

Amir's Life in The Kite Runner

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Abstract: The Kite Runner is a coming of age novel that deals with several themes like guilt, friendship and betrayal, jealousy, and difficult relationship between father and son. This paper is a study on feeling of inferiority through father-son relationship, and the feeling of guilt. The main character of the story Amir deals with them at an early age.

Keywords: inferiority, betrayal, jealousy, guilt

1. Introduction

The Kite Runner is an international bestseller novel written by Khaled Hosseini who was born in Afghanistan and moved to the United States in 1980 according to the introduction of the author in the book. He was named a U.S. goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency.

The story begins by Amir telling about his guilt from an incident of twenty-six years ago when he was a twelve year-old boy. He remembers it clearly as if it happened yesterday. He tried hard, but could not forget it. It had haunted him for the past twenty-six years.

2. Main Characters

Amir's life started as a motherless child because his mother died giving him birth. His father Baba, a wealthy Pashtun businessman drives a black Ford Mustang, and lives in a big house in luxury in a good part of Kabul. Baba has strong opinion of what a man ought to be. He behaved and lived according to that and expected Amir to be more like him, but Amir could not meet his expectations.

They had Ali and his son Hassan as servants who lived in a little shack on their property. Ali cooked for them and did all the chores around the house. The relationship between Amir and Hassan was more like master and servant, and not like two friends. Amir and Hassan spent a lot of time playing together when Amir was not in school. Hassan's mother ran away after giving birth to him. Just like Amir, Hassan didn't know his mother either.

Rahim Khan is Baba's friend and business partner. Amir felt accepted and got the kind of attention from Rahim Khan that he could not get from Baba. Rahim Khan tried to explain Baba that a child is an individual with his own personality and parents cannot change it according to their liking. (Hosseini : 21)

3. Feeling of Inferiority

From early childhood Amir realized that he was unable to meet Baba's expectations. All the things he enjoyed doing like reading poems, writing stories were not appreciated by Baba. Amir also had to deal with being inferior to Hassan in Baba's eyes, not getting enough attention from Baba, and having a feeling of guilt for first, killing own mother and second, not helping Hassan when he needed help the most. Summer Stewart says, "His

feelings of guilt about his mother lead him to constantly try and prove himself to his father (who is called Baba), which in turn leads to his betrayal of Hassan because Amir believes that his father thinks Hassan is a better boy.”

Baba tried to make Amir a man like him. When Baba was young he played soccer and wanted his son to do the same so he signed up Amir in a soccer team. Amir performed very poorly on the team. Baba was disappointed, but he did not give up. Next, he tried to make Amir into a soccer fan. Amir tried to show that he was genuinely interested in soccer by watching the matches with Baba, but soon Baba felt that it was not so. Amir wanted Baba’s attention and that was the sole reason he pretended to enjoy watching games with him. (Hosseini : 20)

Hassan was better than Amir at doing all the things that Baba felt normal boys should do. For example, boys should defend themselves when bullied or hit while playing. Amir never fought back when it happened to him while playing with children his age. It was Hassan who fought other kids to defend him. (Hosseini : 22) For Baba use of physical force among boys was natural to settle those issues because it was normal when Baba was growing up.

When Amir and Hassan were not with Baba, Hassan was the inferior one for being Amir’s servant. Hassan prepared breakfast for Amir, and he ironed Amir’s clothes while Amir ate breakfast. (Hosseini : 27) Hassan always did what Amir asked whether he liked it or not. For example, Amir would ask Hassan to shoot a walnut at the neighbor’s dog with the slingshot, which he did not like to do, but if Amir insisted, Hassan obeyed. (Hosseini : 3-4)

When Amir and Hassan were with Baba, his feelings showed in the way he treated each of them. It seems that Amir felt Hassan was better at either pleasing or meeting Baba’s expectations than he was. This could be the reason for him to feel inferior to Hassan. According to Amy Larson, Hassan had an athletic advantage over Amir. It became obvious on one occasion when Amir and Hassan were skipping stones on a lake. Amir’s stone skipped five times on the water, but Hassan’s skipped eight times. Baba was with them at that time. He patted and put his arm around Hassan. (Hosseini : 13-14) Amir most likely took this to be a statement that Baba is pleased with Hassan because Hassan performed better than him.

4. Feeling of Jealousy

Amir’s sense of inferiority turned into jealousy and hatred toward Hassan. It led to making fun of Hassan because he could not read or write. When Amir read stories to Hassan and a difficult word appeared that he did not know, and asked the meaning, Amir would smile and tease to show his ignorance. (Hosseini : 28-29)

The real serious struggle in Amir’s life from the very beginning was dealing with guilt. His relationship with Baba was not close and loving that he wanted it to be. It was obvious that Baba did not like him as much as he liked Hassan. In search for the reason for Baba’s hatred led him to think that it was because he had killed Baba’s wife. (Hosseini : 19)

According to Baba’s way of thinking, when one kills a man, it is like stealing a life. It is like stealing his wife’s right to a husband. (Hosseini : 18) Here by killing Baba’s wife, Amir has stolen Baba’s right to a wife. Baba was proud of his wife Sofia Akrami and called her his princess. Her ancestors were of the royal family and therefore for Baba to call her his princess was perhaps appropriate.

Sofia was a highly educated person who taught classic Farsi at the university. Amir describes her as one of Kabul's most respected, beautiful and virtuous ladies. (Hosseini : 15) This means many people in Kabul knew Sofia for her intellect and ancestry. For Baba to lose someone like her must have been a great loss, and therefore for Amir to think that Baba hates him because of Sofia's death is understandable. Amir must have felt that in such a situation the best he could do to win Baba's attention and love is to try to be like Baba.

Amir tries to please Baba by being someone according to his expectation. Baba took Amir to Buzkashi tournament loved by most Afghan men. In this tournament, a man on a horse tries to grab a goat carcass to drop it in the scoring circle of the other team. The members of the other team try to snatch the carcass by kicking, whipping or punching him.

One horseman who was carrying the carcass fell off and was trampled by horses. The whole scene upset Amir so much that he cried till he got home. Amir noticed that Baba tried to hide his disgust while driving back. (Hosseini : 20-21)

5. Feeling of Guilt

The second incident that caused guilt feeling was when Amir did not help Hassan when he was being raped. Micco Brisker thinks that because Amir chose not to help Hassan, Amir's life changed forever and created a tension between them. The rape took place right after the kite-fighting tournament.

The kite-fighting tournament is held in winter each year in Kabul for boys which is considered as the highlight of the season. Fighting kites is similar to going to war. This begins by making kites, coating strings with powdered glass paste called tar to cut the opponent's kite. (Hosseini : 49-50)

Winning this tournament was a great opportunity for Amir to prove to Baba that he could be strong, and make Baba proud of him, but after making all the preparation Amir suddenly wanted to withdraw from the tournament. Hassan encourages him and Amir flies his kite. Both Baba and Rahim Khan were also there to watch Amir's kite flying skill. Amir would glance at Baba from time to time and wonder if he was cheering for Amir or waiting to see him fall. Amir felt that flying a kite was much like letting the mind drift with the kite.

Amir started to cut other kites, and the blue kite did the same. In the end only two kites remained, Amir's kite and the blue one. People began chanting, cut him! Cut him! Amir wondered if Baba was also chanting with the crowd. He felt confident that he could win this year's kite-fight. It seemed as if this was the moment he had waited for a long time to be in the center of Baba's attention and not sharing it with Hassan. He thought victory will wipe away the hatred in Baba toward him and the relationship would become more normal between them. Amir prays and asks God to blow the wind in his direction and let him win. He had endured too much pain, and for too long. Suddenly, he felt assured that he was going to win now because the wind lifted his kite and he looped around the blue kite. Soon it was over. (Hosseini : 65)

Amir heard Hassan say, "Bravo! Bravo, Amir agha!" The blue kite has been cut loose and it was drifting. Amir saw Baba standing on the roof of their house, pumping both of his fists and then began to clap. For Amir this was the most precious moment of his life so far because finally he was able to see that Baba was indeed proud of him. Hassan at this point told Amir that he would run that blue kite for him, and he took off.

Amir pulled his kite while people began to gather around him to congratulate. Some patted him on the back

and some shook hands with him. He went home to put his kite away and then went out in search of Hassan because he wanted to meet Baba with the blue kite in his hand. On the way he asked people if they knew which way Hassan went. An old man told Amir that some boys were chasing him. It was getting dark when he heard some voices. He ran in the direction of the voices, and came to an alley when he saw Hassan standing as if he was ready to fight. The blue kite was behind him. Three boys, Assef, Kamal, and Wali who had picked a fight with Amir, and Hassan had come to his help were now blocking Hassan's way. Hassan picked a rock and hit Assef. They knocked Hassan down and raped him. Amir saw this, but did nothing. He knew he had two choices, one to stand up for Hassan like he had done for Amir in the past, or run. Amir chose to run away because he was afraid what Assef would do to him, and also because he was a coward. (Hosseini : 71-77)

This moment changed Amir's life by saddling him with guilt that he carried with him for the next twenty-six years. Ten minutes after running away from the scene, Amir walks back toward the place, and finds Hassan walking toward him carrying the blue kite. When they came face to face, Amir told Hassan that he was looking for him. After a few minutes of silence, Hassan tried to say something, but words did not come out.

Amir carrying the blue kite enters Baba's study where Baba was drinking tea with Rahim Khan. Baba smiled and opened his arms. Amir put his face against Baba's warm chest and wept. For a moment Amir forgot what he had done to get all this from Baba. It felt good and it was just the way Amir had imagined. (Hosseini : 79)

Hassan stayed home sleeping. After a few days, Baba and Ali asked Amir if he knew what had happened to Hassan. Amir told them that Hassan was sick. They had not spoken to each other for a while, but one day, Hassan asked Amir if he wanted to go to the hill. Amir reluctantly agreed. Hassan kept trying to mend the relationship between them.

The following summer, Amir and Hassan went to the hill and picked up some pomegranates. Amir took an overripe pomegranate and hit Hassan with it. Amir wanted to lighten the weight of guilt by making Hassan to hit him back, but Hassan did not hit back. Finally, Hassan picked up a pomegranate, opened it and crushed it on his own forehead. He asked Amir, "Are you satisfied?" Immediately after this Hassan walked down the hill. (Hosseini : 93)

6. Conclusion

This first attempt to reduce the guilt for Amir failed. He began to cry, but came to the conclusion that he had to get rid of Hassan. That year Baba throws a birthday party for Amir and lots of guests were invited who gave lots of presents to Amir. He thought this was a good chance to get rid of Hassan by hiding some of the presents under his bed and accusing him of theft. When Baba asked Hassan if he stole those things, Hassan answered that he did. After hearing that, Baba forgave him, but Ali decided that he and Hassan must leave, and they left. The guilt stayed with Amir for the next twenty-six years.

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「カイト・ランナー」におけるアミールの人生

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概要：「カイト・ランナー」は成人になる過程での罪の意識、友情、裏切り、嫉妬、父と息子の困難な関係などをテーマにした小説である。本稿は父と息子の関係における劣等感、そして罪の意識に焦点を当てて考察する。主人公アミールは若くしてその感情に対処することになる。彼は父親に好かれ、自分の事を誇らしく思ってくれるよう試みる。それは母の死の原因が自分にあり、父親が自分を嫌っていると感じたからである。自分を出産する中で母親が死に、後ろめたさを感じていた。また、彼の召使いハッサンが一番助けを必要とした時、自分が助けなかった罪の意識も持っていた。

キーワード：劣等感、裏切り、嫉妬、罪悪感