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DEPICTION OF AMIR'S CHILDHOOD IN 'THE KITE RUNNER'

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ABSTRACT



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Literary texts from almost all cultures are replete with child characters, depicting their traumas and mental agonies, likes and dislikes. Childhood behavior has been analyzed from psychological point of view and, thus, belongs to the realm of Psychology. Childhood is defined as the age span ranging from birth to adolescence. Childhood is usually associated with ignorance and happy memories, but childhood experiences may not be so exciting for everyone. The present paper aims at exploring child sensibility and the trauma that Amir undergoes in *The Kite Runner*. Amir in *The Kite Runner* is a sensitively drawn character who is psychologically oppressed and deserves our sympathy.

Key Words: Childhood, Psychology, Development, Character

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INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-born American novelist and physician. He has published three novels, most notably his 2003 debut *The Kite Runner*. *The Kite Runner* is the story of Amir who struggles to find his place in the world. The novel shows how the complex relationships in Amir's life overlap and connect to make him the character he is. The first impression that one gets about Amir is that of an ordinary young boy. But as the story develops, he emerges into a powerful persona arousing admiration and sympathy.

Amir, the protagonist of the novel, was a Pashtun and Sunni Muslim. He had a privileged upbringing and grew up accustomed to having what he wanted. Luxury dripped from every corner of his palatial home. His mother died giving birth to him. He was a pampered child. Even the servants, Hassan and his father, Ali, took great care of Amir. All his faults or wrongdoings were ignored.

Amir was jealous of the way Baba (his father) treated Hassan, although Amir realized that Hassan socially had a lower place in society. At this point, Amir is unaware of the fact that Hassan is his half-brother. Amir, consequently, behaved jealously toward anyone receiving Baba's affection: "I remember the day before the orphanage opened, Baba took me to Ghargha Lake, a few miles north of Kabul. He asked me to fetch Hassan too, but I lied and told him Hassan had the runs. I wanted Baba all to myself. And besides, one time at Ghargha Lake, Hassan and I were skimming stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed was five. Baba was there, watching, and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder." (13)

Baba never discriminated between the two kids, Amir and Hassan, which Amir didn't like. Amir wanted to be treated in a special way: "Baba would buy us each three identical kites and spools of glass string. If I changed my mind and asked for a bigger and fancier 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."(48)

Amir tried hard to live up to the expectations of his father, Baba. He was extremely desperate to win Baba's affections. He longed for his father's love and care. Amir craved for Baba. Like any other child, he longed to spend time with his father: "I remember all the time he didn't come home until after dark, all the times I ate dinner alone. I'd ask Ali where Baba was, when he was coming home, though I knew full well he was at the construction site, overlooking this, supervising that. Didn't that take patience? I already hated all the kids he was building the orphanage for; sometimes I wished they'd all died along with their parents."(17)

Baba wanted his son Amir to be a sportsperson. He wanted him to be a "real" man who didn't bury his face in books all the time. Baba was a die-hard soccer fan, but Amir hadn't inherited a shred of his athletic talents. Finally, Baba accepted the hard reality that Amir was never going to either play or watch soccer. No matter how hard Amir tried, but he could not live up to the expectations of his father. Baba wanted to make Amir what he was not.

Amir's mother died giving birth to him. He felt a deep void in his life, and he threw himself into poetry and writing. Baba's aloofness and indifference ignited the flame of literature in him. He found solace in poetry and his dead mother's books: "That was how I escaped my father's aloofness, in my dead mother's books. That and Hassan, of course. I read everything, Rumi, Hafez, Saadi, Victor Hugo, Jules Verne, Mark Twain, Ian Fleming."(19)Amir's childhood relationship with his father had a great impact on his adult years.

The positive response from Hassan reinforced Amir to write stories, but Amir was disappointed when Baba showed no interest in listening to his stories. Amir started harboring feelings of indifference towards his father.

Amir never really missed his mother as Hassan filled the void. Amir was deprived of maternal love at a very early age, so he never really knew what a real mother was. The only person who could understand Amir was Hassan. Hassan knew Amir very well. He could even hear Amir's unsaid words: "How could I be such an open book to him when, half the time, I had no idea what was milling around in his head? I was the one who went to school, the one who could read, write. I was the smart one. Hassan couldn't read a first-grade textbook but he'd read me plenty. That was a little unsettling, but also sort of comfortable to have someone who always knew what you needed."(58)

Amir spent most of the early years of his life playing with Hassan. Hassan never went to school, while Amir did. One can say that it was more than a servant-master relationship. While Amir went to school, Hassan stayed at home helping his father, Ali, in household chores. Hassan always used to protect Amir. The relationship between Hassan and Amir was strong. They were fed from the same breasts: "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."(10)

Amir spent his entire childhood with Hassan: "When we were children, Hassan and I used to climb the poplar trees in the driveway of my father's house and annoy our neighbors by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror. We would sit across from each other on a pair of high branches, our naked feet dangling, our trouser pockets filled with dried mulberries and walnuts. We took turns with the mirror as we ate mulberries, pelted each other with them, giggling, laughing."(3)

An interesting characteristic of Amir is that there is a slight mean streak in him. If, at any point, he felt that Hassan was better, he snubbed him. This attitude can be seen in almost all the children. Amir is a complex character who displays the gamut of emotions. He hates, envies, dominates, loves and cares at the same time. There's jealousy and some cruelty and power struggles. But there's also adoration, loyalty, and genuine affection.

CONCLUSION

Hosseini offers beautiful insights into child psychology by probing the mind of a child, Amir. When one opens and reads through the novel, one finds oneself in the midst of childhood experiences of an Afghan boy

born in Afghanistan. Amir is made by the circumstances of his life. Through the depiction of the child's reaction to the environment, the novelist reveals the working of a child's mind. In this novel, Hosseini has offered a very perceptive picture of the childhood experiences of Amir. He has portrayed different aspects of Amir's experience like sympathy, jealousy, dreaming, mischievousness etc. against the backdrop of war-torn Afghanistan. The novel's place among classics to the world about children is well assured.

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