

**Guilty memories-A transition of Amir from darkness to light in Khaled Hossieni's *The Kite Runner***

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**Abstract**

This paper chronicles the character transition of Amir in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. It is a study of Amir's journey of self-discovery which is marked by his alienation from his family, his culture, and his own identity. Through his experiences, Amir is able to recognize the oppressive forces of class and power in his society and ultimately reconcile with his past. By examining Amir's journey through the Marxist dialectic of alienation and reconciliation, this paper seeks to explore the ways in which Amir's character transition is shaped by his understanding of the oppressive forces of class and power.

**Keywords:** Marxist dialectic, alienation, guilt, memory, character transition, class struggle, and power struggle.

**Introduction**

The novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini tells the story of Amir, a young Afghan whose experiences of guilt reflect the cultural fragmentation caused by socio-cultural walls of oppression and deceit. I have made an effort to use Marx's dialectic and alienation to contextualize Amir's character transformation and illuminate his guilt. While the novel appears to be about a young boy navigating the challenges of growing up, a closer examination of Amir reveals his guilt and internal conflicts mirror the history of a fractured Afghanistan.

The noun form of the word "guilt" refers to an emotion a person feels when they believe they have done something wrong or failed to do something they should have. It is a sense of guilt or regret for committing a wrong or error. Guilt is a complicated emotion that has been studied for centuries by psychologists and philosophers. Since antiquity, the concept of guilt has existed. In the Bible, guilt is frequently associated with sin and considered a punishment for wrongdoing. In ancient Greece, those who had committed a crime were deemed guilty as a form of punishment. During the Middle Ages, guilt was considered a form of punishment for those who had committed sin. In the modern era, guilt is viewed as a psychological phenomenon that anyone can experience, regardless of whether they have

committed a crime or sin. It is viewed as a means of coping with feelings of guilt and regret for wrongdoings. Guilt can be a potent emotion that leads to feelings of shame, regret, and self-blame. Additionally, it can cause anxiety and depression. According to Merriam-Webster, "guilt" is derived from the Old English root word "gylt," which dates back to the 12th century. The primary theme of *The Kite Runner* is accepting responsibility for one's actions, or, more generally, dealing with guilt. The majority of fictional protagonists must contend with guilt. In terms of adding drama, evoking our empathic nature, or revealing a character's conscience, however, this one detail is of great importance. And the character of Amir in *The Kite Runner* fulfils all the criteria by admitting his desire for the blue kite that Hassan possessed, which was essentially a way to prove his worthiness to his father. Throughout the novel, Amir takes significant actions, such as the adoption of Sohrab and his return to Afghanistan, to obscure the series of betrayals that culminate in the ultimate betrayal. However, there are other literary works in which the protagonist's guilt is portrayed through a different set of events, relationships, and feelings. Joseph K's guilt is discussed within the context of totalitarianism and bureaucracy in Franz Kafka's 1937 short story *The Trial*. The protagonist is subjected to mental torture for roughly a year for no apparent reason and is ultimately executed in a quarry. The protagonist attempts to cope with the guilt of being born into a totalitarian regime by protesting against the judiciary and the laws over the course of one year. However, he spoke out against corruption and declined to attend the hearing, which ultimately resulted in his poor treatment.

There are approximately ten protagonists in Agatha Christie's 1940 novel *And Then There Were None*. And each of them has committed at least one offence for which they have not been punished. Each of the ten members was invited to a remote island, where they began to die one by one. As soon as the members realised that the death was being carried out in accordance with the nursery rhyme "Ten Little Niggers," they began to express regret for their actions. Mr. Justice Lawrence Wargrave was one of the guests who planned all the murders and used the threat of death to extract guilt from each member.

*Heart of Darkness*, written by Joseph Conrad and published in 1902, depicts the guilt of protagonist Marlow and antagonist Krutz from contrasting viewpoints. In the novella, Krutz is described as a torturer and mass murderer of African natives. The pamphlet, which concluded with the horrifying phrase "Exterminate all brutes," demonstrates the horrors and brutality of Krutz. But in the end, when Krutz was on his deathbed, he recounted the guilt and horrors of his past.

In Khaled Hosseini's works, a number of the major themes and character decisions are recurrent. The themes of the novels *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013), for instance, both deal with the relationship between close family members. In addition, this raises the question of whether an inappropriate decision, even if beneficial in some way, is truly justifiable. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, Amir accepts the rape of Hassan with "the look of a lamb," which is similar to the incident in which Shaboor sacrifices his daughter Pari for money. Similarly, themes of mother-daughter relationships and sacrifice are explored in *The Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007).

Guilt can be viewed as a powerful emotion that can lie dormant for a very long time. What matters is whether this guilt increases or decreases human value.

This paper examines the role of guilt and other socio-cultural factors in Amir's transformation from bad to good. Bildungsroman is used as the research methodology for studying the psychological and moral growth of Amir. This particular novel, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, serves as the perfect example of the literary style that uses bildungsroman. The novel is about the tumultuous journey of a young boy named Amir, who is forced to confront the consequences of his actions and his own flaws. Through Amir's story, the reader is able to witness his gradual transformation as he comes to terms with his own choices, learns how to forgive himself, and eventually learns how to forgive others. Bildungsroman is an effective tool to examine the different stages, processes, and struggles that arise along the way. *The Kite Runner* provides us with a wonderful illustration of how bildungsroman can be used to consider the development and growth of a character as he confronts his own personal shortcomings and learns to forgive himself and others. This paper seeks to answer the following question: how the socio-cultural, and socioeconomic factors led to the character transition of Amir, who was guilt-stricken.

### **Discussion**

*The Kite Runner*, a novel authored by Khaled Hosseini, is an account of the difficult experiences of a young man, Amir, who discovers the power of repentance and redemption. The story takes place in Afghanistan, where the main character undergoes an odyssey of self-discovery and transformation from an immature and oppressive figure to an adult with compassion and understanding. In order to explore the main character's transition from a bad to a good person, this paper will use Marxist dialectic and alienation theories as frameworks. While Marxist dialectic exemplifies the power of change through class and economic oppression, alienation displays its effects on an individual's self-awareness and connection to others. By knowing what Amir has been through at different points in his life, the paper will show how the two theories can be used to look at how his character has changed.

If we consider the Marxist dialectic from a personal point of view, it allows us to examine how different aspects of the world are interconnected, enabling us to gain a greater understanding of the complex interactions between people and societies. It enables us to see connections in the world and understand how they link together, enabling us to make more informed decisions rather than simply accepting reality as it is. The Marxist dialectic encourages us to think critically and challenge the existing framework of knowledge. Finally, Marxist dialectic allows us to comprehend the world in a more complete and comprehensive manner. "It was dynamic, capable of dealing with metamorphosis, and could explain how things emerge from nothing. Formal logic seemed to indicate that the basic essence of reality was constant. As a result, earlier philosophers had a tough time explaining change. They found in dialectic a demand to investigate social phenomena in terms of their context and interactions with one another, to analyse them in motion and change rather than as static objects." (Woodfin Pg.39)

Marxist dialectic is a theory of analysis based on several theories of Karl Marx, primarily that of class oppression. It considers how class dynamics, economic inequality, and other forms of hierarchical systems can shape and determine an individual's identity and behaviour. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, Hassan suffers from class oppression and economic inequality as a member of a non-affluent class of Hazaras and Shia Muslims living in Afghanistan. Hassan was born into an underprivileged class; he didn't know how to read or

write, and he is constantly reminded of his status by his peers and other civilians. For example, Hassan starts to sob when a Pashtun soldier makes derogatory remarks about Hassan's mother, and Amir tries to console him; "The troops burst out laughing. Squealing was produced by one of them. I instructed Hassan to continue walking. "What a tight little sweet cunt she had!" said the soldier, laughing as he shook hands with the others. Later, in the dark, after the movie had begun, I heard Hassan croaking next to me. Tears streamed down his face. I stretched across my seat, wrapped my arm around him, and drew him in close. He leaned on my shoulder. "He mistook you for someone else," I said quietly. "He mistaken you for someone else." (Hosseini 7)

This is a sign of Hassan's alienating view of Amir as a privileged Pashtun. Another example of Pashtun and Hazara economic inequality can be witnessed when Amir describes his mansion and the mud hut where Hassan and Ali lived. "I walked across the rosebushes to Baba's home, Hassan to the mud cottage where he was born and spent his whole childhood. I recall it being sparse, clean, and softly lighted by a pair of kerosene lights. Two beds were on opposite sides of the room, there was a faded Herati rug with ragged ends in between, a three-legged stool, and a wooden table in the corner where Hassan made his paintings. The walls were naked save for a single tapestry with sewn-in beads spelling out Allahuakbar. Baba had purchased it for Ali on one of his visits to Mashad. (Hosseini 6)

An alienating factor that made Amir maintain his higher status over Hassan was the insecurity that he felt because of the relationship that Baba and Hassan shared. Hassan was regarded as a brave individual who took responsibility for his actions. Also, he was always ready to protect Amir from all sorts of problems he could have faced because of the neighborhood kids or because of his mischief. On the other hand, Amir was a sensitive person with little or no regard for friendship and loyalty during his childhood. "A boy who would not stand up for himself grows into a man who will not stand up to anything." (Hosseini 22) Now, the baba's statement for Amir represents how weak and sensitive he is when it comes to physical and mental toughness." I could see him looking about for the proper words. He dropped his voice, but I still heard him. "I'd never believe he's my kid if I hadn't watched the doctor take him out of my wife with my own eyes." (Hosseini 22) In this particular statement, it clearly depicts how much Baba is disappointed by the actions of Amir.

These minor incidents have already laid the groundwork for what is about to occur in the 1975 kite tournament, where Amir had one chance to prove his worthiness to Baba, and he went to such lengths that friendship and loyalty were tested. And he failed as a person once again, and the guilt that accompanied it would remain with him throughout his life. In this entire scenario, prior to Hassan's rape, a hint has been provided that class discrimination, economic inequality, and the alienation that he felt throughout his childhood all contributed to the decision where he froze when the rape occurred. "I flew this kite for Amir Agha, who won the event. I handled it fairly. That's his kite." "A devoted Hazara. As devoted as a dog," Assef said. Kamal's chuckle sounded harsh and nervous. "But, before you give up yourself for him, consider this: Would he do the same for you? Have you ever wondered why, when he has company, he never engages you in his games? Why does he only play with you when there is no one else around? I'll explain why, Hazara. Because you're nothing more than an ugly pet to him. Something he can kick when he's upset and something he can play with when he's bored. Never delude yourself into believing you are anything more." (Hosseini 68) In this

particular statement or scenario, the blue kite is the central focus, as it is the material demand of Amir to prove his worthiness to Baba. And it fits into the framework of the Marxist dialectic, which states that the material world is translated into forms of thought. "My dialectic technique is not just distinct from the Hegelian, but also its polar opposite. For Hegel... the thinking process is the demiurge (creator) of the actual world, and the real world is just the outward embodiment of 'the idea'. In contrast, the ideal for me is nothing more than the material universe mirrored by the human mind and converted into words of thinking." (Woodfin Pg.40) where the material blue kite was a symbol of gaining the respect of Baba. However, that wasn't the last time he exploited Hassan for his own benefit. To get rid of his own guilt and his animosity for being a failure, he frames Hassan as a thief and tells Baba about it. But even at this point, Hassan kept his word about being a loyal friend to Amir forever. " He'd pledged to do it a thousand times over for you. ". (K. Hosseini Pg.66) At this point, all Amir wanted was to get rid of Hassan, but he too was stunned when Baba forgave both Hassan and Ali. As the alienation he had to face now would be greater than what he was facing. " Except when Baba said, "I forgive you," I was taken aback. Forgive? But the one unforgivable evil, the common denominator of all crimes, was stealing. When you murder a guy, you are stealing a life. You take away his wife's right to a spouse and deprive his children of a parent. When you utter a falsehood, you take away someone else's right to know the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to be treated fairly. Stealing is the most heinous of crimes. Hadn't Baba put me on his lap and told me those words? So how could he just forgive Hassan? And if Baba could forgive that, why couldn't he forgive me for not being the son he wished for? Why—" (Hosseini 98) All this interconnectedness of events and relationships is related to the personal aspect of Marxist dialectic, which allows us to develop a more holistic and complete understanding of the relationship that these three prime characters shared: Amir, Hassan, and Baba.

Guilt has already accompanied Amir in the second phase of his life, whether in the form of a relationship or the bad decisions he has taken during his childhood. But the major transition in Amir's character also takes place in this phase. He gets a call from an old friend, Rahim Khan, who presents him with the opportunity to be a good man again. " I was sitting on a park seat next to a willow tree. I had an afterthought about something Rahim Khan said just before he hung up. There is a way to be decent once again. I raised my eyes to the twin kites. I remembered Hassan. I remembered Baba, Ali, and Kabul. I reflected on my life up to the winter of 1975, when everything changed and shaped me into who I am now." (Hosseini 2) However, the transition that will take place won't be just on the basis of guilt. A major contribution would be the idea that all social and economic systems are in a constant state of change and evolution, and that power dynamics are constantly shifting. A Marxist dialectic would be crucial in defining the struggle that these two classes, Hazara and Pashtun, were facing and how the communist invasion of Afghanistan seeks to explain how these power dynamics are constantly changing and how they shape the world we live in. And that is where Amir realises the difficulties and hardships that a particular individual or community faces when being subjected to oppression. "Karim shut the front door and drew the ragged blankets that served for drapes after he got us inside the dimly lighted, stark living room. Then he took a big breath and informed us that his brother Toor would be unable to transport us to Peshawar. Toor's truck's engine seemed to have exploded the week before, and he was still

waiting for replacement components". (K. Hosseini Pg.109) These were the types of conditions and environments that Amir had to acclimatise to while they were escaping from their country, Afghanistan.

During the rest of his course, Amir and Baba travel to America, where they find it hard to adjust to the American culture. And Amir understands the difficult situations that a minority class of people faces in their day-to-day lives because of class discrimination and economic inequality. "Baba spent \$35,000 on the awroussi, or wedding ceremony, practically his whole life savings. He leased a huge Afghan banquet hall in Fremont; the owner recognised him from Kabul and offered him a significant discount. Baba covered the cost of the chilas, our matching wedding rings, and the diamond ring I chose. He purchased my tuxedo as well as my usual green outfit for the nika—the swearing-in ceremony." (Hosseini 56) This particular statement represents Baba and Amir's average and moderate lives in the United States of America. To get over his past guilt, Amir decides to travel to Kabul to rescue the son of Hassan, named Sohrab, who was originally the nephew of Amir. This revelation of Amir's relationship with Sohrab, who can be considered an extension of his father, helps him to fill that gap of alienation and makes his passage for redemption a bit easier. After the rescue of Sohrab from the cruel, authoritative hands of the Taliban, Amir overcomes his childhood fears of alienation and the guilt that he was suffering from in the form of events and bad decisions that he took under the influence of the historic class struggle between the two ethnic groups. "WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?" With each strike, Assef continued to yell. His spittle got in my eye. Sohrab yelled. "WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?" Assef screamed. Another rib cracked, this time on the left side. What was so amusing was that I felt at ease for the first time since the winter of 1975. I chuckled because I realised I'd been looking forward to this in some secret nook in the corner of my head. I recalled the day I pelted Hassan with pomegranates and attempted to irritate him on the hill. He'd simply stood there doing nothing, his shirt soaked in crimson fluid like blood. Then he'd snatched the pomegranate from my grasp and smashed it against his brow. Are you happy now? He had hissed. Do you feel any better now? I hadn't been happy, and I hadn't felt any better. But now I have. My body was broken—how terribly I didn't know until later—but I felt whole. Finally, I've been healed. I burst out laughing." (Hosseini 265-66). This particular statement further proves the point that the rescue of Sohrab from the hands of the Taliban helped him attain redemption and his character transition from bad to good.

At the end, Amir tries to represent the freedom and loyalty that Hassan had for Amir by becoming the kite runner for Sorabh in the USA and repeating the words "a thousand times over for you." "Would you want me to fly the kite for you?" His As he swallowed, Adam's apple lifted and sank. The breeze blew his hair up. I think I saw him nod. "A thousand times over for you," I heard myself say. Then I turned around and bolted. It was little more than a grin. It didn't make things better. It didn't make things better. Only a grin. It's a little detail. A leaf in the woods, shaken by the flight of a frightened bird. However, I'll take it. With arms wide open. Because when spring arrives, the snow melts one flake at a time, and I may have just watched the first flake melting." (Hosseini 340)

### **Conclusion**

I believe, this study has explored the character of Amir from *The Kite Runner* and his journey from an oppressive and ill-natured figure to one with empathy and understanding. It

has suggested that Marxist dialectic and alienation theories can be used to illustrate Amir's character transformation by examining his class privilege and the influence it had on his behavior, as well as the external power structures and unequal social conditions of Afghanistan. Through suffering the effects of guilt, Amir is led to a newfound awareness of himself and others, which helps him to finally achieve a sense of redemption and self-discovery in life.

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