

## Aesthetic Value of the Novel The Kite Runner of Khaled Hosseini: Putting It to the Test of Bharata's Theory of Rasa

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### Abstract

According to Bharata, each of us is fitted with a built-in structure of *sthayibhavas* (the permanent emotional state), modified forms of basic drives or instincts due to centuries of evolutionary humanization and social living processes. These *sthayibhavas*, chiefly eight in number, are heightened to *rasadasa* (a relishable state) by the writer so that we have one rasa corresponding to each. Bharata defines it as "*Vibhava-anubhava-vyabhichari-samyogad rasa nispatih*" (the savoring of the emotion is possible through the combination or integration of these elements: *Vibhava-anubhava-vyabhicharibhavas*). The aesthetic value of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is explored through the lens of Bharata's theory of Rasa, a classical framework for understanding emotions in literature and performance. This study investigates how the novel evokes pathetic emotions (rasas) outlined in Bharata's *Natya Shastra* and how these emotional responses contribute to the overall aesthetic experience. By analysing some important events in the novel (the friendship and betrayal between Amir and Hassan, and the backdrop of war-torn Afghanistan), the paper illustrates how Hosseini's narrative techniques, character development, and thematic elements align with the traditional Indian concept of rasa. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the universality of Bharata's emotional theory and its applicability to modern literary works, demonstrating the cross-cultural resonance of Hosseini's storytelling.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic value, The Kite episode, Bharata, Theory of Rasa, Emotions, Literary Analysis, Catharsis, Narrative Techniques.

### Introduction

Here is Hosseini's novel, *The Kite Runner*, which demonstrates the bearing of Karuna Rasa. It is the first novel of an Afghan-American writer set in the district of Kabul. The writer presents the story based on the relationship between father and son. Still, this research paper aims to fathom the relationship between two boys, Hassan and Amir, in their adolescence. In this novel, we can see guilt and redemption. A pivotal scene, an act of sexual assault, has been depicted upon Hassan, which Amir enables to stop, and this scene takes Amir far from Hassan. Hassan belongs to Hazara (the Hazaras are a minority in Afghanistan who primarily practice Shia Islam), and Amir is a Pashtun (the Pashtuns are the majority in Afghanistan who practice Sunni Islam). Pashtuns easily kill, insult, and torture the Hazaras, considering them the weakest and poorest race in Afghanistan. Hassan lives and works in Amir's house with his father, Ali, but here, Amir's father, Baba, does not treat Hassan as Hazara. Baba is Amir's father, considered a hero and leader in Kabul. Baba and Amir never quite seem to connect, especially in Afghanistan. Baba always does things for others and expects more from his son. So, it seems at the novel's

beginning that Amir is connected to Hassan, but he plays with Hassan when there is no one around him, and when Amir is surrounded by others who belong to his caste, he does not play with Hassan. But Hassan craves recognition and love, so he has become a devoted servant of Amir, and Amir shows him consideration. The story begins with a kite tournament in Kabul and several other districts like Karteh-Char, Karteh-Parwan, Mekro-Rayan, and Koteh-Sangi. And Baba wants Amir to win this tournament by any means. He says to Amir, "I think maybe you will win the tournament this year" (*The Kite Runner* 52). Amir has no belief in him but Hassan, who makes him realize that he has the power to win the competition. "Remember, Amir agha. There is no monster, just a beautiful day" (*The Kite Runner* 58), and Amir has won this tournament with the help of Hassan. There is only one blue kite in the sky, which Amir cut, and the kite starts spinning and falling to the earth. Hassan runs to grab that kite for Amir because this kite is the symbol of Amir's victory, and soon he catches the kite. As soon as he starts coming home with the blue kite, three boys, Assef, Wali, and Kamal, block Hassan's way out of the alley. These three boys are from that day on the hill when Hassan saved Amir with his slingshot. The story is this: Assef is a Pashtun who does not like Hassan because Hassan is a Hazara. Assef always uses abusive words for Hassan, like 'Kunis', 'kafes', and 'flat nose'. Assef threatens Amir often not to be friends with Hassan. Once Hassan and Amir play, Assef comes there with his two friends, Wali and Kamal, and threatens Amir not to play with Hassan and fights with Amir. When Assef grabs Amir in his arms, he tries to hurt Amir. Seeing this situation, Hassan repeatedly expostulates Assef, "Please leave us alone, Agha" (*The Kite Runner* 39), but Assef denies it. When Assef does not free Amir, Hassan takes his slingshot and shoots Assef. Due to this, he gets injured. On this, Assef says, "Your Hazara made a big mistake today, Amir. This is not the end today; believe me, this is not the end for you either, Amir. Someday I will make you face me one on one" (*The Kite Runner* 40). And the day of revenge has come on the day of the kite competition. Three boys, Assef, Wali, and Kamal, block Hassan's way when he returns home with a kite. Wali stands on one side, Kamal on the other, and in the middle, Assef. Assef waves a dismissive hand towards Hassan and says, "*Bakhshida*. Forgiven. It is done... because it is only going to cost you that blue kite. A fair deal" (*The Kite Runner* 68). But Hassan replies, "Amir Agha won the tournament, and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite" (*The Kite Runner* 68). Assef replies to Hassan sarcastically, "A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog". But Hassan sticks to his words. Then they surround Hassan and throw him on the ground, and Assef crushes Hassan's neck with his snow boot and says to Hassan, "Your father won't find out. There is nothing sinful about teaching a lesson to a disrespectful donkey" (*The Kite Runner* 71). After that, Assef kneels behind Hassan put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifts his bare buttocks. He unzips his jeans, drops his underwear, and positions himself behind Hassan. Hassan does not struggle and does not even whim. Assef rapes Hassan, and Amir is standing far away and watching this whole incident behind a tree. When he watches this scene, he feels that he is "lost in a snowstorm. The wind shrieks, blowing stinging sheets of snow into my eyes. I stagger through layers of shifting white. I call for help, but the wind drowns out my cries. I fall and lie panting on the snow, lost in the white, the wind wailing in my ears" (*The Kite Runner* 70). Seeing Hassan's face, he loses his senses. "It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb" (*The Kite Runner* 71). He bites on his fist hard enough to draw blood from the knuckles. He weeps, and he hears the Assef's quick, rhythmic grunts. On the other side, Hassan gathers his courage and stands and walks towards the home. Amir meets Hassan on the way, making him feel like he has seen nothing. Hassan drags a sleeve across his face and wipes snot and tears. He wants to say something, but his voice cracks. He closes his mouth, opens it, and closes it again. At last, he says that Agha Sahib (the father of Amir) would get angry at them, and they walk towards the home.

### Application of Karuna Rasa

In terms of rasa formulation, when Assef rapes and beats Hassan, Amir feels the pain that Hassan undergoes. Here, Hassan, the *visayalambana*, engenders various emotions in the heart of *sahrdaya* (the spectator), and here, *sahrdaya* is Amir and the readers. Hassan is the *visayalambana* and Amir the *asrayalambana* whose heart is overflowed with sympathy for Hassan. Amir wanted to save Hassan from Assef, Wali, and Kamal but could not. Amir calls for help, but the winds drown his cries. The snowstorm, the darkness of evening, and the shrieking wind ignite the *sanchari bhava* like *Glani* (torment), *chinta* (anxiety), *Vyadhi* (sickness), *Trasa* (fear), and *Vreedha* (sense of shame).

After some days, Amir's birthday comes, and the celebration is going on. As he sees Assef on his birthday with Kamal and Wali, his guilt arises, and Amir does not share this incident with anyone. The irony is that Hassan serves drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter. "The light winked out, a hiss and a crackle, then another

flicker of orange light: Assef grinning, kneading Hassan in the chest with a knuckle, then, mercifully, darkness” (*The Kite Runner* 93). Here *Uddipanalambana* emerges the sanchari bhava like *Nirveda* (disgust), *Glani*(torment), *Jadatva*(dullness), *Smrithi* (recollection), and *Trasa* (fear) in the heart of Amir, and *satvikbhava* as *stambha*, *svedavaivarnya*, *svarabhedas*, and *ashru* are felt by Amir because he still does not share that incident with anyone. The guilt for not saving Hassan is still chasing Amir, and to escape this guilt, Hassan is accused of theft by Amir. He keeps some cash and his watch (which he gets on his birthday) in Hassan's room and tells his father, Baba, that Hassan has stolen his watch and some cash. Amir does it voluntarily because whenever he sees Hassan, that incident comes in front of his eyes. That’s why Amir makes this plan. Baba asks Hassan about this theft, “Hassan’s reply was a single word, delivered in a thin, raspy voice: yes”(*The Kite Runner* 97). As Amir hears this, he flinches like he has been slapped, and his heart sinks. Amir knows that this is Hassan’s final sacrifice for him. If Hassan had not said no, Baba would have believed him because Hassan had never lied, and Hassan knew that Amir had seen everything that day. He knows Amir has betrayed him, and Hassan rescues him again. But Amir wants to move on, forget, and start with a clean slate. He wants to be able to breathe again, but Baba forgives Hassan. But Ali says they would not stay here because life is impossible. Baba pleads with them not to leave, “I don't care about the money or the watch...What do you mean, impossible... Ali, haven't I provided well for you? Haven't I been good to you and Hassan? You are the brother I never had, Ali, you know that. Please don't do this” (*The Kite Runner* 99). Baba tells them that he has already forgiven Hassan and there is no need to leave this place. Ali does not change his mind. When Baba goes to drop them off, Baba cries the first time, and his voice breaks. The departure of Ali and Hassan causes Baba to cry. This is another pathetic moment in the rainstorm accompanying their departure. “It rained in the afternoon. Thunderheads rolled in, painting the sky iron grey. Within minutes, sheets of rain were sweeping in, the steady hiss of falling water swelling in my ears” (*The Kite Runner* 100). Amir says summer rain is rare, just as his father’s tears are rare. Amir does not cry, but the rain provides symbolic tears to view this event. Baba’s pain and plea flow away in the rain. Here, Baba is the *visayalambana*, engendering various emotions in the heart of *sahrdaya* (the spectator). Amir and the readers are the *asrayalambana* whose hearts are overflowed with sympathy for Baba, Hassan, and Ali. The raining, thunderheads, and the steady hiss of falling water are *Uddipanalambana* because the atmosphere ignites the gloom and sorrow in the heart of Baba. Amir, On the other hand, undergoes guilt and sadness, but he feels relieved that Hassan will no longer be part of his life and not to remind him of his past mistakes. the loss of a friend and an opportunity for redemption. this emotional conflict makes this moment crucial for Amir because it signifies the loss of a friend and an opportunity for redemption.

Another tragic episode in the novel is Hassan’s death. Baba and Amir moved to the United States to leave Kabul, and Hassan and his wife, Farzana, took care of Baba’s house in their absence. In this context, Assef, who became a powerful Taliban officer, came to the house and confronted Hassan. Assef forced Hassan to leave the house and essentially evicted him because Assef viewed Hassan as a Hazara and considered him inferior and subjugated. Assef, as a Taliban officer, used the power to assert control over people he deemed beneath him, including Hassan and other Hazaras. Assef had a personal reason to hate to Hassan because of their childhood interactions, where he humiliated Hassan. Assef had a racial hatred towards the Hazara people, and this is a crucial reason to force Hassan to leave.

For Assef, Hassan was just an object to dominate. Hassan was deeply connected to the house of Baba because it was a symbol of Baba’s legacy. He had a sense of duty to protect it, and this attachment played a part in his reluctance to leave. Hassan and Farzana were forced to leave Amir's house in the face of Asif’s demand. This sad moment in the story highlights the helplessness of the Hazara people under the Taliban rule. Hassan and his wife did not leave the house after Amir forced them to leave. Unfortunately, the story took a tragic turn when the Taliban eventually killed Hassan and his wife. they were killed in a very brutal and violent way. The tragic circumstances of Hassan’s death create deep feelings of sadness, loss, and sympathy in the audience, especially in Amir. His death is a huge sacrifice. Throughout the novel, Hassan is the epitome of selflessness and loyalty to Amir. His death was very unjust, and this injustice shows compassion, as the reader feels great pity for him.

The fact that Hassan had been wronged so many times in his life, from Amir's betrayal to the violent actions of the soldiers, compounds the sense of pathos. Readers sympathize with him not only because he is a victim of circumstance but also because he is loyal to Amir—a bond that Amir could not honour in the past. Hassen’s death is the loss of a soul that embodies all that is good, loyal, and selfless. His death leaves Amir with a deep sense of guilt for failing to protect Hassan. Amir’s grief is not for the loss of Hassan but also about not being able to repay

the loyalty and love that Hassan gave him. This grief that Amir experienced on the death of Hassan are important to create the pathos in the narrative. The reader feels compassion for Amir as he grapples with his past mistakes and attempts to make amends. The *Karuna Rasa* here is not only personal but also universal. His death evokes compassion for all those who suffer under oppressive regimes, particularly those who, like Hassan, possess innocence and goodness but are victims of forces beyond their control. In Hassan's death, he is the *Vishayalambana* because his death elicits sorrow (*Karuna Rasa*) from the audience. His innocence, loyalty, and the tragic injustice of his death are the external conditions that stir the emotion of sorrow in both Amir and the reader.

Amir felt guilty, regretful, and in emotional turmoil over Hassan's death, which are the internal emotional responses that support the emotion of sorrow. Amir's sorrow—which is triggered by Hassan's death—acts as the emotional bearer (*Ashrayalambana*) of grief and sorrow. Hassan's death is what triggers the emotional reaction so he can be the *Vishayalambana*. Amir's emotional journey supports the emotion of sorrow (the guilt and longing for redemption), so Amir is the *ashrayalambana*. Hassan evokes sorrow (*Ashrayalambana*), but Amir feels and processes that sorrow (*Ashrayalambana*). They are two separate roles within the emotional framework. *Uddīpana Bhāva* in Hassan's death refers to the atmosphere and external conditions—like the oppressive environment, Hassan's innocence, the violence of the Taliban, and the guilt Amir feels—that trigger sorrow and compassion in the reader. As Clark remarks, "Hosseini's depiction of Amir's moral failings and quest for redemption, while at times melodramatic, is undeniably affecting. The novel manages to capture the universal pain of personal betrayal and the long, often painful process of seeking atonement" (Clark).

In Hassan's death, the *Vyabicharibhāva* are the temporary or fluctuating emotions that characters, especially Amir, experience during and after Hassan's death as Amir's *spāpabodha* and *pāścāttāpa* are fluctuating emotions. After Hassan's death, Amir experienced deep regret for all the wrongs he did to Hassan—especially the betrayal and how he treated him when they were children. This regret is an intense but temporary emotion that amplifies Amir's sorrow. *Sāścaryavismayabhav* that Amir experienced when he learned of Hassan's tragic fate. *Sāttvik Bhāva* in Hassan's death can be represented by *Asru* (tears)—Amir's emotional sorrow and regret. *Sveda* (Sweating) – Physical signs of anxiety and guilt. *Romāñca* (Goosebumps) – Emotional shock from the tragedy. *Stambha* (Stupor) – Shock or disbelief after learning about the death. *Vepathu* (Trembling) – Physical trembling due to guilt and emotional stress. *Vaivarnya* (Paleness) – Pale face due to the overwhelming emotion of guilt and grief.

Next, in the novel, the relationship between Sohrab and Amir profoundly impacts the reader. When Amir met Sohrab, Hassan's son, filled with remorse for his past actions after years of guilt, he attempted to seek redemption through his relationship with Sohrab. Sohrab and Amir's scene in the novel demonstrates *Karuna rasa* through Amir's emotional transformation, his attempt to heal past wounds, and the mutual suffering between father and son. This moment is crucial in Amir's redemption journey and describes the impact of compassion and emotional healing. Throughout the novel, we see Amir's weight of betraying Hassan heavily on him. The guilt is intensified by the knowledge that Hassan is loyal to him, even in the face of Amir's cruelty. Amir's guilt lingered when he came to know about Hassan's death, and only through his relationship with Sohrab did he hope to atone for his past. As, "For you, a thousand times over" (*The Kite Runner* 340) Hassan's words for Amir encapsulate his deep loyalty, making Amir's betrayal even more poignant. Amir's attempt to care for Sohrab is motivated by a deep, almost desperate desire to redeem himself. When Amir attempted to bring Sohrab to safety and offered him love, he never gave Hassan, expressions of his emotions. His compassion for Sohrab arises from his recognition of the child's suffering and his guilt over how he contributed to the pain of the boy's family. We can see the emotional interaction of Sohrab and Amir when Amir says, "He did not smile. He did not cry. He did not speak. He did not speak at all" (*The Kite Runner* 325). This line emphasizes Sohrab's emotional numbness, a reaction to the trauma he has endured, which mirrors Amir's numbness after years of guilt. Here, Sohrab's isolation and silence create the emotional depth in this scene, and emphasize the importance of Amir's empathy. To make amends for the wrongs of the past, Amir vows to Sohrab that he will not permit him to return to the orphanage. "You know, I have done a lot of things I regret in my life ... But that will never happen again, and I am so very profoundly sorry. I ask your forgiveness, your forgiveness. Can you forgive me... I am so sorry, Sohrab. I am so sorry" (*The Kite Runner* 325). This repeated apology is an emotional request for forgiveness by both Sohrab and Amir. This transformational power of *Karuna rasa* is capable of healing even the most profound wounds and is seen in Amir's compassion for Sohrab. This approach to *Karuna rasa* integrates the concepts of *Asrayalambana*, *Vishayalambana*,

*Vyabhichari*, and *Sattvik Bhava* in the context of Amir and Sohrab's relationship, offering a more nuanced understanding of the emotional underpinnings of the scene.

In a pivotal moment, Sohrab slowly responds to Amir's efforts to care for him. Although Sohrab did not immediately express his trust to Amir, this hints at the beginning of healing and also justifies Rahim Khan's line, "There is a way to be good again" (*The Kite Runner* 2). Throughout the novel, this line resonates especially in the case of Amir's redemption. Sohrab's gradual trust in Amir symbolizes the possibility of redemption and healing for Amir. As Adam remarks, "*Hosseini does an admirable job of making Amir's emotional journey both relatable and compelling. His internal struggle with guilt, shame, and the search for forgiveness is the heart of the book. Yet, it is in Hassan's tragic role as a loyal servant and the way his fate is entwined with Amir's actions where the novel sometimes strains its portrayal of class and loyalty*" (Adam, 2003).

#### Conclusion

Thus, Khaled Housseni highlights the emotional complexity of the characters and also emphasizes the themes of guilt, redemption, and the healing power of compassion on a larger scale. Ultimately, *The Kite Runner* highlights the inherent tragedy of human existence, where suffering, though inevitable, provides space for personal growth, understanding, and, potentially, redemption. *The karuna rasa* presents a valuable lens for analyzing the emotional and aesthetic layers of the novel; it also allows us to understand better the characters' inner struggles, the moral conflicts they face, and the larger social forces that shape their lives. Through this approach, we gain a deeper appreciation for how Hosseini's narrative resonates so strongly with readers on an emotional and philosophical level.

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