

Investigation of culture and cultural displacement in Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*

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Abstract:

The purest form of art is literature. Society is influenced and shaped by literature. The role of literature in society is to help and improve our way of thinking and to perceive our surroundings. Literature inspires the whole nation to rebel and change. It helps to learn about human nature in all its life. Culture defines a person's identity. The paper focuses on the loneliness and isolation of immigrants who are caught between two cultures, which exacerbates their emotional pain. Despite their desire to return, there is no actual possibility of doing so. The second generation has cultural flexibility and that flexibility makes them suffer more. They are torn between two cultures and two nations. The Afghan history, folklore, customs, food and indigenous literature continue to shape and transform the lives of those leaving Afghanistan. They wish to return to their homeland, but find it impossible to make a full return, even though the home has become an emotional drag on their lives. The paper is a subsidiary template to read the emergent and unexplored aspects of cultural and diasporic aspects of its citizens traversing different borders.

Key words: Afghan Culture, alienation, cultural trauma, immigrants, memory.

Literature sheds light on human life and cultural development. Modern Afghan literature has its roots in the rich heritage of traditional writings. The novel *And the Mountains Echoed* reveals the experience of cultural identity in Afghanistan. Hosseini's novels portray the bleak images of a changing world. It tries to present the changing world through the important events that happen in the world during the period of the novel.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and geographically landlocked country. This country promotes its faith and traditions based on kinship and family love. Afghan culture has its roots in tribal societies. These societies are shaped by their own racial identity as they have separate racial communities. The hierarchy of Afghan society stems from ethnic differences. The beautification of a country is determined by its unique identity and values in terms of religion, culture and tradition. Afghanistan holds an important place in history and is known for many dark beliefs and destructive forces. Hosseini tried to present the rich culture and identity of Afghanistan through his novel *And the Mountains Echoed*.

Afghanistan is a country with many ethnic groups. It has been disrupted by various wars and the rise of the Taliban regime. War and strife have destroyed Afghan culture and families and have created thousands of refugees. Afghans emigrated to Pakistan, America, and France have lived with their cultural identity and struggles. On the other hand, *And the Mountains Echoed* is about people who have migrated away from Afghan culture. The cause of cultural trauma is known through second generation people namely Abdullah and Pari. The trauma behind their actions is evident in their attitude and approach to Afghanistan. Pari lives with an hyphenated identity in France and faces collective identity crisis. Timur and Adris do not pay much attention to their homeland. The third generation is unaware of its roots and traumatic memories. Most of the migrants

return to Afghanistan to protect their wealth in the country. Hosseini's novel *And the Mountains Echoed* introduces the plight of Afghans and highlights their ongoing immigrant problems. Immigrants from Afghanistan share a common traumatic experience and memories. Characters like Pari Wahdati, Timur and Idris try to help the country as a recovering process from the trauma.

The identity crisis is an important factor in formulating the problem of immigration, which Khaled Hosseini as an immigrant masterfully portrays. Alienated people have difficulty defining their place in the world. The struggle over what home means is an internal conflict fueled by loneliness. A sensation of unhomeliness that results in a sense of alienation and estrangement is largely influenced by displacement and dislocation. It is like being a stranger in a country with a different culture and language. Hosseini seeks to show the mindset of people who experience alienation both within and outside their origins. Khaled Hosseini thrives as an aspiring writer who writes about the lifestyle and culture of the Afghan people. He tells the truth about Afghanistan to remove all the misunderstandings and uncertainty of people in Europe and America. Hosseini gives a great insight into the problems that are faced by immigrants and their way of life and culture. He looks at the immigrants who are expelled, marginalized and displaced. The main character of the story experiences rootlessness, brokenness and alienation. The novel *And the Mountains Echoed* reveals cultural tension in Afghanistan during the 1950s. Khaled Hossein's *And the Mountains Echoed* tackles the theme of alienation.

Alienation through loss of identity is one of the most important themes in postcolonial literature. Modern humanity is unable to understand the true purpose of life and its meaning in the hostile world. Edmund Fuller comments that "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin, but also from inner problems a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness, in his way of existence" (3). The novel presents living beings grow without roots due to cultural displacement. There is an ongoing battle within the lives of characters. The multi-generational novel is set in Afghanistan which is the starting point of the author's life. His honest portrayal of his experiences in Afghanistan, Paris, and the United States gave him a customary, patented edge in crafting the story. By writing about his homeland, Hosseini tries to rediscover himself. The author expresses his sense of alienation through the effects of exile and immigration by taking several countries, including the United States, France, and even the Greek island of Tinos, as well as his native Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini attempts to create different cultural dimensions and perspectives to see the globalized world beyond national borders. Sometimes migrants and non-migrants have the same social experience, but they have different emotions, which is also a kind of contradiction.

Estrangement, alienation, identity crisis and uprootedness are the common features of the modern and contemporary novel. The novel is a document that shows how displacement affects people and the extent to which people feel far from home. Influenced by immigration and diaspora, Khalid Hosseini connects Afghanistan to the world and constructs the diversity of ideas from different countries in his work. He paints a picture of the struggles of immigrants who are not welcomed in other countries. The characters in Khaled Hosseini's novels yearn for association and struggle to achieve an Afghan identity. The novel is the connection between different characters from different countries, and with this technique the author paints a picture of what it feels like to have your roots cut off. Hosseini puts it this way, "But it is important to know this, to know your roots. To know where you started as person. If not, your own life seems unreal to you. It's like a puzzle. do you

understand? Like you have missed the beginning of a story and now you are in the middle of it, trying to understand it” (356).

Afghan literature has a rich literary tradition that reflects their identity in their literary works. The ancient art of storytelling, the richest form of Afghan literature, deals with Afghan life, traditions, values, beliefs, culture and behavior. Due to many wars, most Afghans are uneducated, so folklore and poetry are passed down to next generation through songs and stories. Khaled Hosseini, in his novel *And the Mountains Echoed* says, “we Afghans love our poetry; even the most uneducated among us can recite verses of Hafez, Khayyam or Saadi” (111). The world is experiencing various crises, including world wars, famine and dangerous diseases. In addition to these crises, the postmodern world has seen the rise of terrorism and its inhumane attacks. Insecurity and terrorism have always plagued humanity and are documented through literature. The people of Afghanistan live with uncertainty and fear after witnessing war and the destruction of families, cultures and communities. In Afghanistan, victims are those who have witnessed traumatic events, lived through horrific situations, and lived with the memories of the trauma. Fear and being victims of war affect the psyche of individuals and communities, causing trauma.

The transformation of the identity of individuals or groups in the memory of pain in order to feel their memory and the pain of humanity as a group. The collective mood in Afghanistan is created by immigrants. Moving from one country of origin to another is painful. The problem of displacement in Afghanistan is analyzed in two parts, the first is internal displacement and the second is external displacement. In general, displacement due to conflict and war calls into question identity, origins and origins. In particular, individuals or communities experience an identity crisis as a result of immigration and are affected by their distorted culture.

And the Mountains Echoed spans nearly 60 years of Afghanistan's history and explores the aftermath of an act of desperation that destroyed the lives of two young men and affect many others. The brutal conflicts of the late 20th and 21st centuries create generations of Afghans who rarely experienced peace. They resist British and Soviet invasions and continue to resist the insistence of the Taliban and others. Many Afghans consider themselves survivors. Some older Afghans may see the hardships and political upheavals of recent decades as a disastrous final chapter in a long history of peace.

In the novel, different characters have to leave their hometowns for different reasons. As a child, Pari is sold to a rich couple. The main reason for the suppression of novels is the bad economic situation. Sometimes people's needs are met by alienating them from their roots. Pari grows in a culture that is not her's. Life first in Kabul and then in Paris takes her far from her roots. Despite her luxurious life, a sense of alienation haunts her. “Sometimes it was vague, like a message sent across shadowy byways and vast distances, a weak signal on a radio dial, remote, warbled. Other times it felt so clear, this absence, so intimately close it made her heart lurch” (189). The author raises complex issues where an individual is forced to leave his roots, his homeland, in order to ensure a better life for himself and his family. The plot of the novel is cleverly devised and the story is told from several angles. The novel attempts to present the struggles one faces while living in a different culture. Pari is handed over to a rich couple to give her a better and more luxurious life. After the loss of Pari, Abdullah leaves Afghanistan because he feel he has no connection. Home is what connects our emotions to our identity.

Abdullah loses everything when Pari moves in with the Wahdati family. There is also a mystifying emptiness in Abdullah's life that he feels in all his life, even though he lives with his family in the US.

By connecting different countries in his novels, the author generates different cultures, languages, traditions, living standards, etc., but above all, a human feeling that transcends everything. He sympathizes with his country, but also shows how different countries cooperate with each other. The inclusion of other countries in the plot of the novel reveals the author's worldview and outlook on life, which is an important topic in the 21st century. The main characters are not national, but transnational, which corresponds to the author's identity. On behalf of his country, Khaled Hosseini strives to stay true to his roots while also committing to learn from the experiences of others. Through a cross-cultural process, the novel suggests a global phenomenon and the multiple identities of the characters.

Sometimes people don't see themselves in the life they live in their homeland. Tyson says, "to feel not at home even in your home because you are not at home in yourself" (421). Nila Wahdati, a wonderful and talented poet in the novel, is different from the traditional Afghan women. Instead of accepting the social and cultural norms of patriarchal, male-controlled Afghan society, she refuses to consider herself Afghan. She does not let his adopted daughter Pari grow up in Afghanistan. Although she is half Afghan and half French, she considers her Afghan roots to be half of her troubles. Having caught between two cultures, she never finds a way to live and ends up killing herself. The story presents complex issues that leads to a person being forced to leave his roots and hometown in order to secure a better life for himself and his family.

The people of Afghanistan give great importance to relations. For them kinship is more valuable than kingdom. Later, the scenario changes and values degrade both in the family and in society. In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini describes the relationship between brother and sister; on the other hand, the pursuit of true values disappears in modern times. Characters like Saboor and his children Abdullah, and Pari emphasize the sacrificial love of family. The true nature of Afghan culture and identity is revealed in their way of life and relationships, even when they live in different countries and circumstances. The novel is based on the author's memories of his hometown. Exile communities have a different culture and language than immigrant communities. These cultural differences cause double perception among expatriates. Being Afghans and Americans, they identify themselves in two social worlds. They experience, as Du Bois terms it, "two-ness.....two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (869). Thus, they see themselves in exile simultaneously from the inside and outside. This can lead to psychosocial stress. Therefore, they become marginal assets.

In the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* there is a never-ending process of transformation. The direct experience of displacement brings first-generation Afghan refugees to identity crisis. The first generation of Afghan immigrants are conservative and follow tribal traditions. The culture and traditions of the homeland are rooted in their memory. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for them to assimilate in the lands of exile. However, second-generation immigrants are culturally resilient and more sensitive to the spirit of multiculturalism. There are often many characters representing the second-generation Afghan diaspora and their multicultural identity, completely ignoring their culture of origin. They return to their hometown, but find it impossible to return

completely. On a psychological level, it is an inner journey that leads to personal change and development. The physical ordeal of walking the road creates a psychological trauma rooted in war and exile.

Abdullah respects his immigrant background and thus conforms to the norms of Afghan society. He argues that “you ended up wayward, without a proper home or a legitimate identity” (362). It represents the conservative diaspora, which does its best to preserve the traditions of its homeland. He plays a typical Afghan father who is over protective and takes care of his daughter Pari. This overprotectiveness is a way of distinguishing Pari from Western culture. He does not want Pari to absorb American culture. When she wins a scholarship to one of the best art schools in America, he does not want her to go to Baltimore. Abdullah follows these Afghan values because family is a central part of a person's identity in Afghan culture. Afghan identity and family unity are the most important ties for him. His commitment to his family is demonstrated by the fact that he sends \$1,000 every three months to his half-brother Iqbal, who lives in a refugee camp in Peshawar. He is also loyal to his religion and country. As a traditional immigrant, Abdullah follows the culture and language of his ancestral land. Abdullah forces Pari to learn the language of his country. Abdullah belongs to the first generation of immigrants who carry the cultural baggage of their homeland. He lives a conservative Afghan lifestyle in California. Abdullah does not forget his connection to Afghanistan. He suffers from leaving his hometown. It is constantly in a state of alarm, becoming a marginal entity with a marginal existence. Political instability and natural disasters are driving Afghan migration. The immigration process is full of challenges and difficulties. These refugees come into exile after hardship. In addition, this search for a safe place is emotionally painful. It robs them of their place of birth, social status and cultural identity. In *And the Mountains Echoed* Abdullah takes the tea box containing feathers to Pakistan and later to the United States. The old tin box symbolizes Abdullah's emotional attachment to his sister and cultural attachment to his homeland. Its feathers are the fragile remnants of its culture. So she evokes memories of her hometown and her sister Pari through the feathers in the box. The feathers become a symbol of the hope in Abdullah's heart that one day he would find Pari and return to the land of his ancestors. Even in the midst of hysterical episodes, when he is on the verge of losing his memory, he wants to return to his family and patriotic roots. As such, it implies both cultural and emotional attachment and separation from the homeland. The immigration process is difficult and brings with it emotional and financial crises.

Immigrant communities face crises of identity, isolation, alienation and loss. They differ between two different cultures. Their lives are a mix of nostalgia and a desire to move on. They are psychologically disillusioned by the cultural differences they encounter. Even abroad, it is difficult for them to return and follow their culture. But the cultural distortion or persistence of the second generation makes it suffer more. They are divided into two cultures. Afghan history, folklore, customs, food and local literature continue to shape and transform the lives of those who leave Afghanistan. They yearn to return to their homeland, but there is no way for them to get an absolute reward, despite the emotional impact their homeland has had on their lives.

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