

A STUDY OF CHILD BEHAVIOURAL TRANSITION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

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Abstract

It is to be noted that the study of a child's behavioural pattern or transition needs to be studied not just in terms of archetypes, social or political, but also it needs to be studied in terms of the individual psychology in response to the outside world and to its own self. What kind of changes or 'transition' occurs when a child undergoes variations not only physiologically but psychologically? There's a saying that if a child has learned and faced hardships in life, he seems to understand life better than the one who is pampered and secured well by his family members. But the larger picture does not lie here. Like in the *Kite Runner*, the story is not all about Amir being rich and Hassan being poor. It's a story about discrimination, oppression and above all a division among people-division of two classes of society-One of Hazaras who are considered low and subordinate and the other the Pashtuns who are considered the mighty, the powerful and the rich. Two boys, Amir and Hassan are the centre of Hosseini's *Kite Runner*. This paper seeks to observe how the two grow up together, how the social conditions of the time thrive to set a rift between the two boys and how each of them particularly looks at the other. The seeds of discrimination and racist tendencies are already sown in the minds of Amir who sees other rowdy boys tease Amir. But what happens when things change all of a sudden when Hassan has to leave? How does this separation change Hassan and particularly Amir? All the good times seem to be set in adolescence. But what has caused the change to occur? This paper discusses these questions with a critical eye towards better understanding of child behaviour and particularly child psychology.

INTRODUCTION:

The narrator sets the basic foundation to his child characters that would reveal their true mentality right from the beginning of the novel. As children, Amir and Hassan would climb trees and use mirrors to reflect sunlight into a neighbour's window, or they would shoot walnuts at the neighbour's dog with a slingshot. It is revealed in the novel that these were Amir's ideas, but Hassan never blamed Amir if they were caught. Amir lived with his father, Baba, in a lavish home in Kabul. Meanwhile, Hassan and his father, Ali, lived in a small mud hut on the grounds

of Baba's estate, where Ali worked as Baba's servant. Neither Amir nor Hassan had a mother. Amir's died giving birth to him, and Hassan's ran away after having him. Here's the revealing tone of the novel, which suggests that mentally both families of Ali and Baba were divided based on ethnicity and class. Naturally, the children followed suit, with Hassan being enslaved and Amir emerging as the privileged boy, with both pride and ego. It's a known fact that the lessons or experiences a child goes through in his childhood lays the foundation for his or her future growth. Amir and Hassan, thus, observed their environment and the seeds of good and bad, right and wrong were engrained thereforth.

SHIFT TO ADOLESCENCE:

Adolescent age is a very strange one where children go through many phases like peer pressure, the urge to feel accepted by others and an extraordinary desire to excel at everything. The same way, Amir feels pressured by these things. During childhood, Amir tries to please Baba by being more like him but rarely feels he is successful. He also admits to feeling responsible for his mother's death. Since Baba likes soccer, Amir tries to like it as well, albeit unsuccessfully. What Amir is good at is poetry and reading. But he worries his father does not see these as manly pursuits. When he and Baba go to see a match of *buzkashi*, a popular game in Afghanistan in which a rider must put an animal carcass in a scoring circle while other riders try to take it from him, a rider is trampled after falling from his horse. Amir cries when he sees this, and Baba barely hides his disdain for the boy. Amir later overhears Baba talking to his business associate, Rahim Khan, the man that later calls Amir from Pakistan. Baba says Amir is not like other boys, and he worries that if Amir can't stand up for himself as a child, he will not be able to do so as an adult. We learn that the boy Amir is not only sensitive, bookish, sometimes selfish, and a little mischievous but also not an individual who has his own ways of doing things. He wishes to conform to what Baba likes to do, but still wants to do what he likes. He is eager to please Baba, whom he views as a role model he can never live up to. Yet he feels Baba does not love him because he is not like Baba and because it was during his birth that his mother died. What we learn of the child Amir is he is forced to be who he is not and lives his life on impressing his father. However, Baba is also at blame. Though Baba means good for Amir, he refuses to accept Amir for who he is and sets up standards hard for Amir to follow. However, he is gruff, hardworking, a little distant from Amir, and very much an independent thinker. Anytime someone said he would fail, he didn't listen, and he always succeeded. He doesn't always listen to religious authorities either, evidenced by the fact that he disregarded Mullah Fatiullah Khan saying it is a sin to drink alcohol. Thus, Amir's immense pressure from his own father leaves him with a bad moral sense and humour. It also justifies a strong reason of peer pressure that a child faces at his or her own home. Here, it is also vital to note that the differences between the two boys lie just not in the bigger things, but in very minute things where Amir tries to overpower or dominate Hassan. Thus the seeds of domination are sown right from childhood. In one of the most painful description of the story, Amir says as a child he never thought of Hassan as a friend. This is due to the impact of Baba's relationship with Ali. Even during childhood, Baba never considered Ali as his close friend, though they had always played together. This is virtually followed by Amir as well, who uses Hassan only when he is in need or wants to spend time with Hassan. Though it's hard to digest, it's the truth. Amir's mind is being framed in such a way that he has no control which hampers the way he behaves with others. Even so, Amir's youth seems to him like a long stretch of playing games with Hassan. But while Amir would wake up in the morning and go to school, Hassan would clean the house and get

groceries. Amir often read to Hassan, who was illiterate. Their favourite story was “Rostam and Sohrab,” in which Rostam fatally wounds Sohrab in battle and then finds out Sohrab is his lost son. Also, in many ways Amir and Hassan act for each other as a kind of substitute parent, looking out for the other and providing companionship. They are closer than regular friends. These facts show that influences that are within a home are more important than those of outside, because a child spends a long time at home and so his thoughts are based on his surroundings, as he would not have a thinking of his own to think otherwise.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES:

As strange as the phase from childhood to adolescence is, the outer world that consists of particularly friends and even foes play an important role in a child identifying himself. Influences are quite common in this phase. Innocent kids who are often calm and quiet take on bad ways when coming in contact with the wrong company. Thus, behavioural transitions happen not just physiologically but socially and psychologically. In a similar way, in a particular incident, a new child character is introduced in the novel, who is Assef. While they're walking, a rock hits Hassan. Amir and Hassan discover Assef and two other boys from the neighbourhood. Assef is a notorious bully. He is one of the children who mocks Ali's limp and calls him names. He also carries a set of brass knuckles. Assef calls Hassan a flat-nose and asks if they heard about the new republic. He says his father knows Daoud Khan, and that next time Daoud Khan is over for dinner he's going to talk to him about Hitler. Hitler had the right idea about ethnic purity, he says. Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns and the Hazaras just pollute the country. Assef takes out his brass knuckles. He says Amir is part of the problem for being friends with a Hazara. For a moment, Amir thinks that Hassan is his servant, not his friend, but he quickly recognizes his thought is wrong. As Assef goes to hit Amir, Assef suddenly freezes because Hassan has his slingshot aimed at him, which allows Amir and Hassan to get away. In the incident described above, Assef is a boy who is notorious for his wrong doings. He has no innocence of a child and is the direct product of his surroundings. The narrator doesn't give any hint of his parents having any control of him. He is encouraged to follow his whims and goals. Thus, he's feared and his strong beliefs in social norms like purity, baselessness have been strongly rooted. Therefore, he continues to influence other boys like Wali, who could be much better without him. Assef sees all politics around him and thus learns the harsher ways of life compared to Hassan and Amir who are much softer and pleasant. He also becomes responsible for spoiling the innocence of other children and introducing them to a world of brutality and recklessness. Hence, it's no surprise that both Amir and Hassan have a taste of toughness and harsh reality early in their life.

MATURITY VERSUS IMMATURITY:

On the other side of the coin, the adult Amir, who is telling the story, recognizes several things about his younger self that he evidently didn't realize while he was still a boy. He sees that he was selfish, for example, that he wanted to be the best at everything, and didn't want Hassan to be as good. The young Amir genuinely felt that Hassan was beneath him because of Hassan's poverty, ethnicity, religion, and deformity. Whenever Hassan does something that earns Baba's love and respect, Amir lashes out at him in his thoughts. If Hassan is better at something than Amir, like solving riddles, Amir stops doing it. If Amir knows something Hassan doesn't, such as vocabulary words, Amir teases him for his ignorance. This clear immaturity on the part of Amir leaves him with a tremendous guilt which he is unable to rid.

In the novel, Amir proves that children are also capable of committing mistakes in a certain grave way such as that innocence is not to be expected. In terms of Amir's character growth, his desperation to please his father, plays a significant part in the causing the events of the section. Although Amir feels paralyzed by fear when he sees what is happening, he admits that his main reason for not intervening is selfish. When Baba was a boy, he won the kite-fighting tournament. Though Amir had always done well in the competition, even making it to the final three once, he had never won. Finally, to please Baba, Amir feels he must show Baba he is like him by winning the tournament and bringing home the kite of his final opponent. Only then will Baba forgive Amir for killing the woman who was Baba's wife and Amir's mother. Amir does not stop Assef from raping Hassan first and foremost because he wants the kite to bring to Baba, and Hassan is the price he has to pay. A terrible irony exists in the fact that Amir allows his friend to be raped in exchange for a prize that he believes will earn him Baba's love. If Amir had stood up for Hassan but lost the kite in the process, he still could have proved that he has the courage to do the right thing even when it is frightening or dangerous to do so. Perhaps, more than he could have by any other action, he would have shown Baba that he is like him. Instead, he runs away because he wants the kite to please Baba, inadvertently doing exactly the opposite of what Baba would want.

The main problem with Amir as a child is he does not know how to deal with his feelings of guilt and unhappiness after Hassan's rape. At first he tries to keep away from Hassan, who becomes a constant reminder to Amir of his own cowardice and selfishness. He seems to think avoiding Hassan means he won't feel these things any longer. But Hassan is a part of the household, so Amir can never escape him completely. When the two are face-to-face, Amir wishes Hassan would punish him. He pelts Hassan with the pomegranates, for instance, because he wants Hassan to hit him back. Punishment, Amir feels, would at least begin to make up for the way he wronged Hassan. Hassan, however, does not retaliate, and this becomes the greatest torment for Amir. Hassan proves his love and loyalty to Amir are unshakable, whereas Amir proves that his love and loyalty are weak. While Hassan is more matured and less dramatic, Amir is the other way round.

As both Amir and Baba try to move out of their place in order to avoid violence, for a week they stay in a basement with other refugees. There, Amir recognizes Kamal, who looks sickly and depressed, and Kamal's father. Amir overhears Kamal's father telling Baba what happened to Kamal that made him so weak. Four men caught Kamal out, and when he came back to his father he was bleeding "down there" (p. 120). Kamal no longer speaks, just stares. Finally they find a truck to take them to Pakistan. It's a fuel truck, and the air inside is thick with fumes, making it difficult to breathe. They arrive in Pakistan, but once they're out of the truck Kamal's father begins screaming. Kamal has stopped breathing. Kamal's portrayal in the novel, though short has a profound effect on the whole of the novel. He is the product of his situation and has no control over them. He also leaves a deep impact on Amir, which reminds him of his own crime. These gruelling instances of violence against children are proof enough of a society that has spoilt its own progeny for its selfish motives.

GROWING UP AND REALIZATION:

The adult Amir also feels disconnected from everything he knew in Kabul, but for him this disconnection has a different meaning. He sees it as an opportunity for a new beginning, and he thinks of America as a place where he can literally escape his past. Most significantly, he thinks, it is a place where he doesn't have to be reminded of Hassan and the rape. The metaphor Amir

chooses to describe America is a river. Here, the metaphor has two meanings that are related but separate. First, a river always moves forward. In other words, it is always moving toward the future and never toward the past. Second, the river is a common symbol for washing away sin. In Christianity, for instance, baptism symbolizes purification and regeneration. Amir similarly wants a new birth, free of the sins he committed in letting Hassan be raped and lying to force Hassan and Ali out of Baba's house. However, even as an adult Amir views all these, his thoughts don't show maturation in the exact sense. He prefers to avoid the situation than find a solution in dealing with it.

However, a slight change in his cognitive understanding occurs after a certain point in the novel. The different events of this section all revolve around one focus: Amir becoming a man. He marries and makes love for the first time. He loses Baba and becomes fully responsible for himself. He also completes and publishes his first novel, establishing his career as a writer. In all of these events, Amir experiences a profound mix of joy and pain. Embracing independence and adulthood also requires him letting go of his childhood dependence on Baba. When Amir pleads with Baba to try chemotherapy, Amir asks what he is supposed to do without Baba. Baba replies that this is what he has been trying to teach Amir his whole life. To Amir, it is clear for the first time why Baba has always treated him the way he has. He was preparing Amir to take care of himself and to know right from wrong. In other words, he was teaching Amir to be a man. In his transition to adulthood, Amir also transitions from one family to another. At the beginning of the section he is a boy living in his father's house. At the end, he is a man with a wife and his own home. What Baba does witness of this makes him happy, and he dies proud of Amir. Despite Amir's growth into an adult, one part of his childhood he does not let go of. He still feels guilty about Hassan. This guilt, though it is not prominent as it once was, still rises to the surface on occasion. Sometimes Amir simply wonders about him, as when he wonders if Hassan has married. Other times his guilt is more pronounced. When Soraya tells Amir about the time she ran away with another man, Amir actually feels jealous that she is able to speak about the incident. For Soraya, her secret is an event in the past that is done and over with. For Amir, however, his secret is very much still present, and he still cannot talk about it. Amir feels that, until he is able to atone for his treatment of Hassan, it will continue to haunt him. However, there is an important message in this: One can achieve maturity when one has experienced pain and labour. Pain and hardship make a man more strong and balanced. However, Amir is considerably comfortable at home, as all things are provided for him. He has no worries like Hassan. But only when he loses Baba and becomes independent does he actually grow not just physically but psychologically and emotionally. In that way, he is able to handle things better than before.

On the other hand, we learn about Hassan and his son Sohrab. In many ways, Hassan's relationship with Sohrab acts as indirect proof that Hassan never forgot Amir. Naming the boy after a character in his and Amir's favourite story is one example. Hassan also did with Sohrab all the things he and Amir used to enjoy, such as going to the movies and flying kites. In other words, going to Kabul becomes a test of Amir's honour, loyalty, and manhood and maturity from selfishness. Amir is clearly afraid to go. He knows the city is extremely dangerous, and in returning there he would risk everything he has, including his life and the welfare of his family. Kabul will also undoubtedly recall memories of Hassan and his past that Amir would rather not confront. Rahim Khan recognizes that the decision is a difficult one for Amir. To convince him, he brings up the conversation he once had with Baba, when Baba said he feared that Amir would not be able to stand up to anything as a man if he could not stand up for himself as a boy. Amir concedes that Baba may have been right. Then Rahim Khan reveals that Ali was not Hassan's

father, and implies that Hassan was, in fact, Baba's child. Hassan and Amir, then, would be half-brothers, and Sohrab would be Amir's nephew, obligating Amir further to find the boy. The dilemma brings together the tensions Amir has struggled with in the novel. By rescuing Sohrab, Amir can become the man that Baba always wanted him to be, and he can finally atone for the ways he failed Hassan as a friend. In this instance, though Amir is portrayed to be acting as mature and improve, a deeper way of looking at things might prove otherwise. Amir agrees to rescue Sohrab only when he realises that Hassan is his half-brother. We would never know how he would have reacted had he not known the truth. But this much is clear that Amir has not changed much since he left and that he is still a little selfish. He is polite and good because he is expected to be as a man of responsibility, but given a choice, he wouldn't have the strength to assert his manliness.

Another irony appears in this section: Amir realizes he is more like Baba than he thought. However, what they share is betrayal of their best friends. Baba had betrayed Ali, his closest friend since childhood, by sleeping with Sanaubar. As Amir says, having sex with a man's wife was the worst possible way an Afghan man could be dishonored. Amir had similarly betrayed Hassan. But despite all Baba's lies, Amir sees that Baba was correct to say that Amir always let someone else fight his battles for him. Though Amir never says so explicitly, he knows he is doing what Baba would have done in the situation when he resolves to go to Kabul to find Sohrab. The situation presents a further twist of irony in that Amir realizes he can share in Baba's greatest virtue, the courage to do what is right, only after he has recognized that he shares Baba's greatest failing as well. If Amir saves Sohrab, both he and Baba will be pardoned, at least to some degree, for the ways they betrayed their dearest and closest friends. However, at this point, Amir is capable of analysing things and understanding the true values and virtues followed or otherwise by the people.

The ending of the novel however, ends with a positive note of Amir ready for sacrifice and growth for the future. He learns to pray and learns to be patient. In comparison, Hassan dies the same person as he lived-Loyal, true, honest and kind. He is ever ready to do anything for Hassan and awaits his return. Unlike Amir, he commits no mistakes and thus doesn't keep regrets. In other words, as a man, he becomes more sincere and honest if not less, which makes him a perfectionist in a way. He appeals to the heart of the readers immensely.

One attribute we can give for Amir's slow growth and realisation is social cognition. Social cognition refers to the awareness of one's own and other people's mental states (i.e., acquiring emotions, motives, desires and feelings.) Socio-cognitive skills, such as the ability to understand, describe and predict people's mental states, allow children to develop a strong social cognition. Developing social and cognitive awareness has been especially important to prepare children to interact properly with the social world. The lesson of forgiveness and redemption come hand and hand. In order to be fully forgiven one has to redeem oneself. For some it takes years to master this lesson of maturity and growth, while for others it takes a lifetime. The book "The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini is a great example of forgiveness and redemption.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, we can see the evolution of Amir's character is his journey looking for redemption. There are some patterns that appear in two moments of the novel with different connotations that show Amir's growth. When Amir says "for you a thousand times over" to Sohrab, he shows he has learnt from Hassan's humility, learnt to value little moments in life as his old friend did. Assef also appears in two moments, he represents evil to Hassan and Sohrab; the first time Amir

did not do anything, but the second he knew he would not make the same mistake, he fights Assef. This sacrifice is a way of making up for what he did not do for his friend and in that way he begins to redeem himself. Also, the phrase “I ran” is at the beginning and the end of the story with different connotations. At first, it means cowardice, fear, betrayal, and immaturity and finally it means freedom, acceptance, happiness, humility, and growth. In my opinion, at the end, Amir learnt that Hassan was his true friend but in the past he had not allowed himself to accept him as such because he felt superior, as he was young, immature and confused. When he grows up that changes. He does not feel superior anymore because he has realized and learnt he is not. He accepts his mistake and his situation, learns to be less strict with himself and to love what he has, his wife Soraya and Sohrab. So the character of Amir evolves throughout the story, he matures and learns to see things from a different and better perspective and in the end he is a happier man.

Thus, we see that Amir’s behavioural transition is way different from the behavioural transition of Hassan (If there’s possibly much). During childhood, Amir takes on more of a chameleon kind of a personality wherein he adjusts himself to his surroundings being influenced both from the ways of his father and the bully Assef. Perhaps he thinks that doing the thing that others want him to do or what is expected of him is the right thing rather than assessing them as right or wrong. He suffers from a sense of insecurity which is dependent on how others accept him. However, on the other hand, Hassan does not feel any internal insecurity as his strength lies in the strong values taught during childhood. He believes in his own good and hence doesn’t feel the need to grab attention. He, unlike Amir is individualistic and doesn’t care of how the world perceives him. Thus, the concept of ‘behavioural transition’ is more profound in Amir than Hassan as Hassan remains the same simple, honest and sincere self even after he grows into a man. But Amir undergoes a transformation as he grows from the mistakes he has committed. The transition in both the cases comes not only from age alone, but due to development of mental processes by observing the environment and forming own views of situations. Also, perhaps class barrier also determines changes in behaviour although the argument may not be entirely right. Amir being brought up in a rich home and Hassan being seen as the servant to the family, it is clear about the roles that each of them have to play. The rich Amir doesn’t face any threat of any kind and is well secured by Baba and the household. Thus, he assumes some kind of power and authority over the fragile and the insecure Hassan whose life depends until he is wanted. Hassan cannot exercise power or control on anyone and thus remains tolerant and honest which he maintains until the rest of his life. However, the class he is in is not a cause for his humbleness. He is a genuine human being by heart even as he lives independently when he leaves Amir’s household and marries. But on the other hand, one cannot deny that Amir has let his position and privilege to be misused to satisfy his ego. In other words, he lets his position and privilege he has to possess him rather than otherwise which destroys him. This is what causes him to change. He realises that what he was or what he did was nothing short of selfishness and pride. Even at the end, though he seemingly appears to have changed, there is a streak of artificiality in his actions as he changes not solely for Hassan’s son but to redeem himself and the descriptions are quite vivid not of Amir’s suffering alone, but how he is sacrificing or suffering in order to salvation his mistakes he had done Hassan. The narration takes a artificial and dramatic overtones in the last few chapters projecting the ‘rich’ Amir pushed to misery. There is no tone of ‘greatness’ in his being beaten up when compared to the way Hassan was killed. Towards the latter, there is genuine grief and tears, but with Amir, the readers can just come down to pacify him with a sense of pity.

‘Child behavioural transition’ is not just culture specific but individualistic in nature. Every child changes depending on the demand and the necessity to do so. The larger conflict of Pashtun-Hazara and the violence in Afghanistan which is more outer and external, is in merger with the conflict of friendship, brotherhood and a sense of togetherness which is more internal. In both the conflicts a sense of unity in thought is missing. The Pashtuns have a blind eye towards the violence and the destruction of so many Hazaras. They seem to have totally lost the point in staying united, just as Amir struggles with Hassan to accept him as a friend. Thus, perhaps this is the reason why it is said perception changes things around us.

Thus, behavioural transitions cannot just be fixed depending on environment and place. It depends on a number of factors like age, social background, how he or she is received by the society, what is his attitude towards situations that are challenging to him etc. However, even if two people live in the same social condition, they still may behave and think differently. One may make the best out of his situation and the other may bring out the worst. Of course it goes without saying that every man learns from his mistakes and thus undergoes some form of change or the other. But it is vital to remember, as child psychology says that children at a young age need to accept their challenges in life in the right way to be more wise and successful. As mentioned earlier, adolescence is an age where children are influenced by so many different things and so they tend to make hasty decisions about the things that come their way. A little pain or battle in life is essential in keeping one at the ground realities. Keeping oneself pampered doesn’t help much unless until the child or person knows life outside of his well being. Only then the child will be able to put himself in other’s shoes. One then will he be able to emphasize with other’s problems. Thus, behavioural transition is must where we need to change the child mindset or behaviour in thinking the right way to proceed high in life.

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