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ENGLISH B EXTENDED ESSAY
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*RESEARCH QUESTION: To what extent do the father-son relationships
contribute to the main character's development into maturity in the novel*

“The Kite Runner”?

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1. Introduction

“If the relationship of father to son could really be reduced to biology, the whole earth would blaze with the glory of fathers and sons.”¹ As from this quote, during the development of most male children, fathers influence their sons’ minds, behaviors and personalities. “The Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini explores multiple father-son relationships throughout the novel and the effect the father leaves on his son carries the plotline further and contributes to the development of the main character’s maturity.

The story initiates with Amir getting a phone call from one of his father’s friends, Rahim Khan, who currently lives in Pakistan in December 2001. Amir is happily married to Soraya at that time and they live in the USA, San Francisco. After that phone call, Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, Kabul with his father and their servants, Ali and his son, Hassan. After that, the novel primarily consists of Amir’s childhood memories and how his father affected his current personality and nature. Alongside his relationship with his father, Baba; Hassan’s relationship with his father, Ali and Baba is explored as well. All these interactions help to add or take out some qualifications from characters and modify their identities.

Ensuing Amir’s flashback, the audience gets introduced to new characters. One of whom is Sohrab, a significant individual, Amir’s half-brother’s son. Sohrab’s interactions with his biological father, Hassan and his father after his adoption, Amir, involve in his early development and alter his personality deeply, which affects the development of the main character, Amir, as well.

¹ (Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*. St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.)

It is the effect of the interactions of the characters in the story with their fatherly figures on developing Amir's personality and maturity, which will be comprehensively analyzed in this extended essay.

2. Relationships

a. Amir and Baba

Amir and his father, Baba, have a relationship, which has its ups and downs and affects the personality of both of the characters as well as the order of events accordingly.

Baba is presented as a strong, honest and brave person who is respected by everyone in Kabul. Amir admires Baba and his personality and that is the main reason why he doesn't want to share his father with anyone else. The conflict here is that they have no shared interest or no common topic they want to talk about, which creates lack of communication between them. Baba also creates the impression that he has no love towards his own son. As seen in "*Because the truth was, I always felt like Baba hated me a little.*" (Hosseini, 19), Amir is aware of Baba's thoughts towards him and this affects Amir's behaviors and actions by him trying to find a way to make his father like him.

When the season for "kite running" arrives, Amir realizes that Baba and him share an interest, which is their love towards kites. Amir believes that if he wins this tournament, Baba will be proud of him and a bond will be created between them. With hard work and dedication, Amir becomes the winner of the tournament and their relationship starts to get better. However, for his victory, Amir lets his enemies, Assef

and his friends, rape Hassan while he brings the last kite that fell from the air to his father. After this incident, Amir tries to hide what he has seen from Baba and everyone else around him to look as brave and strong as his father. This event, later in the novel, creates an inner conflict for Amir, which ends up changing his personality and behaviors completely.

Due to the response of the USA regarding the invasion of Afghanistan in 1980s and the political situation Afghanistan is in, Baba and Amir flee to the USA. The reason of their escape is later explained in the novel as Baba saying “*Besides, I didn’t bring us here for me, did I?*” (Hosseini, 130) Baba leaves his reputation and life in Kabul behind for Amir to have a brighter future. There, Amir supports his father while he is adjusting to the new culture and environment. This, also, helps strengthening their bond and relationship.

In the flea market where Baba works and spends time with his Afghan acquaintances, Amir meets a girl whose name is Soraya and falls in love with her immediately. However, due to Baba’s health condition, an inoperable cancer, Amir gets worried and spends most of his time taking care of Baba and his duties instead. One day, when Baba collapses at the flea market, they learn that he doesn’t have much time left. Amir wants Baba to see him getting married and *khastegari*¹, so he asks Baba to ask General Taheri, Soraya’s father for his daughter’s hand. This decision of Amir really makes Baba proud and content.

“Baba’s dry lips stretched into a smile. A spot of green on a wilted leaf. ‘Are you sure?’ (...) He hung up. We looked at each other. I burst into giggles. Baba joined

¹ *khastegari means asking the girl’s father for her daughter’s hand and arranging the marriage.*

in.” (Hosseini, 161-162)

Their marriage shows Baba that Amir is now a grown man and can look after himself. The insecure and weak Amir is gone and a new, brave, and selfless man has taken his place in the eyes of Baba. Shortly after their marriage, Baba's health condition becomes worse and he starts to stay with Amir and Soraya. Baba's last days are spent happily.

“I could see his internal smile, as wide as the skies of Kabul on nights when the poplars shivered and the sound of crickets swelled in the gardens. (...) He asked us to lean in gave us each a kiss.” (Hosseini, 173)

Even after his death, he becomes an inspiration for Amir as he has been raised in such a way that he can be considered as “an unusual Afghan man”. Stories about Baba and about his strength, kindness and the support he showed towards others affect Amir and his way of acting in the future.

“Listening to them, I realized how much of who I was, what I was, had been defined by Baba and the marks he had left on people's lives. My whole life, I had been 'Baba's son.' Now he was gone. Baba couldn't show me the way anymore. I'd have to find it on my own.” (Hosseini, 174)

Amir and Baba have an imperfect relationship while they are in Kabul and there is nothing to connect them. Amir's dedication to create a bond with Baba makes him cause traumatic consequences and changes his personality. After they move to San Francisco, their support towards each other helps them have a better relationship.

Amir starts to learn from Baba as well as Baba is learning from his son. Baba's reactions, stories, memories and personality inspire Amir and affect his actions as explained later in the novel.

b. Hassan and Ali

Hassan is a momentous figure in the novel. His relationship with his so called father, Ali and their shared personality shape the instances mentioned and affect the course of events, in terms of shaping the main character's behaviors.

The first and most important aspect about Hassan and Ali is their ethnicity, which causes them to face difficulties and be treated differently in Kabul. As Hazaras, they also look distinct among others due to Hassan's "flat nose" and Ali's twisted leg with polio and paralyzed lower face.

Ali is described as a gentle and placid person throughout the novel. Even if he caught Hassan and Amir playing with their slingshots, he would only "*wag his finger and wave us (Amir and Hassan) down from the tree*" (Hosseini, 4) He is presented as being extremely happy and delighted on the day Hassan was born. Hassan's presence brings him joy by removing all his problems in his head.

"...he had found his joy, his antidote, the moment Sanaubar had given birth to Hassan" (Hosseini, 10)

Ali is caring and protective over his son, Hassan. In case of emergency or threat, he does whatever he can to protect Hassan. This reaction of him teaches his son how to behave towards children and how to raise a child in a loving and caring

way. Another aspect about Ali is that he never treats Amir differently; he cares about him like his own son.

“Hassan was crying. Ali pulled him close, clutched him with tenderness. Later, I would tell myself I hadn’t felt envious of Hassan. Not at all.” (Hosseini, 35)

With his brave and strong personality, Hassan is presented as a cheerful boy. He is unable to hurt anyone physically and emotionally and he is easy to live and spend time with.

“... Hassan was true to his nature; He was incapable of hurting anyone. A few grunts, a couple of pushes, and out he came Hassan. Out he came smiling.” (Hosseini, 10)

Hassan and Ali have the type of relationship where their bond is created with the affection, trust and love they have towards each other. This relationship is nearly the opposite of the unhealthy relationship Amir and Baba have had in Kabul. Amir is envious of Ali and Hassan’s relationship and compares theirs to his with his own father. With this aspect, Hassan and Ali’s relationship sheds a light in Amir’s mind and leads him in the way of being a “better father” to his future child. With the happiness, comfort and tranquility he observes in Hassan and Ali’s interactions, even though they are facing other problems due to their race and ethnicity, Amir gets inspired and later in the novel when he becomes the minority in San Francisco, he treats children the way he observed from this relationship.

c. Hassan and Baba

Baba and Hassan are described to have a unique relationship throughout the novel. Living in the same house in Kabul and being around the same age with Baba's son, Hassan becomes a special individual for Baba and causes Baba to act protective and sensitive towards him.

Baba cares about Hassan and treats him and Amir, his own son, in equal terms. He never misses Hassan's birthday, and buys him gifts every year for his birthday and on special occasions, which indicates the significance of their relationship for Baba.

"Baba never missed Hassan's birthday. (...) He bought him a Japanese toy truck one year, an electronic locomotive and train track set another year. The previous year, Baba surprised Hassan with a leather cowboy hat." (Hosseini, 44)

Baba caring about Hassan and inviting him to their family journeys and plans also show the importance of the bond they have and the affection Baba has towards Hassan. This situation, however, bothers Amir as a child and causes him to get jealous over his own father. Hassan and Baba's relationship affects Amir's behaviors and changes his way of perceiving events. To overcome his grudge and earn Baba's full attention and affection, Amir plants money and his own personal belongings on Hassan in order to make him look like a thief and force him to leave the house.

For Baba, the only sin is theft. He believes every other sin is an alteration of it and he does not approve the actions of whom he considers as a "thief".

“(...) there is only one sin, only one. And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. (...) ‘There is no act more wretched than stealing, Amir,’ Baba said. ‘A man who takes what’s not his to take, be it a life or a loaf of naan... I spit on such a man. And if I ever cross paths with him, Hod help him.’” (Hosseini, 18)

However, Baba forgives Hassan even though he is now seen as a “thief”. This emphasizes their bond and their connection. Baba trusts Hassan and believes that he is not a sinner. His trust makes Hassan a significant person for him and also alters his own beliefs in life, such as the topic of “sin” and “theft” as he is forgiving a sinner and realizing that his emotions come further than people’s actions.

After fleeing to the US with Amir, Baba still misses and remembers the times they had with Hassan back in Kabul and cares about him. For instance, during Amir’s graduation celebration, Baba says *“I wish Hassan had been with us today”* (Hosseini, 133) and shows his longing.

Hassan and Baba’s relationship alters the personality of the protagonist, Amir, in a significant way. Amir being jealous of their bond causes him to make Hassan look guilty of theft and forces Ali and Hassan to leave the house and start living somewhere else in Afghanistan. Also, Baba being devastated after their departure changes his way of treating Amir and affects their relationship negatively for a long time, until they flee to the USA. The most important aspect in which this relationship influences the novel is after Amir finds out that Baba is Hassan’s biological father, which makes him and Hassan brothers, Amir feels obligated to find Hassan’s orphan

son, Sohrab, who is staying at an orphanage near the warzone, and returns to Kabul after a long time to find him.

d. Sohrab and Hassan

Although the relationship between Hassan and Sohrab is not mentioned frequently in the novel, its impacts on various characters' developments, including Sohrab and Amir can be seen passim.

Hassan is a really protective father and he tries to take care of Sohrab for all costs. Due to political condition Afghanistan is in during Sohrab's childhood, Hassan mentions in one of his letters to Amir that he comes across orphans on the streets and he is thankful for their current situation.

"(...) Then what would happen to my Sohrab? The streets are full enough already of hungry orphans and everyday I thank Allah that I am alive, not because I fear death, but because my wife has a husband and my son is not an orphan." (Hosseini, 216)

Hassan being watchful over Sohrab has an impact on his inner development. For instance, Hassan does not want his son to *"grow up stupid like his father"* (Hosseini, 217), which prevents Sohrab from becoming an illiterate individual and being unaware of the current event occurring in Afghanistan.

Sohrab and Hassan are described as having so many traits in common. One of these is their ability to use slingshots. Further in the novel, this talent of Sohrab helps

him escape from dangerous conditions and places, which can also be seen as a positive effect on his personal development and his life in the future.

Sohrab has grown up listening to the stories of Amir and Hassan and what they used to do in Kabul as friends. Listening to those stories from his father, Sohrab has learnt a lot about the old times in Afghanistan, specifically in Kabul. Furthermore, it is mentioned in the novel that Hassan recreates some of these stories with his son and strengthens the bond they have.

“Do you remember how we used to sit under the pomegranate tree there and read from Shahnamah¹? The droughts have dried the hill and the tree hasn’t borne fruit in years, but Sohrab and I still sit under its shade and I read to him the Shahnamah.”

(Hosseini, 217)

In one of the letters Hassan has written to Amir, he mentions how proud he is as a father as well as telling Amir about how Sohrab and him spend their time in Kabul. By saying, *“I am a very proud and very lucky father”* (Hosseini, 217), Hassan describes his affection towards his son to Amir. After Amir meets Sohrab in person, he realizes that Hassan and Sohrab have similar behaviors and actions.

“He was his father in so many ways: the way he fanned out his cards with both hands, the way he squinted while reading them, the way he rarely looked a person in the eye.” (Hosseini, 306)

¹*Shahnamah* is an Afghani book of stories. In the first few chapters of the novel, it is mentioned as the favorite book of Hassan and Amir growing up. Also, Sohrab is the name of the protagonist of the story book and Hassan is known to name his son after that character.

As expressed by Amir, Sohrab is shy just like his father. His timidity causes him to have trouble getting used to his new home in San Francisco and to his new parents, Amir and Soraya. His connection with his father, Hassan, and what he has learnt from him influences his attitude towards others, including Amir.

Overall, Hassan being protective towards Sohrab and Sohrab looking up to his father are what their bond is based upon. Hassan teaching his son how to read and write, taking him to the spots where he has spent his childhood at with Amir and sharing the same interests with him including slingshots and playing cards affect Hassan's attitude and how he behaves when he faces challenges and his behaviors towards strangers. When Sohrab has been forced to stay with Assef in Kabul, he has dealt with challenges such as Amir facing Assef and getting into a physical fight with him by using his abilities, which he has learnt from Hassan. Moreover, while moving to San Francisco with Amir, he has turned against Amir because of his fear of being alone, which is created in his mind by his father being over-protective towards him growing up.

e. Sohrab and Amir

Sohrab and Amir's relationship is presented in the novel as it takes a long time to build for both characters, especially for Sohrab. They meet each other while both of them are under pressure and stress, in suppressing conditions. At first, Amir pities Sohrab and feels bad for him for the situation he is forced to be in by Assef and the other Taliban supporters. Their first connection and physical contact occurs while Amir is facing Assef in Kabul:

“I took Sohrab’s hand. It was small, the skin dry and calloused. His fingers moved, laced themselves with mine. (...) The bells jingled as we crossed the room.”

(Hosseini, 286)

Even by holding his hand, Amir can feel what Sohrab has been through, his difficult life conditions and their connection starts to build up after this specific moment.

While Amir is fighting to set Sohrab free and offer him a better life away from Afghanistan, the words *“Sohrab is screaming”* (Hosseini, 288-289) is repeated several times to emphasize his fear. Sohrab is afraid that Assef is going to hurt Amir and tries to stop him from doing it.

“‘No more.’ Twin trails of black mascara, mixed with tears, had rolled down his cheeks, smeared the rouge. His lower lip trembled. (...) ‘No more, Agha. Please,’ he said, his voice husky and trembling. ‘Stop hurting him.’” (Hosseini, 290)

Trying to protect Amir and preventing others from hurting him is Sohrab’s way of showing his exigence and need for escaping with Amir. After leaving where they met with Assef and rushing to the hospital, Amir and Sohrab get to spend some time together, which is described as distant and cold in the novel.

“We sat there like that for a while, silent, me propped up in bed, two pillows behind my back, Sohrab on the three-legged stool next to the bed. I fell asleep at some point, and, when I woke up, (...) Sohrab was still sitting next to me.” (Hosseini, 300)

Sohrab waiting for Amir to wake up shows that he cares about him and after all he has gone through, he finally trusts someone. Amir also wants to keep Sohrab away from danger and protect him. By saying *“My heart gave a sick lurch when I looked at Sohrab’s bed and found it empty.”* (Hosseini, 313), Amir’s concern points to his solicitude towards Sohrab. This, further in the novel, affects how Amir treats Sohrab and causes him to take Sohrab with him to the USA, in order to protect him with no worries.

Due to political and social problems between the two countries, Sohrab’s immigration to the USA from Afghanistan faces problems. Amir tells about the situation to Sohrab without hiding any details and adds that he is required to stay in an orphanage for a few months before moving to San Francisco with him. This news breaks his heart and partially destroys the relationship they have both worked so hard to build. Amir’s honesty and trust in their relationship causes a plotline shift in which Sohrab attempts to commit suicide.

After this incident, it has become harder to communicate with Sohrab, due to his silence and sorrow. Amir and Sohrab’s relationship has turned Sohrab into a more introvert, shy and cold person than he has been before, in Kabul.

“It would be erroneous to say Sohrab was quiet. Quiet is peace. Tranquility. Quiet is turning down the VOLUME knob on life. Silence is pushing the OFF button.

Shutting it down. All of it.” (Hosseini, 361)

Amir blames himself for this situation and feels devastated about how Sohrab turned out to be as a person. Yet, he does not force Sohrab to do anything out of his comfort zone and wants him to make the first move in terms of opening up. This aspect of their relationship affects Amir's personality as he starts to think of his relationship with Hassan is equivalent to his relationship with Sohrab and he is afraid to make the same mistakes once again. To prevent this, he decides to recreate his memories of Hassan from Kabul, with Sohrab, by flying a kite in the kite running contest.

All in all, with its ups and downs, the novel presents Amir and Sohrab's relationship and how their bond is formed. Mainly, it can be said that Amir's behaviors have affected Sohrab's attitude and shaped his reactions to events. After facing problems, Sohrab ignoring Amir and using silence as his weapon, the novel ends with both characters finally taking a step further in their relationship and strengthening their relationship by carrying Afghan traditions on and enjoying their time with what Amir and Sohrab's father, Hassan used to do in the past. It can be said that theirs is not a father-son connection at first, but the novel builds up their bond until the end and finishes the plotline by creating a father-son relationship between them. Overall, their relationship affects Amir's personality in terms of building a strong bond with a new individual he has recently met, contributing to his maturity and altering the characteristics of both individuals differently.

3. Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini uses father-son relationships throughout the novel in order to show the development of characters, especially the protagonist, Amir. The father-son

relationships also affect the novel in terms of altering behaviors of certain individuals and affecting their reactions on events mentioned in the book. There are more than one father-son interactions in the novel but the most important ones are Amir-Baba, Ali-Hassan, Hassan-Baba, Hassan-Sohrab and Sohrab-Amir, which shape the characteristic of the main character and affect the development of events as well as the ending. The novel ends with Amir adopting his brother's son, Sohrab. Most of Amir's behaviors and decisions, which is the main part of the plotline as he is the protagonist of the novel, including him treating Sohrab as his own son, are somehow affected by his relationship with Baba and all the other father-son relationships he observed. In this essay, these relationships and their impact on the development of the main character are further explained.

4. References

HOSSEINI, Khaled. Kite Runner. Riverhead Books, 2015.

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