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## Of Fathers and Sons: An Analytical Discourse of Khaled Hosseini's 'The Kite Runner'

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### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between a father and a son is of crucial importance in the proper and healthy development of a parent child bond. From the birth of a son, the father plays an essential role in moulding the life of his offspring. He is expected to be a friend, teacher and guide. The son looks up to his father as his role model and tries to emulate him, which is the highest form of praise that a father can receive from a son. The father on his part looks for in his son traits, that he would want him to possess. All would be wonderful if such was the case. But relationships are never simple and managing them is even more complex.*

*The aim of the present paper is to study five pairs of father son relationships with the intention of gaining a psychological insight into the nature of these relationships.*

*Nature has in her own way, made certain bonds permanent, secure and a source of joy and happiness to those who share them. One such bond is between fathers and sons. Fathers cherish their sons and sons look up to their fathers. These are ideal father son relationships but deviations and disruptions often make such relationships far from ideal.*

### AIM OF THE PAPER

The present paper proposes to study critically five such father son bonds in Khaled Hosseini's 'The Kite Runner' with the intention of unravelling and exploring the probable psychological dynamics at work.

**KEYWORDS:** *Father, son, relationships, Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Baba and his son Amir**

The first father son relationship that we shall look into, is of Baba and Amir. Not only does it involve the two main characters in the novel, their relationship, initiates, and sustains all the major action in the novel.

The novel centers around Amir, Baba, Rahim Khan, Hassan and Sohrab. The opening chapters of the novel reveal the uneasy and uncomfortable relationship between Baba and his son Amir. Amir

longs for his father's love and affection and struggles hard to get his approval. Baba is Amir's ideal hero. He idolises him and tries to win his favour at any cost.

Baba on the other hand, is forced to look after his son as a father's duty, but does not manage to look upon him with pride. He finds it difficult to accept him as his son. Talking to Rahim Khan, his friend and business partner, he says

“He (Amir) needs someone who ...understands him, because God knows I don't. But something about Amir troubles me in a way that I can't express. Its like ...If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with own eyes I'd never believe he's my son.”(p.22)

This seems to be a very strong way of condemning Amir. It comes as a shock to the readers as to why Baba, who is the biological father of Amir, should have such notions and ideas about his only son Amir. Analysing Baba's reaction, we are told in the course of the novel that Baba feels that Amir is responsible for the death of his wife Sofia Akrami. Losing a beloved one (wife) and gaining another beloved (son) is a difficult and complex situation to be in. After losing his wife, he gains a son and hence all of Baba's wishes and unfulfilled desires seem to rest on Amir for fulfillment

Baba is shocked to find that Amir does not have any single trait which he himself possesses and so with the condemnation and the guilt of having being responsible for the death of his wife, Baba begins to look upon Amir with a kind of disgust since he can find nothing in Amir which resembles him. Amir dabbles in poetry, does not play boyish games, cannot fight for himself and needs Hassan's intervention to take up physical challenges for him and is not at all manly or likely to be a 'man' in the near future. Baba is troubled immensely. How can he claim Amir to be his own child. It is easy to understand this dichotomy of feelings in a man who has only his son to look up to and the son seems to fail him at every point.

Amir, however is in awe of his father.

And why not. Baba was strong, manly, courageous and had all those qualities which one would long to see in a man. Lore had it that he had wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands. If the story had been about any other man, people would have dismissed it as the Afghan's tendency to exaggerate. But no one ever doubted the veracity of any story about Baba.

“And if they did, well Baba did have those three parallel scars coursing a jagged path down his back.”(p.12)

Baba enjoyed the famous nickname Toophan Agha or Mr. Hurricane. Amir describes him as a force of nature, a towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair as unruly as the man himself, hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree and a black glare that would “drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy” (p.12,13) as Rahim Khan would say.

For such a fine figure like Baba, it is not surprising that Amir should idolize him. And sure enough he does. But Baba wishes to see his image of a macho man reflected in his son. He is miserably disappointed to find Amir dabbling in art and poetry, something that Baba would appreciate immensely but definitely not want to see in abundance in his only offspring. Together

with this disillusionment, Baba holds him responsible for the death of his wife Sofia Akrami who dies during child birth.

A candid look at the existing circumstances reveal that neither Baba nor Amir are wrong in their feelings. They just don't seem to manage to control their feelings for one another - Amir's is awe and admiration for his father ,while Baba's is disappointment and disillusionment with his son Amir.

### **Ali and his son Hasan**

The second relationship that we now discuss is between Ali and Hassan. Ali and Hassan share a normal father and son relationship. Ironically Ali is not the biological father of Hassan. All the same , one can see the normal doting of a father on his son. Hassan is born with a cleft lip and his smile is distorted. Ali's paralyzed face prevents him from smiling. But neither does Ali stop 'smiling' when he sees his new born son ,nor does Hassan stop 'smiling ' despite his congenital defect of a cleft lip. Sanobar, Ali's wife, however despises both,her husband and her newborn child when she says, "Now you can have your idiot son do all the smiling for you."(p10)Ali's love for his son is so intense that this barbed remark from his wife ,makes no dent in his affection for Hassan. The fact that Ali is not the biological father of Hassan and yet shows immense love for his son, makes one wonder why this should be so. The novel reveals this secret at a much later point Ali was impotent and could not produce a child. Finally his wife Sanobar,through Baba ,produces a son for him .The fact of Ali's impotency is a secret which is closely guarded much to the comfort of all around. This is Ali's redemption . This is the saving grace in Ali's life. Ali's paralysed face and partially paralysed body,have lead him to a compromised status and dignity. And Hassan ,his son ,even though he has a cleft lip and even though he is not his son, becomes the saving grace in Ali's so-called lonely life. Ali is not disturbed by the fact that his wife Sanobar leaves the newborn child, five days after birth and runs away with a troupe of actors. What consoles him is the fact that he has someone to cherish, he has someone to call his own, he has someone who will be with him ,he has his own son. This psychology at work and this mindset in Ali helps him to continue to keep this secret from Hassan who probably never ever gets to know that Ali is not his father. For Ali and Hassan, the bond between a father and son is established from birth and never ever comes to an end. There is always complete trust and dedication between the two. It is a case of complete surrender to one another's will and concern.

The same unconditional love is also forthcoming from Hassan. As his name suggests, Hassan, is incapable of hurting anyone. Hassan's love and respect for his father is never compromised by the paralyzed body or the ungainly movements of his father, Ali. To reciprocate Hassan's love, Ali is overprotective, caring, observant, and reposes immense and unconditional trust in Hassan.

Ali knows his place in Baba 's family and never lets Hassan assume an air of importance. They are Hazara servants and are content to remain so ,never seeking to take advantage of their closeness to Baba or Amir. Loyalty permeates through every word and deed. For Ali ,Baba's home is home and for Hassan ,his dedication towards Amir is reflected in the oft repeated phrase, "for you a thousand times over."

Despite this unstinted dedication, Ali does not think twice about leaving Baba 's services and his home, when his son Hassan is wrongly accused of theft. Instead of challenging the veracity of

Amir's accusation, he humbly submits, but his silent retaliation is visible in his decision to quit. What strong and complete trust between father and son! No discussions, no arguments, no explanations. The decision is final.

"We are leaving Agha sahib" Ali said. "We can't live here any more. (P98)

Baba tries to persuade Ali to revoke his decision and continue to stay. But Ali replies

"I am sorry Agha sahib, but our bags are already packed. We have made our decision." (p.99)

What complete belief in a son by a father.

Strangely, this normal bond of love and trust, must appear abnormal, given the circumstances. Ali is impotent and not the biological father of Hassan. This fact which is very likely to affect normal familial relationships, has no adverse effect on the father son bond. Ali is happy to be Hassan's father, as the entire world knows him, and Hassan, unconditionally accepts his father despite the ridiculing name 'Babalu' by which Ali is often called. Ali and Hassan share a 'normal' bond under abnormal conditions. In contrast Baba and Amir's relationship might be called 'abnormal' under normal conditions.

### **Rahim Khan and Amir**

Strictly speaking this is not a father son relationship but might be considered a foster father, foster son relationship.

A third father son relationship that strikes the reader, is one shared between Rahim Khan and Amir. Rahim Khan looks upon Amir as his son and affectionately addresses him as 'Amir jan', an appellation which Amir would want his father to use, but which is not forthcoming. Amir at times, even wishes that Rahim Khan should have been his father.

In the early part of the novel, Baba, Rahim Khan and Amir are seen together in a photograph.

"Here was Baba and his best friend and business partner, Rahim Khan, standing outside our house, neither one smiling-I am a baby in that photograph and Baba is holding me looking tired and grim. I am in his arms, but it's Rahim Khan's pinky my fingers are curled around." (p5)

Evidently, Baba, being the biological father, is holding Amir, but Amir seems to be in emotional sync more with Rahim Khan. The novel further tells the reader, how well and how much Rahim Khan understood and appreciated Amir. It is Rahim Khan who praises Amir for his writing skills and constantly supports and sides him. Amir loves Rahim Khan dearly and treasures the leather bound diary which he was given as a birthday gift. It serves as a constant source of encouragement and approval from someone who recognizes his talent of writing, of managing to use irony, in his stories, something which Rahim Khan tells him many writers strive for, but are not able to manage. Nothing about Amir is hidden from the astute eyes of Rahim Khan. Even without Amir's actual revelation of the mean and cowardly involvement in Hassan's rape, Rahim Khan encourages him to "be good again". As a foster father, Rahim Khan knows, not only the fine qualities Amir possesses but also recognizes the gnawing guilt in Amir and encourages him to seek redemption-the only cure for the guilt of a sin, the burden of which he has been carrying for the past twenty six years.



### **Hassan and Sohrab**

The only normal, happy and ideal father son relationship is seen in the Hassan-Sohrab pair. Hassan dotes on his son and the feeling is equally reciprocated by his son Sohrab. Ironically and unfortunately, the most comfortable and ideal relationship dealt with in the novel, is not meant to last. Hassan is killed in the Afghanistan insurrection and Sohrab is exploited physically and emotionally by Aseef, who had always had a grudge against the Hazara community in general and Hassan in particular. Not much is told to the reader about Hassan and Sohrab. But from the little that is mentioned by Rahim Khan nearing the end of the novel, the reader assumes and rightly so that Hassan enjoyed a short lived but abundantly fulfilling and fruitful relationship with his son. Probably the love and affection that hasn't received from Ali, is transferred full on to Sohrab and this makes the Hassan-Sohrab relationship complete and fulfilling.

### **Amir and Sohrab**

The last in our discussion of father son relationships, is the relationship between Amir and Sohrab. Like Rahim Khan and Amir, this relationship too, is one of foster father and foster son, but is more complex than the former. Amir and Sohrab's father, Hassan, are half brothers. They share the same father, Baba. This fact is revealed to Amir in the later pages of the novel. This discovery makes Sohrab, Amir's nephew. The affection that develops between the two, now comes as a result of complicated social situations and circumstances. Amir goes in search of Sohrab who is held in captivity by Aseef. Under normal circumstances Amir would have paid money to someone who could rescue Sohrab but when he is told that Sohrab is his nephew, Amir sees an opportunity to redeem himself of the guilt of Hassan's rape. This forces him to undertake a risky trip to Kabul, face the ire of Aseef, who is his rival, be beaten up, all in order to rescue Sohrab.

Rahim Khan's revelation that Amir and Hassan are half brothers and that Baba is the father of both, come as an unpleasant shock to Amir. Amir now realises why Baba and always shown equal affection to both Hassan and Amir, why Hassan's cleft lip had been surgically operated and cured so that he would not suffer from any physical deformity, why Baba had always wanted and considered Ali and Hassan to be family and why he had been so hurt when Amir had asked Baba to change their servants and bring in new ones. This knowledge further aggravates the guilt that Amir is living with. The guilt of standing like a coward and doing nothing to stop Hassan's rape just in order to win his fathers appreciation, love and approval. How selfish could he have been but now a grown up and mature man, Amir feels that his rescuing Sohrab, will be the best form of redemption for himself as well as Baba from guilt.

### **CONCLUSION**

Problems are yet over. It takes Amir quite a while to communicate with Sohrab, a confused, insecure and traumatized boy and convey his noble intentions of looking after him. Amir decides to adopt Sohrab as his son. The final bonding and redemption comes about when Amir, at the end of the novel, decides to give Sohrab the status of 'Kite fighter' himself settling to be the 'Kite runner' for Sohrab. Amir is redeemed of his guilt with the inclusion of Sohrab into his family. Amir

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pulls up enough courage to proclaim openly and fearlessly, that the Hazara boy is his nephew, a thing that he never managed to do in his life -stand up for something.

The Kite fighter, now becomes the Kite runner and Sohrab is elevated to the status of Kite fighter. The plot of the novel comes a full circle.

The reader concludes that relationships are not easy. To maintain biological relationships at times, might be as challenging as managing other relationships. Khaled Hosseini, very skillfully manages to touch upon such psychological concerns and considerations which transform behaviour and force individuals to behave the way they do. Normal father son relationships, might not be normal in the common sense of the word they might turn out to be complicated convoluted and complex and unravelling the mysteries behind such behaviour might take a lifetime.

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