

IMPACT OF PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP ON SELF ESTEEM IN KHALED HOSSAINI'S NOVEL KITE RUNNER

Abstract

The Kite Runner is the debut novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American author in the year 2003.

The novel revolves around the character Amir who spends many years away from Afghanistan as an immigrant in the United States. It is a father-son story and revolves around the themes of friendship, betrayal, guilt, redemption, and the difficult love between the father and sons. Fatherhood is a highly revered institution in Afghanistan.

Every tribal community is allowed to accept only its paternal identity. In the novel, Amir idolizes his father and suffers from the constant feeling of guilt and shame for not being able to fulfil his father's standards of an ideal son. His negative self-esteem is an outcome of his negative self-worth which is an effect of his relationship with Baba. This research paper attempts to analyse the relationship of the father with his sons to understand how the parental relationship is instrumental in shaping the feeling of positive self-esteem.

Keywords: Parental Relationship, Self Esteem, Social Values, Cultural Beliefs.

Authors

Tanvi Sharma
Digital Content Producer
Times of India
India.

Dr. Mouli Chowdhury
Assistant Professor
Department of English
School of Media Studies and Humanities
India.

Social values are a group of principles that are morally acceptable by the society. These principles are created by various communities, institutions, societies, traditions and cultural beliefs of the people on conducting themselves according to their cultural norms. Self esteem is one of the integral elements of social value that decides one's worth in the eyes of the society.

I. SELF-ESTEEM AND PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Self-esteem is a person's sense of personal worth or value. Self-worth is dependent on the level of approval from stable and important people in our lives. It fluctuates with the level of approval received from such people. Regardless of the situation, it helps in appreciating oneself and is an element of self-improvement (Michelle A. Harris).

Adolescent behaviour is deeply associated with the parent's behaviour and their interaction with them. Children with positive self-esteem are prepared to meet any challenges and demands of their lives (Adolescent Development). Parental warmth and support have their impact even many years later in adolescence and young adulthood. Low self-esteem harms adolescent behaviour and mental health. It leads to depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and attempts (Dat Tan Nguyen). The harmonious relationship between parents and their child/children provides reinforcement and confidence in children to face any challenges and problems in their lives.

Perfect parenting is a matter of great concern for parents, and it has always become challenging to maintain a balance between three major things that are mental, emotional, and physical support. The importance of talking and expressing love and support makes every human being confident and content. In the case of children, it is important to constantly showcase parental support and love as it makes a child confident and ensures good mental health ultimately influencing their personality (George).

Every parent expects a good at heart, smart and well-behaved child. Some parents expect that their child shall carry on their legacies, culture and respect them throughout their lives as they have been incorporating these rituals and cultures in their lives. It has been observed that parents' expectations are sometimes fulfilled but sometimes they have to face disappointment resulting in breaking their trust and leading to a feeling of incompleteness and incompetency in the society. Society plays a major role in such relationships as it shapes parental expectations from their children. The society which has been portrayed in the novel *The Kite runner* is established on legacies and traditions constructing parents who had similar expectation from their progenies.

II. THE KITE RUNNER AND FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS PORTRAYED IN THE NOVEL

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Fatherhood is a highly revered institution in Afghanistan. Every tribal community is allowed to accept only its paternal identity. In the novel, Amir idolizes his father and suffers from the constant feeling of guilt and shame for not being able to fulfil his father's standards of an ideal son. His negative self-esteem is an outcome of his negative self-worth which is an effect of his relationship with Baba. This research paper attempts to analyse the relationship of the father with his sons to understand how the parental relationship is instrumental in shaping the feeling of positive self-esteem.

In the novel, Amir constantly took decisions that had an impact on the relationships he shared with the other characters of the story. As a young boy he desired to become a writer, but Baba wanted him to be like him because he thought that is what was needed to survive in this world and since Amir was the only son, he has been destined by birth to run his father's successful business. Baba's love for Amir was more materialistic as he wanted to provide everything to his son. He worked hard and established a business providing Amir with everything he ever needed (Kumar). Amir on the other hand needed psychological support to establish his worth in Baba's life as the constant disapproval from Baba fluctuated his self-esteem. He needed someone who could encourage him as he was constantly reminded of his father's success and was thriving for his validation, respect, and support.

The relationship with Baba was never emotionally gratifying for Amir. He was not fascinated by the materialistic love that was offered to him. He needed emotional encouragement which could eventually help him in achieving great success. His love for writing and reading often made Baba dissatisfied. Since Baba was a man who was hard-hitting and masculine with ground-breaking mental and physical agility, he expected similar qualities in Amir.

Amir being the legitimate son was the one who got the right to live under the limelight of a successful father. He lost his mother when she gave birth to him and was considered the cause of her death. This was one of the causes wherein he blamed his presence in his father's life for the absence of his mother and lacked an emotionally supportive relationship with his father. Amir always looked for validation in Baba's life and was always left feeling unwanted. Baba needed a son who made him proud and is a reflection of his personality but was also left feeling contrary to it. Amir was more like his mother who loved books, away from the charm of money that his father had. Baba expected his son to be as powerful and gutted as he was but found him surviving behind Hassan's back.

Hassan was the illegitimate son of Baba. He treated him and Amir equally which made Amir jealous as he always pursued to receive his father's undivided attention. Amir who was unaware of the fact that Baba was Hassan's biological father believed that he belonged to him solely. Baba would always teach Amir about the only sin.

There is only one sin, only one. And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. Do you understand that?" "When you kill a man, you steal a life," Baba said. "You steal his wife's right to a husband; rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. Do you see?"(Hosseini16).

However, ironically in the novel, he is a thief. He steals away Amir's right of truth. He took away Hassan's right of being the son of the house where he served as a servant. This negligence and lack of fatherly interest show the self-centred image of Baba that eventually was visible in Amir. The fact was that they both were betrayed by their biological father as neither of them was aware of the fact that they were brothers. He, who taught Amir about sins, was a sinner himself. He lied about Hassan's reality taking away his rights of receiving fatherly love from his biological father. The lie also separated brothers from each other. The whole scenario would have been different for Hassan if he would have been given equal rights and place in the house.

The father is a pivotal role model to his son as is evident in the majority of families in Afghanistan. Amir's life is deficient in fatherly love as his relationship is affected by Baba's disappointment with him. Baba speaks to Rahim Khan, his best friend, and business partner, about his confusion with Amir, wherein his son's interests are not similar to his own. Baba who expected his mirror image in Amir takes time to come to terms with the fact that children though given birth by their parents will have a personality of their own. Baba does not put forth much effort towards forming a bond with Amir during his childhood because of the emotional detachment created by him.

Amir always wished for his father's approval; however, nothing he ever did could win his father's pride. Baba was not empathetic towards Amir's feelings, so he did not understand how much Amir craved to find his approval. Amir is jealous of Hassan was an answer to the insecurities and existential crisis he was having in that house. Being an admirer of his father and then not receiving what he was hustling for, being the only son, he wanted to be like his father. The appreciation and admiration of him were nowhere to be seen in Baba's eyes. This made Amir question him and when he heard Baba talking to Rahim Khan about Hassan being the saviour of Amir, he realized he was nowhere near his ideal man.

When Amir won the kite tournament and was waiting for his blue kite he knew and planned what things he will do once he received that kite but the whole scenario changed when Amir discovered Hassan struggling in the alley to bring the kite to him. He saw Hassan getting tortured and raped but he did not help or tried to stop because he wanted the kite so badly that putting the life of a Hazara at risk was easier than he thought. Hassan eventually brought the kite to Amir representing his faith in their friendship which almost meant nothing to Amir even though he appreciated the fact that Hassan was always his ally who could do anything for him but because of the society and his father (Baba) he tried to portray himself as a selfish and unfaithful friend.

Amir wanted his Baba's undivided attention and was desperate to achieve it at any cost. When Amir blamed Hassan for being a thief who took his watch and money, he portrayed an image that was selfish and self-centered like his own father. Baba's step of keeping things secret was a step to keep his ideal image pure and sacred in front of others even at the cost of his own son's turmoil with life. Baba cried over Ali and Hassan portraying how broken he was from inside seeing his illegitimate son going away from him. Ali being the father of Hassan took a step in the favour of his master's child (Hassan) whom he considered his own and took him away from the pain.

Amir was in guilt when he saw his father torn apart when it came to the separation of Ali and Hassan from them. However, not being aware of the fact that Hassan was more than just a servant boy for his father. Amir was hurt too seeing Hassan going away was making him guilty but the only thing he ever wanted was his father's undivided attention and at the end of it all, he was going to get it. With this belief that his father will be only his and there will be no other to compete with him, Amir went to this path and kept the secret and pain entombed in him.

The secret was one of the major parts of both Amir and Baba's life which eventually contributed to building their self-esteem. Since everything that was hidden from others was their vulnerabilities. Both Amir and Baba flaunted their strengths, like Baba being all made by himself: A Businessmen and a bear fighter and Amir on the other hand just won his kite tournament, but when it came to accepting their mistakes and flaws, they both took the help of stillness. But their decisions were making things difficult for themselves in Baba's case he lost his other son, whom he never treated like his own, but Baba had love for him which was eventually showcased in the novel when Amir thinks of making things easier for him by replacing Ali and Hassan (their servants)Baba refuses snappishly. In Amir's case it was his long, pure childhood friend Hassan, he lost him. Amir also lost a brother he never knew about, and the pain of losing Hassan can be witnessed by the guilt Amir always had.

Amir's hunger for Baba's attention came to reality. Baba's separation from Hassan changed things Baba indeed became closer to Amir his only hope and only son in front of him and he wanted good things to happen to him. They both escaped Afghanistan and went to live their life away from terrorism in Pakistan later moving to America. Baba just for the sake of his only son Amir chose to move on to Pakistan and then to America for his better and best future. Amir was his only hope and like any other father, Baba wanted the best for his son and gave everything that Amir needed to become successful. In this process Baba even lost himself and moved on to live in a foreign land with foreign rules, regulations, and society. He left his life and pride in Afghanistan and was trying to make living in America. But Baba never forgot his culture and tradition which he eventually was following in America too. The importance of traditions for him can be seen in the marriage of Amir as well.

Amir on the other hand had everything finally, his father was his strength and power. He loved him and he also learned to stand for himself and was pursuing his dream and became a writer. Amir's self-esteem was responding positively because he finally was able to stand in front of his father whether to make him understand things like racism or supporting him in his treatment of cancer. After getting graduate Amir saw his father's pride and love which Baba expressed by gifting him a car. Amir and Baba finally had what they both were thriving for. Baba supported Amir in every aspect of his life.

Change of place was somewhere helpful for Amir, he dominated his father in terms of this father-son relationship. But Amir was incomplete without his father. When Amir falls in love with Soraya (Amir's lover) a perfect Afghani girl he met whose father (General Taheri) was a good friend of Baba. His life turned towards love overlooking that Soraya's father was an Afghani man made of his honour. While Soraya's father caught Soraya and Amir chatting, he immediately interrupted like any man with Afghani culture would do. General Taheri (Soraya's father) made it clear to Amir to follow principles and traditions making it clear that

until and unless things aren't about marriage coming close to Sahara would be harmful to him.

Amir again felt hopeless, and Baba knew what Amir was dealing with. He helped Amir getting what he wanted and for that, he made things possible for Soraya and Amir. Later with the agreement of both the families and following all traditions and culture they both got married. No matter where Amir was in his life Baba's experience and support were always everything, he needed for leading a perfect life. Baba and Amir both needed each other at one point or other.

Without Baba Amir would have been in chaos in Afghanistan where people, families, culture, and traditions were destroyed by terrorism. On the other hand, Baba needed Amir because he was his only hope left Baba was away from his soil and people anything that now mattered to him was his only son's life that he remembered to prosper with love care, and support. Baba was not a perfect father, but he tried his best to keep Amir happy and that is what makes him a human someone who is failing yet trying.

III. CONCLUSION

Charles Cooley, an American sociologist developed the concept of the looking-glass self, which is creating one's own self-image based on the responses of others. Baba has been proved that he was not successful in imparting important terms and factors in his parenting style which in the future made Amir suffer in silence. The image of Amir when he was younger in the mind of Baba was accepted as an image of his own by Amir. It is important to see a child as a child and not someone who is born to compete in society on our behalf. The bond that a father and his son have should be beyond any race, culture under the factor that Baba was a single parent made things more complicated. The participation of both the characters was pivotal but, in this case, it was never maintained until in the end when Baba stood for his son and tried to make him happy with actual love and care by successfully making Amir marry a girl he loved. Baba was well equipped in making Amir happy materialistically but when it came to love and support, he failed devastatingly.

Baba loved the fact that Amir won and this newly acquired respect and the victory gave Amir enough courage to support something wrong. He attempted to alter his relationship with Ali and Hassan. The relationship between Ali and Baba was extremely strong and was meant to be forever as it also ensured that his illegitimate child will never go away from him. Baba loved Hassan and his presence was important to him. This being the reason he kept Hassan near him as a servant becomes clear and shows that even society was not able to replace the love a father had for his son. Baba wanted to see the perfect child who could stand tall and be strong, one who could run his business and was strong to be a hard worker and honourable. But Amir was a shadow of his mother who loved books, he loved reading them and later this love made him a writer. Amir was growing but he wanted a son who was his reflection. He was moulding him in the same way he wanted him to be, but he forgot to embrace the quality and gift Amir had. Eventually, when he became a successful writer Baba saw his potential and finally appreciated him.

However, Amir tried to connect with Sohrab as a parent as he loved and cared for him. At the end of the novel, Amir took Hassan to Lake Elizabeth Park in Fremont and brought a kite which he flew with Sohrab. Amir indulged in a kite-fight with another person and cuts the opponent's line helping Sohrab relive the relationship he had with his father (Hassan) and giving hope to Amir and Sohrab's relationship. Sohrab had been silent since his suicide attempt, an emotionless husk; however, on that day he began to open up again after Amir took interest in Sohrab's interests. The role and importance of self-esteem in the lives of Amir, Baba, Hassan, and Sohrab were reflected prominently in the novel *The Kite Runner* and it is evident that the parent-child relationship between parents is instrumental in shaping the self-esteem of the child as they see their own image in through the eyes of their parents. Thus, this research paper attempted to prove that self-image of Amir and Hassan was influenced by the image that Baba created in his minds.

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