

## **“THE MAN WHO SUFFERS AND THE MIND WHICH CREATES”: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER TOOPHAN AGHA IN THE KITE RUNNER.**

**Dr Vinu George**

Assistant Professor,  
Dept. Of English,  
Jai Narain Vyas University,  
Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

---

**“Can a man scoop fire into his lap without clothes being burnt? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.”**

(The Bible, Proverbs 6: 27-29)

Khaled Hosseini's first novel *The Kite Runner* was published in 2003 which has sold over three million copies and was the number one New York best seller. The story is about a boy Amir who witnessed a gruesome rape of his best friend Hassan and is haunted by the guilt of not standing by his friend and embracing cowardice. (Hosseini, 68) This story was inspired by the news that came in CNN that the Taliban has banned kite flying - which was a long tradition. The novel is seen from the eyes of the central character- Amir and Hosseini uses a lot of flashback techniques to keep the readers involved in the action which unravels with every flashback. The most appealing lines in the novel are the self monologues of Amir which gives us a peek into his psyche and inner tortured soul and when we see it through the eyes of a child it is gut wrenching.

This present paper is an attempt to understand the character of Amir's father or Baba or as referred by Rahim Khan Toophan Agha (11) who is without doubt one of the most important characters in the novel and only in the last movement of the novel, the readers came to realise that his father was a tortured soul (263) just like him. This tortured emotion can also be termed as ethical fretfulness (Neupane, 31) which arises when we do not follow the moral direction which our super ego has already given us. Amir and his father are worlds apart, yet we come across instances when- we see things in the present, in light of the past.

Baba is anxious about how Amir will face the world and when he confesses to Rahim Khan- a boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything. (Hosseini, 20) Baba had a knack with words, he could sting that so few words (15) and words like- if I haven't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes I'd never believe he's my son (20) have a long lasting effect on the Childs psyche.

When we read the novel we come to know that Amir belongs to the Pashtun community and his father's ancestry runs down to the time of king neither Shah who was a friend of his grandfather. His Baba was a well known businessman in Kabul and had made a name for himself in that place. The towering personality and the respect which Baba commanded is visible in Amir's description about him -his six foot five physical stature drew attention to him like sun flowers turning to the sun. (11)

Though his father was not from a business class family, he had proved his doubters wrong with his widely successful carpet exporting business, two pharmacies and a restaurant. He even married a highly educated, respected, beautiful and virtuous woman -Sofia Akrami (14) who was a descendant of the royal family. The best and worst part of the man was- that he saw the world in just two colors- black and white or good or bad. He considered religion and practical life two different sides of a coin. But according to him there was only one sin, that is, theft, he says that there is no act more wretched than stealing (16) and he calls the religious teachers as self righteous monkeys. (15)

Baba tries to make Amir more like him as he thinks Amir is lost in some dream (19), he wanted his son to be like real men who did not bury their face in books or shuffled around the house. He signed Amir for soccer and realized in sometime that his son lacked the athletic talents (18) and that he will never generate interest even to be a good spectator. The father fails to accept the son as he is and he fails to realize that children aren't color books, you don't get to fill them with your favorite colors (19). He acknowledges the fact that the child needs someone to whom he could open up because as he puts it God knows I don't.(20) He is a bit envious with Rahim Khan because he can connect with his son but yet something keeps him away from building a loving bond.

It turns out that Baba has built around himself an invisible force field which how hard Amir tries cannot breach. Amir rarely had time to spend with Baba who was mostly out for business trips and working on the plans for an orphanage. But baba is a totally different person when Hassan- the servant's son is with him. We read about incidents from his childhood and wonder if it is the same Baba who Amir cannot reach out. But Amir is able to

breakthrough the force field with a blue kite which he wins during the kite flying competition. Baba now lets him sit in his study room and sip tea (76) with them and we find a relationship take a turn for the good.

If we probe a little in the character of the strongman, we find that his circumstances were never favorable to him. He had to keep proving himself before others- be it in his business or even the construction of the orphanage. He had to be the best at everything and the only place he felt cheated out of true triumph was Amir not turn out to be physically and mentally strong like his father. A few other hints that we get are that he lost his beloved wife when she gave birth to their son. When Amir describes his mother we find that she was not just faithful and virtuous wife but a prized trophy for his father. But her untimely death left a vacuum in his life which couldn't be filled with things or people around him.

We find him leaving his homeland and well settled business because of the Russian invasion. He settles in the U.S. and works in a gas station- a job that just keeps food on the table and pride in his heart. He educates his son teaches him to be a man who can run the affairs of the family and just when we think that he has found meaning and peace in life he is diagnosed with cancer and the ailment eats him up steadily. His worry about his son also eases when his son marries Soraya the beautiful daughter of general Tahiri and then he dies peacefully in a sleep.

There is something which doesn't add up to this strong character. Question like why was he's so hard on his son and why in the US he has found a place to mourn (112) Why Amir refers to him as a widower who remarries but can't let go of his dead wife (112) and what makes him miss Hassan and wish he had been there. (116)

The answers to all these are left to be discovered through Amir as he visits his childhood mentor after almost two decades. Rahim Khan lets out the secret which only four people knew about- Baba, Ali, Rahim Khan and Sanaubar ( Hassan's mother). This secret not only brings Amir's life to a standstill but makes us see Toophan Agha as a tragic figure. His only mistake became his albatross to bear and this guilt of this sin made him a different person around his son. His own moral values the ones he talked about where all damp squibs in real life. The things he tried doing, his motivations and actions become complex (Bressler, 95) due to his pangs of guilty consciousness. (Freud, 134)

Baba was guilty of only one sin- his own lack of judgement or act of Adultery is his Hamartia. (Aristotle.) We find the reason why Baba had been so aloof to Amir's feelings Herbert Morris explains: when one is guilty of wrongdoing, one separates oneself from another or others with whom he was joined. (Morris 96) Baba feels guilty of this act committed and knows it to be bad. (Freud 71)

To the external world Baba is poised, he works for the society, gives alms, throws party for everyone around him but deep within he is fighting his own created evil and it is because of this shame that he is restless with his own son. He cannot give attention to his son when Hassan is around because like a man who feels guilty- he is like a horse divided against itself. (Ross, 7) Baba tries to atone himself with his charity work and taking care of Ali and Hassan trying to close the chasm between them (76)

Baba is not at all religious- yet he knows the difference between right and wrong. He tells Amir about the greatest sin, yet he himself commits the same sin. As Amir puts it- Baba and I were more alike than I had ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us. (Hosseini, 197) When we see Baba standing up to Russian soldier in the truck to defend the honor of a totally unknown woman as Amir puts it- it was his nature (101) or his way of seeking salvation whether in this world or in the world to come. (19) The way he takes care of Ali and Hassan and gift's Hassan a surgery for his birthday shows that Baba is guilt ridden and his actions are as if there was some burden of which one must rid oneself. (Morris, 100)

Baba is trying to repent for the one wrongdoing of his and to repair the damage (Ross, 7) and we find that when Sanoubar returns, she is also seeking forgiveness from Hassan trying to put to right what one has destroyed. (7) In the words of Rahim Khan, we find that Baba had mended his ways by changing himself to the better when guilt lead to good. (Hosseini, 263)

Baba can be seen as a truly tragic figure- his change in fortune due to death of his wife, which led to his adultery, then the Soviet invasion and finally his physical ailment and peaceful death. It is only after his death that is true nature and sin comes to the forefront. It is only keeping these things in mind that we understand every act of his and every word. When he was in Kabul he did everything in his power to keep Hassan happy and gave him all he needed. But he is a changed man in the US, he starts to accept Amir as he is and becomes more considerate towards him. He realizes that his son has a strong liking towards stories and creative writing and lets his son pursue his studies in that area, as compared to his belief in Kabul that real men did not require a tree and God forbid they should ever write it! (Hosseini, 17) Rather than being a very harsh dad as he used to be- Baba taught Amir about nang and Namooos (126) helping his son one last time and perhaps- living with the person he was in love with that is, Soraya.

In these and many other ways we find Barber not just trying to turn a new leaf of his relationship with Amir but also changing and redeeming himself. When Baba dies in his sleep we feel at peace within but after the discovery of plot within the plot we realize that Baba's death in sleep doesn't just arouse our sympathies but also helps in our catharsis. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas royal speak of tragedy in their book – keeping the elements like the suffering/torture, central character, his acts arouse our sympathy, his death should make readers think about their own death. (Bennett and Royle, 107) We see the character Baba not just changing but

helping his son Amir for a future without him and fulfilling the role as a tragic character. He has undergone a change that allows him to see his son in the new light which he hadn't seen in Kabul and his redemption is when he helps Amir in his career and how sorry he feels for being a tough father- which is only understood when Rahim Khan tells Amir about his father's mental conflicts. These things- like acceptance, internal struggles, change and redemption makes the character Toophan Agha a truly tragic character and tells us that he was really carrying on emotional turmoil within himself and becomes the suffering man in his mind.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aristotle. The Project Gutenberg EBook of Poetics, by Aristotle, Translator: S. H. Butcher. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>. 2008.
- [2] Bennett, Andrew, and Nicloas Royle. An introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Great Britain: International Book Distributors Limited, 2009. Print.
- [3] Bressler, Charles E. Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice. Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2003. Print.
- [4] Freud, Sigmund. Civilization and Its Discontents: 1930. New York: W. W Norton, 1962. Print.
- [5] Hosseini, Khaled. The Kite Runner. London: Bloomsbury, 2003. Print.
- [6] Morris, Herbert. On Guilt and Innocence. London: University of California Press, 1979. Print.
- [7] Ross, Alf. On Guilt, Responsibility and Punishment. University of California Press, 1975. Print.