



Khaled Hossaini's 'The kite Runner' : A soul stirring saga of guilt and redemption

Pooja Bora

Phd research scholar, Cotton university

Abstract-

Khaled Hossaini's *The kite Runner* is a devastating tale of betrayal, guilt and redemption that depicts the horrific realities of a war-torn Afghanistan. It tells the story of friendship between two boys Amir and Hassan growing up in Afghanistan. Amir is tormented by an all consuming guilt throughout his life, emanating from the sins he committed against his unwaveringly loyal and innocuous friend Hassan in his childhood. Amir's quest for redemption from his guilt -ridden past makes up the heart of the novel. Intricacies of human relationships are depicted through Amir's insecurity regarding his relationship with father, his desperate craving for his father's love and approval.

Keywords- Guilt, Betrayal, Redemption, sacrifice, brutality, intricacy of relationship

'The Kite Runner', the first English novel by Khaled Hossaini, is a heart -wrenching saga of improbable friendship between a privileged Afghan kid Amir, from a dominant and powerful social community called 'Pasthun' and Hassan, who belongs to one of the most oppressed and marginalised segments of Afghan Society, called 'Hazara'. The novel unfolds against the backdrop of a war torn and turbulent Afghanistan and vividly portrays the pages of history stained with bloodshed and scars. The novel depicts the plight of a nation ravaged by war and the brutalities inflicted on its people from time to time, exodus of Afghan people to Pakistan and United States as a ramification of Soviet invasion, massacres of oppressed and marginalized Hazara people under the tyranny of the Taliban.

For most of the people around the world, Hearing the name Afghanistan brings to mind the picture of a nation afflicted with heinous atrocities of war, terrorism, genocides, whose human development index is one of the lowest in the world. The kite runner brings forth a unique, hopeful and humanitarian picture of Afghanistan endowed with natural beauty and splendor, a patchwork of cultures and people from 1970's onwards. Throughout the novel Hossaini depicts a humanitarian tragedy marked by sheer lack of progress, owing to the significant strategic value of the region, which has been exploited by international powers to obtain stranglehold on the region. Years of political unrest and war have compelled the fiercely independent people with a culture of their own to flee the country and seek refuge in Pakistan and United states, with a hope to find some semblance of peace and security.

The protagonist Amir is the son of a wealthy and influential father while Hassan is the son of Amir's father's servant Ali. They develop a strong bond of friendship and spend their childhood flying kites in the hitherto peaceful city of Kabul. Hassan is the personification of courage, loyalty and sacrifice, who is unwaveringly committed to stand up for Amir through thick and thin

and will do anything to help and protect him. On the other hand Amir lacks the courage to stand up for anything. His lack of courage stems from his struggles with forging an intimate relationship with his father. He feels abandoned at his own home, perturbed by a sense of insecurity emanating from his father's display of lack of affection towards him. He craves for his father's love and approval. Amir's wealthy father, who he refers to as Baba, keeps whining about his son's lack of courage to stand up for himself, to his friend Rahim Khan, who is very kind, supportive and a father figure to Amir. He says 'There's something missing in that boy'. 'A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who won't stand up for anything'.(Hossaini,p.89)

One day Amir wins a local kite fighting tournament and rejoices over his victory, thinking Baba would be proud of him. Hassan runs for the losing kite to retrieve it for Amir, saying 'For you a thousand times over!' However, after finding the kite, Hassan is confronted by Assef, a bully who always mocks and hurls abuses on Amir for socializing with a 'Hazara', which according to him is an inferior race. Assef and his friends offered not to hurt Hassan if he hands over the kite to them. Hassan stands his ground, refusing to give up the kite. Assef physically assaults and rapes him. Amir witnesses the act but runs away, thinking if he doesn't bring back the kite to home, baba would be less proud of him. When he meets Hassan with the kite, he pretends as if he doesn't know what happened. This is the beginning of Amir's guilt for his betrayal of Hassan, a friend who was unflinchingly devoted to him and always stood up for him in his hour of need. Themes of guilt and redemption feature predominantly in the novel. As the story unfolds, Hossaini enables the reader to become acquainted with the protagonist Amir, through picturesque descriptions of the events and an interior monologue, or the words a character uses to describe his or her own feelings to him or herself, is pervasive throughout the novel.

Amir's quest for redemption from the sins he committed against his immaculate friend Hassan make up the heart of the novel. His longing to atone for his transgression grows more intense over time. Amir's guilt drives the climatic events of the story, including his journey to Kabul to find Sohrab, the son of Hassan, to rescue him from the hands of Taliban and his face-off with Assef.

Intricacies of relationships between parents and children are embodied through the troubled relationship of Amir with his father. The story delineates love, denial, secrets, sacrifice, guilt, forgiveness, redemption and everything that makes us all humane and flawed. In an interview, Hosseini elaborated:

'Both (The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns) are multigenerational, and so the relationship between parent and child, with all of its manifest complexities and contradictions, is a prominent theme. I did not intend this, but I am keenly interested, it appears, in the way parents and children love, disappoint, and in the end honour each other'.

'There is only one sin, only one and that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal his wife's right of a husband, you rob his children of a father. When you lie you steal someone's right to truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. There is no more wretched act than stealing. A man who takes what is not his to take, be it life or a loaf of naan, I spit on such a man. And if I ever cross paths with him, God help him'. It's a piece of advice given by Baba to Amir, that becomes deeply ingrained in his psyche during his childhood, only to leave him baffled at a later stage of life, when he discovers that Hassan is his own brother, an illegitimate child of his father, a secret Baba kept from Amir till he breathed his last. Amir is left completely bereft of an answer to why Baba stole his right to know the truth, a man who always advocated speaking the truth and considered 'theft' to be the worst crime of all. Hossaini's use of situational irony is evident here. Baba's hypocrisy and cowardice are revealed by the author in a subtle manner, leaving the readers in an inquisitive state of mind, to contemplate and analyze how Baba betrayed Amir and deprived him of his right to know the truth. Was Baba's harshness and lack of affection towards Amir a consequence of his self-denial, guilt and lack of courage to tell the deepest secret of his life to his son, a truth that inextricably intertwines the lives of Baba, Amir and Hassan? Poor Hassan ends up as the victim, suffering throughout his life and eventually sacrificing his life at the hands of Taliban.(Hossaini,p.123)

The protagonist is flawed and definitely not a likable character throughout most of the novel, whereas Hassan is portrayed as an immaculate character that draws immense sympathy from the readers. To what extent Amir can redeem himself even after his act of saving Hassan's child from the hands of Taliban, risking his own life, is a pertinent question readers might ask, for some sins can only be forgiven, not redeemed?

'For you, a thousand times over!' (Hossaini,p.78).The piousness, unconditional love, sacrifice, courage and everything that is embodied through the character of Hassan, reverberate in the mind of the readers and tears roll down the cheeks of the readers, leaving them devastated, perplexed and enraged for everything that happened to Hassan for all the wrongs he never did.

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