

The Concept of Parenthood in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract

Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are two heart-wrenching novels that glorify the power of indestructible love and affection. The protagonists of both of the novels Amir and Mariam undergo several psychological, familial, and political plights in their life. They show their undefeatable and unconditional spirits in their quests to overcome their predicaments—to achieve their desired identities. In this way, they slowly walk on the path to parenthood. In their pursuits of life, they struggle to protect Sohrab and Laila and to ensure a bright future for them. Their indomitable effort to decorate the life of Sohrab and Laila gradually eradicates all their discontentment of life and turns them into contented parents. The study aims to focus on the concept of parenthood portrayed in the novels. It analyses how parenthood offers a new meaning of life to Amir and Mariam releasing them from the havocs that they have experienced in their life.

Keywords: Affection, Love, Plight, Parenthood, Identity, Life

1. Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's (1965-) *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) recount the devastating and painful stories of human life debunking the frustrating truth about the duplicity at the personal and political level and demonstrate the clash between pessimism and optimism. Moreover, in these novels, Hosseini portrays the vigorous strength of human relationships that overpowers all kinds of adversities. The stories revolve around the incessant quests of Amir and Mariam for perceiving the meaning of their life that culminate in their sense of parenthood. The author masterfully develops their characters showing how their faulty relationship with other characters contributes to their plights, how they fight back the sources of the plights and achieve self-actualization.

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is a tormented soul exhausted by his experiences of the past from which he incessantly envisions release. In his childhood, he fails to get the love, affection, and care he expects from his father that develop an inferiority complex, mistrust, and hypocrisy in him. His craziness to please Baba, his cowardice, and betrayal are

the nightmares that haunt him creating a guilty conscience—consciously and subconsciously he cries atonement for. Lately, his initiatives to save Sohrab, Hassan's son, and to offer Sohrab fatherly affection redeem him from his lies and culpability. Thereby, the sense of parenthood renders endless gateways for Amir to be mature.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam suffers from an identity crisis till she shows courage to kill Rasheed to rescue Laila. In her childhood, she also craves her father's love and acceptance which she has been denied. Later on, the thorny nuptial bond creates a kind of panopticon where she bleeds. However, she shows her enormous strength for saving Laila from the ruthless husband and establishes her identity as a mother figure sacrificing her life for the betterment of the daughter. She dies with acceptance and identity.

Amir and Mariam's pursuit of their identities gradually leads them to become the symbol of a father to Sohrab and a mother to Laila. Through their quests, Khaled Hosseini attempts to illustrate that love and affections are the most controlling things in the world. Their unconditional love and struggle to protect Sohrab and Laila convey the idea that parenthood has no specific ground. Focusing on the multidimensional layers of parenthood, this thesis attempts to explore the quest of Amir and Mariam for being parents. It will also focus on how their plights in the quest impart them immense power to uproot all the obstacles that hinder the understanding of their selves.

2. Literature Review

A lot of researches have been done on Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Most of the works are concerned with the issues like religious and political oppression, cultural conflict, patriarchal subjugation, war, the poignant condition of the war-ravaged Afghan people, etc. Among them, Juan Du (2017) in "A Journey of Self-actualization of Amir in *The Kite Runner*" focuses on Amir's spiritual growth. This paper attempts to reveal the journey of Amir from sin to atonement—he returns to Kabul and saves Hassan's son Sohrab which paves his way to redemption. U. Jaya (2017) in "Familial Relationship in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" emphasizes relationships among the characters especially, the relationship between Amir and Baba, between Hassan and Ali, between Hassan and Sohrab.

Anuradha Nongmaithem (2017) discusses how sisterhood formulates a possible solution to a lot of women's problems in "The Role of Women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini". She analyses the episodes where Mariam and Laila help each other, struggle together to get rid of the tyranny of Rasheed, and form a bond of sisterhood. To save Laila, Mariam kills Rasheed and ensures the way for Laila to find refuge. Laila lives a new life that Mariam gives. Attadeepa Maurya (2015) in "Matrix of Violence, Love, and Sacrifice: A Critical Study of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" explores the idea of violence, oppression, and women's relationship in a claustrophobic atmosphere. She equates distorted familial relationships between the father-daughter and the husband-wife that take a bitter turn. Alongside, she sheds light on the bond of sisterhood that gives inner insights and power to Mariam and Laila.

Familial relationships, the theme of guilt and redemption, war and its consequences, women's oppression, the theme of sisterhood, etc. are the major issues that researchers have usually tried to explore in these novels. These themes are known to the readers still in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, parenthood is a significant concept yet to be explored. The paper will articulate the issue.

3. Discussion

Parent is someone who takes the responsibilities of children, provides them both mental and physical comfort, and shows them true insight into life, "Parents meet the biological, physical, and health requirements of children. Parents interact with children socially. Parents stimulate children to engage and understand the environment and to enter the world of learning" (Bornstein, 2002, p. 13). *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are not stories of war, violence, loss, and betrayal only, rather inspiring stories of resurrection also. Khaled Hosseini's protagonists Amir and Mariam are resurrected by achieving their identity as a father and mother.

3.1. Parenthood in *The Kite Runner*

Khaled Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* tracks the saga of a man, Amir, who dares to fight against the Taliban for the sake of an orphan child named Sohrab. Amir starts his life as a selfish child thinking Hassan (Baba's illegitimate son) is a threat attaining his father's affections. However, he ends his life with the satisfaction of being a proud father to Sohrab. Throughout the novel, he undergoes several mental upheavals for betraying his loyal friend Hassan but finally achieves his inner satisfaction by taking the responsibilities of Sohrab. It is Sohrab who opens a new world for Amir where he explores the true meaning of life.

The story of Amir's life can be divided into two phases. The first phase focuses on his struggles to achieve his father's love and affections, and the second phase focuses on his quest for saving Sohrab and getting self-contentment as a father. Parenthood serves as a way to atone his unatoned sins, "*There is a way to be good again*" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 2).

3.1.1. A Child's Quest for Belongingness and Father's Love

The beginning of the novel tells the story of Amir's childhood where he feels alone in the crowd. His bitter experiences of childhood cause his mental disturbance. His relationship with Baba (Father of Amir) is like an empty castle where he finds no love, care, and affection and "So Amir was confused and he was so naive that he thought he could change this by constantly trying to please his father" (Du, 2017, p. 91). Baba shows concern and affection towards Hassan which makes him

more insecure. He feels jealous of the closeness between Baba and Hassan. His anxiety at losing his father's attention and love creates a kind of disillusionment in his mind. Though he does not suffer apparently in Baba's huge palace, his sense of lacking his father's love torments him inwardly. He tries to analyze the reasons behind his father's indifference to him and finds many. Sometimes he concludes, "Because the truth of it was, I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess, hadn't I?" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 17). Moreover, he fails to meet Baba's expectations. Baba wants to build a strong personality in him—a formidable guy, but he fails to achieve that. His inability to reach Baba's heart and Baba's indifferent attitude to him creates a huge gap between the son and father, which they cannot minimize. He reveals his deplorable conditions:

I clear it and told him I'd written a story.

Baba nodded and gave a thin smile that conveyed little more than feigned interest. "Well, that's very good, isn't it?" he said. Then nothing more. He just looked at me through the cloud of smoke.

I probably stood there for under a minute, but, to this day, it was one of the longest minutes of life. Seconds plodded by, each separate from the next by an eternity. Air grew heavy, damp, almost solid. I was breathing bricks. Baba went on staring me down, and didn't offer to read. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 27)

Furthermore, the possible bondage and love between Baba and Hassan raise a kind of storm inside Amir's mind, "Amir often finds passive-aggressive ways to take his frustration out on the Hassan, such as mocking his ignorance or his inability to read" (Jaya, 2017, p. 100). He considers Hassan as a threat who might snatch all of his rights and his Baba from him. He finds Baba's image more in Hassan than in himself for Hassan has more comprehending power, he is braver and more confident than Amir. Every time Amir falls in danger, every time Hassan steps forward to save Amir provoking Amir's jealousy. Amir dives here and there into the sea of confusion and does not know how his yearning and hunger for his father's warmth can be satisfied as "Baba sets his expectations high for Amir and Amir finds that difficult to deal with. He ends up comparing himself to Hassan and how he would be better son for Baba" (Walters, 2014, para. 3). Later on, to ensure his sense of belongingness and Baba's love, he sets a mission. He comes to a realization that he can only meet the expectations of Baba, kindle his relationship with him by winning the kite tournament. Baba will watch him and if he wins, he will feel proud of him. Amir reveals his inner states:

. . . the resolution that I would win that winter's tournament. I was going to win. There was no viable option. I was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. then may be my life as a ghost in this house would finally be over . . . I would finally be pardoned for killing my mother. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 49)

God grants his wish to win the tournament, his "key to Baba's heart" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 62). This kindles his relation with Baba, still, he fears losing his affection because he knows what happened to Hassan. The rape of Hassan happened in front of his eyes and he could not protect him because of his cowardice, more specifically for his craving for Baba. This fear of losing the father leads him to design a plot against Hassan, "Their relationship becomes the motive behind betraying Hassan because he saw how much attention Baba was giving to Hassan instead" (Studydriver, 2019, para. 3). Hassan shoulders the false allegation. In this way, Amir manages to fulfill his safety and belonging needs—achieves acceptance from the father. However, his guilty conscience pursuits him to move forward to achieve the self-actualization that he achieves in parenthood.

3.1.2. A Father's Strife for Protecting the Son

In the second phase of Amir's life, he proves himself a brave man who dares to go to Afghanistan which is under the strict rule of the Taliban to protect his nephew Sohrab. In America Amir enjoys his professional and familial success, but somehow, he feels a kind of guilt for betraying Hassan and his inability to have a child with Soraya. Though Amir achieves dignity, status, and achievement in the eye of society, he feels void inside. After getting a call from Baba's friend, Rahim Khan, he decides to go to Pakistan where he meets the utmost truth of his life that changes his perception of life—gives him satisfaction.

In Afghanistan, though Amir feels devastated when he knows the tragic death of Hassan and the pathetic condition of his son Sohrab, his self-centered mind constantly seeks refuge. He clarifies his position to Rahim Khan, "I have a wife in America, a home, a career, and a family. Kabul is a dangerous place, you know that, and you'd have me risk everything for. . . I stopped" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 194). However, when Rahim Khan reveals Baba's relationship with Hassan, that is, Hassan is Baba's illegitimate son, Amir begins to feel the image of Baba in him, "As it turned out, Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 197). This epiphany moves him to do something for his half-brother and attain his self-esteem accordingly. Here, his journey towards parenthood starts.

With the taxi driver Farid, Amir sets on an expedition to save Sohrab, Hassan's son. He takes it as a responsibility to wipe his previous sin as well as the sin of his father. At the very beginning of the journey, he tells his intention to Farid that he goes only for the sake of Hassan. When Farid asks him about Sohrab, he only states, "His father meant a lot to me" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 208). At this stage it is evident that he feels no affection or sympathy towards the orphan child; he only comes to Kabul to wipe his guilt and restore himself. He only plans to bring Sohrab to Pakistan and hands over him to the foreign orphanage. However, when the director of the orphanage Zaman tells that Sohrab is not here, has been taken by the Taliban, Amir feels a strange feeling for Sohrab, probably this feeling is connected to his repressed desire to have his child. A

kind of realization grows in his mind and he recalls the innocent faces of his neighbor's children, "I remembered Wahid's boys and . . . I realized something: I would not leave Afghanistan without finding Sohrab" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 223).

From his childhood, Amir has been a cowardly boy. He turns into a new man utilizing the opportunity to prove himself. Though he feels fear to approach the Taliban officers, his determination to protect Sohrab gives him miraculous power to fight against the brutal Taliban. This time, Amir breaks the shell of a cowardly boy to fight against the Taliban. Amir once failed to protect Hassan but now he gains new insight into the life and plays the role of a father to Sohrab. He becomes the protector of Sohrab and remembers the sacrifice of Hassan, who was raped by Assef for saving his kite. It is his time to do something in return; it is time to repent his sin. He is ready to sacrifice his own life to save the life of Sohrab. According to Maslow (1943, 1954) esteem needs denote two needs: self-esteem and the acknowledgment of esteem by others. These two needs provide inner satisfaction and make individuals autonomous to justify their potentiality. From childhood, Amir tries to achieve esteem needs for himself. He struggles for making himself someone who will be appreciated by others especially Baba. However, Baba's indifferent treatment develops a sense of inferiority in him. He attempts to flourish his potentiality. He gets fame, respect, status everything in U. S. but he is not satisfied. He feels satisfaction when he gains respect in the eyes of Sohrab. To rescue Sohrab from the oppression of the Taliban, he goes to the Taliban headquarter, he confronts Assef (The Taliban officer in Kabul) who challenges Amir to fight against him to protect Sohrab. He shows his bravery and accepts his challenge though gets a brutal beating. Sohrab saves him by shooting Assef in the eye with his slingshot. Though Amir gets injured, successfully they escape the place. He feels honored and proud because it releases him from the allegation of being a coward.

Sohrab acts as a silent agent to wake Amir's unconscious desire to become a father. After escaping from the Taliban office, Amir is admitted to the hospital. Gradually a strong feeling of fatherly affection develops in him when every day Sohrab comes to visit him. As he spends a quality of time with Sohrab, Amir feels a kind of connection to him. Furthermore, Rahim Khan's last letter makes him more sensitive. He thinks of the predicament of Baba who has never revealed the identity of Hassan as his son because of the fear of society. Amir unknowingly begins to feel the pains of a father and starts to play the role of Sohrab's father. Hence, Rahim Khan in his letter to Amir refers, "I hope your suffering comes to an end with this journey to Afghanistan" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 263). To protect Sohrab, he leaves Kabul ignoring his physical pains.

Again, he involves in another difficult mission to get legal permission to take Sohrab to America with him. As Sohrab is an orphan child of war-ravaged Afghanistan, the American Embassy denies giving him legal permission to get an American visa so easily. When Sohrab comes to know these, he becomes terrified thinking that Amir will leave him alone and again the Taliban will take him with them. Thinking of the horrifying things, he decides to commit suicide. The lengthy process of adaptation, Sohrab's frustration, and then his suicide attempt, open up a horrible world before Amir where he finds himself a helpless father. He begins to understand the value of promises that he has given Sohrab as a father. Finding no other viable option, he seeks consolation in religion:

I throw my makeshift *jai-namaz*, my prayer rug, on the floor and I get on my knees, lower my forehead to the ground, my tears soaking through the sheet. I bow to the west. Then I remember I haven't prayed for over fifteen years. I have long forgotten the words. But it does not matter, I will utter those few words I still remember: *La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah*. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 301)

When Sohrab gains his sense, Amir assures him to protect him by all means though Sohrab is unresponsive. His fatherly feeling to Sohrab is so inimitable and indomitable that he never loses his hope to get a response, acceptance from Sohrab. After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Counter attack of U. S. Amir and Soraya come to Afghanistan to raise funds for the people of Afghanistan. There on a fine day, he buys a kite for Sohrab as a part of a series of efforts that he has been doing all time to make Sohrab normal. When Amir cuts a neighbouring kite, Amir notices a smile on Sohrab's face, "It was only a smile, nothing more. I didn't make everything all right" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 324). Though it is only a smile, it cures the heartaches that he has been carrying all these years. He feels like a child, he screams like a child—he feels he is purified as he has got a positive response from his son, nothing is precious than this. He joyfully utters,

I ran. A grown man running with a swarm of screaming children. But I didn't care. I ran with the wind blowing in my face, and a smile as wide as the Valley of Panjsher on my lips.

I ran. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 324)

Amir gains the meaning in life by becoming the father of Sohrab. The idea of being a father alters his life—transforming him from a selfish man to a responsible father who can fight against all the odds to protect his son. In this way Amir achieves his self-actualization, he finds a glorious world before him as a father.

3.2. Parenthood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini describes a heart trembling story of an Afghan woman, Mariam, who shows her enormous power to challenge the traditional role of women in society. She dares to battle against her inner self as well as the backdrop of the Taliban regime to establish her own identity and to get recognition from others. Mariam begins her life as an illegitimate daughter and ends her life with the acknowledgment of a proud mother who has sacrificed her life for the sake of Laila. Mariam takes radical steps to protect Laila from the tyranny of Rasheed as well as from the tyranny of the Taliban. Like Jesus Christ, Mariam crucifies herself to bring harmony in her daughter's life, and through this sacrifice, she achieves the meaning of life.

Like Amir, the life span of Mariam can also be divided into two phrases: Mariam's failure to achieve father's and husband's love and her success of gaining new insight into life. In the first phase of her life Mariam struggles for

overpowering her illegitimate identity and in the second half, she struggles for searching her own identity and ends her plights in parenthood.

3.2.1. An Illegitimate Child's Quest For Father's Love and Social Recognition

At the beginning of the story, Khaled Hosseini gives a pathetic glimpse of Mariam's life, introducing her as an illegitimate child, "clumsy little *harami*" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 4). At this stage, though she is only nine years old and is unable to decode the meaning of the word *harami*, she suffers a lot for this shameful identity. As a child of an affluent father, Jalil, Mariam dreams to have a better life with her father but Nana (a woman of lower class), Mariam's mother, constantly reminds her of the bitter truth of her birth. Like Jalil's other children, Mariam wants recognition, love, and affection from her father. Though Jalil shows a little bit of responsibility towards Mariam, he does not give her the recognition of a legitimate child. However, Mariam believes in the pretensions of Jalil ignoring the truth exposed by Nana. Therefore, when she goes out to meet Jalil, on her way to Herat she feels happy thinking that she is not an abandoned child, she is not an illegitimate one as "... no one threw a rock at her. No one called her a *harami*" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 30). However, her expectations from her father prove wrong, because "The motherhood is an obvious term for the birth of a child but the fatherhood is relative" (Sebastian, 2016, p. 52). Her quests for achieving fatherly love and legitimization bring disasters in her life. Afterwards in Jalil's house she faces the utmost harshness of life as she is not allowed to get in, "Let me in this house" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 33). This represents her craving for identity and safety. Jalil's rejection makes her realize that "She did not belong here" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 40). Additionally, Nana's suicide shakes her world and makes her realize that she belongs nowhere.

After her mother's death, as she does not have any place to live in, Mariam starts living in Jalil's house not as a family member but as an outsider. That is why his wives settle her marriage with a middle-aged man, Rasheed, to get rid of her. Though Mariam lives in her father's house, a sense of existential crisis arises in her mind because of her father's unwillingness to accept her as his legitimate daughter. In Mariam's early life she fails to fulfill her psychological needs. Though she lives with her mother, fear of insecurity makes her anxious. When Mariam moves to Jalil's house, she faces the same kind of insecurity of being an unwanted child. After marriage, though in Rasheed's house, Mariam starts a new and safe life with a legitimate title as a wife, he fails to give her the warmth of love and respect. In Rasheed's house, Mariam again engages in a new quest for acquiring her husband's love and respect. Rasheed forces her to live according to his wish and compels her to wear a burqa by declaring that, "Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 69). He treats her like an object whose main purpose is to satisfy her husband's needs. Rasheed takes care of her because he wants a son but whenever she experiences several miscarriages, it deviates his mind and makes him crueler. Mariam wants a child to survive in this harsh world but her fate does not favor her. Mariam's infertility makes Rasheed more violent. He becomes so violent that when Mariam fails to cook well, he even forces her to eat stones. Mariam comes to Rasheed's house with a dream of a happy and respectful life but he leaves her alone to face the pangs of sufferings and pains. His cruel and bestial attitude makes Mariam more eager to gain love and belongingness.

3.2.2. A Mother's Struggle for Protecting the Daughter

In the second phase of her life, Mariam meets Laila who works as a catalyst to evoke her potentiality. Like Mariam, Laila always wants her mother's love and affection but the devastating effects of war make her mother motionless. Mariam and Laila-two empty souls together become companions to each other developing a mother-daughter relationship between them. When Laila gets injured and loses her family because of the Taliban invasion of Afghanistan, Rasheed gives her shelter. Mariam takes care of her and gives her mental support. Mariam relates her sufferings to Laila, both are parentless and have gone through unbound pains for their mother's death. However, Rasheed's conspiracy to marry Laila makes Mariam insecure and inferior, and Mariam begins to see Laila as an enemy. She feels a sense of hollowness when he behaves more rudely with her in front of Laila and addresses her, a village girl and a *harami*. Mariam thinks that Laila comes to snatch her position. Though Mariam feels a kind of motherly affections, she suppresses it because of Laila's marriage to her husband.

Mariam and Laila come from different backgrounds, different ideologies, but they have the commonality of feelings. They suffer silently in Rasheed's prison. Though both of them understand their inner agony, they do not have enough courage to raise their voice against Rasheed. After the birth of Aziza, the daughter of Laila and Tariq (Laila's former lover), Mariam feels strong affection for Aziza and Laila. Furthermore, when Laila for the first time shows her strength to protect Mariam from the cruelty of Rasheed, her love and affection for Laila grow more, as, "... she raised her head and looked at Laila, looked at her as if for the first time" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 243). Gradually Mariam and Laila build up a friendly relationship between them. Two souls are united together to make a world of love and affection. Hosseini states, "And in this fleeting, wordless exchange with Mariam, Laila knew that they were not enemies any longer" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 244). This fulfillment of love need moves Mariam to search for her self-esteem and self-actualization needs.

The political upheaval of Afghanistan makes their lives more deplorable. To get rid of the Taliban and Rasheed, these two women dare to break the law and decide to leave Afghanistan to find a peaceful life in Pakistan. When Laila tells Mariam to join her to leave Afghanistan, Mariam realizes that without them her life is meaningless. Once she had tolerated so many losses: mother's suicide, father's rejection, and husband's deception, now she doesn't want to lose her close ones. A new sense of self-esteem and inner calling begin to wake her restless mind. To have a better life and identity, Mariam again starts a journey to save her from all kinds of societal dogmas and oppression. Laila inspires her to open the eyes to see her inner capability which has been surpassed for a long time, "Laila's rebellious attitude helps Mariam to change the view of life and realize that she has the power to tear all indictments" (Yeasmin, 2020, p. 389). To have a free life, the mother and daughter set for their journey but unfortunately on the way they are caught and forced to return to hell. Their attempt to elope makes

Rasheed crueler; he tortures them physically on different occasions. His brutality can be compared to that of the Taliban as both show their inhuman act to uphold their so-called masculine power. The more Rasheed mentally and physically tortures them, the more their mother-daughter bond grows stronger, “The husband-wife, father-daughter relationship are distorted due to the violent acts of Rasheed. Though the man woman relationship takes a sour turn, a sister like bond develops between Laila and Mariam.” (Maurya, 2015, p. 329). The sister-like bond later turns into the bond of motherhood—the sense of motherhood that grows inside Mariam makes her realize the unconditional relationship between a mother and a daughter. If she had that perception before, she would never hurt Nana, “She wished she’d understood then what she understood now about motherhood” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 280).

Mariam deliberately presents herself as a mother who is ready to do anything for the betterment of her daughter Laila. Though she was an ungrateful daughter, she now wants to prove herself as a good mother. During Zalmai’s birth (Laila’s son), Mariam takes Laila to the hospital. Laila has previous experience, even, this time she gets more scared, she cries and holds Mariam’s finger. The doctor who is assisting to deliver her child notices their bond and asks Mariam, “ ‘You’re the mother?’ ‘Yes,’ Mariam said” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 282), she declares herself the mother of Laila. As a benevolent mother Mariam wants to make Laila free from the shackle of Rasheed. Mariam encourages Laila to go back to her true love, Tariq. Rasheed becomes more violent day by day to his wives especially, to Laila. Moreover, when Zalmai reveals to him that Tariq comes to their house to meet his mother, he gets angry and swings the belt at Laila countlessly to kill her. Mariam can’t bear the torture anymore:

Mariam lost count of how many times the belt cracked, how many pleading words she cried out to Rasheed, how many times she circled around the incoherent tangle of teeth and fists and belt, before she saw fingers clawing at Rasheed’s face, chipped nails digging into his jowls and pulling at his hair and scratching his forehead. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 338)

She, overcoming her past demeanor, feels utmost strength brighter than the brightness of thousand splendid suns in her and she resists. As a mother Mariam shows her anger and murders her husband who has troubled her a lot; she will not let him do it again. She has endured oppression as a wife but as a mother, she is not willing to see her daughter’s pain:

But in Rasheed’s eyes she saw murder for them both.

And so Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it touched the small of her back. She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life.

And, with that, Mariam brought down the shovel. This time, she gave it everything she had. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 341)

By doing this Mariam realizes her potentiality and steps in the path of self-actualization. Mariam’s resistance symbolizes her rebirth, from a submissive individual to a subversive one, as if she were born like a phoenix and got energy from the ashes of her past sufferings to ensure a new beginning to her daughter’s life; “Her final stroke against the dictator shows that she breaks the gender asymmetries and becomes a radical woman who is dauntless to face anything” (Yeasmin, 2020, p. 389).

Later on, Mariam shows honesty to her motherly affections. She surrenders to the law knowing that if she escapes, the police will search for them until and unless they find them, and if it happens, Laila will never be able to start a new life. Hence, when Laila insists on her escape with them, Mariam strongly rejects and declares, “Think like a mother. I am” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 349). She achieves a sense of belongingness in her life by becoming the mother of an orphan girl Laila. Though she starts her life as an illegitimate *harami*, she ends her life as a blessed mother who crucifies herself for the betterment of her daughter. Through this sacrifice, Mariam gains her self-contentment which she has searched for throughout her life. She declares, “For me, it ends here. There’s nothing more I want. Everything I’d ever wished for as a little girl you’ve already given me” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 350). To save Laila, she confesses her crime and happily accepts the death:

Mariam wished for so much in those final moment. Yet as she closed her eyes, it was not regret any longer but a sensation of abundant peace that washed over her. She thought of her entry into this world, the *harami* child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian.

A mother. A person of consequence at last. No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way.

Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 361)

By killing her tyrant husband, she proves her ability and strength. Furthermore, becoming the mother of Laila, she feels the utmost happiness and respect in her life. Her plights come to an end. Though Mariam dies, her sacrifice writes a new saga of unconditional love and affection that makes her immortal.

3.3. The Nature of Parenthood in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

In Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Amir and Mariam show their undefeatable spirit to perform their responsibility to Sohrab and Laila. Both protagonists reveal their innate affections towards the orphan boy and girl; dare to fight against their psychological as well as societal prejudices. In both of the novels, Amir and Mariam go through several upheavals that spirited them in their quests for self-actualization.

3.3.1. A Sense of Hollowness

Amir and Mariam dream to have a pretty life full of familial love and affection. Unfortunately, they both have a cold relationship with their fathers. During Amir’s birth, his mother died, that is why he desperately wants to get Baba’s love.

Hassan, Baba's illegitimate son comes between them and Baba shows more concern for Hassan. Baba's lack of attention and affection creates a sense of hollowness in his heart. In the same way, Mariam is her father's illegitimate daughter who wants to get proper love and recognition from her father. To achieve her father's concern Mariam leaves her mother alone which leads her mother to commit suicide. Father's rejection and mother's death create a sense of emptiness in her mind. Both protagonists consider themselves responsible for the death of their mothers. This sense of guilt and hollowness leads them to search for the warmth of human love and affection.

3.3.2. The Way of Maturity

Amir and Mariam fail to be an ideal son or daughter, this inability leads them to prove their potentiality. Later on, they endeavour to perform the role of parents by taking the responsibility of Sohrab and Laila. Amir and Mariam do everything for Sohrab and Laila, even they are ready to sacrifice their lives for them. Both characters undergo a process of transformation that transfers them into mature human beings.

3.3.3. The Fulfillment of Desires

Amir and Mariam begin their life with the title of the selfish son or illegitimate *harami* but end their life with the recognition of a devoted father or mother. Throughout their lives, they struggle to gain belongingness. Sohrab and Laila provide them such feelings; inspire them to realize their innate goodness. Their sense of parenthood overshadows their sense of hollowness, ends all the plights in their life. Being the parents of Sohrab and Laila, they find the expected happiness in life. They successfully form their identity and prove themselves as a father and mother who can fight against all the odds for the sake of their child.

4. Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represent the saga of two individuals who quest for belonging somewhere and creating identity. Their plights in life culminate when they turn themselves into parents by sacrificing themselves for the goodness of humanity. Performing the role of a father or mother, Amir and Mariam ultimately prove that biological connection is not always mandatory to be a father or mother. Parenthood is more than this, it is a kind of affection and feeling connected to the core of the heart. Hosseini's protagonists are strongly driven by these senses of parenthood that make them understand the value of the human bond. The bonds between Amir-Sohrab and Mariam-Laila offer a different model to resolve the conflicts prevalent in their life. Thus, their bonds excel the mere blood relationship.

The Kite Runner and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are not only stories of war, violence, loss, and betrayal rather inspiring stories of rebirth. Hosseini's protagonists Amir and Mariam are resuscitated by achieving their identity as a father and mother. They show their affections towards Sohrab and Laila and face unbounded sufferings to protect them. Eventually, they deconstruct the traditional idea of parenthood—of biological connection to be a father and mother. This study will point towards a new angle to understand parenthood and the essential strength of the human relationship that can overpower all difficulties.

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