

## **MEMORY, MIGRATION, AND IDENTITY: THE AFGHAN DIASPORA EXPERIENCE IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S TRILOGY**

**Dr. U. Maria Liny Jenifer**, Asst. Prof., Dept. of English, Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur (Tamil Nadu)

### **ABSTRACT :**

This research paper explores the themes of memory, migration, and identity within Khaled Hosseini's trilogy—The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, and And the Mountains Echoed. It examines the experiences of Afghan people through the characters and reflects the complexities of diaspora, illustrating their struggles with cultural displacement and longing for home. The paper analyzes how memories of the homeland shape identities and influence the characters' relationships in their new environments. Through a close reading of the texts, the study highlights the intersection of personal trauma and collective history, revealing how the Afghan diaspora vents out the issues of belonging and resilience. Ultimately, this research underscores Hosseini's contribution to understanding the Afghan experience in a global context.

**Key-words:** Afghan diaspora, memory, migration, identity, Khaled Hosseini, cultural displacement, belonging

### **INTRODUCTION :**

A dwelling place on earth with bounded emotions, feelings, memories, and relationships is home. The word 'home' is very sensitive in contemporary society. It refers to the place where an individual resides, and in particular, the land. The land with boundaries, rigid rules, and intense attachment towards the land. It ignites an individual to get attached to the homeland and creates a patriotic sensation toward one's country. The shift of the home from one place to another carries all the memories, traditions, cultures, and ethnic identities. When the departure starts from their homeland, diasporic life begins and it creates an environment filled with memories and imaginations of their homelands as well as traumatic experiences. Displacement causes an individual to question their roots, identity, and cultural practices. The interrogation on displacement also tends them for the quest. These are some of the key elements in diasporic literature. Despite their religion, community, language, and landscape, they feel isolated and alienated from their homeland. In diasporic life, the human mind seeks to belong and demands for their identity.

Every nation's residents eventually move abroad for marriage, business, or education. But in recent times, the situation is different, people migrate due to civil and international conflicts and political and economic problems, which drove the citizens into exile. A person may be forced by internal disputes to flee from their own country and to live as refuge elsewhere, or they may choose to remain in their nation by losing their identity. Many isolate themselves where life is merely to survive rather than live. This article explores the Afghan diaspora through the writings of Afghan expatriates.

### **OBJECTIVES :**

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To investigate migrant experiences, identities, and cultural conflicts of displaced Afghan communities.
- ii. To explore the role of memory, nostalgia, and trauma in shaping the narratives of migrated people and the diasporic sense of belonging in Afghan literature.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW :**

The article entitled "The Afghan Diaspora: A Global Perspective" by Amin, H. (2013) in the Journal of Refugee Studies explores the widespread Afghan diaspora, highlighting the sociopolitical factors driving migration and the resulting cultural transformations. The article provides an in-depth analysis

of how Afghan communities maintain their identity while integrating into host societies. Amin's work portrays the diaspora dynamics from a global perspective irrespective of race, gender, and cultural aspects.

Fariba Sadat's (2015) "Unearthing Buried Narratives: Recovering Afghan History through the Diaspora Lens" explores the narrative style of Afghan diaspora writers and their narratives about Afghanistan make the reader visualize the past glory and present agony of Afghans. Sadat argues that their work provides a platform for marginalized voices and forgotten histories, particularly the experiences of women during wartime. The present study agrees with the argument of Sadat and elucidates the diasporic lives regarding fictional writers.

Tamim Younsi's (2018) thesis "Whispers Across Borders: Constructing Afghan Identity in a Globalized World" examines the concept of 'hyphenated identity' in Afghan diaspora writing. Younsi explores the writer's use of language, memory, and cultural references to construct a sense of self that blends their Afghan heritage with their adopted cultures. The hyphenated identity holds the pain, aspiration, and resilience. The present study highlights the struggles and traumatic experiences of the characters to uphold their identity.

Azadeh Moaveni's (2013) book "Afghanistan in Ink: Literature Between Diaspora and Nation" provides a comprehensive overview of Afghan literature, including the works of the diaspora. Moaveni argues that the diaspora has led to a new era of experimentation in Afghan literature, with writers employing various forms and languages to express their experiences. The book lends a hand to the researcher to comprehend the ideas and themes in Afghan literature.

Sahar Mandouie's (2017) article "Code-Switching Selves: The Linguistic Landscape of the Afghan Diaspora" analyzes how Afghan diaspora writers utilize code-switching and multilingualism in their work. Mandouie argues that this technique reflects the complex linguistic realities of the diaspora and their negotiation of multiple identities. Mandouie's study particularly emphasizes the fluidity of these linguistic landscapes, as Afghan migrants adapt to and reshape their surroundings through language.

Niladri Sinha's (2012) "Unmoored Selves: Negotiating Afghan Identity in the Diaspora" argues that Afghan diaspora literature wrestles with themes of displacement and the complexities of forming an identity in a new cultural context. Sinha analyzes how characters navigate cultural clashes and grapple with feelings of 'in-betweenness.' The tension and friction of being a diasporic person are higher than for the citizens of the country.

Amir Khisrow's (2015) "Memories of Exile: Afghan Writers Reflecting on Home and Displacement" analyzes autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works by Afghan writers in exile. It focuses on how memories of home and experiences of displacement shape their narratives. The study underscores the importance of literature in documenting the emotional and cultural aspects of the Afghan diaspora's life.

Mariam Rahmani's (2017) "Displaced Narratives: The Afghan Diaspora in Contemporary Literature" explores contemporary Afghan literature written in the diaspora, highlighting how these narratives address issues of displacement, nostalgia, and identity. The article discusses various authors and their contributions to the literature, offering insights into the collective consciousness of the Afghan diaspora. This article records the fragmented narratives of displaced communities.

Lina Hamid's (2020) "Afghan Women Writers in Exile: Challenges and Contributions" focuses on Afghan women writers in exile, analyzing their contributions to literature and the unique challenges they face in their lives. The study emphasizes writers' directions between preserving cultural heritage and asserting the individuality within the diasporic context.

Nushin Arbabzadah's (2013) "Afghan Rumor Bazaar: Secret Sub-Cultures, Hidden Worlds, and the Everyday Life of the Absurd" explores the interplay between the Afghan diaspora and the motherland through anecdotes and narratives that illustrate the unique subcultures within Afghan communities abroad. She delves into how rumors and stories serve as a cultural currency, maintaining connections to Afghanistan while navigating life in the diaspora.

Wali Ahmadi's (2008) "Modern Persian Literature in Afghanistan: Anomalous Visions of History and Form" examines the evolution of modern Persian literature in Afghanistan and its impact on the Afghan diaspora. He highlights how literary works serve as a medium for the diaspora to preserve cultural identity and engage with the socio-political changes in their homeland. The book offers critical insights into the narratives that resonate within the Afghan communities abroad.

Maria Liny Jenifer's (2020) thesis explores the Afghan diaspora in Khaled Hosseini's novels, focusing on the trauma of displacement caused by decades of conflict. In *The Kite Runner* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini portrays Afghan refugees struggling with cultural adaptation, identity loss, and unresolved trauma tied to their homeland. The characters experience alienation and guilt, highlighting the emotional burden of exile. Literature on the Afghan diaspora suggests that displacement deepens the trauma as individuals must navigate life in foreign lands while holding onto memories of Afghanistan. Hosseini's depiction reveals the complex interplay of war, loss, and identity in the Afghan diaspora experience.

#### **METHOD:**

This research paper follows a qualitative and descriptive analysis. The theoretical framework includes diaspora in particular to Afghan diaspora. The diasporic elements are analyzed and deliberated from a trauma point of view. The loss of identity and sense of belonging are deeply rooted in the diasporic feelings of the displaced people. Afghan people were dislocated from their country due to various tumultuous wars and ethnic disputes. These aspects are discussed in the paper. The findings and analysis of this research paper are based on the traumas of the characters from the literary works. The lives of the victims are recorded and reflected in the literary works. Their lifestyle, resilience, and yearning toward their homeland are a continuous reminder of their fragmented memories. Many writers reflected this idea by emphasizing the narratives of the displaced people. Khaled Hosseini's novels rightly focus on the impacts of displacement through his characters.

#### **ANALYSIS :**

The writings of diasporic writers depend on identity or quest for identity in life due to their less attachment to their new land. The expatriates live between two consciousness such as a homeland with imagination and a host land with a new atmosphere. Etymologically the word 'diaspora' originated from the Greek words *speiro* (to scatter or to sow) and *dia* (over, through, or around). Diaspora came to be used specifically to describe the exile of Jews from Babylon in 586 B.C. The Jews were the most ancient and known diasporic people who had no country. Many authorized dictionaries define "Diaspora" as the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries. It means when any group of people who are dispersed from their original land and try to settle down outside. It suggests new life and new roots.

Diaspora may also be defined as the migration of a population or a section of it, along with their ways of life to the place of destination or the receiving nation. In general, they maintain their ways of living and cultural patterns in order to get integrated into the host country. Diasporic Literature pays attention to their native country, land, or nation that still has some claim or hold on those who have migrated to another place. Nostalgic feelings about their homeland are seen as the space around them because they inhale, think, and live with their memories and belongingness towards their motherland<sup>1</sup>.

Afghanistan is in southwestern Asia, bounded by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan; China and the part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir controlled by Pakistan; on the south by Pakistan; and the west by Iran. "In the case of Afghanistan, there was no colonial master. Instead, the boundaries are set by the outer limits of British, Russian, Persian (Iranian), and to some extent Chinese expansion through ethnic homelands"<sup>2</sup>. The constant foreign invasions and internal clashes between different warlords have made the land of Afghanistan a breeding ground for wars between

world powers or colonizers. “These wars led to a huge destruction of infrastructure, economy, culture, mass killings of innocent Afghans, raped their women and destroyed the Afghan's rich cultural heritage”<sup>3</sup>. These worse conditions intolerably gave birth to Afghan migration and escape from the war. The continuous conflict affected their living and they were in a position to seek peace or to escape from the cruel war. Over subsequent decades war collapsed and destabilized the Afghan society. Due to invasion of foreign troops and armed militias, it increased the number of registered refugees across globe like Pakistan, Iran, Germany, India and America, in search of safety and economic opportunities. <sup>3</sup>

Afghans who struggled much to find protection outside of their homeland have given birth to diasporic communities. Afghan citizens are known for their ethnic identity in their country which made them struggle a lot to live in other countries. Afghan People who are living in exile express their experience as foreigners in their writing. Afghan diasporic writers express their belongingness toward their homeland and search for a better life through their writings. Diaspora literature or expatriate writing by Afghans has emerged due to the displacement of Afghan people to various countries. The reasons behind the exile is political power and pride in their ethnic communities.

Human migration has a long history, but it is only in the twentieth century that the issue becomes politicized and internationalized. The migration could be due to political turmoil, civil strife, ethnic conflict, cultural clash, domestic violence, environmental degradation, draught, and economic crisis. By chance and by choice man moves away from home and is displaced to another place. The Afghan diaspora is different from other diasporic experiences. The reason for the Afghan diasporic lies behind the political and economic instability in Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>. The conflict between the ethnic communities is also one of the major key factors for the war. It showcases a world that never creates space for either their neighbors or relatives.

Afghanistan was under monarchy from 1747 to 1973. Later, the king was overthrown by the military officers, the country was proclaimed as a republic. But the republic dissolved in 1992 as the country erupted into civil war. After the struggle and defeat of the British in 1919, Afghanistan was torn between the struggles of monarchs and Republicans, the internal struggles were largely supported by different external powers. The horrors of war in contrast with nostalgia for the ‘good times’ served to emphasize the involuntariness of departure from Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>.

Afghans revolted against the Taliban regime and their atrocities. Afghan rebelled against the civil war and the government began not with the Soviet invasion or with the U.S government but with Daud. He made an attempt to change the country. In Afghanistan's political history, a reign of forty years Zahir Shah skillfully promotes Afghan's interests, which brilliantly demonstrates the power of a non-aligned country to derive the benefits from other countries. Both the USA and the USSR built highways and hospitals, in a mood of superpower competition coordinated by Zahir's cousin and brother-in-law Daud Khan (prime minister from 1953). His departure prompts Zahir Shah to attempt a major constitutional reform. The result, in 1978, was a violent revolution setting Afghanistan upon an entirely new course which ended in civil wars. In March 1979 a resistance group declared a *jihad*, or holy war, against the godless regime in Kabul. Since 1978 the Soviet presence has been gradually increasing in Afghanistan. In the anarchy of late 1979, Moscow decides to take a more active role. The political history of Afghanistan states the causes of Afghanistan's migration.

In 1985 during the meeting in Peshawar, formed a united front as the Islami Ittehad Afghanistan Mujaheddin (Islamic Unity of Afghan Warriors, or IUAW). The Mujaheddin (holy warriors or freedom fighters), from the same Arabic root as *jihad* (holy war) become famous throughout the world as the latest manifestation of the Afghan fighting spirit. The warfare between Russia and the Mujaheddin not only devastates an already poor country but also depopulates it. After many wars, Najibullah plans to remain in power, holding at the Mujaheddin. The last communist ruler, Najibullah, agreed to a UN-sponsored plan for a multiparty interim government. On 19<sup>th</sup> March he announced that he would resign. That day a resistance alliance seizes Mazar-i-Sharif, blocking the road from Kabul to Russia<sup>2</sup>.

The Afghan diaspora is filled with traumatic experiences and heart-touching stories of numerous families. Life as a refugee and hope of returning to their land are mixed with their memories.

Afghan mass migration throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century can be divided into four phases from the 1970's to the present.

- (1) First Phase of Refugees (1973-1992)
- (2) Second phase of refugees (1992-1996)
- (3) Third phase of refugees (1994- 2001)
- (4) Fourth phase of refugees (2001)

Afghanistan has long been used as the battleground for strategic wars by larger external powers, first by the British and then by its geographical position, and due to the fragmented and polarized nature of Afghan society, which is divided into different ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, a group of people migrates from one place to another in order to live and work. In Afghanistan, the diasporic feeling starts within the country because of their pride over their identity. Afghanistan is the land of multiple ethnic values and to stay with their identity they fight and dominate over other communities. The longing for a happy life starts within the country. In this situation, the homeland itself becomes the host land for them.

"Identity and connections between people and place can neither be seen as primordial and unchanging, nor as infinitely flexible. Claims of roots play an important role among Afghans in diaspora,"<sup>3</sup> Afghans living as immigrants have faced much turmoil as they try to settle down in an alien land. The problem of Afghan identity, exploration of memories, and belongingness are seen in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* written by Khaled Hosseini.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American physician who writes novels in English. Hosseini was born on March 4, 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan; his father was a diplomat, and his mother was a teacher. The author, a U. S. immigrant and practicing physician, grew up in Afghanistan and incorporates autobiographical elements in his writing. Hosseini lives in California. Born and raised in Kabul, San Francisco writer is the first Afghani to produce a novel of his homeland in English.<sup>5</sup>

Khaled Hosseini's novels *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And The Mountains Echoed* depict the life of Afghan people. The setting, background history, political issues, and ethnic groups of the novels reflect Afghan society. In his novels, Khaled Hosseini gives us a vivid picture of Afghanistan that reminds us of how long his people have been struggling to triumph over the forces of violence and economic domination. Nevertheless, even today they are not free from violence and social inequalities that continuously threaten them. His novels illustrate the life of the Afghan people, their class conflicts, their ethnic differences, in particular, the struggles in the life of women. Hosseini's novels present Afghanistan in a different way, which is contradictory to the stereotypical idea of that country. It breaks the stereotypical idea of Afghanistan and the author shows Afghanistan as a peace-loving country.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini explores the Afghan diaspora, delving into identity, cultural displacement, and the trauma of migration. Amir and Baba's exile from Afghanistan to America exemplifies this, as they grapple with adapting to a foreign culture while clinging to their heritage. Baba's struggle to reconcile his past life of prestige with his new status as a gas station attendant reflects his dislocation as Baba was like the widower who remarries but can't let go of his dead wife. Amir's guilt over leaving Hassan echoes the moral fractures faced by many refugees.<sup>6</sup> Through these conflicts, Hosseini portrays the complexities of cultural dissonance within the Afghan diaspora. Khaled Hosseini's novels are knitted with political, social, and historical events including ethnic differences and religious controversies. The background of the novel, and the life events and incidents in the novels are closely connected with each other. The central theme of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is about women in Afghan society. In this novel, Hosseini powerfully portrays the life of two women. Mariam, an illegitimate child who longs to have something determined of her own in



her life, is forced to accept her fate, her husband, and her new environment. She is uneducated and deprived of all her rights. Twenty years later the story shifts to Laila, the other women protagonist in the novel. Laila grows in a different environment from Mariam. Her father encourages women's education and women's participation in Afghan society. She enjoys the benefits of schooling and the freedom that was once possible for women. During her school days, she loves Tariq. The bond between Mariam and Laila, two very different women brought together by their horrible circumstances, constitutes the heart of the novel.

In the later part of the novel, Laila lives with Tariq, a legless man. He is the victim of the Soviet Invasion and Laila is the victim of the Taliban are displaced to another country with Laila's children. Tariq is also the representative of the refugees whose families are one of the many displaced subalterns who suffer from poverty, disease, homelessness, and most importantly, hopelessness and despair<sup>7</sup>. They were exiled to Pakistan and started their life with happiness and hope that Afghanistan would come back to normal without war. Memories and dreams of the homeland are reflections of their mind and longing for their homeland.

Laila has her own dreams. In them, she's always back at the house in Kabul, walking the hall, climbing the stairs. She is alone, but behind the doors, she hears the rhythmic hiss of an iron, bed sheets snapped then folded. Sometimes she hears a woman's low-pitched humming of an old Herat song.<sup>8</sup>

Geologically and mentally the refugees and diasporic communities find their space in their place. The identity crisis and longing for their original identity make a person to get the information, happenings, and news about their land. Back home, bombs- Laila has been watching images of the war every day on television as she changes sheets and vacuums<sup>8</sup>.

The belongingness of one's land is the power element in diasporic literature. Even though they are exiled from their homeland the expatriates follow their roots, their homeland's culture, and traditions.

A year ago, she would have gladly given an arm to get out of Kabul. But in the last few months, she has found herself missing the city of her childhood. She misses the bustle of the shoe bazaar, the gardens of Babur, the call of the water carriers lugging their goatskin bags. She misses the garments haggling at Chicken Street and the melon hawkers...it isn't mere homesickness or nostalgia that has Laila thinking of Kabul so much these days. She has become plagued by restlessness.<sup>8</sup>

Laila misses her homeland and shows her longing for her homeland and their country. This makes Laila to return to her native land.

Laila hears the news that schools are reopened in Kabul, roads are repaved, women returning to work and she decides to go to Afghanistan and to stop being a refugee. "I'm happy," Laila says. "Of course I am. But. . . where do we go from here, Tariq? How long do we stay? This isn't home. Kabul is, and back there so much is happening, a lot of it good. I want to be a part of it all. I want to do something. I want to contribute"<sup>8</sup>. Laila, Tariq, and their two children go back to their homeland with hope and assurance that war will not disturb them. Laila's words become the voices of entire Afghan refugees, they wish to live in their country with their own identity. Yet the dreams of many Afghans become the imaginations of their homeland.

After the fall of the Taliban Laila and Tariq, returns to Kabul from Pakistan, when peace is restored in Afghanistan. Laila goes to Herat, Mariam's birthplace. She finally settles down in Kabul with the best treasure of memories of friendship with Mariam who lives in her heart, and shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns<sup>8</sup>. They used their money to fix up the orphanage, where Laila started working as a teacher. The novel ends with optimistic words and it gives hope to other Afghans who are living as refugees that better times will approach and the peace will restore their country and their journey to their homeland. Laila becomes the representative of many Afghan women who are seeking for happy life in their homeland.

In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Khaled Hosseini addresses the Afghan diaspora, focusing on the disconnections within families across borders. Pari's separation from her brother, Abdullah, and her

eventual life in France epitomizes the diaspora's emotional toll: My brother is a ghost in my life. This sentiment reflects the enduring bonds and unhealed wounds felt by those torn from their homeland. Meanwhile, Nabi's reflections on Kabul's lost beauty contrast with his expatriate employer's distant nostalgia, highlighting the varied experiences of the Afghan diaspora. For him, Kabul is like a myth he has come to believe. Hosseini's narrative portrays exile as both a fracture and a painful, enduring memory.

Afghan diaspora not only focuses on the homeland's treasure but also the memories of their country before and after the wars. The memories filled with traumatic experiences as

The devastation of Afghanistan has been very costly in both human and economic terms. Many Afghans have been exposed for a long period of time to several traumatic experiences; consequently they suffer from the physical and psychological shriek of torture and trauma, ranging from minor anxiety to severe psychosis.<sup>10</sup>

## **CONCLUSION :**

Memory and hope are the strengths of diasporic individuals which make them to return to their homeland. The Afghan civilians are isolated in their own country and they not only long for their homeland but also long for their past peaceful state in their country. They await an aura that would help them to regain their happiness rather than power. Khaled Hosseini as a pioneer in reflecting Afghanistan in his writings, represents the harsh reality and the trauma that followed in his entire life. The displacement from the homeland is the mixture of dislocated families, cultures, traditions, and their identity.

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