



# Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 11  
Issue 2 October 2007

Article 10

8-10-2016

## The Kite Runner

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### Recommended Citation

Blizek, William L. (2016) "The Kite Runner," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol11/iss2/10>

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# The Kite Runner

## **Abstract**

This is a review of *The Kite Runner* (2007).

Based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* seems to be a simple beautifully told story of two boys growing up in Afghanistan and the different paths their lives follow. As the story unfolds, however, we discover that the lives of the boys are deeply intertwined in ways that are the result of culture, religion, and tragedy.

One of the two young boys, Amir, is the son of a moderately well-to-do Pashtun man, Baba, of the controlling Sunni Muslim class;<sup>1</sup> the other, Hassan, the son of his Hazara<sup>2</sup> servant and, thus, a servant as well. Childhood companions, Amir is often unsettled and puzzled by his father's seeming favouritism of Hassan and the attention and praise he gives him.

A kite tournament is the event that starts their journey down different paths. Amir strives for and finally gains his father's open approval when he wins the tournament and it is from this incident that the film, and the book on which the film is based, get their name. Tradition is to run after a kite that is cut down from the sky by your kite, collecting them. Hassan is the best of the best kite runners and he runs after Amir's last opposing kite. Bullies follow Hassan, try to take the kite and commit an unspeakable sinful assault against him. Amir, seeing the assault from a distance does not try to help Hassan; rather he hides until the bullies are gone and then goes to him pretending not to have witnessed the assault.

Religious tolerance, or lack thereof, was not an issue for Amir, who takes for granted the position in life that his family enjoys. The only religious discussion he has with his father is when his father talks to him about theft being the only sin and his father's less than favourable comment about the mullahs. For Hassan, his position in life is due to religious intolerance and is something he lives with on a daily basis. Not speaking up to those who are Pashtun, saying nothing when bullies take advantage of him and remaining subservient when Amir tries to provoke him to strike back at him are all a part of his position in life.

It is the assault and Hassan's unwillingness to get angry enough to try to get his father to leave their service to Amir's family that causes a rift between the boys and as Amir tries to rid himself of the guilt he feels for not coming to Hassan's defense, he draws on something his father has told him, something he is sure will rid him of Hassan and his father – theft is the only sin and all other sins are variations of theft – not consciously realizing that the theft affects not only the victim but the thief as well. He hides a couple of his birthday gifts in Hassan's room, tells his father that Hassan has stolen from him, hoping that his father will fire Hassan's father, Ali, so that they will leave and he will not be faced with a reminder of his cowardice daily. Of course, in best story-telling manner, Amir's father forgives Hassan who, in turn, confesses to the crime he did not commit. Amir is at a loss to know why this should happen since his father has emphatically explained

to him that theft is a sin. However, Hassan's father refuses to stay in the midst of this disgrace and at this point the paths of Amir and Hassan part.

Hassan and his father go to the Hazarajat to live while Amir and his father end up in California in the early 1980s, following a journey caused by the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s. Amir marries but he and his wife are unable to conceive. Hassan marries and fathers a child. The political climate in Afghanistan worsens and Hassan's child, Sohrab, is left warehoused in an orphanage.

Memories flood back when Amir receives a call from his mentor, a kind uncle of sorts, and his father's friend, Rahim Khan, who is now living in Pakistan. Khan asks Amir to come to Pakistan to see him one last time. Life begins to repeat itself as Amir learns Hassan is his half-brother and that his nephew has been taken from the orphanage to the home of the young bully, now grown up, who repeats earlier assaults on Hassan's son. While Amir confronts the bully, Hassan's son saves Amir from certain death, carrying out the threat his father had made to save Amir when Hassan and Amir were young.

Although the movie is not about religion per se, it provides an excellent example of how religion, in this instance the same religion, comes to separate people from each other, including Amir and Hassan. In a world where the equality

of human beings is recognized to an ever greater extent, religion continues to serve as a way for some people to feel superior to others and for that reason to treat them badly. Whether this is a matter of religious doctrine or not, it is in practice the way that people use religion. In *The Kite Runner*, directed by Marc Forster, religious discrimination is the background against which the fascinating story of Amir and Hassan plays out.

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<sup>1</sup> Pashtuns form the dominant ethnic and linguistic community who gained control over Afghanistan in the 19th century. See <http://www.afghan-network.net/Ethnic-Groups/pashtuns.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The Hazara settled in Afghanistan at least as far back as the 13th century. Hazaras have always lived on the edge of economic survival. As a result of Pashtun expansionism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which was fueled by Sunni prejudices against the Shia, the Hazaras were driven to the barren dry mountains of central Afghanistan (the Hazarajat). See <http://www.afghan-network.net/Ethnic-Groups/hazaras.html> The term "Hazara" is believed to come from the word "Hazar," meaning one thousand. See <http://www.hazara.net/hazara/haz-summary/haz-summary.html#The%20word%20Haza>