't acknowledge Hassan as his own son in front of the Afghan community. Consequently, he is hard on Amir, and it is only possible for him to show his love for Hassan indirectly, by taking Hassan out along with Amir. Every year, on Hassan's birthday he surprises him with toys and gifts. For instance, he also pays for Hassan's lip surgery as a gift for his birthday. In contrast with this complex relationship between Hassan, Amir and Baba, the most loving and tender relationship between father and son is that of Hassan and Sohrab. Hassan is later killed in the Taliban's rule. And towards the end of the novel Amir attempts arduous fights to become a substitute father of Sohrab. Their relationship encounters its own strains as delicate Sohrab, who is getting back from the loss of his father and the harassment he suffered makes him difficult to connect with Amir. An American author states, "No love is greater than that of a father for his son" (Brown) Though Amir tries everything to get attached with Sohrab, it is difficult for him to substitute Amir in Hassan's place.

To sum up, family and friends are the most important people in an individual's life. They are the people who give moral support to their loved ones when they are in need. Amir feels Hassan understands everything that goes in his mind. This is inferred through the lines from the book,

I was the one who went to school, the one who could read, write. I was the smart one. Hassan couldn't read the first-grade textbook but he'd read me plenty. That was a little unsettling, but also sort of comfortable to have someone who always knew what you needed. (Hosseini 58)

A strained relationship happens when the people engaged in a relationship are corrupted with envy, greed, wrath, lust and pride. These sins easily break any kind of trustful relationship. Faults in their behaviour and character make a relationship strained. Similarly, jealousy overrules Amir's morality and makes him betray Hassan. Thus, the relationship becomes strained. Also, Baba suffers from guilt because of the mistake he has done out of lust.

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