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

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**Annotation:** This article explores the image of the father in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. Through a comparative literary analysis, the study examines how different paternal figures—such as Baba, Jalil, Rasheed, and Hakim—shape the moral, psychological, and emotional development of the main characters. The article highlights fatherhood as a complex construct influenced by patriarchy, social norms, silence, guilt, and responsibility. It argues that Hosseini presents fathers not merely as authority figures but as morally ambivalent individuals whose actions and omissions deeply affect their children's lives. By contrasting nurturing, neglectful, and oppressive models of fatherhood, the article demonstrates how paternal influence functions as a central force in themes of trauma, redemption, and ethical transformation within Afghan society.

**Keywords:** fatherhood; paternal authority; patriarchy; moral responsibility; silence and guilt; intergenerational trauma; redemption; Afghan society; Khaled Hosseini; comparative literary analysis

The novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, written by Khaled Hosseini, present deeply emotional portrayals of Afghan society across different historical periods. One of the most powerful and recurring motifs in both works is the image of the father. Through diverse paternal figures—biological, symbolic, absent, abusive, loving, or morally conflicted—Hosseini explores themes of authority, masculinity, responsibility, guilt, redemption, and intergenerational trauma. Although the two novels differ in narrative focus and gender perspective, the representation of fatherhood functions as a central psychological and moral force shaping the destinies of the characters.

In *The Kite Runner*, the father figure is embodied primarily in Baba, whose commanding presence dominates Amir's childhood and emotional development. Baba is portrayed as a physically strong, socially respected, and morally complex man, admired by the community for his generosity and courage. To Amir, however, Baba is an intimidating and emotionally distant figure. Amir's desire for his father's approval becomes the driving force behind many of his actions, including his betrayal of Hassan. Baba's masculinity is defined by traditional Afghan ideals: bravery, honor, independence, and strength. He despises cowardice and dishonesty, yet ironically hides a profound secret—his biological fatherhood of Hassan—that contradicts his public moral code. This contradiction reveals Hosseini's nuanced portrayal of fathers as flawed human beings rather than idealized patriarchs.

Baba's relationship with Amir illustrates how emotional neglect can be as damaging as overt cruelty. Although Baba provides material comfort, he fails to offer emotional



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warmth, which leaves Amir feeling inadequate and unloved. Amir interprets Baba's disappointment as a reflection of his own weakness, particularly his lack of physical courage. This psychological pressure pushes Amir toward moral failure. In this sense, the father figure in *The Kite Runner* becomes a source of both aspiration and trauma. Baba's authority shapes Amir's moral compass, yet his silence and distance also contribute to Amir's guilt and self-loathing.

At the same time, Baba's hidden sin complicates the traditional image of the father as a moral guide. His refusal to acknowledge Hassan publicly denies Hassan not only a father but also social legitimacy. Baba's generosity toward Hassan can be interpreted as unconscious compensation for his guilt, suggesting that fatherhood in Hosseini's work is inseparable from moral responsibility. Baba's eventual decline in America, where he loses social status and physical strength, symbolizes the erosion of patriarchal authority in exile. As Baba becomes vulnerable, Amir gains the opportunity to redefine himself and ultimately achieve moral redemption by rescuing Sohrab, thus symbolically correcting his father's failure.

In contrast, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* presents a broader and often harsher spectrum of father figures, reflecting the novel's focus on women's suffering in a patriarchal society. Jalil, Mariam's father, represents emotional weakness and moral cowardice. Although he shows affection toward Mariam in private, he refuses to publicly acknowledge her as his daughter because she is born out of wedlock. Jalil's love is conditional and self-serving, prioritizing his social reputation over his child's emotional well-being. His abandonment of Mariam initiates a chain of suffering that defines her entire life. Unlike Baba, whose strength masks moral weakness, Jalil's weakness is evident in his inability to protect his daughter or challenge social norms.

Jalil's character highlights a different dimension of fatherhood: the destructive power of passive neglect. His failure is not rooted in violence but in silence and inaction. Mariam's longing for paternal love mirrors Amir's emotional hunger, yet Mariam is denied even the illusion of belonging. Jalil's later remorse, expressed through his letter and inheritance, comes too late to heal the psychological damage he has inflicted. Hosseini thus portrays fatherhood as a lifelong responsibility that cannot be absolved by delayed regret.

Another significant paternal figure in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is Rasheed, who functions as a husband-father figure within a coercive domestic structure. Rasheed embodies the most brutal manifestation of patriarchal authority. His role as a father is defined by control, violence, and rigid gender expectations. Although he claims to desire a son, his disappointment and cruelty toward Mariam and later Laila reveal that his concept of fatherhood is rooted in ownership rather than care. Rasheed's tyranny exposes how distorted paternal power can become when combined with misogyny and social instability. Unlike Baba or Jalil, Rasheed lacks moral complexity; he represents an almost absolute negation of nurturing fatherhood.

However, Hosseini also presents alternative, redemptive images of fatherhood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hakim, Laila's father, stands in sharp contrast to Jalil and Rasheed. He is gentle, educated, and deeply committed to his daughter's intellectual and



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emotional growth. Hakim encourages Laila's education and independence, embodying a progressive model of fatherhood based on empathy and respect rather than dominance. His character suggests that paternal love can function as a source of resilience and hope even in times of political chaos. Hakim's death leaves Laila emotionally devastated, underscoring how vital a positive father figure can be in shaping a child's sense of self-worth.

When comparing the two novels, it becomes evident that Hosseini uses father figures to critique traditional patriarchal norms while simultaneously acknowledging their emotional power. In both works, fathers occupy positions of authority that profoundly influence their children's moral and psychological development. Yet Hosseini refuses to present a single, fixed image of fatherhood. Instead, he offers a spectrum ranging from compassionate guidance to destructive domination. This complexity reflects the broader social and historical realities of Afghanistan, where war, displacement, and rigid traditions have fractured family structures.

Another shared element in both novels is the theme of silence. Fathers often fail not through explicit cruelty but through what they leave unsaid. Baba's silence about Hassan, Jalil's silence during Mariam's humiliation, and Rasheed's suppression of women's voices all demonstrate how paternal authority can perpetuate injustice through inaction. Conversely, Hakim's willingness to speak, teach, and listen represents a moral alternative. Hosseini suggests that true fatherhood requires moral courage as much as social power.

Redemption is also closely tied to the image of the father. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir's journey toward redemption involves confronting his father's legacy and correcting his mistakes. By saving Sohrab, Amir symbolically becomes the kind of father figure he once needed. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam achieves a form of moral redemption by sacrificing herself for Laila, thereby breaking the cycle of abuse initiated by failed father figures. Although Mariam is not a father, her final act embodies the protective, selfless love that absent or cruel fathers failed to provide.

Ultimately, the image of the father in both novels serves as a lens through which Hosseini examines broader ethical questions about responsibility, love, and human dignity. Fathers are shown not merely as biological parents but as moral agents whose choices shape entire lives. Their failures are deeply consequential, yet the novels also suggest that individuals can transcend paternal legacies through conscious ethical action. In portraying fathers as simultaneously powerful and fallible, Hosseini offers a deeply human exploration of authority and compassion.

In conclusion, the image of the father in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is multifaceted and deeply symbolic. Through characters such as Baba, Jalil, Rasheed, and Hakim, Hosseini explores how fatherhood can nurture or destroy, protect or abandon. These paternal figures reflect the tensions between tradition and change, power and responsibility, silence and moral action. By situating personal family dynamics within the larger context of Afghan history and culture, Hosseini transforms the image of the father into a profound commentary on human ethics and social justice.

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> January-2026

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