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Theme of Redemption in Khaled Husseini's The Kite Runner

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Abstract: *Khaled Hosseini's Novel*, The Kite Runner is considered one of the major novels of the late 20th century. The

narrator considered a 'living classic' creates a story of redemption which transcends both culture and time. The novel is set in Afghanistan, a country in the process of being destroyed with *the fall of monarchy and the intervention of Soviet military to the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States and also the rise of the Taliban*. The Kite Runner thus transports readers to Afghanistan at a tense and crucial moment of change and destruction. Besides this, it is a haunting tale of friendship which spans cultures and continents and follows a man's journey to confront his past and find redemption. The protagonist Amir, the son of a rich Kabul merchant and also a member of the ruling caste of Pashtuns moves to California and becomes a successful novelist but returns back after 26 years to redeem his sins by saving his friend Hassan's son's life. Hosseini also uses the dynamics of father-son relationships to express theme of redemption using a web of tragedy to bring the assurance that there is always "a way to be good again".

Keywords: Baba, Hassan, Amir, Hazara, Pashtun, California, Redemption.

Khaled Hosseini chooses redemption as one of the most important themes in The Kite Runner. He develops it throughout with a pivotal scene relaying the story of the protagonist's childhood as well as an event which shapes the plot of the novel. Amir an Afghani-American and first-person narrator of the novel seeks redemption for an act of violence against his closest friend, servant and constant companion Hassan. The novel is an unforgettable, heartbreaking story of their unlikely friendship, who though belonging to different social classes and ethnicities remained steadfast in their friendship no matter how the circumstances were. Amir says "...we were kids, who had learned to crawl together and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that..." (25). Amir says, "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" (29).

However their uncommon bond is torn by Amir's choice to abandon Hassan when he was physically assaulted by Assef. This guilt haunts Amir throughout the novel and its torment makes him insomniac. He tries his best to redeem himself in as many ways as possible. He starts avoiding Hassan by concentrating on reading books, writing stories, and studying in his room so that he doesn't have to think about the incident. Still Amir has an overwhelming need to be punished, to be redeemed as his remorse does not let him live in peace. He asks Hassan to go with him to the Pomegranate garden to read a story but actually picks up a fight by throwing overripe pomegranates at Hassan. He snapped: "Get up! Hit me back!" (80) Or "You're a coward! Nothing but a goddamn coward!" (81) so many times but all Hassan can do is pick up a pomegranate and hit himself and say: "Are you satisfied? Do you feel better?" (81) and walks down the hill. At last Amir feels that one of them has to leave as he cannot hurt Hassan anymore. He places a couple of envelopes of cash and his new watch under Hassan's mattress. "Then I knocked on Baba's door and told what I hoped would be the last in a long line of shameful lies". Although Hassan didn't steal those things, he still admits it and leaves with Ali as a final sacrifice for Amir.

In a large kite fighting tournament of Kabul, Amir and Hassan win but in order to be truly victorious, Hassan had to retrieve the blue kite so Amir could bring it home as a trophy. But Hassan is raped by Assef, who wants the blue kite which Hassan and Amir refuse resolutely as Amir wanted to take this Kite to Baba, to earn Baba's love and raise himself in his eyes as Baba always thought of him as a weakling. "All I saw was the blue kite. All I smelled was victory, salvation, redemption" (65). "Then I'd bring it home and show Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. Then maybe my life as a ghost in this house would be over" (56). Amir thus strives to redeem

himself in Baba's eyes because his mother died giving birth to him and he feels responsible. Thus Amir's desire to raise himself in his Baba's eyes made him to betray Hassan. Amir was indeed right as Baba was actually very proud and the father son began to bond with love.

Amir had the opportunity to save Hassan however he closes his eyes but is guilt stricken and seeks redemption for his betrayal of Hassan and for his cowardice as he fails to stop Hassan's rape. He thus commits the vilest sin in Afghani culture and must depart on a long and debilitating journey for the ultimate goal of redemption. After the Russian invasion, Amir leaves the country via Pakistan and arrives in California but returns to Kabul twenty six years later, to save dead Hassan's son Sohrab from the Taliban on the advice of Rahim Khan, his father's friend on a life-altering phone call from Pakistan. Amir temporarily leaves his comfortable life in Northern California and returns to Afghanistan to rescue his friend's now orphaned son. Rahim Khan thus offered him a golden chance of redemption as well as forgiveness, when he says: "There is a way to be good again" (198). Rahim Khan had understood Amir's guilt and his search for redemption a long time back. To get Sohrab, Amir has to fight Assef, now a Taliban leader. However Amir is beaten brutally by him until Sohrab shoots him with his slingshot and Amir is left with a scar above his right lip, strikingly similar to the one Hassan had after undergoing surgery for his cleft lip. The scar on his lip represents Amir's finally attained redemption. Rakhpreet Kaur Walia says: "Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is....about the individual's search for redemption; redemption for the sin committed in the past; for the things left unfinished; for the failure in performing moral and ethical duties towards friends, family, humanity and country" (Rakhpreet,114). Sohrab's rescue was the rescue of an innocent, the rescue of a lamb. By ending his exploitation, Amir attains redemption for his childhood sin. Returning finally with the blue kite was an avenue of redemption for Amir. On the way home, he does a

lot of things that show how he can truly redeem himself such as planting money under his driver's mattress named Farid, laughing when Assef beats him brutally because "...for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace" (253). After adopting Sohrab and bringing him back to America, Amir teaches him to fly the kite and he even puts himself into a servant's position and tell Sohrab exactly what Hassan tells him before : "For you, a thousand times over"(323). Amir rescue of Sohrab is as an act of redemption for not preventing or speaking about the rape of Hassan when they were children. By saving Sohrab and winning his love, Amir finally redeems himself.

The Kite Runner is thus a novel of redemption with Amir trying to redeem not only his own sin but Baba's as well. Baba too tries to redeem himself by building an orphanage, treating Hassan well, fixing his harelips and helping others. As Brinkley states, "the novel does not intend to give an encompassing narrative of Afghanistan's history nor its troubles, but rather to tell the story of a son's attempt to respond to his father's sin and his own cowardice and betrayal. There is nothing that haunts Amir more than his betrayal of Hassan after the kite running competition as can be seen in Amir's valiant defense of Hassan's son in his journey to Kabul" (Brinkley, 2010). The novel thus centers on Amir's attempts to atone for this transgression by rescuing Hassan's son after two decades. Amir's quest "to atone for his past sin and redeem himself of the guilt thus forms the central crusade of the novel" (Rakhpreet Kaur, 210).

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