

Chapter Five

Thematic Representation in Film

Celluloid is a great medium to express one's ideas and the opinions even without being didactic. Khaled Hosseini's novels which are suitable for silver screen since he has sketched the stories in a visually impressive way have been a tremendous hit with the people of tinsel. Hence Hollywood has taken *The Kite Runner* to be made into a movie. There were also talks about the second novel of Khaled Hosseini *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to be made into a movie, but due to some reasons the project got stalled. However *The Kite Runner* which became a movie brought the problems of Afghanistan to the fore. The elements of family being broken to pieces due to various factors are shown poignantly in the movie.

5.1 *The Kite Runner*: On Silver Screen

“The film tells you the story of two boys...whose life are turned upside down by the war, chaos, as well as personal misdeed. But as much as this film is about family and friendship, it is also a testament to the power of the written word, and how it can transform lives. Today Afghanistan is a country at crossroads. There is extreme poverty and hardship, but there is also hope for the people. Much of that hope rests with the work of non-governmental organizations who are helping with humanitarian aid, education, literacy initiatives and job training. . .” (Hosseini, Khaled. Introduction to the movie *The Kite Runner*. prod. Dream

Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The desire to help Afghanistan out of its slumber motivated Khaled Hosseini to write the novel *The Kite Runner*. The writer of this extraordinary novel wanted the world, which held nothing but hatred towards Afghanistan, to see the real picture of his land. His help in turning the novel into a movie has made a tremendous contribution towards this cause. The film leaves a deep impact on the psyche of the audience because they witness the truthful representation of the atrocities that the weaker population of Afghanistan underwent, just the way they unfold in the real world. *The Kite Runner* is a critically acclaimed movie, one that has been applauded by prominent figures of film industry as well as people who have been associated with organisations working in Afghanistan, for its truthful representation of the life in the troubled lands. The themes of family, friendship, loyalty and courage under fire are the core subjects which have been dealt with utmost care and great attention to detail in the film *The Kite Runner*.

“A good review from the critic is just another stay of execution”

Hoffman, Justin. <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/critics>)

For any filmmaker or a writer, a critic’s verdict is very crucial for the piece of art that is created. Any work of art meets both, prejudice against it and favorable appreciation. It is the fate of every piece of work in the creative world. Critic’s opinion does play an important role in the life of an art work. It is only time that determines whether a piece of art will withstand the onslaught of time. One can bring in numerous examples to quote various works that have stood the litmus test of time. Same can be said of Khaled Hosseini’s bestselling

novel *The Kite Runner*. It has been in talk ever since it was published and in 2003 it was even adapted to the big screen as a movie of the same name. It has been a hit with the people. A whole lot of critics do call this movie as a ‘pure story’ which has held the interest of the audience without any big stars in it. But there are few others too who think it to be an attempt to cash on the sorrows of a country which has been brought into the public glare because of the problems few had created to the mankind who belonged or took refuge in that land.

In view of this dissertation, The film *The Kite Runner* has succeeded in showing life of the common man who lived through the troubled times of Afghanistan. For all those who were far removed from the kind of life Afghans were forced upon, it might appear to be an attempt to cash in on by showing the harrowing scenes, but what the critics are oblivious to, is, that was exactly the way life unfolded day in and day out to innumerable Afghans in their own country ridden with wars. In fact one must appreciate the strength of all the artists who belonged to Afghanistan yet did take part in the project. The cast of the film is as follows:

Khalid Abdalla as Amir Qadiri
Zakeria Ebrahimi as young Amir
Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada as young Hassan
Homayun Ershadi as the Agha Sahib (Baba)
Atossa Leoni as Soraya
Shaun Toub as Rahim Khan
Said Taghmaoui as Farid
Abdul Salaam Yusoufzai as Aseef
Elham Ehsan as young Aseef
M. Ali Hassan as Sohrab

Mehmoona Ghezal as Jamila Taheri

Qadir Farookh as General Taheri

Khaled Hosseini (cameo) as doctor in the park

Camilo Cuervo as a Taliban soldier

(Titles of the movie *The Kite Runner*, prod. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The best thing about *The Kite Runner* is that the film has not deviated much from the novel. Unlike most of the Hollywood films based on a literary work, *The Kite Runner* stays true to the script - the novel in this case. It is just about the same depiction on screen as that of the novel. David Benioff, who is the screenplay writer, has kept his scenes very authentic to the novel. David Benioff is a well-known screenplay writer who has also penned the dialogues of much acclaimed movies like *Game of Thrones*, *X-Men Origins Wolverine*, and *25th Hour*. Talking about his experiences in dealing with the screenplay for *The Kite Runner* David Benioff has said:

“There are many wonderful scenes in the book, but in the screenplay, it ended up making the structure a bit lopsided, because if we spent a lot of time here only 10 minutes left for the part of America and we will not be left with time. Hence I had to cut a number of scenes which I liked. (David, Benioff. *The Kite Runner*, Dir. Marc Forster, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

In fact one who sees the movie after reading the novel feels that many of the chapters are not brought on the screen but does not find any new thing being added into it. It is obvious that the cuts have been made to fit the film into the

time slot of commercial movies, but adding new dramatics and characters is what ruins the script. Luckily, such was not the case with *The Kite Runner*. David Benioff has been at times brutal in cutting many scenes from the novel, but he gives credit to Khaled Hosseini for being accommodative and for not being nose-y about the deletion of scenes. David Benioff says:

It is really tricky to adapt someone else's novel to screen as it means you are taking someone else's baby and giving it a plastic surgery. Khaled was incredibly cooperative and he was always enthusiastic. He knew that great changes have to be made about the book and he gave that freedom to me. He was a great asset. He gave me insights into the culture and the traditions and so on. (Ibid)

Marc Forster's direction is crisp to the extent that, though the film is 2 hours and 8 minutes, a relatively lengthy view, audience is kept wanting more from the film. Most of them being natives, the actors have played their roles with ease. Marc Forster has succeeded in bringing a reader's vision on to the screen with precision as he has done with his other films *Monster's Ball*, *Finding Neverland*, *Stay* and *Stranger than Fiction*. Robert Ebert, in his review about *The Kite Runner* says,

This is a magnificent film by Marc Forster, now 38... but *The Kite Runner* equals *Monster's Ball* in its emotional impact. Like *House of Sand and Fog* and *Man Push Cart*, it helps us to understand that the newcomers among us come from somewhere and are somebody." (Ebert, Roger. 3rd December 2007
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-kite-runner-2007>)

The Kite Runner was released in December 2007. The original soundtrack has played a prominent role in bringing the desired effect in the movie. The Background score is rendered by Alberto Iglesias. Many scenes get their intended depth because of the music in the background – the scene where the two boys are flying kites, how Hassan runs to get the fallen kite, the stoning scene and the final fight between the Talib Aseef and grown up Amir are but a few examples of exemplary music which brings in great impact on the intellect of the audience as the score is synonymous to the mood on screen. The music has a local Afghani flavour to it. A lot of research has gone into bringing very effective soundtracks to the movie. Even the artists who play at Baba's party thrown on Amir's birthday and the song selected for Amir's wedding with Soraya were deeply researched. Being an Afghan by birth and having been brought up there during his formative years, Khaled Hosseini has an insight into the country that was his. Talking about these things and what and how Afghanistan was as he knew it, Khaled Hosseini says:

Ahmad Zahir was the Afghan-Elvis. He was, probably, and still is, the most popular singer in Afghanistan. He was killed under kind of mysterious circumstances in the late '70s. but he was very popular when I was growing up, he kind of changed Afghan's music and brought in the electric guitar, and the drums, and the bass, and that moved it beyond the tabla and the harmonium. Actual Ahmad Zahir's son was employed to sing at the party in the film. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*, Dir. Marc Forster, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Out of 18 compositions of Ahmad Zahir, a happy festive track was selected by Marc to be exactly opposite of the scene that had happened just before that. The party scene comes just after young Amir witnesses a goat being slaughtered. Marc Forster says it serves the imagery of something being slaughtered for the superficial pleasures in the human world. This comes after the pivotal scene of the movie where Hassan is violated by the neighborhood bullies. Soon after this incidence it is party time as Baba wants to throw a party on Amir's birthday and also because he has won the Kite Tournament. The paradox of life strikes hard when the music suddenly changes to a happy note. There is a beautiful song, a peppy Afghan number at the time of Amir's wedding. It was also chosen after a lot of research by Marc Forster's team. Thus music has enhanced the outcome and leaves the audience with a lingering sense of melancholy.

The film is produced by William Horberg, Walter F. Parkes, Rebecca Yeldham and E. Bennett Walsh under the production companies Participant Production, Sidney Kimmel, Entertainment Parkes+MacDonald and Neal Street Production. The locale chosen for the shooting of the movie was South-West part of China. So the cinematographer had a great responsibility to accomplish as it was he who had to ensure that every shot and every image that came across the lens was perfect. Roberto Schaefer, as the cinematographer of the film did an astounding job in his part of the movie making. Every shot seems a natural progression of the previous one ensuring zero fumbles. The movie is edited by Matt Chesse. The crisp editing never gives a moment of respite to the audience. Thus Marc Forster's movie *The Kite Runner* has succeeded with general positive ratings, earning a 65% "fresh" rating on Rotten Tomatoes, based on 165 reviews. ("*The Kite Runner*- Rotten Tomatoes" Rotten Tomatoes.

Downloaded on 12th June, 2017). On Metacritic, the film has an average score of 61 out of 100, based on 34 reviews. It can be said that the movie has a fairly good review. Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, who is the most important critic of the movie has named it as the 5th best film of the year 2007 (Roger Ebert. “The year’s ten best films and other shenanigans” *Chicago Sun-Times*. Downloaded on 12th June, 2017)

Amir’s Baba’s (Houmayun Ershadi) household is a place of intellectuals. He is a man who detests Communists and Mullahs alike. He is a free spirited individual who has a deep desire to help the underprivileged. In fact Rahim Khan-a friend of Baba, who is a constant visitor to this house is a better intellectual because he sees the discord between his friend Agha Saab and his son Amir in its budding stage and tries to reason out with his friend that children cannot all be the same and that he shall not judge his son in comparison with others. Baba hates Amir’s penchant with pen. He hates it when Amir wants to show him a story he has penned. Baba is a man of action rather than words in black and white. He favours Hassan’s valour over Amir’s love for books. This simmering conflict between Baba and Amir makes Amir determined to do something to make his Baba proud. This becomes a major reason for Amir to hate Hassan because Baba likes Hassan’s go-getter attitude which Amir lacks. In a scene where Baba and Rahim Khan are sitting in the drawing room, Baba expresses his concern about how he does not like this trait of Amir when he lies about Hassan. Amir overhears this conversation and derives that his Baba does not love him. The seed of discontent is sown in the mind of Amir as he thinks Baba loves Hassan more than his own son. In a very touching scene Amir confides in Rahim Khan his belief that his Baba hates him because he is the reason of his mother’s death as she died in the child birth. The

scene is picturised in Dari – a Farsi dialect widely used in Afghanistan. Use of Dari gives an authentic depth to the scene. Amir really likes Hassan but does maintain a distance with him. He plays with him. But never calls him a friend. In the novel Khaled Hosseini has used couple of pages to explain how Amir considers Hassan a lesser mortal but in the movie David Benioff's screenplay and Marc Forster's crisp direction have, in very few scenes, establish this reality of Amir. When they are confronted by a neighbourhood bully Aseef while roaming around hand in hand, all that Amir can muster say is, "We have not troubled you." He has no spine to come to Hassan's rescue when his friend is called names. Amir loves his friend Hassan but at times he does like to show him down for the latter is a lesser being and an illiterate. Marc Forster has managed to showcase all these feelings through the characters at his disposal.

Eventually, the family gets broken because Baba does not understand what his son Amir actually is. Baba's ignorance is Baba's curse. He does not understand that because of his over-rated impetus on physical display of valour, his own son was drifting away from him. This becomes a catalyst in the fire making things go bad to worse between Amir and Hassan.

From the perspective of the director, two friends Amir and Hassan live in a blissful world untouched by demons of future. The life around them moves on swiftly but in its own rhythm. Amir is the son of an established businessman and Hassan is the son of his servant who lives in the outhouse of Amir's expansive mansion. This difference in their social status does not stop the two young boys from having innocent fun of childhood. They go to watch movies together, play in their favourite place (under a pomegranate tree in a cemetery) near their house and fly kites together. It is the kite flying that bonds them more dearly than anything else. Hassan is a master of kites, knowing every time

where and when a severed kite would land. The film very strongly projects Hassan as a person who is all giving and sacrificing for the sake of his friend. He is so full of love and deep seated knowledge of sorrow that he cannot be hated for what he is. The boy in his childishness too seems to be aware and accepting of his fate with resigned disinterest. He plays pranks only to appease Amir, not for his own satisfaction which usually is the hallmark of a child. There is a scene in the movie where a dog of the neighbours is sleeping and Amir wants Hassan to shoo the dog away from that place. Hassan does not want to do it, but since Amir insists on doing it Hassan shoos the dog away using his sling shot. The movie depicts the lives of these two boys in a manner very faithful to the novel. It seems it is Hassan's deep seated reverence towards Baba and love towards Amir that holds their family together. He leaves no stone unturned to keep Amir happy. He listens to the stories narrated by Amir, completes every chore in the house so that he can go and be a company to Amir as he comes from the school. Thus his faithful togetherness is the thing which brings smiles to Amir's face. But Amir is not as faithful to his friend as Hassan. Playing the role of Hassan, Ahmad Khan Mahmudzada excels the list of all the actors. His innocence and the convincing way of depicting the feelings of a young boy are unmatched. He hates to be called names but can take anything for the sake of his friend Amir. He sacrifices himself to Aseef to keep Amir's prize kite intact. He does not barter his safety with the kite. When Amir ultimately wins the kite tournament, Amir tells Hassan to run for his kite and Hassan in turn tells him "Anything for you a thousand times." To be true to his words, he runs for Amir's prize kite, but the neighbourhood bully Aseef, played brilliantly by Elham Ehsan, comes bargaining for the kite. He demands either the kite or Hassan's honour. Hassan fights back, but in vain. The anguish, the agony and the pride portrayed by young Hassan is marvellous. His effort to free

himself from the clutches of the tormentors goes in vain and he falls prey, but he does not surrender Amir's kite. If he had given away the kite he would have bartered his honour and freedom. Instead he fights. The act of valour and innocent dignity are portrayed in one of the best picturisations ever in this scene by the film makers.

Amir's character, according to Marc Forster, is a markedly fascinating and extremely intriguing one. It is not black or white. It has all shades of grey. He can blame, lie and connive, but at the same time he also knows that he is wrong. Talking about his character Amir, Khaled Hosseini has the following things to say.

“Very very briefly I entertained the idea of this novel from the view point of Hassan and I immediately saw that Hassan is entirely a different character. Whereas Amir was a shifting character. He was somebody who was capable of tenderness but also capable of doing really atrocious things, and who is capable of betraying and lying, conniving, but never without being aware of what he is doing. He is not aloof of his failings and his own shortcomings he wears it on sleeve. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Amir is someone who does not know how to handle his darker feelings. He is not strong enough to oppose misdeeds taking place in front of his eyes knowing very well the repercussions of his silence. He is a boy who becomes fidgety when faced with problem.

In yet another important scene in the film, Baba's admiration for Hassan is laid out for the viewer. Baba on Hassan's birthday, asks Hassan to sit in the front seat of the car making Amir to get down from his seat. They go to a kite store as Baba gifts Hassan with a kite. While Baba drives them to the kite shop, the Kabul visible on the screen for viewer is the life which existed before Afghanistan became puppet of various rulers and bore the brunt of inevitable civil war along with that. Talking about the Kabul that he lived in before leaving his country Khaled Hosseini says:

“What is great about the scene is we see the heterogeneity of the population. You have a woman in a full Burka, then you have a woman just walking in a hijab, you have a hippie...then you have just people in semi-Western clothes, very much the way it was in the '70s.” (Ibid)

Baba in his appreciation and enthusiasm to please Hassan forgets that he is not taking Amir into confidence and he is not making Amir party to Hassan's joy. Amazingly Hassan even in his joy, does not forget Amir. He picks up a kite so that Amir can fly it on the day of tournament. He has no joy unless Amir is a part of it. Amir has a patronizing feeling towards Hassan, whereas Hassan has nothing but love for Amir. Baba does not see this difference. He does not sense this rift. This paves way for the breaking up of a beautiful family. It disturbs the family's balance and a family well established and not short of means and reasons to be happy gets diffused.

Another important character of this beautiful film is Aseef. Aseef hates Hassan vehemently as the latter is a Hazara. He rapes Hassan on the very day which both Amir and Hassan had marked to celebrate Amir's victory of in the

kite tournament. This deep rooted ethnic divide is portrayed boldly in the film as the cause for the disruption of its characters. Even though both Amir and Hassan are happy in their own world, the world around them cannot digest this blissful co-existence of the two innocent souls. Aseef who is a representative of that repressing world robs the duo of their love. It is the day of reckoning for Amir. It is the day he had long waited for. All through his days he had waited to get a word of appreciation from his father. He had grown feeling inferior to everything that Hassan was capable of and wanted to prove himself to his father by accomplishing something on his own. The Kite tournament scene has a great story behind it. It was shot in the city of Kashgar in western China with more than 350 extras working for the scene and the entire city's business being paused for three days to shoot the sequence. It is nine hours' drive from Beijing to Kashgar and a lot of effort went into making this scene come alive on the screen. Khaled Hosseini has an interesting story to narrate about what had happened on the day when they were shooting the scene in Kashgar. He says:

The shooting of kite tournament was a big thing. It took three days to shoot the scene. 350 businesses were closed and 350 extras were brought on the set. It was a kind of organized chaos. And I was standing on the side line one day, and one of these assistant directors walked by and he saw me, and he goes, "Man, who is the 'bleep' who wrote this scene?" because it's actually two pages in the novel, but took so much work to reproduce it. (Ibid)

It was a tremendous effort on the part of entire team of *The Kite Runner* to shoot this particular scene. Talking about the times when they used to fly the kites back in Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini says:

Kites were a big, big part of my upbringing as a kid in Kabul. We all flew kites, we all played in these neighborhood tournaments. A couple of my cousins were actually really, really good. It was really these kites that got the whole story and the novel going. I saw a story on the television about the Taliban; they had banned this game that is there in the movie. So hearing that story, I remembered my own childhood and I sat down and wrote this short story called *The Kite Runner*, and that eventually was the basis for the novel...The title was the first thing that came. The title came before everything else. (Ibid)

The day Amir wins the Kite Tournament is the day of reckoning. Marc Forster has depicted the scene in such a way that it violently evokes a feeling of hatred towards everything that is wrong. A small boy's modesty is outraged as the one he considers to be his best friend peeps from hiding, like a scared pigeon, too confused even to fly away. Amir wins the tournament but loses his friend.

Khaled Hosseini in an interview has said:

"Both the short story and the novel were about 'the scene', one pivotal moment, in somebody's life that kind of alters how they see themselves, how they see the world, and alters in some ways not only the course of their own life, but the course of a number of other people's lives. And so the book really is kind of a story that's woven around that incident, and all the ripples from that incident in this character's life. (Ibid)

As said by Khaled Hosseini, the act of this character, Amir, alters the course of so many lives. Hassan's life, Ali's life, Amir's father's life, Rahim Khan's life and Amir's own life get disturbed because Amir could not gather courage to stand for his helpless friend who lost so much for the sake of his friendship.

Talking about why the character of Amir becomes so endearing to all, Marc Forster has said at length about the most basic human quality of Amir.

“What I love about it is that we all sometimes didn't have the courage to stand up and prohibit something.” (Forster, Marc. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Hassan is someone who finds joy in making Amir happy, but Amir finds his joys secretly without any trace of Hassan in it. He does tell Hassan that he is happy only to patronize him and not because he wants Hassan to be happy. But Amir is very human. He could be almost anyone around the viewer. His qualities are more universal and omnipresent. Talking about how people are relating to Amir's character, Khaled Hosseini has said:

The Kite Runner is being read in many high schools, one of the most common comments I get from the kids is, “I try to put myself in the shoes of this kid (Amir) wondering if I would step in and defend my friend against these three much bigger bullies.” “There's that coward and there's the hero in all of us, and I think part of the reason why this character Amir has appeal to readers is that he's flawed in very recognizably human ways, and we see ourselves in this boy and in the man that he becomes. We see our

own shortcomings, and our own potential, our own possibilities. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Amir loses Hassan because he cannot muster the strength to defend his friend from the bullies. He becomes a mute spectator to the harrowing scene that unfolds in front of him in a closed and deserted alley. He remains nothing but a Peeping Tom in the alley throughout a major part of his life because he never goes back to undo the mistake that he had committed. This scene serves as the breaking point in the film. A happy family which knew only to love gets disintegrated. Amir starts to dread the presence of Hassan. Hassan's presence keeps reminding him of his own cowardice. He can no longer be with Hassan. He wants Hassan to loathe him for what he was. He wants Hassan to berate him and fight with him for being such a milksop, but Hassan does none of it. Instead he starts to treat Amir as if he is the one who is wronged and it is Amir who needs care and attention. This is the time in film where Amir wants to push Hassan away. So he tries to do it in his own way. He takes Hassan to the pomegranate tree and provokes him into hitting him. But when Hassan does nothing he beats Hassan with ripe pomegranates. A bewildered Hassan who does not understand why Amir is angry takes a pomegranate and smashes it on his own face and asks Amir whether he is happy about it. Thus Amir realizes that Hassan will not hate him for ever so he devices a plan to push Hassan away from his house. He knows that his Baba hates dishonesty; therefore he plants some money and a watch under Hassan's pillow and tells his Baba that he suspects Hassan has stolen his belongings. Hassan, after getting to know the accusation, understands his friend's predicament and does not plead his

innocence. The scene as captured in the movie and the performances of all the four characters of this scene is marvelous. Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada as young Hassan, Zakeria Ebrahimi as young Amir, Homayun Ershadi as the Agha Sahib (Baba) and Ali have brought the right kind of anguish into the scene. It is a scene which gets etched into the mind of the viewer forever. Ahmad Khan Mohmidzada as young Hassan has brought in the right blend of horror and love in the scene where his family dissolves. Young Amir has a chance to come clean of the tragedy that is eating into their lives. Hassan knows the reason for Amir's changed behavior. Ali, Hassan's father, knows that Amir is privy to cause of the ugly separation of loving souls, that only he can fix. But Ali is a proud father who does not want to stay in the house that labelled his son to be a thief. He deserts the house where he had stayed all his life to go to Hazarzat, a Hazara dominated area. The delicate structure of relationship of the residents of the house gets rocked and life is thrown in a swirl of rogue waves. Amir has to carry the burden of guilt all through his life. One feels outraged because Amir lacks the guts to do what is right. He does not come forward to accept his own shortcoming. He maintains his accusation and proves Hassan guilty. Whereas Hassan only sacrifices his own self to keep Amir unhurt. Talking about how Amir destroys a beautiful bond because he is not deserving of all the good that is showered on him, Marc Forster says:

“It's about the destructive power of guilt, and how, if it's not handled properly, it just becomes this thing that eats at you, and it becomes a very destructive force. After this Amir, in the novel decides to take things in the hand and decides on how he's going to rid of Hassan. But that incident of the alley has a tremendous effect on the boy and essentially he realizes that he loves Hassan, but he

can't live with him anymore because Hassan is the living, walking, breathing reminder of Amir's own shortcomings, his own failings as a person, and he just can't bear to see him anymore. So he turns this very negative feeling outwards, and lashes out at Hassan, because it is easy. (Forster, Marc. *The Kite Runner*, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Amir's misery at dealing with goodness in his life fails him and he victimizes Hassan for his incompetency. The family of Agha Sahib once broken thus never gets joined ever in his lifetime. Even though Amir as a grown up tries to make amends to the wrongs in the later stage of life, but by that time Baba and Hassan are dead. The two people who meant the most to him are gone. How much ever Amir tries to bring that innocent smile which was part of his life as child, he can never do that ever again.

The child artists have played their roles to perfection. However this film also had to face the hate from the hate mongers. There was a threat to the lives of the child artists in Afghanistan, their own country. In order to deal with this threat to its artists; the film's release was delayed. The child artists had a threat to their lives, as they belonged to Afghanistan - especially Ahmad Khan Mohmidzada who played the role of Hassan for being a part of the rape scene. The artists believed themselves to be privileged to have made this film but they and their family members had to face danger. Ahmad Khan Mohmidzada is found saying:

“I want to continue making films and be an actor but the rape scene upset me because my friends will watch it and I won't be able

to go outside any more. They will think I was raped” (“*Kite Runner’ Boys Fear Afghan Backlash*” *RAWA News*. January 14, 2007 Downloaded on 13th June, 2017)

Though the scene was brought to life using body double and was depicted in less harrowing a fashion without any nudity. (“*Inside ‘The Kite Runner’ Rape Scene*” *Defamer*. October 5, 2007 Downloaded on 14th June, 2017)

The *Daily Telegraph* reported:

“...there were also the fear of intertribal reprisals, as Hassan was a Hazara and the boys who bullied him were Pashtun.” (“*The Kite Runner: Real-Life Drama that Forced Four Child Stars into Exile*” *Daily Telegraph*, 18th December, 2007)

The producers Paramount relocated the three child actors playing Amir, Hassan and Sohrab along with another minor child artist who played the role of Omar, to United Arab Emirates. (“*Life in the Raw*” *The Age*. Melbourne. January 6, 2008. Downloaded on 13th June, 2017)

The locale chosen for the film is the rugged south-western part of China. Marc Forster chose to shoot his movie in China because of the troubles Afghanistan was reeling under. Talking about how he feels about the matter that the child artists had to face threat, Khaled Hosseini went on to say to Jeremy Kay of *The Telegraph*:

“To me it is a positive story and yet I am a little irked when people call it a film about sexual privation. It’s about friendship and honour and guilt and violence, and this has been doubly upsetting

because I got to know these kids during filming. They are beautiful and vibrant people. I feel a great weight has been lifted off my chest now that they are outside Afghanistan and in good spirits. I'm looking forward to the world applauding them.” (Khaled Hosseini-the author of the novel *The Kite Runner* to Jeremy Kay. The Telegraph. *The Kite Runner: Real-Life Drama that Forced Four Child Stars into Exile*. 18th Dec, 2007)

Marc Forster could never have shot the movie in Afghanistan. The similarity of landscape of this part of China with Afghanistan proved to be a blessing. In many shots the landscape looks very drab but one can say that it has made justice as scenes are meant to be of Afghanistan. The story of the film moves in the similar track with the novel. Only couple of details which are there in the novel are omitted here in the movie and some things like why Amir's Baba who is such an upright man suddenly leaves his land and decides to take refuge in America remains a mystery in novel but Marc Forster and David Benioff make it clear in the film that Baba who was a wealthy businessman fears himself and his son becoming target to the invading Communist Russians. There is a scene to this effect where Baba (Homayoun Ershadi) tells Rahim Khan (Shaun Toib) that everybody in Afghanistan knows what he thinks of Communists and they would not spare him if he is around. Fearing the safety of his son he leaves Afghanistan in haste. In another scene when Baba is seen saying:

"Mullahs want to rule our souls and communists say we do not have any.” (*The Kite Runner*, Dir. Marc Forster, Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

By saying this Baba makes it obvious that he neither likes the religious preachers nor the communists. He does not believe in any of the ideologies of these two extremes. All he believes is one should not lie, because a lie robs people off their right. He gives the same teaching to Amir as well. This ideology of his is what he knows would bring trouble to him some day. So he decides to leave everything behind in the hands of his trusted friend Rahim Khan and leave the country.

On the way to be smuggled out to Pakistan from Afghanistan the truck in which Amir and Baba are travelling gets stopped by an inebriated Russian policeman. As the policeman checks the truck, he wants to get to spend half an hour with a woman who is there in the truck. There are many men in the truck, but none rise to the occasion. It is only Baba who rises against the policeman, ready to be killed by him in the process than giving her away to him. This scene is very symbolic. Amir intervenes to stop his Baba for he fears the policeman might kill him. But Baba snaps at him for being a coward and asks him whether he has not taught him anything at all. In reality, Amir has not learnt anything of Baba's teachings. He in fact sacrificed his best buddy for the fear of getting hurt. Hassan was in a way treated as a sacrificial goat at the hands of Amir. On the day of his birthday Amir sees a lamb being slaughtered by the butcher. This is quite symbolic of Amir himself becoming a butcher in Hassan's case where he mercilessly cuts off all the ties between him and Hassan and does not hesitate to send him away from home where Ali-Hassan's father had lived for Forty long years. Expressing his views about the scene where Amir remains quiet while Ali decides to leave the house Khaled Hosseini has said in an interview:

There are a lot of things that are happening in this scene under the surface. Hassan knows what has happened, and that Ali, his father knows what has happened, that Amir knows what he's done. And here's the moment where you're rooting for Amir to step in. but he's being passive in this scene, and watching this terrible thing happen is infuriating. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Baba fighting the odds on the way, a man who always went around in his Mustang, lowers himself down in a tanker. He hides in a tanker to cross the border to Pakistan. Amir who is there with his father tells him that he cannot breathe as the air is too stuffy, Baba tells him to remember some poem that he had memorized while in school. Amir asks him whether he can recite a poem to which Baba asks him to do so. David Benioff has chosen a beautiful poem by Rumi for this scene. In the novel there is a suggestion by Khaled Hosseini that he recites Rumi, but the beautiful poem selected by the screenplay writer is a masterstroke. There is place transition and time lapse that happen in the movie as Amir recites this poem in the truck. The calmness of Afghan hilly region gets suddenly transformed into the bustling city of California. The boy Zakeria Ebrahimi-Amir in the film, has very endearingly recited the poem of Rumi.

If we come to sleep,
We are His drowsy ones!
And if we come to wake,
We are in His hands.
If we come to weeping,
We are His cloud full of raindrops!

And if we come to laughing,
We are His lightening in that moment.

If we come to anger and battle,
It is the reflection of His wrath!

And if we come to peace and pardon
It is the reflection of His love.

Who are we in this complicated world?

(Jala-ad-Din-Muhammad-Rumi, *The Kite Runner*, Dir. Marc Forster, Perf. Dream Works SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The flash back of adult Amir ends here in the movie. Rahim Khan's call from Pakistan which says, "There's a way to be good again," puts Amir into a dilemma of going to Pakistan in haste. Soraya-Amir's wife does not understand why he is in haste. She tells him that he has to go on the book tour they got their hands on as Amir has become a writer. Amir tells her without Rahim Khan there would have been no book. Thus the childhood of Amir, which was very blissful but for the mistakes he himself commits, comes to an end.

Unlike many other book inspired films, *The Kite Runner* has done complete justice to the novel. It doesn't tamper with the story lines or the characters. The essence of the book is in place. Though the film negotiates many sad turns, the change of heart of Amir toward the end delivers a much needed respite to the heart-broken viewer and fills the screen with hope. All in all, both formats of *The Kite Runner* are equally good to serve the ones favouring either of them.

“There’s a way to be good again,” is the firm belief and philosophy of Rahim Khan. The movie though starts with a scene of some kids flying kite in California, soon establishes that Amir who is the protagonist of the novel has become a writer whose book is about to be published. He gets a call from Pakistan. The caller turns out to be his father’s friend – Rahim Khan. He asks Amir to come to Pakistan. He does not explain why he wants Amir back in Pakistan, but the call surely flips a switch which floods Amir with memories of his childhood, every memory rushing back to him like an avalanche. Memories which were buried deep in his subconscious start to surface again. He suddenly transforms into the boy who made his friend Hassan to pelt stones at an innocent dog, the boy who wrote ‘Amir and Hassan are the Sultans of Kabul,’ the boy who won a kite tournament and ultimately the boy who sacrificed his own friend for the fear of being bullied by hooligans. In his early years, Amir is a boy whose own cowardice clings on to him like gum under the boot. His own incompetency makes him hate Hassan and his proximity. Amir plants his watch and cash under Hassan’s pillow to prove Hassan of as a thief in front of everyone that mattered to him, especially Baba. Hassan who understands about Amir’s ill will towards himself does not plead guilty in front of Baba. Amir, as an adult, tries to repair the damage that was done by him as a boy. What he doesn’t understand is that some damages are permanent. Scars and wounds given by life never heal. They, in some circumstances may be forgotten but they never completely heal and one can never come clean of the blood from those cuts. The memories of tragedies that strike an individual or family keep coming back with vengeance to rob the happiness off one’s life. So here in this film too, Amir, who had made a sort of arrangement with his life has to face the ghost of his cowardice once again at a time when he wants to be busy in a more exalted way in his professional life. A call makes him to revisit his past. He does not

know yet why Rahim Khan has called. But instantly he knows it is because of his own guilt that Rahim Khan wants him to retrace his steps and undo the mistake he has done.

A poignant scene unfolds when Amir and his Baba flee Afghanistan. When Baba (Homayoun Ershadi) has to leave Afghanistan due to the ongoing attack of the Russians, one can feel the pain writ large on his face for the situation because he has to leave his house in his friend's custody. He leaves the house in haste with his son, but is ready to lay his life to save the honour of a lady co-passenger. The horrible situation that they are in does not stop this proud Afghan from saving a woman from looming dishonour by an inebriated Russian officer. This is a telling remark on Baba for his valour, courage and righteousness.

Amir also recollects how he and his father struggled in America. The movie sets the tone of refugee crisis and the life of such refugees in America as there was an exodus of Afghans who had left their country and took refuge in America from early 1980's to till very recently. Khaled Hosseini, the author of the novel *The Kite Runner*, who himself was a refugee and lived through these problems, tells that one could meet many a great men of Afghanistan in the flea markets setup by Afghans all over America. Recollecting the problems faced by Afghan refugees in USA, the writer says:

Flea market actually is very much part of my own experience as an immigrant in the United States. That was back in the '80s at a flea market in San Jose, you would have entire aisles occupied by Afghans, who were buying junk from garage sales the day before, and then they would show up on Sunday, and wanted to sell it for a

small profit. And I remember we were with my father, and I would walk down the aisle and meet these Afghans that we knew from years before. Former Generals, professors, and doctors who would set up shops to sell, old sewing machines, tennis racquets. That encapsulated that Afghan community, in this little flea market. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. DreamWorks. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The depiction of disrupted, broken families trying to grope at any little help they stumble upon and trying to maintain human dignity is shown by Marc Forster in the film. The film is so much a commentary on how desperate humans would agree to anything to ensure the wellbeing of their families. There are certain human emotions displayed very subtly in the movie which were lacking in the novel. For example the scene where Baba appears for the first time after moving to America makes one feel sudden connect with the character because at one point or the other all of us have fallen from grace. As the scene opens, the viewer finds Baba working as a gas station manager. One day while manning the counter, he sees a customer get down from a *Mustang*- a luxury car. Baba used to drive the same car back in Afghanistan. His eyes linger on the car even while he is attending the customer. He asks the customer whether he is the owner of the *Mustang*. On his affirmation Baba says that it is a beautiful car. In that moment, one can read the agony on Homayoun Ershadi's face, agony of having lost the regal car which he used to drive with such pride and esteem. The scene is penetrating and touches the right chords. In an interview Khaled Hosseini has spoken about the scene where Baba looks at the *Mustang* that pulls up at the gas station where he is working:

The *Mustang* that pulls up at the gas station. Of course we saw Baba earlier with his *Mustang*. And it just shows this character's fall from the grace, in the very different circumstances of his life. It's a beautiful image. (Ibid)

Khaled Hosseini gives full credit to Marc Forster, the director of the movie and to the screenwriter David Benioff for bringing out the situation in such an emotional highlight on the screen. Baba misses his lost glory but life makes him agreeable to make amends with the drastic change in reality. They live in America but without the zest of the past which was there in Afghanistan. In the novel Khaled Hosseini has projected Baba as a man incapable of adjusting to the situations in America, but David Benioff's screenplay shows Baba as a person who is ready to mould himself to fit into the given circumstances. He accepts the reality and comes to terms with it. He also doubles himself up as a vendor in the flea market to earn few extra bucks. But the only adjustment he cannot make is, he cannot accept any Russian in his life as a friend not even as an acquaintance, how much ever friendly the Russian might turn out to be. He can never forgive Russia for making his beloved country Afghanistan get into all the turmoil that it had to due to the Russian invasion. There is a poignant scene in which Baba refuses to be treated by a Russian doctor and throws a tantrum for him being led to a Russian doctor by Amir. Back in Afghanistan he was an established and a respected businessman who never had to sweat his brow doing laborious work. He was a capitalist who got things done, always having a say in matters. To get a new lease of life in America, he had to make a lot of compromises. On the other hand Amir in his adulthood is depicted as someone totally different from the Amir of his younger days. The young Amir always hesitated to do what he believed in, but Amir as

an adult is stronger, proved by the way he deals with the difficult situations. He seems very natural, mature and at ease with the conditions that have posed themselves in front of him. Amir finishes his graduation. His Baba aspires for him to be a doctor. He does everything to support Amir in his education towards that goal, but Amir in America is a character way stronger than the one that was in Afghanistan. He confronts his father, telling him he wants to be a writer and that he has a gift to write stories and writing is his passion. Though not these many words are spoken in the movie, neat editing and crisp direction have made the words unspoken come very strongly to the audience.

Baba is a people's man and he loves to have a gathering around him. Whether in his native or in a foreign land, he gathers crowd around him. When Amir completes his graduation and is awarded his certificate, Baba throws a party instinctively to the bar mates who were present that day. Talking about this scene David Benioff says:

I like the scene where one sees Baba retaining his charisma and his power even in a foreign land. Baba is still the life of the party. (Benioff, David. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Another essential trait that is projected in the movie is that Hassan is never far removed from the memories of either Baba or Amir. Though they never speak of him, Baba does think of him in each of his happy times. In the party which he throws instinctively on Amir's graduation, he starts thinking of Hassan after he had downed a couple of drinks. He says to Amir that Hassan would have been really happy if he were present. That Baba remembers Hassan

on days like these is a reason enough for Amir to get irked. He cannot comprehend why his Baba should remember Hassan when the day is special because of Amir. Describing this scene, David Benioff says:

After Amir's graduation he remembers Hassan. It is important because Hassan can never leave Amir. He lingers on. As a ghost his presence is felt. He is always there. (Ibid)

A family which is broken, separated from the others, goes on surviving with a vacuum in its heart. That void never gets filled. The departed dear ones keep coming back in memories to make even happy times doleful. Hassan is such a memory, a ghost. He is a deep despondency in the lives of Amir and his Baba. One is surprised though that Baba should be remembering Hassan at this time. The scene hits the gut of the audience. An old man in his happy times remembers someone who seemed to be of no significance when he was with the family. Marc Forster has brought this poignant story on celluloid with much gusto. The actors also have played the roles very convincingly. There are a couple of heartbreaking scenes where the anguish of seeing a family getting wrecked to pieces and the pain of not being in a position to bring the home to its past glory have attracted the attention of this dissertation the most.

The pride, the anguish played by Baba is very heart-rending. The acting of Homayoun Ershadi has made the scene very plaintive.

Working from Khaled Hosseini's best seller, Forster and his screenwriter David Benioff have made a film that sidesteps the emotional disconnects we often feel when a story moves between past and present. This is all the same story, interlaced with the fabric of these lives. There is also a touching sequence as Amir and

his father, now older and ill, meet a once-powerful Afghan General and his daughter Soraya (Atossa Leoni). For Amir and Soraya, it is instant love, but protocol must be observed, and one of the movie's warmest scenes involves the two old men discussing the future of their children. I want to mention once again the eyes, indeed the whole face, of the actor Homaoun Ershadi, as Amir's father; here is a face so deeply good, it is difficult to imagine it reflecting unworthy feelings. (Ebert Roger. 3rd December 2007
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-kite-runner-2007>)

This scene explained by Roger Ebert is an iconic scene where one witnesses two elderly men, both very proud in their bearing and their past, anguished about losing the life as they knew it and the desire and the hope to regain it knowing completely well that it is impossible. The knowledge that the life they remember will never be theirs again. That life has been unfair to them and has made them inmates of a prison in the guise of a flea market makes it more poignant. Though they mention not much in the regular fashion of lamenting about the life they have lost, the very fact that these two gentlemen who once had a decorated status back in their own country, have to stand in the flea market where they have their stalls, that now they have very little as to call as their home makes it extremely heart-rending. They seem to be the relics of great family life that broke into pieces, huge chunks of that glorious past which cannot find an anchor. The only topic they can talk over is about their past. Talking about their present is too shameful for each of them. Especially Houmayoun Ershadi as Baba and Qadir Farookh as General Taheri have portrayed this pain in a stupendous manner. The pain, the shame and the never

say die attitude towards life are all together portrayed by both of these actors in an exquisite way.

Khaled Hosseini has his own story to recount about the refugee experience. He says he knows of men who held great positions in Afghanistan but are now subsisting on the penury they get by flea market and such other menial jobs in America. Talking about General Taheri's character Khaled Hosseini has said:

The General reminds me of entire generation of people like him in northern California, these kind of very elegant older men who have their own... the way they move, the way they speak. He is that man. Flea market actually is very much part of my own experience as an immigrant in the United States. That was back in the '80s at a flea market in San Jose, you would have entire aisles occupied by Afghans, who were buying junk from garage sales the day before, and then they would show up on Sunday, and wanted to sell it for a small profit. And I remember we were with my father, and I would walk down the aisle and meet these Afghans that we knew from years before. Former Generals, professors, and doctors who would set up shops to sell, old sewing machines, tennis racquets. That encapsulated that Afghan community, in this little flea market. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. DreamWorks. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

They are still proud of their lineage, but the life they are leading does not support them to be as aristocratic as they once were. But they cannot free

themselves from those memories. They seem to be the remnants of the past glory. Such is the condition of both Homayoun Ershadi and Qadir Farookh who play Baba and General Taheri in the movie respectively. Baba being a former businessman seems to have adapted to the ways of the present scenario that he is living in and have made amends. But upon gazing at General Taheri one gets the feeling that he is still caught up in the whirlpool of his past. Though he has setup a stall in the flea market, he never sits at the counter. He goes around the market meeting people from his land in his tweed three piece suit and talking Afghan politics to them. This shows how he still clings by nails on to his aristocratic ways. Since he was a decorated General in Afghanistan, he has that pride translate in his walk, in his speech or even the way he looks at others. Baba, though a proud Pashtun, does respond to the toll time takes on his pride and starts to mingle, without any apprehension, with people considered to be placed below his station in Afghanistan. Baba emerges as a fine businessman who is ready to take up any business for the survival with ease. But it is not so with General Taheri. Though he loves things that are Afghan, he would not talk to people below his accepted norms.

For Marc Forster, the way how human dignity in America is bestowed on all in spite of the work they are employed into or the standard of the life they can afford is something he marvels at. He says it is America's spirit of equality and honour of labor that acts as a great equalizer.

That is one of the things about America. You can be in a parking lot and then suddenly you meet a scientist from Russia or a professor from any kind of country in the world, who has been holding all sorts of Ph.Ds and titles, and are highly intelligent, suddenly they're doing very basic jobs. (Forster, Marc. *The Kite*

Runner. Perf. DreamWorks. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

This is one of the great qualities about life in America, but the people who had to make these adjustments are endlessly waiting for their past glory to revert, their past life to prevail once again. General Taheri is one such character. He waits for his country to become free so that he can go back and be a man of consequence and social bearing. What he does not realize or does not want to accept is that those who get the country free would not seek the ones who fled the country during her time of need when she was pleading with merciful eyes. They will look at them with disdain as they had not been the ones who took up arms against the enemy of motherland, whoever he may have been. Talking about General Taheri's character Khaled Hosseini has said:

A lot of them, especially the older generation had a difficult time adjusting and letting go of the past, and the General in the book, he has this watch that he keeps winding, and he keeps waiting for Afghanistan to become free, so he can go back. I know a lot of men like that. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. DreamWorks. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Though America gave him refuge and security, which no other country could offer, he considers her to be only a temporary home. For him only the things that are Afghan are acceptable. But it is the inevitable truth for him to be in America. The reality is inescapable, but he does satisfy his ego by being a way little frosty nosed about the mundane things and by becoming a little haughty at times about the things that are not in line with the Afghan culture

and tradition. When Amir wants to make friends with Soraya who is General Taheri's daughter, General Taheri gets annoyed at the young man's advances. Amir, on getting to know that Soraya has interest in reading literature, wants her opinion about his works and also to make friends with her. Hence he goes on to give her his collection of stories. General Taheri, making no effort to hide his displeasure, throws the loosely bound booklet in the dustbin, right in front of Amir. Marc Forster is of the view that:

It is very difficult to let go of the past, especially if you were used to a certain lifestyle and power, and suddenly, you have to start from scratch again. (Forster, Marc. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

In another scene where Amir (Khalid Abdalla) saunters to the stall of Soraya (Atossa Leoni) to have a talk with her and befriend her, does not get that chance as her father General Taheri (Qadir Farookh) stops Amir in his endeavour. He tells him in plain words that a young Afghan of good reputation should do something good rather than writing stories as everyone there was a story teller. It is a commentary on the kind of life they were all spending over there in America as refugees. It is also General Taheri's struggle not let his family break to pieces as he hardly appreciates the value of freedom as appreciated in America especially for the young boys and girls. One can feel the suppressed anguish of everyone in America about the lost glory of their lives back in Afghanistan.

General Taheri takes pride in his origin. He follows religiously the practices that are dictated by his culture. He goes to visit Baba when he is

hospitalized upon discovery of cancer symptoms. He visits Baba with his family and asks Baba if he needs any help and urges him to call upon him without any hesitation if help be needed, as it is the duty of a brother to help the other in need. This kind of talk is very Afghan and he stands by his words. The families are uprooted from their land. They are broken, but the human spirit and the pride in one's own lineage could not be disrupted as portrayed by these two characters.

Another thing that strikes us all the most is the way Baba puts his proud self behind and starts to slog for the betterment of Amir. The director of the movie Marc Forster is all praises about the never die attitude of Baba. He says:

Baba is mainly doing all the adjustments for his son. He wants him to be educated. That's what I love about it. He's doing it always for his son. It's all about the son. It is truly beautiful because it all comes from love. (Ibid)

This concern of Baba is evident more clearly in the second half of the movie, the part up till Amir and Baba going to America being considered as first half of the film. Baba tries to do everything possible for him to make his remaining family safe and contented. He slogs as much as possible in the foreign land to make both ends meet and make his son an educated person. He accomplishes this, but it takes a toll on Baba's health. He very soon becomes a victim of cancer and as soon as Amir is married to Soraya, he passes away. Even in his last moments, he kisses the earth he had brought from Afghanistan. This is how a once majestic life ends. Baba is a proud Pashtun. He has a lot of love for his land, but he has to pay for his free will by being away from his dear motherland doing all kinds of mundane Works. in a foreign country for the sake

of his family. The only person left in the family for him is Amir and after Amir's marriage it is Soraya who he loves like his own daughter. Baba dies with an unfulfilled desire of going back to his motherland. The scene is very poignant as he remembers his country even in his last breath. Talking about the death scene of Baba, Khaled Hosseini in a talk with Marc Forster has said:

The gesture with the sniff box is so touching. I watched this scene. (To Marc Forster) you were kind enough to arrange for a screening with my family, and, Man! there wasn't a dry eye in the house when we saw this. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The fall of a man, so proud and upright, is naturally a matter which evokes pity. Not just because he was once lofty, but because he is a man with a lot of flaws, just like any one of us. This connect with the characters makes the film a memorable one because this can happen to just anyone. A proud man like Baba becomes someone so helpless and dependent so as to be assisted by his son and daughter-in-law to the bed is overwhelming to see. Marc Forster has caught this emotion quite skillfully. Baba has content on his face when he slips into bed the last time yet there is an overlapping pain in the whole thing as he kisses the sniff box which has the earth of Afghanistan as its content. The family of Baba which had his friend Rahim Khan as the confidant, Ali as the faithful servant and the bubbly little Hassan as the constant playmate and best buddy of his son gets destroyed and Baba finds just Amir among his loved ones from Afghanistan at his side at the end. The foreign power which entered Afghanistan and the deteriorating conditions owing to the ongoing war in the country did not give Baba any chance to go back to his land and start all over

again with pride and honor. He dies the death of a desolate man. He compromises with life and dies kissing the earth of his land held in a sniff box.

Rahim Khan's character also has been made with a lot of deliberation and discussions. Shaun Taub looks the character that he plays - a very sympathetic man, but having great many secrets in his heart to see everybody happy and contented in their lives. It is he who calls Amir to ask him to come to Pakistan as 'there is a way to be good again'. He understands everybody's true value in spite of their shortcomings. He loves his friend greatly and does everything for the good of his family. He has no family of his own but his friend's family is all that he considers as his. So he goes on to the extent of setting that family straight by calling Amir back to Pakistan to reveal family secrets to him, so that he can take steps which he needs to. Amir comes to Pakistan on Rahim Khan's behest. In fact Amir himself owes a lot to Rahim Khan, because it was he who read his stories during his childhood and encouraged him to write more, something even Baba did not support him for. It was this golden heart that Amir is indebted to as he publishes his first novel called *A Season for Ashes*. Amir comes to Pakistan. Interesting matters are shared by Marc Forster about the place which was chosen as Rahim Khan's house. He says that as it was not financially viable to shoot the film in Pakistan, the place where Rahim Khan is shown to be residing is in China itself. It is the place called Kashgar where rest of the movie is also shot.

I had been to Peshawar to do some research, to see how the city looks like. The design, the entire production design changed. I brought a lot of pictures with me back for Carlos (he is the production manager of the film) to look at, and give him references. I saw it was one of the first moments when I was

walking in Kashgar through the streets, and I saw this apartment up there in this building, and I said, “That’s where Rahim Khan should live.” It just feels right. (Forster, Marc. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

The team of Marc Forster worked meticulously by taking every minute detail into consideration in making the movie which won accolades world over. Rahim Khan’s portrayal in the movie does justice to what Khaled Hosseini has written. The man who knew to keep secrets of the family also proves to be a man who knows to divulge it at an opportune moment to the right person so that things can move in the desirable direction then on. He calls Amir to come and take charge of the things that once were set wrong. He tells him:

“There’s a way to be good again”.

Amir comes to meet Rahim Khan in his Pakistan residence which is a building about to give way and is without any charm in it. Amir, as he comes, presents Rahim Khan the novel he has written and Rahim Khan is very glad to read the dedication of the book. Khaled Hosseini is all praises for David Benioff’s intelligence in giving credit to Rahim Khan and making Amir a person who has not forgotten his past. The dedication which mentions Rahim Khan is a testimony to what Amir as a person has become.

I liked the dedication David, “For Rahim Khan, who listened to my stories before I knew how to tell them.” That’s really great. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Khaled Hosseini's praises mean a lot to the screenwriter David Benioff who has done an excellent job with the novel that was given to him to be adapted for screen in a limited time. The scene shows how connected in fact Amir is to his roots and that he has not forgotten anything at all. During Amir's childhood Baba is not fond of Amir writing stories because he does not consider it manly enough pursuit. It is Rahim Khan who comes to him, asks him what he is doing to which Amir with incredible benevolence of a child tells "E dastan" - which means 'a story'. Rahim Khan takes his story home and leaves him with a note which reads "Bravo" for the story. The encouragement which he gets from Rahim Khan when he was a kid makes Amir believe in his ability to write stories and he decides to follow the path of his liking. Hence he dedicates his book to Rahim Khan. Khaled Hosseini says by making Amir write the dedication of his novel to Rahim Khan, David Benioff has done a very fine thing.

Rahim Khan tells Amir that his friend Hassan died while taking care of Baba's house in Kabul. The scene where this dialogue takes place is a lengthy one. Khalid Abdalla as Amir and Shaun Taub as Rahim Khan have made it possible for this scene to be one of the best scenes of the movie. In this scene Rahim Khan tells Amir that when no servants worked in the house as requisite, he went and brought Hassan back from Hazarajat. As mentioned earlier, Ali after knowing about the rape of his innocent son on the day of kite tournament does not want to stay there anymore. Baba's enquiry into whether Hassan had stolen Amir's watch was the final straw for Ali. He decides to leave the place then and there. He goes to Hazarajat. Rahim Khan tells Amir that he brought back Hassan from there and Hassan with his wife Farzana took care of the house to the last detail. They did everything to keep the house in good condition

as they waited for Amir and Baba to come back. Meanwhile, says Rahim Khan, he fell sick and came over to Pakistan to get treated for his ailment leaving Hassan and his wife to take care of the house. The incidence that Rahim Khan narrates next is gruesome and builds up sadness in both reader and audience. Some Talibs come and ask him to vacate the place. Hassan tells the Talibs that he is keeping watch on the house and refuses to leave the house as he should be present there when his masters come. The Talibs, says Rahim Khan, brought Hassan out of the house, asked him to kneel down and shot him in the head. As Farzana came out protesting they shot her dead too and took the child Sohrab away with them. The killing of Hassan and his wife is not enacted in the movie but is narrated by Rahim Khan. Incidentally what does not change here is the end of a happy family which otherwise could have lived in bliss in each other's company. They had to die because they belonged to certain ethnicity, considered to be below them by some maniacs. The ethnic divide becomes the reason for a beautiful life's end. Rahim Khan continues his narration and tells him that Sohrab is in an orphanage in Wazir Akbar Khan district. Amir feels dreadful about what had happened. Yet he does not come clean with his guilt to Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan urges him to go to Afghanistan and bring the boy back. Amir is not too inclined to do so. He says he will give money to anybody who wants to go but he would not go himself citing his responsibilities towards his wife. Rahim Khan now comes forward to tell the real reason why he should go and rescue the child as Hassan, just like Amir, was also fathered by Baba and not Ali. This comes as a shock to Amir. He had always held his father in high esteem, but now he gets to know that his father had lied to him all his life. He gets infuriated because the very foundation of his life shakes beneath his feet. His father had betrayed him. Rahim Khan tells him that Hassan's mother gave birth to Hassan and went away. Ali was impotent, proved because he

could not have any children from his first wife, who left him and married another man to bear five children. The reality strikes Amir hard. His life comes crashing down on him. He realizes there has been a great misdeed done towards Hassan. He realizes both he and his father have let Hassan down. Hassan had always been at the receiving end. Amir gets a letter written by Hassan where he tells him he has learnt to read and write only because of his desire to communicate with Amir through letters. He says all these days he could not write as he wanted to master his skill at writing and then communicate with Amir. The past hits Amir very bad. Marc Forster has used a lot of symbolisms in the film. As Amir reads the letter sitting in a market place, a cart full of pomegranates gets strewn all over the place due to a minor accident. The pomegranates spilling all over the place has memories of Amir hitting back at him as he had hit Hassan with pomegranates long time back to provoke him. But all he had got from Hassan was just love. Love for Amir was all that Hassan was filled with. Now as he realizes Sohrab is his own flesh and blood and he is the only child left of family as Amir is childless, he makes up his mind to go to Pakistan. But one thing that stands apart is, before going to Pakistan, he tells his wife Soraya over the phone about the guilt he was carrying all his life. That Amir chooses to go to Afghanistan to bring Sohrab and that he wants to tell everything to Soraya before going tells a ton about how the adult Amir wanted his family to be. How badly he wanted all his family members together, is evident in the way in which he takes up the challenge of going to Afghanistan which was still under the control of the Taliban. It was nothing short of entering a lion's den. Amir does so to set things straight, which once were set wrong. Though he cannot bring back the departed, he tries to gather all the lost threads to be knit again.

It is a harrowing experience for Amir to go to his own country. He feels like a tourist in his country. Khaled Hosseini has said that it was the same experience for him when he got an opportunity to visit his country after he had spent twenty seven years in America. He says he too had the same experience as all the news reports and the articles about present day Afghanistan had not prepared him enough to see the ghost of what he had remembered and lived in as a child. There is a scene where Amir visits his Baba's house and the pomegranate tree which he used to play under in a cemetery. Khaled Hosseini says he too had the very same experience when he visited his father's house in Kabul.

I wrote this scene in the novel probably sometime around late 2002. And then about three months later, in March, I actually went to Afghanistan after 27 years. Like this guy Amir, I actually went and found my father's house where I'd been raised, and found it just the way he finds in the movie. I found it just completely decrepit. The trees cut down, the house falling apart, and I remembered it from '70s being beautiful. I followed the footsteps of this fictional character, I saw it again when I was in China, and I watched Khalid, who plays Amir, play that scene. It was a very strange experience for me to see it in three different ways. The house seemed tiny and I couldn't believe it. (Ibid)

For Khaled Hosseini it was Deja-vu. He had experienced it while writing the novel and when he went to Kabul himself. Again when he went during the shooting of the scene to China he overcame with emotions as it was too expressive a scene since he had many things to remember as he too was a refugee.

There is another scene where Amir and Farid played by Said Taghmaoui, go to orphanage to find Sohrab. The orphanage scene brings forth the disgusting reality of the Taliban to the fore in totality. The role of the director of the orphanage Zamaan is played by an Iranian actor Naseer in an outstanding manner. He has provided the necessary depth to the character. Zamaan in the movie is a Pashtun himself, the very ethnicity the Talibs belong to. He hates the crimes committed by the Talibs all around, but he keeps trying to protect the children in the orphanage with a dream that one day his country will shake itself loose from all the ill governments and someday his country will be free. He is not a party to the crimes committed by the Talibs though he is from Pashtun ethnicity. To Amir's dismay he gets to know that a Talib officer has taken away Sohrab from the orphanage. A mind bred in the western sensibility cannot even understand why a boy child should be taken away thus. But there is a distressing and disgraceful practice prevalent in Afghanistan where men take young boys for sexual pleasure. Afghanistan has a saying:

“Women are for child birth and boys are for pleasure.” (Afghan saying)

Thus the practice which is infamously called as *Bachcha Baazi* is rampant in Afghanistan. The Talib Officer has taken away Sohrab with the same intention. These young boys are made to dance to music wearing anklets and even satisfy the men with sexual pleasures. Sohrab is a victim of this ugly practice. When Amir gets to know about this he becomes extremely furious. He starts getting furious at Zamaan for having bartered Sohrab for the money the Talibs have given as relief for the orphans. Zamaan fights back asking whether he is happy to be doing so and whether he does not feel betrayed to give away children like that. He tells that if he does not let a child go, the Talibs may take

all the children away. Khaled Hosseini has said in an interview that the western sensibilities suddenly become violent at the face of gross outrage of human rights but he says such things happen because they do not understand the gravity of the situation of where the locals have lived and made sacrifices.

The western bred outrage at the situation without understanding really the full complexity of what's actually happening. (Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Perf. Dream Works. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

Hence says Zamaan, the director of the orphanage that he gives them away a child and tries to keep others fed and safe. He also asks them whether they think he does not have relatives and family back in Iran and America. He tells them that he has his people where he can go to, forgetting about the misery in Afghanistan, as many people have done, but he does not want to do that. If he does so, all the children whom he keeps in orphanages will never have anybody to look up to. He tells he is staying in that God forsaken place only for the sake of these orphans who had no one to turn to. The scene stays in the mind as it holds mirror to the lives of the children who have nobody and have no way to escape from drudgery. The situation becomes all the more heart wrenching because Baba in his good days was seen giving donations to build orphanages across the country, but now his own grandchild has become the victim of communal hatred and has ended up in a Talib's harem via an orphanage which was supposed to protect him. The family's honour gets ravaged in the market place thus by the lustful Talibs who proclaimed themselves to be the messiah of righteousness. The dent this makes on the mind of the little child Hassan never

gets repaired ever. The family which Amir tries to cement never comes clean without a crack.

Another scene which churns one's gut is the scene of stoning. Amir is told by Zamaan that he can meet the Talib who took away the child at the Ghazi stadium at mid time of the foot ball match. Surely Amir reaches the place at decided time with Farid in tow. Amir has to wear a beard as the beard patrol would take anybody who is not wearing a beard into custody and they had the right to put any man behind the bars for not sporting a beard of prescribed length. Amir wears a duplicate beard. In the stadium, to Amir's disdain, he witnesses the stoning of a man and a woman, because as per the Talib's Shari'a law, the couple had shown the audacity to fall in love with each other. Marc Forster who calls the film to be a testament for love and retribution does not fail to show how gruesome the laws of the land have been towards its own people with women being deprived of any right. The scene of the woman being stoned is nauseating and since all know that it ends with the life of that woman and the man along with her, it drains out the audience emotionally.

The interest of this thesis is towards highlighting the destructive effect of such killings and of gross outrage of the human rights and the modesty of the people of Afghanistan. Hence this scene becomes very important even from the point of view of this study. Marc Forster says that it was a difficult time for him to shoot this scene as Beijing authorities who had given all the requisite permission to shoot the scene, stopped him at the end when he had got the entire scene ready with all the extras and when all the actors in the film had gotten into their makeup. He had to obtain fresh permission to shoot the scene and he had to move the entire unit from the previously designated place and had to choose another stadium for the scene to be shot. Finally Forster selected a

place called Boading which is out of Beijing to shoot the stoning scene where Amir meets the Talib who has taken away Sohrab and witnesses the stoning of a couple accused of being lovers. It is a moving tribute to all those who have lost their lives in such horrible state of affairs. There is also an Iranian movie by the name *The Stoning of Soraya M* wherein the epicenter of the film is the woman called Soraya M and how she gets framed by her husband and how he makes her loving children to stone her to death. This movie is based on a true incidence later on written in the form of a novel by a French journalist Freidoune Sahebjam. The practice of stoning is still prevalent in many Islamic countries including Iran where *The Stoning of Soraya M*. is set. Robert Edgar who is a film critic does not like the brutish way in which the stoning scene in the movie *The Stoning of Soraya M* is picturised. But then there is no mild or subtle way in which the brutality of the mighty and the powerful can be shown on the screen. The innocent ones are killed not because they were wrong but because the powerful think they were wrong and their interpretation of the codes of conduct make the innocent lives succumb to the atrocities inflicted on them. *The Kite Runner* by Marc Forster is one such masterpiece. He has shown the atrocities that the innocent and voiceless have to face, the charges levied by mighty and the innocents have to pay with their dear lives for no fault of theirs.

After this scene one sees Amir meeting the Talib who has taken Sohrab from the orphanage. He goes to the designated place which actually is a maze of a house, which is in a secluded place from the human settlement. Amir meets not the Talib who had taken Sohrab but a young man in dark shades. The Talib instantly recognizes the beard that Amir sports is fake. To Amir's horror the young Talib turns out to be the same Aseef of his childhood days who had tarnished Amir's childhood by sodomizing Hassan. Aseef recognizing the man

who has come for the boy to be Amir asks him how his Baba is. This puts Amir off guard. It is a bone chilling revelation for Amir that the man who he is sitting with is none other than Aseef. This is also a time where Amir gathers courage to even talk to Aseef and oppose him and his work. It is for the first time Amir who as a child remained peeking into the alley where Hassan was raped starts walking towards Hassan to help him out of the situation. It is that boy who takes steps towards setting the things right in the right direction. Sohrab is called and he comes with the anklets jingling in his ankles. Amir is devastated to see the condition of Sohrab. Talking about the scene Khaled Hosseini has said:

He (Sohrab) almost looks like a puppet. He is very reluctant. His heart is not in it. It is like somebody is pulling the strings. (Ibid)

Commenting about how Talibs listen to music though the common people were forbidden from listening to music or playing music, he has said:

“Taliban did a lot of things they forbid.” (Ibid)

Khaled Hosseini’s viewpoint about Taliban is the view point of the learned gentry of the world. But the world view has no place in the governance of the Taliban and the groups like them. All they did is terrorizing the people and using men, women and children according to their whims and fancies.

Amir asks Aseef to leave the boy as he wants to take him away from that place. Aseef challenges him for a duel as nothing is for free, he says. Thus there is this cathartic fight between the cruel Aseef and poetic Amir. One nice act in the scene is that it is Amir who gets beaten thoroughly until Sohrab takes a bronze ball of the size of a lemon and aims at Aseef’s eye using his slingshot making Aseef writhe with pain on the ground. Thus Amir escapes from that den

like building with Sohrab. The scene of the fight is like a balm to the inner wounds of Amir. He emerges a hero though he gets badly bruised by Aseef. The same slingshot which Amir had once presented to Hassan as his birthday gift does the miracle of subduing Aseef. Again it is very symbolic because the same Hassan who had been victimized comes to Amir's rescue in the guise of Sohrab.

Amir's return journey to America through Pakistan is uneventful save he has to go in search of Hassan for once which leads him to the doorsteps of God where finding himself very puny he begs the Almighty to give him his son back. This scene symbolizes every individual's need to beg for mercy from Him is universal. Sohrab is brought to America, but the boy is too terrified because he cannot trust anybody as he has become victim of pedophile and sodomy. Meanwhile there is a huge cloud that keeps gathering around Amir and Soraya as they have brought a boy home, who has distinctive Hazara features, whereas they are of Pashtun blood. General Taheri who takes pride in being of superior class and blood wants an explanation from Amir calling Sohrab as a "Hazaara boy". This makes Amir visibly angry. He rises to the occasion to meet his father-in law's stern talk and looks. Though Mrs. Taheri is ready to welcome the boy into the household with a suggestive gesture of willing to weave a sweater for him, General Taheri is adamant and has great concern about what people might say

Gen. Taheri : Amir Jan, You're going to tell me why you've brought this boy back with you?

Mrs. Taheri : What sort of question is that?

Gen. Taheri : While you're busy knitting sweaters, my dear, I have to deal with the community perception of the family.

People will ask why there is a Hazara boy living with our daughter. What do I tell them?

Soraya : You can tell them...

Amir : It's alright. General is correct. People will ask. You see, General Sahib, my father slept with his servant's wife. And she bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping in the other room is Hassan's son. He's my nephew. That's what you tell people when they ask. And one more thing General Sahib. You never again refer to him as "a Hazara boy" in my presence. He has a name, and it's Sohrab.

(*The Kite Runner*. Dir. Marc Forster. Perf. DreamWorks. SKG. Paramount Classics. Sidney Kimmel Entertainment. Participant Productions. 2007)

By retorting to General Taheri's question in a befitting and firm manner Amir puts an end to the matter once for all. He sets the things straight which went wrong years ago. Hassan and his family which was also the family of Amir, gets its due recognition. The disrupted family does seem like getting glued up finally, but in the lengthy process the family loses many a loving hearts. That void and that vacuum could never be filled by anybody.

The last scene of the film is the inevitable kite flying scene where Amir and his wife Soraya are trying to make Sohrab fly kite. Amir tries to bring a smile on the face of Sohrab by narrating how his father Hassan was the best kite runner in the whole town. Ultimately when Sohrab flies the kite and Amir manages to cut another kite, Amir volunteers to run for Sohrab's prize kite and finally says:

“For you a thousand times” (Ibid)

This scene is also very symbolic of the fact that Amir is ready to do anything for Hassan's son. It is in a way a retribution for the wrongs that was done against Hassan. It is Amir's penance to bring a smile on Hassan's son's face. Even the name Sohrab was born of Hassan's love for Amir which is another heart touching tale. Hassan always loved to listen to the story of Rustom and Sohrab from Amir and it is the same name he gives to his son. In the pride that's clearly visible in Amir's eyes, when he tells General Taheri that the boy who sleeps in the other room does have a name and that is Sohrab. The resolute behavior of Amir echoes the entire Hassan and Amir saga. The saga that started between two kids and though it endured such hardships and lost loved ones along the way, life comes full circle and again reaches an innocent boy whose blood comes from Hassan and name from Amir. The Hassan and Amir saga continues.

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