

Betrayal and Redemption Between Divine Assurance and Human Agency: Surah Yusuf and The Kite Runner

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Abstract:

This paper examines how betrayal and redemption are conceptualized in Surah Yusuf (Quran 12) and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. It evaluates how a sacred and a secular text portray moral transgression and restoration. Surah 12:92 depicts betrayal as a vehicle for divine revelation, with salvation achieved through Allah's mercy and predetermined reconciliation, exemplified by Yusuf's unconditional forgiveness of his brothers. In contrast, betrayal in *The Kite Runner* is situated within political and cultural contexts, framing Amir's guilt and reconciliation as outcomes of human choice, moral responsibility, and personal transformation. Drawing on Quranic exegesis, literary criticism, and psychological theory, this study shows that redemption can emerge through divine or human action. The comparative analysis highlights the enduring relevance of these themes, suggesting that both theological and cultural narratives illuminate human fallibility and the capacity for change through forgiveness. This work contributes to comparative literature by reframing redemption not as a universal moral process but as a phenomenon mediated by either divine assurance or secular contingency.

Keywords: *Sūrat Yūsuf, The Kite Runner, betrayal, redemption, Qur'an, postcolonial criticism, psychoanalysis.*

1. Introduction

Surah Yusuf in the Quran is known and referred to as "the best of stories" (Qur'an 12:3) in which family betrayal or jealousy and the imperfect nature of humans are resolved through divine teachings, mercy, and predestination. The trials faced by Prophet Yusuf, including being abandoned by his siblings and becoming a slave and then unjustly imprisoned, serve as a reflection of the Quranic paradigm where the deficiencies of human morality are absorbed in a divine plan, which eventually results in the restoration of individual and social balance. Redemption in this paradigm, therefore, is not only an ethical but also a spiritual accomplishment, which is achievable not only through human effort but also by divine grace.

By contrasting theologically based literature, Hosseini also establishes a secular-socio-historical context of betrayal in *The Kite Runner* that deals with the moral crime of Amir in an Afghan multiethnic and multipolitical context. The protagonist has an internalized prejudice, fear, and personal weakness that result in his betrayal of his friend Hassan as a child, which causes a psychological burden that the adult Amir must consciously struggle to break. The theme of redemption in the novel is founded on human action that triggers Amir to reflect on the consequences of his deeds and interferes with societal constructs and engages in reparative actions in the long run. Avoiding any direct religious context, the path of Amir, however, is still consonant with larger ethical discourses and shows how the notion of individual responsibility, moral strength, and justice align. The main question of the novel, the possibility of moral repair by human activity, is expressed by the words of Rahim Khan to Amir: "There is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 2). Repeated throughout the story, this phrase is used as a moral guide for Amir and provides secular boundaries against which redemption must be pursued.

Although the structures employed are not similar, the two stories end up with the conclusion that redemption is a process that entails transformative efforts that involve active work with the antecedent transgressions, either in a context of divine absolution or human effort. Although the narrative of Prophet Yusuf has been widely interpreted across Islamic exegetical traditions and the novel *The Kite Runner* has created several studies on the topics of guilt, trauma, and postcolonial identity, comparatively few studies have been conducted focusing on the two stories through a common analytical lens of betrayal and redemption. Although in recent works Surah Yusuf is often treated in terms of theological or moral exegesis (Nasr, 2015; Rahman, 1980), in a novel by Hosseini, psychological guilt and the hierarchies of Afghan socio-political structures are discussed (Khadawardi, 2017; Kanosh, 2023). What is under-researched is how sacred and secular discourses create redemption by making various ontological assumptions about moral agency.

This paper thus explores the two texts in terms of how they conceptualize moral failure, repentance, and reconciliation using contrasting frames of divine providence and human agency. The comparative literature and narrative ethics of redemption are generalized by the study through the placement of a Quranic narrative beside a modern postcolonial novel, showing the cultural mediation of redemption instead of a universal structure.

Methodologically, this paper uses a qualitative comparative textual analysis that combines theological interpretation and literary criticism. The three stages of the analysis are interconnected. To begin with, both texts identify key narrative episodes that explicitly dramatize the themes of betrayal, repentance, and reconciliation. The Surah of Yusuf has been analyzed in the case of the conspiracy of the brothers against Yusuf (Quran 12:9), the moral trial of Yusuf in Egypt (12:33), and the reconciliation and forgiveness moment (12:92). In *The Kite Runner*, the focus of the discussion is the betrayal by Amir of Hassan, the subsequent discovery of the birth of Hassan, and how Amir tried to redeem himself by saving Sohrab. Second, these narrative episodes are analyzed by means of chosen theoretical frameworks. Surah Yusuf is addressed through the moral framework of Quranic exegesis and Islamic theological ideas, including qadar (divine will), rahma (mercy), and tawba (repentance). Conversely, the sense of guilt and moral redemption, as experienced by Amir, is understood in terms of psychoanalytic approaches to guilt and reparation (Freud, 1930), existentialist approaches to the ethics of responsibility (Sartre, 1948), and postcolonial theories of structural injustice (Fanon, 1963).

Finally, the paper does a thematic comparison of the two stories in terms of how moral failure and redemption are organized in them. Instead of the mere recognition of similarities, the analysis dwells on how the narrative structure, philosophical assumptions, and cultural contexts influence the ethical definition of betrayal and reconciliation in each text. Using this comparative structure, the paper identifies the ways in which sacred and secular stories develop different forms of moral repair, one based on divine providence and the other on human action. They are synthesized in subsequent comparative discourse, leading to the conclusion that clarifies the delayed implications of betrayal, atonement, and redemption mechanisms in both the sacred and secular realms. The results, therefore, highlight the long-standing ethical relevance of these writings, which provide information about how human strength, moral responsibility, and compassion could be expressed in diversified cultural and theological contexts.

2. Literature Review

The thematic exploration of betrayal and redemption in Surah Yusuf and in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* can be formulated on both theological and secular levels to depict the culture, morality, and time of the history surrounding both texts. Within

Islamic theology, the story of Surah Yusuf is understood through the concepts of divine mercy (rahma) and predestination (qadar). This framework presents the trials Yusuf faces as part of an ordained process designed for spiritual elevation and the strengthening of moral character (Nasr, 2015). The forgiveness of his brothers, shown in the Quranic verse, does not blame him today, said Yusuf (Qur'an 12:92, Abdel Haleem, 2004), which is the attribute of hilm (forbearance) and indicates the quality of Allah al-Rahim (The Merciful) (Al-Qurtubi, 2003). Classical exegetes argue that the misfortunes that beset Yusuf, such as the jealousy of his brothers, his wrongful incarceration, and how he finally came to power, are executed in line with a divinely predetermined plan (tadbir ilahi), thus balancing human agency (ikhtiyar) with cosmic design (Al-Tabari, 2007). This system of theology focuses on divine sovereignty, moral order, and an inalienable course to redemption, a point that the Quran has made clear, as ethical rectification is eventually a work of divine guidance and not a human initiative single-handedly (Nasr, 2015).

On the other hand, in *The Kite Runner*, redemption is placed in the context of a secular, postcolonial paradigm, where the socio-historical theory is supported by an existentialist one. The path of guilt and atonement of Amir plays out in the context of systematic oppression and the ethnic stratification of Afghanistan and its marginalization of the Hazara people. The story of Hosseini requires Amir to take action and break the so-called scripts of ethnic determinism, which is the equivalent of the work of Fanon (1963), who characterizes inherited colonial and social trauma in the framework of the enduring Pashtun-Hazara power imbalance in Afghanistan (Dupree, 2002). The way Amir rescues Sohrab can be compared to the concept of collective catharsis. Fanon developed, according to which individual moral heroism moves the social healing process forward and, as a result, shows that personal redemption and the justice of society are intertwined (Kanosh, 2023, p. 145). The theory of guilt as a motivator of reparative action by Freud (1930) also explains why Amir needed physical atonement and thus explains the psychology behind his quest. "The persistence of Yusuf (sabr) does not require such psychological or physical strain but instead depends on unshaken belief in divine providence" (Abdel Haleem, 2004). While Freudian guilt theory is not doctrinally comparable to Islamic tawba, both frameworks illuminate how moral injury demands acknowledgment and repair.

The gap this study fills can be observed through a systematic review of the literature available. The theological and moral universalism of Surah Yusuf is generally the focus of the studies, and the themes of patience, divine justice, and prophetic steadfastness are presented in the articles by Nasr (2015) and Abdel Haleem (2004). Similarly, classical exegetical tradition, like Al-Qurtubi (2003) and Al-Tabari (2007), presents the story in terms of divine decree (qadar) and mercy (rahma). However, the studies are not extended farther than the sphere of Islamic theology and are not engaged in the comparative literary analysis with the secular ones. Conversely, psychoanalytic criticism and postcolonial criticism have dominated the academic

discourse on *The Kite Runner*. Khadawardi (2017) approaches the Freudian theory of the superego to explore the guilt that Amir feels, and Kanosh (2023) offers it a postcolonial understanding of ethnic stratification and catharsis. The treatment of trauma in the novel has been studied in other works (van der Kolk, 2014), such as the treatment of existential responsibility. However, too much of what is now being analyzed ignores the possibility of ethical or theological parallels with religious texts and views redemption as a purely psychological or socio-political process. Recent developments in narrative ethics and comparative literature emphasize that moral sense in literature is not developed solely through abstract doctrines but by narrative structures. Martha Nussbaum and Paul Ricoeur suggest that literary stories serve as ethical laboratories in which readers have to consider issues of responsibility, forgiveness, and moral change (Nussbaum, 1990; Ricoeur, 1992). Here, both religious and non-religious narratives may be viewed as examples of moral construction that are narrative in nature. A comparison between Surah Yusuf and *The Kite Runner* in that regard allows the present paper to challenge the purpose of narrative form in the mediation of redemption: the context of the Quranic story frames the questions of betrayal in the framework of divine providence, and the context of the novel by Hosseini frames the questions of moral redemption in the framework of historical contingency and decision-making.

The current body of literature, therefore, reveals a divided landscape: theological examination of Surah Yusuf and secular critiques of *The Kite Runner* function independently, with no sustained comparative analysis that bridges these domains. This study fills these gaps by drawing parallels between Islamic theological ideas, like tawakkul (trust in God), and human agency and ethical responsibility in existentialism to show the dual aspects of redemption, one achieved through divine grace and the other through the conscious action of a human being. As an example, the reconciliation of Yusuf with his brothers, rooted in predetermined divine mercy (Qur'an 12:92), compares with the atonement, which entails hard labor on the part of Amir in his mother country and which, in a sense, proclaims ethnic hierarchies rooted in his stewardship of Sohrab (Hosseini, 2003).

This comparative synthesis highlights both locally idiosyncratic and universally applicable aspects of redemption. Surah Yusuf emphasizes such universal moral values that do not depend on time or social context (Qur'an 12:104), and, by contrast, the moral revolution in *The Kite Runner* takes place in a time and socially specific context (Fanon, 1963). The combined analyses reveal the transformative force of a redemption process in both sacred and secular paradigms and how the resilience of humanity, their moral responsibility, and the restoration of an ethical order are conceptualized both through divine and human planes. According to the above literature review, the analysis has now shifted to a more detailed textual analysis of the two narratives. We begin by evaluating Surah Yusuf, thus analyzing how the Quranic narrative of family betrayal and the ending reconciliation creates a

paradigm of redemption that is based on theological theories. This analysis will help clarify the place that divine qadar (predestination) and rahma (mercy) hold as the main engines driving moral reform, which will then be used to frame a benchmark against which the secular humanism of the novel *The Kite Runner* shall be assessed.

3. Surah Yusuf: Divine Subject and Unconditional Forgiveness

The story of Surah 12 (Yusuf) is a detailed theological paradigm in which the themes of betrayal and misery are conveyed as part of a premeditated moral and spiritual uplift, led by God. The plot element of the conspiracy of Yusuf's brothers (Qur'an 12:9) serves as the plot trigger that puts the main moral conflict of the surah, envy between the members of the family and its betrayal (Abdel Haleem, 2004). Classical commentators, including Al-Razi (2000), understand this scheme as *ghay*—an intentional moral perversion driven by envy (*hasad*) to the detriment of the family (p. 234). The narrative role that this episode plays is not only to narrate an event but also to define in what moral condition the brothers were and to initiate a God-planned series of events. The conspiracy of the brothers is a symbol of human moral failure, but the agency of the former is immediately undermined by the fact that the text is placed in the context of divine omniscience: "They planned, and Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners" (Qur'an 12:77). This narrative strategy makes human sin both factual and, at the same time, inferior to a greater cosmic order, which forms the theological basis on which redemption ensues. Although the act is morally wrong, it is presented to meet divine purposes, hence demonstrating the Quranic maxim that they plan and Allah is the best of planners (Qur'an 12:77; Abdel Haleem, 2004). As a result, the story exemplifies Islamic theology that human action, even with all its flaws, is understood within a broader framework of divine decree (*qadar*), combining human free will (*ikhtiyar*) with the law of God (Al-Tabari, 2007; Nasr, 2015).

The way Yusuf has reacted to ill-fate portrays the qualities of *tawakkul* (faith in God) and *sabr* (patience), depicting the Quranic model of ethical bearing. On being accused wrongly by the wife of Potiphar, Yusuf states, "My Lord, prison is more desirable to me than that to which they invite me" (Qur'an 12:33; Abdel Haleem, 2004), prioritizing moral integrity over personal liberty. It is a depiction of a critical moment in the narrative, which operationalizes the idea of *tawakkul*. It illustrates how trusting God is not passive resignation but an active moral decision that directs human action towards godly pleasure instead of worldly benefit. The psychoanalytic model may explain this as the incorporation of the ego with the transcendent ideal, but in the Quranic story, it means the reconciliation of the human will and divine command. This episode highlights the Quranic idea of ethical agency as it predicts the conscious moral choices in line with divine revelation but not survival, as explained by Rahman (1980). Classical exegesis also focuses on the steadfastness of Yusuf in trials, using prophetic steadfastness as the ideal form of patience as both a spiritual and psychological remedy to withstand moral decay (Al-Tabari, 2007). The role of the wife of Potiphar can be described as a narrative agent of trial (*fitna*); her

role is to challenge the moral and religious devotion of Yusuf. Yusuf denies it, which fits the description of trials under Al-Qurtubi (2003).

The unique Quranic view of unconditional forgiveness occurs during the climax of Surah 12 when Yusuf forgives his brothers, saying, "No blame will be upon you today. May Allah forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful" (Qur'an 12:92; Abdel Haleem, 2004). According to scholars like Al-Qurtubi, the pardon of Yusuf has the qualities of divine mercy, al-Rahim (the Merciful), and al-Ghafur (the All-Forgiving), which are beyond human abilities and provide a model for believers (2003). Such forgiveness does not depend on the confession of the brothers and their repentance. Such forgiveness by Yusuf happens immediately with guidance by God as opposed to the secular models, where the process of atonement is long and recurrent, as moral rectitude and spiritual transformation cannot be practiced without the mercy of God (Nasr, 2015). is made after Yusuf reveals himself and extends forgiveness, indicating that the confession of sins is a result of grace and not a precondition of grace. This narrative ordering reinforces the theological priority of divine mercy over human merit.

In addition, the test of redemption that Yusuf administers to his brothers to determine their level of honesty by putting a cup in the bag compels Benjamin to see an instructive method of redemption. This literary tool helps them to repent and reflect on themselves (Al-Qurtubi, 2003, vol. 9, p. 157). The following statement of the brothers, "By God, God has preferred you over us, and we have indeed been sinful" (Qur'an 12:91; Abdel Haleem, 2004), compares celestial design with human recognition, being the archetype of the Quranic synthesis of free will in a predestination-cosmos. Theologically, this moment represents the Ash'arite position on kasb (acquisition), where human actions are acquired by individuals but created by God. The brothers admit their sin, exhibiting moral responsibility, yet they also see Yusuf's elevation as divinely destined, acknowledging God's sovereignty. As a result, redemption is perceived as the restoration of moral order, the reconciliation of broken relations, and the balancing of human activity with divine reason.

The imprisonment of Yusuf and his subsequent ascendancy to power depict the Quranic narrative logic of adversity as a means of moral elevation (Nasr, 2015). This is quite contrary to humanist concepts of redemption, as presented in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, where moral restoration is achieved through self-focused work, existential angst, and social restitution (Nietzsche, 1887; Sartre, 1948). Accordingly, Surah Yusuf also provides a certain paradigm: betrayal and suffering in the light of divine providence become a moral and theological lesson, and the idea of real forgiveness and redemption is closely connected to the providence of God.

Overall, Surah 12 Yusuf is a great model of divine justice and moral endurance. The development of souls and restoration of moral order are shown as a result of betrayal. Yusuf is seen as a remarkably patient person, a wise leader of his brothers, and also an infinitely forgiving personality, which all backs the Quranic vision where

mercy, moral thought, and reconciliation override human constraints. Redemption that depends on human behavior is inseparable from reconciling human agency and divine will, bringing to us timeless teachings about the power of patience, the righteous way of being, and mercy.

4. *The Kite Runner*: Secular Atonement and Human Agency

The theme of betrayal and redemption in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is positioned in a secular, socio-historical background of the narrative, thus highlighting the intersection of personal guilt and societal postcolonial trauma. The sheer betrayal of Hassan by Amir, a longtime friend and secret half-brother, is based on childhood cowardice and internalized ethnic hierarchies based on Pashtun-Hazara tensions (Hosseini, 2003). Hosseini captures the moment of betrayal with devastating clarity: I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan... Or I could run. In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me... I actually aspired to cowardice. (Hosseini, 2003, p. 77)

This internal monologue reveals not merely fear but Amir's conscious choice of moral failure. Narratologically, this text is a narrative device that serves as a psychoanalytic theory referred to as a primeval scene of moral wounding. The reflection in the first person and the past tense brings a dualism, namely the child who ran and the one who remembers and judges. This plot device forms the psychological principle of the whole redemption process since the identity of the adult Amir is essentially rooted in this episode of ethical agency failure. Structurally, this scene serves the same purpose as the betrayal of the brothers in Surah Yusuf, i.e., it sets the ethical discontinuity that will propel the remainder of the narrative. However, the philosophical framing is quite different. Whereas the Quranic version represents betrayal as in the divine providence, Hosseini gives the choice of Amir as absolutely contingent and psychologically oriented. This narrative thus transfers the moral meaning load from theology to individual responsibility. In contrast to the divinely designed tests of Yusuf, the moral failure of Amir is self-imposed and socially constructed, which is what Fanon (1963) determines as the psycho-affective outcomes of systemic oppression (p. 112). His transgression is therefore personal in nature but symbolic, as it is the larger conspiracy of Pashtun privilege to perpetuate ethnic marginalization.

The novel complicates individual guilt by revealing Baba's parallel betrayal. When Amir learns that Hassan was his half-brother, he recognizes, "Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known... We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 226). This discovery transforms his childhood failure into participation in a family legacy of secrecy and ethnic denial: "And with that, this revelation of Baba's, this final con of his, made sense of all my guilt" (p. 227). The psychoanalytical model that this revelation extends is that of personal

superego guilt to what can be described as what can be referred to as inherited guilt, which can be interpreted with reference to Freudian ideas of transgenerational transmission and also the discussion of colonial psychic trauma being transmitted across generations, as in the case of Fanon.

Amir must go through redemption, both physically and psychologically, and he has to fight against the material consequences of his previous errors and the destruction of inherited lines of injustice. The novel's central question, how one achieves redemption, is introduced through Rahim Khan's phone call: "There is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 2). This phrase, repeated throughout the text, becomes Amir's moral compass. From a narratological perspective, Rahim Khan can be seen as a catalyst character whose speech triggers the quest structure of the second part of the novel. What gives him the power is not the authority of God but his position as a moral witness to the past of Amir and a family's secret keeper. Later, Rahim Khan elaborates: "I know that in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, and he will forgive me. But I like to think that he will forgive. But how can he forgive me if I don't give him the chance? How can I ever make up for what happened?" (p. 302). This framing positions redemption as requiring human initiative, a sharp contrast to the unconditional divine forgiveness in Surah Yusuf. In this case, even the forgiveness of God is conditionalized on the action of man; the mercy of God, although it is supposed to be accepted, is inaccessible without the person itself establishing the preconditions of its acceptance. This is a massive secularization of the redemption story in that the burden of initiation is put squarely on human shoulders.

The key part of the process is the salvage of Sohrab, the orphaned son of Hassan, out of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and guilt is thus transformed into a reparative act (Kanosh, 2023). The theory of guilt as a motivator of reparative acts by Freud (1930) helps understand the necessity of Amir to have a physical atonement, which is also explained by modern trauma theory, a process that aligns with contemporary trauma theories of moral injury, which focuses on moral repair and resilience (van der Kolk, 2014). The mental burden of a shame that remains to be resolved is expressed in self-punishment and self-examination, which launches Freudian superego processes. Amir's courageous actions culminate in his confrontation with Assef, who symbolically represents ethnic violence as an established social norm. The beating Amir endures becomes the physical manifestation of atonement, as he describes: "For the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in a corner of my mind, I'd been looking forward to this... My body was broken...but I felt healed. Healed at last" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 289). The text is critical to comprehending the secular operation of redemption in the novel. The catharsis is material, not spiritual, and it is obtained by the tormenting of the body, rather than by the pardoning of God. This is explained by the psychoanalytic model, as the superego is satisfied at last by the requirement

to be punished and gives the ego some respite in the short term on the issue of guilt.

According to the existentialist definition, this is where the action Amir chooses (in challenging Assef) is in line with his own self-construction and brings about meaning in engaging Assef through embodiment. This cathartic moment portrays the Freudian theory that guilt would form a psychological need for reparation (Freud, 1930). The fact that Amir is physically hurt would symbolically help him heal since passive guilt is transformed into active moral responsibility. This interpretation bears similarity to the existentialist thesis according to which moral identity is not given but made (Sartre, 1946).

Hosseini focuses on the atonement of Amir, which is neither prompt nor absolute. When Amir confesses to Rahim Khan that he has "a past of unatoned sins" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 327), he articulates the secular burden of guilt that cannot be absolved by divine decree alone. This confession echoes throughout his journey, most poignantly when he reflects, "I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night" (p. 359). This observation is congruent with the existentialist axiom suggested by Sartre (1948), according to which humans are condemned to be free, and they are completely responsible for their actions in a world where there are no pre-destined moral consequences (p. 29). The repetitiveness of the redemption of Amir is quite contrasting to the forgiveness that is immediate in Surah Yusuf. Redemption in the Hosseini story takes time, bravery, and introspection; hence, human agency is the most important mediator towards ethical healing.

It is the postcolonial environment that also influences the path of Amir. The ethnic hierarchies in Afghanistan, especially the systematic abuse of Hazaras, increase the moral and social urgency of the betrayal of Amir. Fanon (1963) points to the fact that colonial histories and inherited social orders cause enduring psychic traumas that can be resolved only with the help of personal and communal catharsis (p. 43). The redemption of Amir takes the dual form of a personal and a socio-political one, as it addresses both the personal and the socio-political level of guilt, thus acting as a manifestation of the combined nature of self-recovery and social healing (Kanosh, 2023). The story shows that redemption in a postcolonial and secular context requires recognition of historical and structural injustices and being on the frontlines to enable the correction of these issues. This postcolonial aspect introduces the element of collective responsibility that the Freudian approach of individualism lacks. The guilt of Amir is not just a personal one, but it is a collaboration in a system of ethnic discrimination. His redemption, then, must not only be that personal atonement but also the symbolic dismantling of such a system by his rescue and adoption of a Hazara child, something that cannot be sustained by his silence any longer.

Hosseini also describes redemption as being relational. Atonement of Amir revolves around his relationship with Sohrab; his attempts to protect, nurture, and reconcile with the boy are indicative of a restorative morality that is based on human responsibility in opposition to the divine assurance of reconciliation in Surah Yusuf (Abdel Haleem, 2004). The turning point of the novel is not the absolution of Amir; it is his ongoing, incomplete devotion to Hassan's son. Amir is taken aback upon viewing a photograph after he took Sohrab to the United States. "I looked at the photo. One day, I might return to this land of my past, but now I was home...home with Sohrab, in the land of blood and betrayal, of my "again and again" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 371). Redemption remains incomplete and contingent, mirroring Sohrab's own fragile recovery. Unlike the harmonious reconciliation of Yusuf's family, Hosseini leaves his protagonist in a state of ongoing moral labor. Further, female characters like Soraya help Amir to learn about morality, which outlines gendered aspects of ethical labor and social interdependency in the context of secular redemption. It is this relational dimension that puts emphasis on the fact that in humanist paradigms, moral recovery is often dependent on the expression of empathy, interpersonal action, and long-term ethical interaction as opposed to divine intervention.

To sum up, *The Kite Runner* is a complicated secular paradigm of redemption, assuming human agency, existential responsibility, and social accountability. The process of atonement experienced by Amir is a process that is iterative, contingent, and relational, where Amir is required to face his moral lapses of the past, systemic injustice, and individual cowardice. Redemption is not something that is given by God but a human accomplishment created through moral activity, daring, and constant contemplation. This model is the opposite of the divinely mediated forgiveness of Surah Yusuf, and both stories come to reconciliation as the transforming effect of patience, forgiveness, and compassion. Through his novel, Hosseini, therefore, demonstrates the ethical and psychological mechanisms in which people can come to terms with betrayal in the past, and these are based on personal guilt and socio-historical responsibility.

5. Key Contrast: Secular Contingency vs. Divine Assurance

The foregoing studies establish the unique theological and secular frameworks within each text. This section closely contrasts these perspectives, concentrating on their metaphysical basis and the ensuing implications for the redemption process. Redemption in the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is understood as a secular and contingent process that requires a critical approach to systemic oppression and individual complicity. This search by Amir to get absolution requires him to address Pashtun-Hazara forms of hierarchy, which are structural forms of betrayal built into the historical fabric of Afghanistan. His redemption is comparable to the way Friedrich Nietzsche (1887) wrote about becoming what one is, a developmental path of self-creation that emerges due to the overcoming of moral

incompetence (p. 210). In comparison, the trials of Yusuf in the Quran are geared towards a cosmically intended solution through human intervention that is beyond the effort of man. Whereas Yusuf redeems his brothers by referring to the mercy of Allah (rahma), the redemption of Amir is based on humanist responsibility, rejecting ethnic determinism and proactively raising Sohrab. This contrast draws attention to the conflict between Islamic predestination, which was implemented as the positioning of the moral results in the transcendent plan of Allah (Nasr, 2015, p. 674), and secular existentialism, in which, following in the footsteps of Albert Camus (1955), one needs to imagine Sisyphus happy in his eternal existential struggle (p. 123).

The novel by Hosseini thus disavows theological fatalism, but at the same time, it supports an existential agency where the redemption of Amir is not guaranteed nor even full but an ongoing negotiation of guilt and grace. In Yusuf's case, divine assurance guarantees the outcome; the story is inevitably driven towards reconciliation since it is a plan of God. There is no such assurance in the case of Amir. At any moment his redemption might be lost, and it is just the uncertainty that creates the tension of the novel. The opposition, however, is not simply one between two kinds of redemption but between two orders of the metaphysic, the one in which moral outcome is at the end guaranteed by transcendent power and the other in which they are always in danger and dependent upon feeble human decisions. The novel experiences atonement as a secular sacrament, according to which moral repair is only accomplished by means of human endurance and not by divine intervention (Kanosh, 2023, p. 145).

This opposition in the operation of redemption is indicative of a major departure in metaphysical perspective, the active rejection of theological fatalism in favor of an ethical humanism. Although Surah Yusuf insists on the fact that even moral transgression fulfills the grand, transcendent role of qadar (divine decree) and thus relieves the individual responsibility of ultimate causation, *The Kite Runner* deliberately removes this transcendental safety net. Hosseini makes Amir act in a moral vacuum where his duty is radical and absolute, and this is reflected in Sartre's claim that the individual is condemned to be free (1946, p. 29). This secular framing highlights the terrifying insecurity of human ethical life in the present, when moral repair is not a gift or even the outcome of some previously written play but a creation fashioned out of raw human desire. It therefore confirms the existential assumption that human transgression can only be corrected through human agency.

6. Comparative Analysis: Mercy, Repentance, and Cultural Contexts

Surah Yusuf and *The Kite Runner* both affirm redemption as possible; however, they have a fundamental point of divergence as to the processes by which redemption is negotiated, how redemption is culturally framed, and what ethical imperatives it is

eliciting. This section systematically compares these divergences across three key axes: the locus of agency, the nature of repentance, and the role of cultural context.

6.1 Divine vs. Human Agency

In Surah Yusuf, redemption is a gift of the grace of God, to which Yusuf owes his forgiveness at once: "No blame will be upon you today." May Allah forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful" (Qur'an 12:92; Abdel Haleem, 2004). The Ash'arite version of Islamic theology, including the stress on divine omnipotence without overemphasizing the blame and responsibility of humans, adds a layer of complexity to the depiction of Yusuf as divine-directed and self-directed (Nasr, 2015; Al-Ghazali, 1997). The Ash'arite concept of *kasb* (acquisition) is particularly relevant here: while the brothers "acquire" their sinful act through their own intention and choice, the creative power behind that act and the ultimate moral outcome belong to God. This theological complexity saves the narrative from collapsing into either pure determinism or pure free will, keeping both human responsibility and divine authority. This forgiveness is beyond human endeavor and is grounded in the attribute of Allah al-Ghafur (the All-Forgiving) that the classical exegetes such as al-Qurtubi (2003) define as mercy that is forgiven without condition (vol. 9, p. 159). The repentance (*tawba*) of the brothers is summarized by "We have indeed been sinful" (Qur'an 12:91) and is an action of a collective nature, but it is not about their merits but rather a grace of Allah (*rahma*). Therefore, divine guarantee and unconditional forgiveness are in direct contrast to the ethically contingent journey that Amir had to follow.

On the other hand, *The Kite Runner* shapes the concept of redemption as a secular process that is hard and demanding. The atonement that Amir needs involves physical and emotional labor: saving Sohrab, putting up with the violence of Assef, and overcoming the internalization of Pashtun supremacy. This is a voyage that Freud (1930) claims guilt, being an output of the superego, requires that guilt be purged through working through reparative actions (p. 81). In this case, there is no agency with a divine partner, but it is completely human. There is no *kasb*; there is only action and its consequences. The demands of the superego are to be fulfilled by concrete reparative measures since there exists no transcendent authority that will be able to forgive guilt by fiat. Unlike Yusuf, who was promised pardon by God, the redemption of Amir is uncertain and reflects the Sartrean (1948) principle of existentialism that forgiveness is always created by action and not preexisting (p. 28). This opposition forms a radical philosophical difference in the thinking of moral healing.

6.2 Cultural Framing

The universalism of Surah Yusuf is a reminder of all worlds (Qur'an 12:104), and it crosses time and cultural borders (Nasr, 2015). The ordeals that occur in the text are

outlined as being archetypal teachings of patience (sabr) and divine justice (p. 674), which are relevant to all believers regardless of their situation. The narrative is deliberately decontextualized from specific historical or ethnic markers. Although a setting in the ancient Near East is utilized, the details of the story are described in a manner that underlines their paradigmatic, as opposed to their specific, meaning. This narration technique supports the text with its moral, universal authority. *The Kite Runner*, on the other hand, criticizes the ethnic tribalism of Afghanistan as being caused by the collective memory of Amir's guilt by the Pashtun and Hazara hierarchies. Hosseini places the betrayal of Amir in the postcolonial fissures where Hazara people are described as the wretched of the earth (Fanon, 1963, p. 43). The novel is also filled with certain cultural details: kite-fighting tournaments, the terminology of Afghan family relations (Baba, Rahim Khan, and Sohrab), the geographical peculiarities of Kabul and its districts, and the historical peculiarities of the Soviet invasion and the Taliban rise. It is this rich contextualization that makes the moral drama so specific in time and place that redemption, in the secular context, can be no more abstract than the concrete social and historical situation that gave rise to the first sin. The redemption that Amir is undergoing, therefore, involves facing systemic oppression; Kanosh (2023) notes that in order to have redemption, Amir needs to renounce the colonial logic of Pashtun superiority and accept hybridity (p. 144). This difference highlights the ability of universal moral principles to be presented using culturally specific stories: Surah Yusuf is a spiritual message that can be repeated throughout time, and *The Kite Runner* is a critique based on the socio-historical context.

6.3 Repentance: Group vs. Private Ethics

The sense of communal repentance shown by brothers in Surah Yusuf can be viewed as a paradigmatic example of the Islamic collectivist system of ethics in which moral accountability is intertwined with social unity. Their confession, "We have indeed been sinful" (Qur'an 12:91), is a proclamation of their own sin, which must be reconciled by both family and God. This practice is consistent with the prophetic tradition that considers true repentance equal to living a sinless life (Ibn Majah, 2007, Hadith no. 4250), which thus highlights the urgency of the necessity to re-enter the community. The reconciliation scene is collective and family-related; the brothers confess before Yusuf, and their restoration in the family is the main image of the moral order restored. The public aspect is crucial: redemption remains incomplete until the social fabric, frayed by betrayal, is clearly restored.

In comparison, the confession Amir is subjected to is one of loneliness and introspection and symbolic of the Western ideal of the buffered self (Taylor, 1989, p. 134). The way he confesses to Rahim Khan, saying that he has a past of unatoned sins (Hosseini, 2003, p. 327), is a form of private reckoning; it fits into the modern secular paradigm, which favors personal responsibility. And even his final gesture of

redemption, taking the kite to Sohrab, is an intimate, near-symbolic gesture between himself and the boy. The greater Afghanistan community is still divided; the ethnic stratifications he was able to break by saving Sohrab are not defeated but defeated on a personal level. Redemption in this case is personal and not a community renewal. This contrast throws light on the opposite expectations placed on society and the spiritual world for people who want to attain redemption.

6.4 Scholarly Perspectives

Nasr (2015) interprets Surah Yusuf as a microcosm of Islamic eschatology, according to which the trials (ibtila) that are faced by the protagonist are tests of God meant to bring a man to a higher spiritual level (p. 675). This is in line with the Quranic statement that faithful people are put through fear, hunger, wealth loss, life, and harvest loss but are guaranteed relief to those who survive through it (Qur'an 2:155, Abdel Haleem, 2004). The reason behind Allah's rahma and not the merit of human nature explains why Yusuf survived betrayal and spent time in prison as a typical example of sabr (patience). Conversely, Kanosh (2023) reads *The Kite Runner* as a postcolonial discourse that supports the argument that the guilt of any individual surpasses the failure of a person, and it is the way ethnic hierarchies are organized in the system.

The atonement Amir needs is to address the inherited prejudices, which means he needs to rewrite the scripts of ethnic determinism (Kanosh, 2023, p. 145) by saving Sohrab. Such views express the cultural groundedness of the texts. Surah Yusuf is preoccupied with universal, transcendent ethics (Qur'an 12:104), and in *The Kite Runner*, moral healing is placed in a socio-historical context. Recent work in narrative ethics (Newton, 1995) and comparative theology (Clooney, 2010) offers frames of reference for how these contrasting contexts create the moral imagination of the readers. The Quranic narrative provokes one to associate with a paradigm of prophetic eternity, whereas the novel by Hosseini requires one to relate to particular historical injustices. They are both ethically formative, but they shape two sorts of ethical subjects: one that is transcendentally submissive and the other immanently responsible.

6.5 Discussion

The two stories recognize the transformative power of redemption, but ontologically, they are different. In Surah Yusuf, mercy is presented as a divine gift (ni'mah), and it is provided through Allah's qadar (cosmic decree) and forgiveness, which is not dependent on human action: "No blame will be upon you today. May Allah forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful" (Qur'an 12:92). Classical exegesis asserts that the trials that Yusuf experiences serve a predetermined purpose that symbolizes tawhid (divine oneness) (Al-Qurtubi, 2003, Vol. 9, p. 159). This is redemption from above, a vertical descent of mercy that restores horizontal human

relationships. On the other hand, *The Kite Runner* promotes human agency as an ethical command based on the challenge of socio-political legacies. The repetitive atonement of Amir, who saved Sohrab and abandoned Pashtun hegemony, is similar to the call made by Fanon (1963) to abolish colonial hierarchy (p. 43) and Freud's (1930) insistence that guilt requires reparatory action (p. 81).

This is redemption from within and below, a horizontal struggle that aspires toward, but never fully achieves, the restoration of moral order. Together, these writings shed light on two avenues of moral healing, one divinely offered through divine rahma and the other through human ikhtiyar (free will), which is difficult to reach. The enduring significance of comparing them resides not in privileging one over the other but in understanding how each narrative form, one prophetic and assured, one novelistic and uncertain, shapes a distinct moral imagination and offers a distinctive avenue for pondering the repair of human mistakes.

7. Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that redemption is not a universal moral constant but a culturally mediated process shaped by theological and secular epistemologies. In Surah Yusuf, redemption is a promise of Allah, based on the rahma (mercy) of Allah and qadar (cosmic justice). All the trials that Yusuf passes, betrayal, enslavement, and imprisonment, are not punitive but are put in place to lift his spiritual rank: "No blame will be upon you today. May Allah forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful" (Qur'an 12:92, Abdel Haleem, 2004). This forgiveness is a classical *ilm* (forbearance) and testifies to the Quranic principle of divine mercy that cannot be engaged with human action and reinforces the surah as a whole as a reminder to the entire world (Qur'an 12:104). Classical exegesis also emphasizes the harmony between human free will and Allah's preordaining, which highlights the moral universality of Surah Yusuf (Al-Qurtubi, 2003; Al-Tabari, 2007).

On the other hand, redemption in the context of the secular, postcolonial world of *The Kite Runner* is placed. The guilt that Amir faces is based on Pashtun privilege and the role of complicity in the oppression of Hazaras: to face ethnic hierarchies, save Sohrab, and deny inherent biases (Kanosh, 2023, p. 145). His experience is echoed by those of Fanon (1963), who suggests that moral healing requires a breakage of systemic injustices (p. 43). Amir, unlike Yusuf, is not guaranteed redemption by God, but rather, his journey is repetitive and tentative, which resembles the concept of Freud (1930), who believed that guilt had to be worked through by means of repentance, and Sartre (1948) and his existentialist postulate that moral identity is created by acting consciously (p. 28).

Regardless of these variations, both stories lead to one common truth: the process of betrayal and misdeed can be cured not by revenge but by kindness, forgiveness, and ethical valor. The reconciliation of Yusuf with his brothers is an illustration of divine grace, and the adoption and protection of Sohrab by Amir is a representation of

human strength and moral responsibility. Together, these readings shed light on the two aspects of redemption, which are freely received through divine rahma or are hard-won through human ikhtiyar (free will), which lie between the theistic and the secular processes of restoring morality. Secular, incomplete redemption is summed up in the last photograph of the novel, Amir running to retrieve Sohrab and his kite: "I ran. A grown man running with a swarm of screaming children. But I didn't care. I ran with the wind blowing in my face and a smile as wide as the Valley of Panjsher on my lips. I ran" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 371). This scene recalls the first episode when Amir ran away while Hassan was being raped; now he runs for Hassan's son. Redemption is not declared complete; it is enacted, embodied, and ongoing.

The specific contributions of this study to comparative literature are threefold. First, it fills an immense void in theological and secular literary studies by putting Islamic exegetical traditions into a face-to-face confrontation with postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory. Second, it shows that redemption is not a singular entity but is, in essence, a matter of narrative form. The prophetic guarantee of the story of the Quran generates an alternative moral imagination to the contingent, novelistic form of Hosseini. Third, it sheds light on the mediation of moral repair possibility and meaning by cultural and theological contexts, putting universalist assumptions of ethical criticism in question. The implications of this comparative analysis for modern ethical discourse are enormous, especially in fostering interfaith and intercultural forgiveness, moral responsibility, and group reconciliation. It depicts the ways in which the culturally and theologically varied structures may meet on common human experiences and deepen interpretations of ethical change.

Understanding these various paradigms can deepen modern debates about restorative justice, trauma recovery, and interfaith communication by giving detailed models of how individuals and communities perceive the path from transgression to repair. Future studies can either expand this comparative study to other world histories of conflict and reconciliation or attempt to understand the psychology and spirituality of tawba in contemporary scenarios (Elgohari, 2014; Carveth, 2019; McLeod, 2013). This kind of work may also enlighten the role of redemption at the individual level, social order, and divine morality.

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