



Facets of Love in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

This paper is deliberated to highlight the bond of love shared by different characters in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Love, friendship and father-son relationship remain fulcrum as discussed, the themes by Khaled Hosseini in his work. The author through his work *The Kite Runner* tried to explain the meaning of love by showing a bond between half brothers Amir and Hassan with their father and other characters. *The Kite Runner* is the story how beautiful Afghanistan was before Taliban affected Afghans, how Hazaras, lower caste muslims lived peacefully with Pastuns, high class muslims and how Afghanistan was destroyed by Taliban and how it affected the lives of Afghans, specially of Hazaras. Hosseini's story is about the two characters Hassan was Hazara and Amir was Pashtun who were half-brothers and their lives were totally changed after Kite flying competition that was held every year, one got the peaceful life other was sodomised and roof over his head was also snatched. . It mainly had the male characters which made it different from the platonic, cosmic or romantic love which urged the researcher to find out the warmth shared by the characters in the novel. The researcher explored the novel in depth to accentuate the endearment shown by the characters amidst tough times. This paper analyzed several types of love shown by different characters in the novel *The Kite Runner*.

Keywords: Love, *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini, friendship, half brothers.





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1. Introduction:

Human beings are the societal beings but to survive they need love, care and affection. Love is the main ingredient for a sustainable relation. Literature is the art through which we learn many ethics and values such as love, selflessness, truth and peace which are important for one's survival in the society. Khaled Hosseini through his maiden novel *The Kite Runner* tried to teach values to people particularly love and selflessness. He had revealed the condition of Afghanistan people, prevailing post invasion by Taliban and Russian forces. *The Kite Runner* basically revolves around two siblings Amir and Hassan conjoined as half brothers. Hassan is true friend and savior of Amir and loves him unconditionally. Later on Amir came to know about the truth that Hassan is illegitimate son of Baba who loved Hassan more than Amir. Ali, their servant and projected as Hassan's father had warmth for both Hassan and Ali. Rahim Khan, Baba's friend as well as Amir also considered Rahim Khan as his friend. Amir didn't have a child but he loved his nephew Sohrab, son of Hassan more than anyone. He sacrificed almost everything for him as Sohrab was his own kid. Khaled Hosseini beautifully pictured every relation. Khaled Hosseini currently living in California is an Afghan-American author as he moved to United State in 1980 when his family was granted political asylum. He was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. Hosseini has authored four books *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *And The Mountains Echoed* and *Sea Prayer*. *The Kite Runner* was first published in 2003 and Issabel Allende, author of *The House of the Spirits* praised it as

This is one of those unforgettable stories that stay with you for years. All the great themes of literature and of life are the fabric of this extraordinary novel: love, honour, guilt, fear, redemption... It is so powerful that for a long time after, everything I read seemed bland.

Researcher accepted *The Kite Runner* as full of virtues we need to improve our daily life.





2. Undying Friendship

The love shared by two friends is beyond imagination, they lived for each other and would die for each other. Friends are the family away from home. So is Hassan for Amir as Hassan was unaware of the fact that Amir is his half brother still he didn't leave any stone unturned to help and love him. As Mitch Albom in *Tuesdays with Morrie* said

Devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.
(Albom, 43)

It was felt that Hassan's purpose was to serve Amir selflessly. Hassan and Amir shared a master-servant bond because Amir was Pashtun and Hassan was Hazara. Hassan as a loyal servant followed his master's commands entirely whether it was going at hills with him or moving away from Amir's life. Hassan's loyalty was everything which he offered to Amir and that kept their bond stronger. As Amir mentioned what he enquired from Hassan and what he got in reply:

"Would I ever lie to you, Amir agha?" Suddenly I decided to toy with him a little. "I don't know. Would you?" I'd sooner eat dirt." (Hosseini, 50)

After the Kite Flying competition, Aseef asked Hassan for the Kite that he collected for Amir. Hassan refused to give and Aseef labeled him "A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog"(Hosseini, 68). Loyalty is the foundation of any relation and Hassan made it stronger day by day.

Sacrifice is the other thing love demands. Hassan sacrificed everything for Amir from the roof over his head to his masculinity. Their lives were changed after the kite flying competition, where Amir won this competition and Hassan was sodomised. As Aseef wanted the last kite that Amir cut but Hassan refused to give, Aseef traumatized him and performed unnatural act with him.

One was the blue kite resting against the wall, close to the cast-iron stove; the other was Hassan's brown corduroy pants thrown on a heap of eroded bricks.

Aseef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of lamb (Hosseini, 70-71).



This incident changed their lives and Amir tried to avoid Hassan, he stayed at his room for most of the hours. He felt uncomfortable with Hassan and he decided to kick him out of the home. He put the blame of stealing on Hassan and when Baba asked Hassan, Hassan agreed with that too and made his final sacrifice for Amir.

Baba came right out and asked “Did you steal that money? Did you steal Amir’s watch, Hassan?” Hassan reply was a single word, delivered in a thin, raspy voice: “Yes.” I flinched, like I’d been slapped. My heart sank and I almost blurted out the truth. Then I understood: This was Hassan’s final sacrifice for me. If he’d said no, Baba would have believed him because we all knew Hassan never lied. (Hosseini, 97-98)

After that gruesome act that Aseef performed with Hassan, Amir felt guilty and he wanted to get punished as he ran away from there. So one day he took Hassan to hills and wanted Hassan to punish him so Amir hit Hassan with pomegranates but Hassan didn’t hit him back.

I don’t know how many times I hit him. All I know is that when I finally stopped, exhausted and panting, Hassan was smeared in red like he’d been shot by firing squad. I fell to my knees, tired, spent, frustrated. Hassan did pick up a pomegranate. He walked toward me. He opened it and crushed it against his own forehead. “There,” he croaked, red dripping down his face like blood. “Are you satisfied? Do you feel better?” (Hosseini, 86-87)

Hassan was so aware of Amir’s likes and dislikes and his belongings. Hassan suggested Ali to gift Amir his favorite book “Shahnamah”. Ali told Amir “Hassan said your copy was old and ragged, and that some of the pages were missing.” (Hosseini, 96)

Hassan left the place but his heart still had a special corner for Amir. He left for Hazarajat but later he came to Amir’s home back to live with Rahim Khan. When Rahim Khan left for Peshawar, Hassan gave a letter to Rahim Khan for Amir. Letter was written in Farsi. That had wordings:

In the name of Allah the most beneficent, the most merciful,
Amir Agha, with my deepest respects,

Farzana jan, Sohrab, and I pray that this latest letter finds you in good health and in the light of Allah’s graces. Please offer my warmest thanks to Rahim Khan sahib for carrying it to you. I am hopeful that one day I will hold one of your letters in my hands and read of your life in America. Perhaps a photograph of you will even grace our eyes. I have told much about you to Farzana jan and Sohrab, about us growing together and playing games and running in the streets. They laugh at the stories of all the mischief you and I used to cause! (Hosseini, 199-200)





Hassan was a great soul and Amir was loved selflessly by him. The dreadful experiences were forgotten and happy moments were kept by him. He further added about him and Sohrab.

The two of us often walk up to the cemetery on the hill. Do you remember how we used to sit under the pomegranate tree there and read from the Shahnamah? The droughts have dried the hill and the tree hasn't borne fruit in years, but Sohrab and I still sit under its shade and I read to him from Shahnamah. (Hosseini, 200-201)

The memories which he should remove from his life, he let Amir to experience. Hassan had a brave heart. He didn't end the letter here. He wrote in the end.

And I dream someday you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an old faithful friend waiting for you. (Hosseini, 202)

Hasan was the embodiment of true friendship and he had set the very high bar of friendship. He gave a new meaning of friendship to the world.

Love is expressed in the form of friendship not only of Hassan and Amir. Even Amir and Rahim Khan shared the same bond. Rahim Khan, Baba's friend had a very special bond with Amir as he called him, Amir jan. He treated him as his son more than a companion. He guided him as a friend and loved him as a father. He was the one who told Amir "There is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 171). These words changed Amir's life, helped him to do redemption and to be free from the guilt he nurtured. "In the Judeo-Christian tradition, redemption is price paid for a sin, it could be a guilt offering or a sacrifice (Helen, 296). He went to Peshawar to meet Rahim Khan and then to Kabul to save Sohrab, son of Hassan so he could have absolution of his guilt. Rahim Khan played a vital role in transforming Amir.

Rahim Khan was the one of those who understood Amir. Amir was fond of reading and writing, Rahim Khan always encouraged him as Baba didn't like his this habit and when Amir wrote his first story his Baba didn't respond. He mentioned "Baba nodded and gave a thin smile that conveyed little more than feigned interest" (Hosseini, 29-30) but Rahim Khan uplifted him with the note.

Amir jan, I enjoyed your story very much. Mashallah, God has granted you a special talent. It is now your duty to hone that talent, because a person who wastes his God-given talents is a donkey. You have written your story with sound grammar and interesting style. But the most impressive thing about your story is that it has irony. You may not even know what that word means. But you will someday. It is something that some writers reach for their entire careers and never attain. You have achieved it with your first story. My door is and always will be open to you, Amir jan. I shall hear any story you have to tell. Bravo. Your friend, Rahim. (Hosseini, 31)





Hassan was another who motivated him after listening to his story. Hassan commented “Mashallah, Amir agha. Bravo!” (Hosseini, 31).

Amir felt alone on his birthday night, Rahim Khan sat with him and provided him solace and gave him something which was beneficial for Amir. He knew Amir more than Amir’s Baba.

It was a brown leather-bound notebook. I traced my fingers along the gold colored stitching on the borders. I smelled the leather. “For your stories,” he said. (Hosseini, 93)

It was not a one sided friendship, Amir also contributed equally. When Amir went to Peshawar to meet Rahim Khan, he was not well. Amir forced him to move to California with him for the better treatment.

Let me take you home with me, I can find you a good doctor. They’re coming up with new treatments all the time. There are new drugs and experimental treatments, we could enroll you in one. (Hosseini, 186)

Care is another name of love and that love was seen in Amir’s eyes for Rahim Khan.

Care is based on Being-there, giving meaning to existence, because it is a way of being in the world, the the relationship with oneself and with others. (Cestari et al.)

Rahim Khan who loved Amir as a father, while on his deathbed gave some valuable advices to Amir in the form of letter which read:

I believe, is what true redemption is, Amir jan, when guilt leads to good.

I know that in the end, God will forgive you. He will forgive your father, me and you too. I hope you can do the same. Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But, most important, forgive yourself.

I have left you some money, most of what I have left, in fact. I think you may have some expenses when you return here, and the money should be enough to cover them. (Hosseini, 277)

In the end he requested Amir for not finding him and further added “I leave you on the hands of God” (Hosseini, 277).

Hosseini had shown love through different level of friendship, another example he set was of Baba and Rahim Khan. We normally say friends are the secret-keeper and Rahim Khan was the secret keeper of the Baba. He kept his greatest and darkest secret that Hassan is illegitimate son of Baba which he disclosed later to Amir when it became crucial to tell. He made Amir aware of the fact “Ali was sterile”(Hosseini, 205), the fact that changed Sohrab’s and Amir’s lives for forever.

Rahim Khan made Amir’s Baba understand at every stage. Baba was not satisfied with Amir, he believed “there is something missing in that boy” (Hosseini, 21). Baba always wanted a



child who is physically strong as he mentioned “If I hadn’t seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I’d never believe he’s my son” (Hosseini, 22). Rahim Khan just told him just one word “- grateful that he’s healthy” (Hosseini, 20).

3. Parental Love

Hosseini mostly portrayed the father-son duo in the novel. Baba shared the fatherly connection with Hassan and Amir. Hassan was more close to him as compared to Amir but he had affection for both the kids. Hassan was illicit child and he was in guilt that he couldn’t provide him a luxurious life as that of Amir but he cared for Hassan a lot and took his all responsibilities. He tried to provide everything to Hassan whatever he bought for Amir. As Amir mentioned once

Baba would buy us each three identical kites and spools of glass string. If I changed my mind and asked for a bigger and fanciful kite, Baba would buy it for me- but then he’d buy it for Hassan too. Sometimes I wished he wouldn’t do that. Wished he’d let me be the favorite.(Hosseini, 48)

Baba arranged a doctor from New Delhi for Hassan’s plastic surgery as a birthday gift. Amir mentioned “Hassan hadn’t done anything to earn Baba’s affections; he’d just born with that stupid harelip” (Hosseini, 43).

Baba was the one who didn’t want Hassan to go away from the home because he couldn’t see him going away from him. Amir put the false accusation of stealing on Hassan and Hassan happily accepted that and at that moment instead of throwing out of the home he said “I forgive you” (Hosseini, 98). Ali then told him they wanted to live as it was becoming uncomfortable for them to live there. He further added:

I don’t care about the money or the watch. I don’t understand why you’re doing this ... what do you mean ‘impossible’?

Ali, haven’t I provided well for you? Haven’t I been good to you and Hassan?

At least tell me why. I need to know! (Hosseini, 99)

Baba tried his best to stop Ali and Hassan as he never wanted his child to go away from him but all his efforts had gone waste.

Amir believed that his Baba didn’t love him and he didn’t find Amir worthy, it was Amir who felt this often and he further felt that Baba neglected him.

The World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 1999) defines child neglect as the failure to provide for the development of child in all its spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions. This failure must be gauged in the context of resources reasonably



available to family or caretakers and whether it causes or has high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. (Hornor)

We can see in the initial years Baba had ignored him and that affected Amir a lot but in later years did almost what a father does for a child! Baba safely took Amir away from Kabul to Peshawar and then to California. When Amir told him

Maybe we should go back to Peshawar.

You were Happier there, Baba. It was more like home.

You work so hard here. (Hosseini, 120)

Baba told him "It's not so bad now" (Hosseini, 120). He wanted to give his son a perfect luxurious life which he had in Kabul for which he had joined as day manager at a gas agency. He struggled a lot but was able to give a good life to his son.

He showed his love, care and affection by arranging his marriage with Soraya, daughter of General Sahib, Mr. Iqbal Taheri.

Ali may not be father of Hasaan but he took care and responsibility as a father be it standing beside him when he had to go for surgery or taking the decision of leaving Agha's home when Amir put the false blame on him. He said:

We are leaving, Agha Sahib.

We can't live here anymore.

Life here is impossible for us now. We're leaving. (Hosseini, 98)

He was so protective for the kid whom he raised as his own son. Amir mentioned that how Ali curled his arm around Hassan.

Ali drew Hassan to him, curled his arm around his son's shoulder. It was a protective gesture and I knew whom Ali was protecting him from. Ali glanced my way and in his cold, unforgiving look, I saw that Hassan had told him. (Hosseini, 98-99)

General Taheri was Amir's father-in-law but he kept the bond of father-son with him which he mentioned during the wedding of Soraya and Amir.

Amir jan, as for you, I welcome you to my home as a son, as the husband of my daughter who is the noor of my eye. Your pain will be our pain, your joy our joy. (Hosseini, 155)

General Taheri also knew about his love for writing so he presented a typewriter to him as a house warming gift when he shifted to new house with Soraya after Baba's death.

The general gave me an additional present, a brand-new IBM typewriter. In the box, he had slipped a note written in Farsi"



Amir jan,

I hope you discover many tales on these keys.

General Iqbal Taheri (Hosseini, 166)

The Kite Runner is the story of three generation, Hassan also became father and taught his son Sohrab to read and write as he didn't want Sohrab to be illiterate like him, which he mentioned in the letter written by him to Amir.

I wish you could see Sohrab. He is a good boy. Rahim Khan sahib and I have taught him to read and write so he does not grow up stupid like his father. And can he shoot with that slingshot! I take Sohrab around Kabul sometimes and buy him candy. There is still a monkey man in Shar-e-Nau and if we run into him, I pay him to make his monkey dance for Sohrab. You could see how he laughs! (Hoesseini, 200)

Hassan gave the minutest details of his kid to Amir as a proud father and further told him how he read from Shahnamah for Sohrab and he wished one day Sohrab could also read from it. He felt he was the luckiest. "Soon he will be able to read from book himself. I am very proud and very lucky father" (Hosseini, 201).

Sohrab may not be the biological child of Amir and Soraya but he had the strongest bond with them and they loved him above anything. Amir when got to know about that Hassan was his half brother and Sohrab was Hassan's son, he didn't wait for moment and left for Kabul to save his nephew. Kabul was not same as Amir left it. It was now devastated by Talibans and Sohrab lived in an orphanage but till Amir reached there, Aseef took Sohrab away from the orphanage then Amir went to the place where Sohrab was kept, he met Aseef there but this time he didn't run like a coward but faced Aseef. Aseef allowed him to take Sohrab with him first but later he told him "We have some unfinished business, you and I, You remember, don't you?" (Hosseini, 263)

Amir with the help of Sohrab rescued him from Aseef and took him away from Kabul to Islamabad. In Islamabad at the very first day of their stay, Sohrab ran to mosque to pray but Amir got so tensed as he feared he lost him, the love he had can be seen through the energy he put to find Sohrab. He asked from hotel staff "Mr Fayyaz, have you seen him?" (Hosseini, 288) When he didn't get the positive response he rushed outside to find and later on he found him in "Shah Faisal Mosque" (Hosseini, 290).

Amir wanted to take him to America with him, for this he went to American embassy to have Sohrab's visa. There, he met Raymond Andrews and told him "I want to adopt this boy, take him back to States with me" (Hosseini, 301). Andrew said "Tell me your story" (Hosseini, 301). He told everything that happened in Afghanistan. Andrew further told him that your petition can



face certain obstacles. He asked Amir about the death certificates of Hassan and Farzan later on Amir told it was Afghanistan, there people don't have birth certificate and it's somewhat impossible to have death certificate. Andrew told him

Your next problem is that you need the cooperation of the child's country of origin. Now, that's difficult under the best of circumstances, and, to quote you, this is Afghanistan we're talking about. We don't have an American embassy in Kabul. That makes things extremely complicated. Just about impossible. (Hosseini, 303)

Amir was in anger at that time because he had to take Sohrab with him at any cost by seeing at Amir's firmness Andrew helped him by giving the number of immigration lawyer.

Then I advise you to get a good immigration lawyer. Omar Faisal works here in Islamabad. You can tell him I sent you. (Hosseini, 304)

Amir with a hope visited Omar Faisal but he dimmed his shimmer by saying

Well, it's like this. In the aftermath of a disaster, whether it be natural or manmade-and the Taliban are a disaster, Amir, believe me-it's always difficult to ascertain that a child is orphan. Kids get displaced in refugee camps, or parents just abandon them because they can't take care of them. Happens all the time. So the INS won't grant a visa unless it's the child meets the definition of an eligible orphan. I'm sorry, I know it sounds ridiculous, but you need death certificate. (Hosseini, 309)

Lawyer Omar Faisal told him other facts that made adoption impossible but Amir was firm as he had to take Sohrab with him. He asked for other possibilities from Omar, he told

There is another option probably your best shot.

You could relinquish him to an orphanage here, then file an orphan petition. Start your I-600 form and your home study while he's in a safe place.

The I-600 is an INS formality. The home study is done by the adoption agency you choose. (Hosseini, 311)

Amir was not satisfied with this idea as he promised Sohrab that he would not put him into orphanage again. He discussed the same with Soraya and Sohrab but Soraya was trying hard from America and she was successful in that.

I heard back from Kaka Sharif. He said the key was getting Sohrab into the country. Once he's in, there are ways of keeping him here. So he made a few calls to his INS friends. He called me back tonight and said he was almost certain he could get Sohrab a humanitarian visa.



Anyway, we'll serve as the sponsors. It should all happen pretty quickly. He said the visa be good for a year, plenty of time to apply for an adoption petition. (Hosseini, 314)

The hard work Soraya and Amir did to take Sohrab to America was commendable. They had a corner for Sohrab in their hearts.

Amir was possessive for him that's why he wanted to fly with him to States but when he found Sohrab committed suicide he was lost as he lost himself. He ran to hospital just to save him and he prayed as the family members do for their loved ones.

La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah.

They had to transfuse several units of red cells-

How will I tell Soraya?

Twice, they had to revive him-

I will do namaz, I will do zakat.

They would have lost him if his heart hadn't been young and strong-

I will fast.

He is alive. (Hosseini, 319)

His prayers worked. The attachment he had for Sohrab can't be imagined. Sohrab got consciousness; he told Amir "I wish you had left me in the water. Don't ever say that, Sohrab. I can't bear to hear you talk like that (Hosseini, 325).

Soraya had arranged Sohrab's room in America and Amir showed the affection once more by telling General Sahib that he would not mention Sohrab as Hazara boy in his presence he had to call him by his name Sohrab. Sohrab was not their kid but he took care of his every need and even Amir took him for kite flying as he was interested in it. He just wanted small touch of love from Sohrab as he was silent after the meeting with Faisal but he smiled when he flew the kite.

Amir may become good father but he was a good son during initial days he hated how his love was shared with Hassan but he was unaware of the fact. He always had fondness for his father, be it in Kabul or America. When he got to know Baba had cancer he with Soraya took proper care of him.

Soraya dedicated herself to taking care of my father. She made his toast and tea in the morning, and helped him in and out of bed. She gave him his pain pills, washed his clothes, read him the international section of the newspaper ever afternoon. She cooked his favorite dish, potato shorwa though he could scarcely eat more than a few spoonfuls, and took him out everyday for a brief walk around the block. And



when he became bedridden, she turned him on his side every hour so he wouldn't get a bedsore. (Hosseini, 158)

4. Martial Love

The love between a husband and wife is pure and blissful. Amir and Soraya bond was also pious. Husband and wife are those who support each other in tough times. Amir and Soraya were trying to have a baby but nothing happened. When Soraya told him

A year isn't while, Amir! In a terse voice unlike her. Something's wrong, I know it.

Then let's see a doctor. (Hosseini, 169)

Amir like a supportive husband took her to doctor and accepted the truth that she had some problem called "Unexplained infertility" (Hoessini, 170). He didn't let only Soraya to have tests but he went first for his examination.

Amir proved to be a good husband too and Soraya as a wife supported him for everything even she agreed when Amir made the decision to go to Peshawar to meet Rahim Khan after Amir received the call from Rahim Khan and accepted his past and took care of Sohrab.

Conclusion

The research shows that different forms of love have been shown by Khaled Hosseini through his characters be it in the form of friendship, fatherly-son relationship or husband and wife. Hosseini gave a very different perspective about the love to the world. Afghanistan was fighting and tough times were for Afghans but it is said every cloud has a silver lining and Hosseini has shown the situation but let the love to prevail.

The Kite Runner will be staying in the hearts of millions as it teaches us valuable lessons which are necessary to live a peaceful life. "A sweeping novel of love, betrayal, loss and violence set in Kabul and San Francisco"(New Statesman).

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