

**THE IMAGE OF THE FATHER IN “THE KITE RUNNER” AND “A
THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS”**

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Abstract: *This study explores the image of the father in Khaled Hosseini’s novels “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, focusing on how paternal figures shape the emotional, moral, and social development of the main characters. In “The Kite Runner”, the character of Baba is portrayed as a powerful yet emotionally distant father whose high moral expectations and public heroism profoundly influence Amir’s sense of guilt, identity, and quest for redemption. Baba’s contradictions his generosity toward society and emotional restraint within his family create a complex father–son relationship marked by admiration, fear, and unspoken love. In contrast, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” presents the father figure primarily through Jalil, whose weakness, hypocrisy, and failure to protect his daughter Mariam result in deep emotional trauma and lifelong insecurity. Jalil’s absence and moral cowardice highlight the destructive consequences of paternal neglect, especially within a patriarchal society. By comparing these two representations, the study reveals that Hosseini uses father figures not only as personal influences but also as symbols of broader social and cultural values in Afghan society. The analysis demonstrates that fathers in both novels play a decisive role in shaping their children’s identities, illustrating how authority, silence, and responsibility or the lack thereof can determine the characters’ paths toward suffering, resilience, or redemption.*

Key words: *father image, paternal authority, family relationships, Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, identity formation, patriarchy, moral influence, emotional trauma.*

INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini is widely recognized for his powerful portrayal of Afghan society, family relationships, and the emotional struggles of individuals shaped by personal and historical trauma. Among the most significant themes in his novels is the role of family, particularly the image of the father, which functions as a central force in the psychological and moral development of characters. In “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, Hosseini presents contrasting paternal figures whose actions, silences, and moral choices deeply affect the lives of their children. Through these father figures, the author examines authority, responsibility, masculinity, and the consequences of emotional distance within a patriarchal cultural context. In “The Kite Runner”, the relationship between Amir and his father Baba is marked by admiration, fear, and emotional estrangement. Baba’s

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strong personality, social status, and rigid moral code shape Amir’s identity while simultaneously creating a sense of inadequacy and guilt. Conversely, in “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, the image of the father is embodied by Jalil, whose moral weakness and inability to publicly acknowledge his daughter Mariam result in abandonment and emotional suffering. Unlike Baba, Jalil lacks the courage to protect his child, and his passive behavior reflects a different but equally damaging form of paternal failure. This study aims to analyze and compare the image of the father in these two novels, focusing on how paternal authority, emotional presence or absence, and moral responsibility influence the destinies of the main characters. By examining these contrasting father figures, the research highlights Hosseini’s broader critique of patriarchal values and emphasizes the crucial role of fatherhood in shaping identity, resilience, and the search for redemption.

METHODOLOGY.

The present study employs a qualitative literary analysis to examine the image of the father in Khaled Hosseini’s “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns”. The research is based on close textual reading and comparative analysis, focusing on the depiction of paternal figures and their influence on the psychological, emotional, and moral development of the main characters. Primary data for the study are drawn directly from the two novels, while secondary sources such as literary criticism, scholarly articles, and theoretical works on family relationships, patriarchy, and identity formation are used to support and contextualize the analysis. The methodological approach includes character analysis, thematic analysis, and contextual interpretation. Character analysis is applied to explore the personalities, behaviors, and moral qualities of the father figures, particularly Baba and Jalil, and to evaluate their relationships with their children. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes related to fatherhood, authority, responsibility, guilt, abandonment, and emotional distance. Contextual interpretation allows the study to situate these representations within the broader socio-cultural and historical framework of Afghan society, highlighting the influence of patriarchal norms and social expectations on paternal roles.

RESULT

The analysis of “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns” reveals that the image of the father plays a decisive role in shaping the emotional, moral, and psychological development of the main characters. The findings demonstrate that Khaled Hosseini presents father figures as complex representations of authority whose presence or absence significantly influences the life trajectories of their children. In “The Kite Runner”, Baba is portrayed as a dominant and morally admired figure whose emotional distance creates inner conflict in his son Amir. The results show that Baba’s high expectations and silence regarding emotional expression contribute to Amir’s feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and desire for approval. At the same time, Baba’s moral principles and later acts of sacrifice indirectly guide Amir toward personal growth and redemption. Thus, paternal authority in these novel functions both as a source of psychological pressure and moral direction. In “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, the results indicate that Jalil represents a weaker and more

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damaging form of fatherhood. His refusal to acknowledge Mariam publicly and his inability to protect her from social humiliation led to deep emotional trauma and a lasting sense of worthlessness. The study finds that Jalil’s moral cowardice and neglect have more destructive consequences than physical absence, emphasizing the long-term psychological damage caused by paternal irresponsibility. Overall, the comparative results show that while Baba and Jalil differ in strength and social status, both fathers fail to provide emotional security. Hosseini uses these paternal figures to critique patriarchal structures that prioritize social reputation over emotional responsibility. The results confirm that the image of the father in both novels is central to understanding themes of identity formation, suffering, resilience, and the search for redemption.

DISCUSSION.

The findings of this study highlight the central role of the father figure in Khaled Hosseini’s “The Kite Runner” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns”, demonstrating that fatherhood is portrayed not merely as a biological or social role, but as a powerful emotional and moral force. The discussion of the results reveals that Hosseini presents contrasting models of paternal authority to expose the consequences of emotional distance, silence, and moral failure within a patriarchal society. In “The Kite Runner”, Baba’s image reflects a traditional model of masculinity characterized by strength, honor, and social dominance. Although Baba is admired publicly, his inability to express affection and vulnerability creates a profound emotional gap between him and Amir. This emotional absence contributes to Amir’s internal conflict and sense of unworthiness. However, Baba’s moral values and eventual sacrifices also suggest that paternal influence can operate indirectly. Amir’s journey toward redemption can be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile with his father’s ideals, indicating that even flawed fatherhood can inspire moral growth. In contrast, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” presents a more destructive paternal image through Jalil. Unlike Baba, Jalil lacks moral courage and consistently prioritizes social reputation over his daughter’s well-being. His weakness reinforces Mariam’s marginalization and suffering, illustrating how paternal neglect can perpetuate gender inequality and emotional trauma. Jalil’s role underscores the vulnerability of women within patriarchal systems, where fathers often serve as both protectors and gatekeepers of social legitimacy. The discussion further suggests that Hosseini uses father figures as symbols of broader social and cultural failures. Both Baba and Jalil embody patriarchal authority, yet their inability to provide emotional security reflects the limitations of a system that suppresses emotional expression and accountability. Through these representations, Hosseini critiques the traditional expectations placed on fathers and emphasizes the need for emotional responsibility and moral integrity.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, the analysis of the image of the father in Khaled Hosseini’s “The Kite Runne” and “A Thousand Splendid Suns” demonstrates that paternal figures play a crucial role in shaping the emotional, moral, and psychological development of the main characters. Hosseini presents fatherhood as a complex and often flawed institution, deeply influenced by patriarchal values, social expectations, and cultural constraints within Afghan society. In

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“The Kite Runner”, Baba embodies a powerful yet emotionally distant father whose authority and moral ideals profoundly affect Amir’s identity and sense of self-worth. Although Baba fails to provide emotional intimacy, his principles and sacrifices ultimately guide Amir toward redemption and personal growth. In contrast, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” portrays a more destructive image of fatherhood through Jalil, whose weakness, neglect, and concern for social reputation result in lasting emotional trauma for his daughter Mariam. Jalil’s failure highlights the severe consequences of paternal irresponsibility, particularly for women in a patriarchal environment. By comparing these two father figures, the study concludes that Hosseini uses the image of the father to critique traditional models of masculinity and authority. Both novels reveal that emotional absence, silence, and moral compromise can be as damaging as physical abandonment. Ultimately, the image of the father in Hosseini’s works underscores the importance of emotional responsibility, moral courage, and compassion in parenthood, emphasizing that the presence or absence of these qualities significantly shapes identity, resilience, and the possibility of redemption.

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