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**Thematic Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *A Kite Runner***

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**Abstract:**

Khaled Hosseini is a versatile genius who dwells deep inside the psyche of his characters. He moves the story both ways—from psychological point of view of the characters to the historical cataclysm in contemporary Afghanistan. The kite here symbolizes the free will of the two young boys—Amir and Hassan. Amir is highly ambitious of winning the local kite-fighting competition and his loyal friend Hassan supports him but both are unaware about the consequences of political upheaval in their homeland i.e. Afghanistan, invaded by the Russians, and accordingly he along with his father has to flee leaving all his belongings to save his life. In this spree, he loses his kith and kin. However, he realizes that he must return to his homeland so that he may get redemption. Thus, the novelist weaves his story around various themes like evil and sin, friendship, class consciousness, displacement, gender oppression, child abuse, etc. Therefore, the present research paper is an attempt to study the novel from the perspective of thematic analysis.

**Key words:** Political Upheaval, Friendship, Class-consciousness, Displacement, Gender Oppression and Redemption.

## Full Paper:

The novelist deals with the theme of evil and sin with an entirely different concept rather than the traditional or rigid viewpoint. However, he firmly believes that one cannot run away from one's past sins. Those misdeeds haunt that person throughout his life say for example, the protagonist declares in the beginning of the novel, "Standing in the kitchen with the receiver to my ear, I knew it wasn't just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my past of unatoned sins" (*KT* 1). But, the novelist propagates that one is always capable of atoning one's sins. Therefore, the protagonist finally achieves happiness when he expiates for all his wrongdoings in the past and consequently feels free of all his burden of sins on his conscience when he gets redemption towards the end of the novel. Rahim Khan puts it more clearly when he says to Amir: "There is a way to be good again" (*KR* 2).

Further, friendship is one of the significant themes of the novel. Both the prominent characters Amir and Hassan are close friends in the novel. They are like brothers. They fondly call themselves the duo of Sohrab and Rustom. However, they belong to the different classes of society, but even then, they always help each other. On one point, Amir declares:

I talked Hassan into firing walnuts with his slingshot at the neighbour's one-eyed German shepherd. Hassan never wanted to, but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything. (*KR* 3)

Thereby, Hassan does mischief on the asking of Amir. Moreover, when Hassan's father catches him red handed, he never reveals that it was Amir's idea. He willingly takes the blame. In the same way, Amir also cares for him. As for example, on one occasion, when a group of soldiers teases Hassan with abusing words about his mother, Amir consoles him by saying, "He took you for someone else" (*KR* 7). However, Hassan seems to be more committed than Amir in this relationship right from the childhood. Amir himself acknowledges this fact in the following lines:

Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words.

Mine was *Baba*.

His was Amir. My name. (*KR* 10)

As for instance, whenever the neighbourhood boys tease them, it is always Hassan who steps in and fends them off. For example, when a local boy Assef along with his companions insults Amir and Hassan, and tries to assault them, it is Hassan who comes

forward with the answer to their threatening words and threatens Assef with his slingshot and ultimately forces them to run away: “But perhaps you didn’t notice that I’m the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move, they’ll have to change your nickname from Assef ‘the Ear Eater’ to ‘One-Eyed Assef,’ because I have this rock pointed at your left eye” (KR 37). Similarly, on the day of ‘kite flying competition,’ Amir asks Hassan to bring that kite back for him as the winning trophy. Hassan remarks, “For you a thousand times over” (KR 59)! Though he captures the kite at last but fate had written something else for him as Assef and his disciples confront him in a deserted alley. Assef put the condition before him to leave the kite for him and only then he can go. But Hassan replies that it was the prize of Amir, and therefore, he cannot leave it. After that, Assef along with his disciples harasses him sexually. Though Amir reaches there on time but he does not dare to intervene because of the fear of Assef. It is here we see the lack of commitment in the friendship from the side of Amir. However, this guilt of not helping Hassan at that crucial moment haunts Amir throughout his life: “I wished he’d give me the punishment I craved; so may be I’d finally sleep at night. May be than things could return to how they used to be between us” (KR 81). But unfortunately, Amir has to leave for America along with his father. But Hassan is always hopeful about the returning of Amir. He writes in a letter: “And I dream that 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” (KR 191).

Further, religion is discussed in detail in the novel, and therefore, it serves as a prominent theme of the novel. However, the treatment of religion here is very unconventional as the novelist does not deal with it through extremities. All the main characters of the novel are not extremists. They explicitly differentiate between the faith and fanaticism when it comes to the matter of religion. For instance, when Amir tells his father about the teaching of a mullah about Islam like ‘virtues of *zakat*,’ ‘duty of *hadj*,’ ‘intricacies of performing the five daily *namaz* prayers,’ and ‘drinking, a terrible sin,’ his father argues:

I see you’ve confused what you’ve learning in school with actual education...but first understand this and understand it now, Amir: You’ll never learn anything of value from those bearded idiots.... They do nothing but thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don’t even understand.... God help us all if Afganistan ever falls into their hands.  
(KR 15)

Similarly, when Amir tells his father that mullah told him that those who drink would have to answer God for their sin on the day of Qiyamat i.e. the Judgement Day, his father replies that if there is a God, He should have more important things to attend to than his drinking or eating pork. On another occasion, when Amir along with his father and other displaced people of Afghanistan are on an escape journey to Pakistan, their truck has been broken down and some people pray together while Amir's father does not take part in the prayer. At this, one of them asks him to join them in prayer as God shall save them. But he replies: "What'll save us is eight cylinders and a good carburetor" (*KR* 104). Thus, he has a very realistic attitude toward religion instead of blindly following the conventional practices of a religion. Amir aptly states about him: "Baba had been such an unusual Afghan father, a liberal who had lived by his own rules, a maverick who had disregarded or embraced societal customs as he had seen fit" (*KR* 157). Further, when Assef, who has become a Talib, asks Amir that he is on a mission of Islam. Amir at once burst out: "What mission is that?... Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam" (*KR* )? Thus, the novelist puts a question mark on all those who gladly execute all the criminal activities in the name of religion.

Then the theme of class consciousness is so prominent in the novel that it does not spare even the beautiful relationship of Amir and Hassan as they belong to different class in the society. At one point in the novel, Amir himself acknowledges this fact that, though they play with each other, teach each other to ride a bicycle, spend entire winter flying kites, running kites, and Hassan is like the face of Afghanistan for him, but still he does not consider Hassan as a friend; and the reason is explicit:

Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was a Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing. (*KR* 22)

Similarly, Rahim Khan tells Amir about his past life; how he was in love with a girl and wanted to marry her, despite the fact that she was a Hazare—a Shi'a. They planned their grand wedding. But it was not easy to challenge the rules of society where the class consciousness is so much prevalent that one cannot marry outside his class. Rahim Khan describes the horrible condition of his family when they come to know about his action:

You should have seen the look on my father's face when I told him. My mother actually fainted. My sisters splashed her face with water. They fanned

her and looked at me as if I had slit her throat. My brother Jalal actually went to fetch his hunting rifle before my father stopped him. (KR 86).

Further, glimpse of the theme of gender oppression and gender discrimination is also visible in the novel. Women have been exploited sexually all over the world throughout the ages irrespective of their class or creed as they are oppressed because of their gender. Same is the case in the novel. When, some of the displaced people of Afghanistan are travelling in a truck to Pakistan, they are halted on a checkpoint by Russian soldiers. At that point, a Russian soldier demands for a young woman among them as the driver of the truck explains that, “it’s his price for letting us pass” (KR 100). However, Amir’s father opposes him by asking where his shame is. The Russian soldier threatens him by his gun but he does not stand down and bravely faces him. Thus, the incident shows the miserable status of women as they are considered as a mere sexual object. Similarly, gender discrimination is also explicitly visible in the novel. For instance, the central character of the novel, Amir feels attracted towards Soraya, the daughter of General Taheri; he talks to her in public but is very conscious about not taking too much time as it is considered inappropriate for a young woman talking to a young man. Even General Taheri rebukes Amir for his irresponsible talking to Soraya as, “everyone here is a storyteller” and he does not want that his daughter to be the topic of these stories. Amir himself describes the situation:

This was teetering dangerously on the verge of gossip material, and the best kind of it. Poison tongues would flap. And she would bear the brunt of that poison, not me—I was fully aware of the Afghan double standard that favored my gender. (KR 128)

On another occasion, Amir comes to know that Soraya’s mother Jamila was a talented singer of Kabul, with her enchanting voice. She could sing folk songs, ghazals, even raga in the past but General Taheri put the condition before marrying her that she would have to give up the singing which is another example of gender discrimination. Moreover, on the occasion of Amir and Soraya’s marriage, she wants to sing only one song but the General denies even that to her. Further at another time of the marriage of Soraya’s cousin, two women criticize Soraya for her misadventure in the past. At that point, Soraya loses her patience and bursts it out:

Their sons go out to nightclubs looking for meat and get their girlfriends pregnant, they have kids out of wedlock and no one says a goddamn thing. Oh,

they're just men having fun! I make one mistake and suddenly everyone is talking *nang* and *namoos*, and I have to have my face rubbed in it for the rest of my life. (KR 156)

Then, it is described that when General Taheri brings back her from her boy friend's place, he forces her to cut off all her hair and consequently she does not step out of the house for weeks. This incident explicitly shows the mindset of society towards women. Then the letter of Hassan, which Amir reads, narrates the incident of one day when Hassan and his wife Farzana went to the market and there Farzana asks the vendor the cost of potatoes but the vendor could not hear her because of a deaf ear. Therefore, she had to speak louder. Suddenly, a Talib came there and hit her with his stick on the thighs. She fell down instantly because of the strike. "He was screaming at her and cursing and saying the Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly" (KR 190). What an ironic situation, where a woman does not have a right to speak loudly even for a fair reason while a man has the right to scream irrelevantly!

The novel also deals with the theme of child abuse which is scattered in fragments throughout the novel. The novelist shows this theme through the incident when some soldiers harass Hassan on the way when he and Amir are going to watch a movie. The soldiers comment on immoral behaviour of Hassan's mother. They make immoral gestures in front of Hassan and consequently, he feels so miserable that he continuously cries throughout the movie. At another time, we come to know that Assef who has become a Talib takes the children from orphan house at regular intervals in order to satisfy his immoral desires. Moreover, it is sad to see that the care taker of that Orphan House feels so much helpless that he does not raise a voice against this inhuman behavior of the Talib as he used to give some money to the care taker for the food of other children which is a scarcity in this tumultuous time in Afghanistan.

Although, the novelist deals with various gloomy themes like, evil and sin, class-consciousness, displacement, gender oppression and child abuse, yet the novel is not just all about bleakness, despondency and hopelessness as it deals with the cheerful theme of friendship; and most prominently it explicitly ends with the hope for the future. Though, the dark is prevailed densely as Russian soldiers invade Afghanistan, the Talibs take the control over the country, Amir has to escape from Afghanistan to America, Hassan and his wife are murdered by Talibs, yet there is some ray of hope for the future, as Amir returns to his

homeland in order to save Hassan's son Sohrab from the chill grip of Talibs. Facing all the dangers, he ultimately saves Sohrab and consequently atones for his past sin of not helping his loyal friend Hassan in the hour of need. The novel ends on a hopeful note when, in America, Sohrab assists Amir in kite-fighting, and Amir runs after a falling kite in order to catch it and present it to Sohrab as a prize like Hassan used to do for him.

**Works Cited:**

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