



Seeking Redemption Amongst Chaos: A Close Reading of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Middle East Literature replaces stereotypes, transforms world views, develops personal relationships, humanizes Islam and Muslim people and most importantly focuses on the lives of Arabs. Khaled Hosseini, the popular Afghan writer is always concerned about the condition of his own people, their sufferings and future. Hosseini's well acclaimed novel 'The Kite Runner' is the journey of the protagonist, Amir, who also leaves Afghanistan due to the political situation and comes back to his native place to redeem himself. Here my paper analyses the theme of sin and redemption within a society which is at war against itself.

KEYWORDS

Middle East, Muslim, Arab, Afghanistan, Sin and Redemption

Modern Middle East Literature is a world of unexplored human experiences. The Middle East is always a politically disturbed, historically complex and religiously orthodox region. These peculiarities reflect in the works of contemporary Middle East writers. The contemporary Middle East Literature replaces stereotypes, transforms world views, develops personal relationships, humanizes Islam and Muslim people and most importantly focuses on the lives of Arabs. Khaled Hosseini, the popular Afghan writer is always concerned about the condition of his own people, their sufferings and future. His writings deal with the unseen aspects of Afghan literature, their culture, their beliefs, their victimisation and a lot more. His novels are intertwined with socio political, economic and religious aspects of Afghan society. Hosseini, himself, born in Kabul, Afghanistan, has moved to U.S.A at the age of 15 to escape the Russian coup. Hosseini's well acclaimed novel *The Kite Runner* is the journey of the protagonist, Amir, who also leaves Afghanistan due to the political situation and comes back to his native place to redeem himself. A true analysis of the novel shows how the cruel hands of religion, politics and greed affect the lives of common folk. Amir's story cannot be told without the intermixture of these factors.

Sin, redemption and salvation are recurring themes in worldwide literature. Many writers have explored these themes in several ways in their works. The English word, 'redemption' means 'repurchase' or 'buy back'. This theme is the central concept of all religions; the means to achieve it, may be different. In theological terms, redemption is forgiveness or absolution for past sins or errors. It also includes protection from damnation and disgrace generally through sacrifice. In Buddhism, redemption is detachment from worldly pleasures. In Christian theology, redemption is salvation and deliverance from sin. Salvation can be achieved through accepting one's mistake, belief in God, courage and sacrifice. According to Islamic religion redemption is possible through ardent belief in God and Islamic ways. Sincere faith in God, offerings, sacrifices and virtuous deeds are the possible ways to redemption in Hinduism also.

People attain salvation in different ways. Some devote themselves to God, some die in remorse and some correct themselves in the long roads of life. Another group suffers throughout their lives without finding a way out and connecting every worse deeds of their life to their earlier sins. Here my paper analyses the theme of sin and redemption within a society which is at war against itself. *The Kite Runner* is rich with several Afghan images especially the kite running festival. Amir, the son of a respectable affluent Pashtun, spent his childhood in wealth and other amenities. Each and every mo-

ments of his childhood is related with his half brother, Hassan (the fact he comes to know later). When Afghanistan becomes a rioted place with 'children without childhood', Amir and Baba lose all wealth and turn to refugees, leave for Pakistan and finally settle down in America.

Even though, Hosseini doesn't divide the novel into parts, it can be done according to its theme. The first part of the novel is completely set in Afghanistan describing Amir's and Hassan's childhood days. The second part is Amir's life in America, his marriage and new atmosphere. The last part is his journey to truth, and salvation for his sins. Both Amir and Hassan, without knowing their brotherhood, share a rare relationship. In Amir's words, 'Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And under the same roof, we spoke our first words' (Hosseini, 10). Hassan, born to Hazara parents, was always neglected by society. Discrimination among different groups in the same religion exemplifies the worst side of enmity between human beings. There is a long story of rivalry between Pashtuns and Hazaras. The Hazaras were not given any position in society. They were not considered as human beings and were neglected from the pages of history. Once, Amir finds out a book in which one whole chapter is devoted to Hazaras and that surprises him, 'The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their homes, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was the Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shia's' (Hosseini, 9).

Hassan was the son of Ali, Amir's Baba's servant. Baba had great love and care for Hassan that made Amir jealous many times. Hassan's love towards Amir was beyond words. 'For you a thousand times over Amir Agha' (Hosseini, 7.) was always his promise. He saved Amir's honour from the rowdy gang of Assef. He stood for Amir and helped him attain good name before Baba. But Amir had a different attitude towards Hassan. He liked Hassan's company, but considered him as inferior. He used to read stories to Hassan, but played some tricks on his illiteracy. It is to be admitted that Hassan is more courageous than Amir and he becomes a symbol of suffering and sacrifice while Amir suffers from his complexes.

Amir's whole life was eaten by the unpardonable sin he had done to Hassan. At the day of kite flying festival, Hassan who was running after their victorious blue kite, to make his friend proud before Baba, was terribly beaten and raped by Assef. Amir, who followed Hassan, witnessed the whole incident quietly and his fear of Assef did not allow him save Hassan. Later he pretended as he had not seen anything and behaved

heartlessly to Hassan. He handed over the winner kite to Baba and gained Baba's love. Amir became victorious at the cost of Hassan's honour. This incident changed the lives of both Hassan and Amir. Amir is innocent by nature, but weak in character and temperament and he feels shame for his silence. He could not face Hassan and it leads to his second sin. He forces Baba to drive away Ali and Hassan from their home and plays a dirty game for this. He hides his gift watch given by Baba in Hassan's room claiming him to be thief. He couldn't understand Hassan's love for him until Hassan accepts the lie Amir has cooked up. The rape creates unhealed injury in Hassan's mind that makes him desolated and despaired. When the Russian troupes take control of the nation, the situation of Hazaras become worse. Ali who comes to know about his son's disgrace leaves Baba's house and Kabul along with Hassan.

Amir's remorse overflows but feels relieved at Hassan's exit. Even after their arrival at America and their secure settling there, Amir's sins haunt him. He believes that he is not sincere and truthful in his life and considers himself as a traitor. He punishes himself through such thoughts. It may be because of these thoughts that Amir accepts Soraya, ignoring her past. He thinks,

I envied her. Her secret was out. Spoken. I opened my mouth and almost told her how i'd betrayed Hassan , lied, driven out, and destroyed a forty year relationship between Baba and Ali. But I didn't. I suspected there were many ways that Soraya Taheri was a better person than me. Courage was just one of them (Hosseini, 152.)

Later, when God did not bless them with a child, Amir comes to the conclusion that, '...perhaps something, somewhere, had decided to deny me fatherhood for the things I had done. May be this was my punishment, and perhaps justly so.' (Hosseini, 173.)

After several years, Amir learns from Rahim Khan about the secret behind Hassan's birth; the illicit relationship with Baba and Saunabar, her marriage with Baba's obedient servant, Ali and the birth of Hassan. This makes him connect his sin with Baba's. He thinks, '... 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, 209). Baba was also a sinned person and he suffered because of it throughout his life. Baba loved Hassan as his own son. He never forgot Hassan's birthday and gave proper medical care to him by treating his harelip. His each and every actions; helping poor, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need were the ways of redemption. Amir remembers Baba's strange expression to his persuasion of abandoning Ali and Hassan. 'Hassan is not going anywhere...He's staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we're his family' (Hosseini, 208.). As Rahim Khan said, Baba had a separated soul, a soul torn between the legitimate and illegitimate halves. He saw his own guilt in human form in Hassan.

Thus Amir's odyssey to salvation is double sided. Amir's journey to Afghanistan gives him a chance to redeem himself and his father. Rahim Khan tells Amir about his father's all time worry about him, 'Rahim, a boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything.' (Hosseini, 204.). This proves to be true when Amir strongly objects to Rahim Khan's request to save Hassan's son, Sohrab, who stays in an orphanage in Kabul. His words to Rahim Khan show his cowardice, the same feeling that pushed him into the darkness of agony years before. He says, 'I can't go to Kabul. I have a wife in America, a home, a career and a family.' (Hosseini, 209.). But the realization of the truth that Hassan is his half brother, changes his mind. Rahim Khan's words act as a catalyst to his success. He take the brave decision to save Hassan's part named Sohrab.

Amir's journey to Afghanistan gives him the current picture

of his nation under Taliban where he 'feel like a tourist in my own country.' (Hosseini, 214). Amir undertook a dangerous responsibility of saving Sohrab from the custody of Taliban. The care taker of the orphanage gives a true picture of Afghanistan,

There is very little shelter here, almost no food, no clothes, no clean water. What I have is ample supply here is children who've lost their childhood. But the tragedy is that these are the lucky ones. We're filled beyond capacity and every day I turn away mothers who bring their children. (Hosseini, 234.)

Taliban has destructed everything in the nation. The children in the orphanage are victims of brutal rape by ruthless Taliban officials. Sohrab is one among them. It is really pathetic to see that Sohrab was raped by Assef, the same beast who had put disgrace on his father. Assef, the admirer of Hitler who has become the head of Taliban, is the symbol of evil in the novel.

It is to be admitted that Amir is strong willed after his anagnorisis. He was completely aware of the consequences of saving Sohrab. But he sticks on his decision. His encounter with Assef takes him at the verge of losing his life. He was completely defeated and bloodied by Assef's attack. It may the strange play of fate, that Sohrab saves Amir's life. He proves to be Hassan's son by saving Amir with his slingshot. Amir's redemption reaches its climax with the freedom of Sohrab and it gets completed by his decision to adopt Sohrab as his son and help him restart his life in America. Rahim Khan's words become a soothing song to Amir's ears,

What you did was wrong, Amir Jan, but do not forget that you were a little boy when it happened. A troubled little boy. You were too hard on yourself then, and you still are...but I hope you will heed this: A man, who has no conscience, no goodness, does not suffer. I hope your suffering comes to an end with this journey to Afghanistan. (Hosseini, 276)

Now, Amir has paid not only for his but his Baba's sins also. He feels relieved with Sohrab in America. He thinks that God has forgiven him for his mistakes. He forgives his father and most importantly he forgives himself. Amir's odyssey becomes successful. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini depicts the paradox of searching for truth and peace in a world of chaos. When Amir leaves Afghanistan for good along with Sohrab, the readers are happy at his success and at the new life of Sohrab. But another question that haunts us is about the lives of people in such a hell like nation and the future of the poor children in the orphanage. It is doubtless that Hosseini is able to bring the lives of some unfortunate people whose lives are unknown to us otherwise. This makes *The Kite Runner*, a novel with insight.

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