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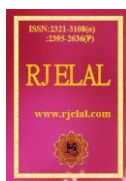
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REGRET AND REDEMPTION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

SEETHALAKSHMI¹, Dr.T. SENTHAMARAI²

¹Research Scholar (M.Phil), Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai.

²Associate Professor Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai.



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Abstract

This paper, "Regret and Redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*", attempts to analyse the portrayal of Amir's guilt towards his actions in the past as a core theme of the novel. The novel reveals the protagonist's realisation of being superior and becoming inferior in two different parts of the world as time passes. It discusses the alienation and identity crisis of the characters in a foreign land. It addresses the importance of overcoming emotional regret by rescuing. Further, this paper explores the themes of guilt and redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

Keywords: Redemption, Regret, Remorse, Friendship, Betrayal, Jealousy

Introduction

"We all make mistakes, struggle, and even regret things in our past. But you are not your mistakes, you are not your struggles, and you are here NOW with the power to shape your day and your future," says Steve Maraboli, a veteran author and an insightful speaker. Reflecting Maraboli's quotes about regret in life, the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini deals with guilt from the past and its redemption in the present world; and shows how it empowers the future.

The novel explores significant themes such as regret, remorse, redemption, migration, identity crisis, betrayal and socio-political division as an important theme. The entire story revolves around Amir and Hassan and their secret relationship. Though Ali, Sohrab, Baba, Soraya, Aseef, Sanaubar, and Rahim Khan are minor characters, their presence makes a significant impact. This masterpiece highlights the emotional and physical

detachment from the homeland of Kabul to America. It inscribes the rich culture and traditional events in Afghanistan before Taliban influence. The traumatic past of Amir and Hassan's life is vividly discussed through regret and redemption.

Theoretical Framework

Regret theory or decision theory was initially developed by Graham Loomes and Robert Sugden, economists, but later, it was applied by David E. Bell and Peter C. Fishburn. Though it was designed to analyse economic changes, later, due to its characteristics, it has been widely applied in the areas of psychology and literature. This theory affirms positive and negative traits with positive and negative outcomes. For example, realization or guilt is an outcome of negative regret and finding alternative and resolution is an outcome of positive shame.

Wikipedia defines Regret theory as, "on making decisions under uncertainty should

information about the best course of action arrive after taking a fixed decision the human emotional response of regret is often experienced and can be measured as the value of the difference between a made decision and the optimal decision." James Chen, in his article, defines Regret theory as "people anticipate regret if they make the wrong choice, and they consider this anticipation when making decisions. Fear of regret can play a significant role in dissuading someone from taking action or motivating a person to take action. Regret theory can impact an investor's rational behaviour, impairing their ability to make investment decisions that would benefit them instead of harming them." His Investopedia article on Regret theory suggests five key characteristics to understand its purpose. As he proposes,

1. Regret theory refers to human behaviour regarding the fear of regret, which stems from people anticipating regret if they make the wrong choice.
2. Fear can affect a person's rational behaviour, impairing their ability to make decisions that would benefit them instead of harm.
3. Regret theory impacts investors because it can either cause them to be unnecessarily risk-averse, or it can motivate them to take risks they shouldn't take.
4. During extended bull markets, regret theory causes some investors to continue to invest heavily, ignoring signs of an impending crash.
5. By automating the investment process, investors can reduce their fear of regret from making incorrect investment decisions. (Chen, Investopedia)

Though the above are indicators of economics and business purposes, regret theory is widely applied in literature for its relevance to the psychology of human beings. Regret, or the act of regret, is a recurring mental condition that surfaces repeatedly. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir experiences the traits of Regret theory as he regrets his past decisions and remains guilty. Instead, he negotiates

with regret and comes to terms with it by deliberately choosing to resolve it. Amir handles his trauma well by treating it with his kind gestures and overcomes it by saving a life in the present. It mainly depicts the friendship between the two boys, and the rest of the plot focuses on Amir's attempts to amend his guilt by rescuing Hassan's son.

Thematic Analysis of *The Kite Runner*

The novel, *The Kite Runner*, unfolds a story between two boys, Amir and his servant, Hassan. Since childhood, they spend their time and have a fair share of childhood memories. Shockingly, Amir twists the relationship when Hassan becomes his father's favourite, so he deliberately deserts his friend from the family by making a false accusation of Amir stealing. As a result, Hassan and Ali leave the house and eventually face terrorism upon entering the outside world. They were protected as long as they were at Baba's home. Later, regret, guilt and realisation gulf him around; Amir frequently blames himself for what happened to Hassan. Throughout the novel, he constantly feels guilty for his inability of decisions making, and remorse drives him forward.

The novel opens with Amir receiving a call from Rahim Khan, an old Baba friend, asking them to visit Pakistan. During the Taliban's influence over Afghanistan, many of its native people fled to neighbouring countries, while Amir and his father migrated to America. Rahim Khan's call was a flash from the past as Amir began to recall his childhood friend Hassan. He realises what he had done to Hassan, and he never had a chance to reveal it to anyone, eventually ending up a sufferer of guilt. Nonetheless, the call from Pakistan was a second chance to resolve what he had done to Hassan and his family.

When Amir reached Pakistan, Rahim Khan explained the aftermath events took over in Kabul after Amir and Baba migrated. Through Rahim, Amir learns that his childhood friend Hassan is executed along with his father Ali and his wife Farzana by the Taliban. Meanwhile, Hassan's son Sohrab is sent to an orphanage during a war zone in Kabul, Afghanistan. When Rahim asked Amir to bring back Sohrab, he refused and disagreed until he learned

the fact that Hassan is his half-brother. This sudden revelation of his relationship with Amir was unexpected, and he was perplexed by his deceased father. Yet he finds that rescuing Sohrab will save him from the resentment of betraying Hassan, his family, and his ethics.

Amir and Hassan belong to two different families and communities. Amir is a wealthy boy from the superior class, 'Pashtuns', whereas Hassan is from the lower class, 'Hazara'. There was a genuine brotherhood between them. Yet, Amir is conscious of their differences, especially their status. He recalls entering Hassan's hut just a few times. He is aware that they are his employees and they are Hazaras. Amir adores Hassan but is envious of his great physical power and ability to defend him from the local bullies. Amir never recognizes Hassan's support.

But now, Amir regrets for not sticking up for his closest buddy and exploiting Hassan's love for him. When Assef and his group assaulted Hassan in the alley, Amir stood by and did nothing. He could have stopped them or attempted to help, but he was terrified and fled. To quote lines from the text,

I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan-the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run... I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. I aspired to cowardice because Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. (TKR, 72).

Also, Amir had placed his money and watched in Hassan's home and claimed that Hassan had stolen them to absolve himself of his humiliation and guilt. Hassan eventually confessed it and departed with his father. They were not allowed to stay at Amir's house in any way. But deep inside, Amir knew that no matter how loyal Hassan was to him, he would leave him behind at any moment. He took a step back and observed Hassan battling on his own. He lost his moral self while betraying Hassan.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud underlines, "To begin with, if we ask how a

person comes to have a sense of guilt, we arrive at an answer which cannot be disputed: a person feels guilty (devout people would say sinful) when he does something he knows to be 'bad'" (Freud, 71). A child's developing conscience, or superego as Freud refers, is characterized by the growing acceptance of certain limitations by the individual. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir feels uncertain due to his sensibility, influenced by a set of moral values that have been put before him. Amir's response to their crimes was at first violent and complicated because he could not judge their behavior ethically. As a young boy, all Amir needed was emotional support and his father's love. As a single child, he failed to analyse the circumstances, and he had done was out of self-concern. Having lost his mother while she gave birth to him, he feels guilty about being responsible for her death and believes his father hated him. As a grown-up man, Baba wanted his son to behave like a man. Baba wished Amir to be an athlete, a football player or someone who stands up for himself. As Mishra in her article says, "Amir is, however, neither sporty nor athletic. However hard his father tries to spark in him an interest in sports, Amir fails. He fails in his attempt to play football. He fails in watching the popular Afghan sport Buzkashi: he cries seeing a severely injured player. He lets the other kids push and shove him. His father cannot accept his sensitive nature and inability to fight back, and he confides his disappointment to Rahim Khan" (Mishra, 70).

Although Amir has finally gained his father's attention, he does not deserve it and cannot relish it. Amir marries Soraya, who has a sad history and confesses it to him before the wedding, but eventually, Amir agrees to marry her. Amir knows he will live with the burden of remorse for the rest of his life, so he feels a bit of relief while accepting Soraya. As a human, Amir knows the struggle behind regrets as he says, "But I think a big part of the reason I didn't care about Soraya's past was that I had one of my own. I knew all about regret" (TKR, 180).

"There is a way to be good again." (TKR 2) Amir takes the phone call and tries his best to be human again. His search for Sohrab is a saga of sacrifice. Amir turns out to be a wise man by his choice of taking Sohrab with him. He thinks it is the

answer to his grief and regret. It is a payback to Hassan. At the end of the novel, Amir decides to take Sohrab to America after finding that he is his nephew. Amir and his wife have no children, which he believes is payback for what he did as a boy. He decides to raise Sohrab as his own. Perhaps that is the best way to seek Hassan for forgiveness and atone for his sins. Amir's remorse is followed by Sohrab's suicide attempt and quiet behavior. To overcome his childhood sense of guilt, Amir made a thorough attempt to break this barrier of relationship and communal discrimination; he attempts to love Sohrab.

According to Jefferess (2009), the kite symbolizes friendship, justice, kindness, honesty and bravery. The exploration of kites is the exploration of good nature in humans. The kite symbolizes the interrelationship between betrayal and redemption. The kite at the beginning of the novel in which Amir won symbolizes betrayal. The kite Sohrab has at the end of the novel symbolizes redemption.

Conclusion

"The idea of redemption is always good news, even if it means sacrifice or difficult times", says Patti Smith, the American author and poet. Similar to Smith's quotes, the novel *The Kite Runner* remains an example of redemption in a world full of revenge. The character Amir stoops to renew himself from the regrets of the past. Though Amir finds it challenging to raise Sohrab, a boy from the Hazara community, he sees it as an opportunity to apologize to Hassan. He is relieved by the fact that he is free from guilt. Amir is an example of regret and redemption as he realised his fault and came forward to rectify it through an insightful act.

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