



## Epitome : International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN : 2395-6968

---

### ILLUSTRATING THE THEME OF ALIENATION AND ANTAGONISM IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S "AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED"



**SHABIR AHMAD MIR**

Student of English Language and Literature

Islamic University of Science and  
Technology, Awantipora, Pulwama

Jammu and Kashmir (India)

Email: [optimist821@gmail.com](mailto:optimist821@gmail.com)

#### **ABSTRACT**

Alienation and estrangement are not the octogenarian and over-the-hill disquietude causerie that emerges in the literary oeuvre, but they have an active role in the present literary world in promulgating the on-going identity conjecture, uprootedness, extremity etc. and are predominantly the quotidian characteristics of modern contemporary fiction. It is an established reality that displacement and dislocation play a key role in bringing about a sense of unhomeliness, and this leads to the birth of alienation and estrangement. These cataclysmic doleful feelings have certainly made an innumerable population to survive a living death. The sense of Alienation and Antagonism is the feeling of being a pariah or outsider who doesn't share his own culture and language in a different nation. He is in irremediable exile. He has very judiciously uttered; "*if culture is a house, then language was the key to the front door; to*

*all the rooms inside. Without it, he said, you ended up wayward, without a proper home or a legitimate identity* (Hosseini, 362) the present paper purports to highlight the repercussions of evacuation on people and in what way people feel disgruntled outside their homeland. The paper also vividly vocalizes the ideas of those people who feel alienated and estranged even in their homeland.

### **KEYWORDS**

Antagonism, unhomeliness, alienation, cataclysmic, evacuation, quotidian, Khaled Hosseini.

### **RESEARCH PAPER**

Alienation is the very abecedarian form of incipience or rootlessness, which provides an abysmal raw material to the psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies. Alienation has certainly corroborated as a colossal and mammoth theme of human condition in the contemporary era. It is only natural that a pervasive spectacle like alienation should leave such an unforgettable plague upon the contemporary literature. It has proved to be an incurable malady that has strangled an innumerable population to living death. Alienation interposes as congenital and incorrigible ramification of existential quagmire both in intrinsic and extrinsic terms.

The theme of alienation has been vibrantly dealt with pertinaciously and doggedly in Khaled Hosseini's, and the mountains echoed. Alienation is the outcome of loss of identity which is one of the most important themes in postcolonial Literature. The dispossessed personality's search for identity is a common place theme in modern fiction. Man fails to perceive today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world. Edmund Fuller remarks that in our age *"man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems-a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence"*

Alienation is a state, in which people find it very arduous and gruelling to ascertain where they belong to. They are trapped in their own world without an attempt to move away from it. This dudgeon and discomfiture gives birth when a person is not so proficient to scrutinize or identify himself to his surroundings. It is a cerebral discordance which emerges when there is a scantiness of self-cognizance. The sense of isolation has its manifestation in the quest for meaning of home. Home is a place where one acquires his emotional as well as his physical needs fulfilled. If he feels alienated while living in a place, this reflects his emotional isolation. He continually tries to discover meaning in life. Displacement, dislocation, and

uprootedness lead an individual to have myriad cultural magnitude. When a person is budged or dislocated, it is congenital for him to feel alienated. The relationship between displacement and the feeling of alienation has been the theme of much focus in contemporary modern fiction. We have seen refugees from Syria, Myanmar, Vietnam etc. have callously suffered the wrath of displacement and dislocation and that has given birth to this truculent and wanton state of alienation. The theme of alienation has now become a cynosure of every modern contemporary writer's eye. The present world as we are acquainted is teetering on the brink of chaos and disharmony and man is isolated in his own house. He is trapped in his own world, unable to communicate and engulfed by the desperations. This unwanted feeling of being a pariah or outsider and barred from partaking his own culture as well as language. A person's root provides a meaning to his life. It is a feeling or relation for a place he associates himself with. Lois Lowry, the American writer and very popular for writing young adult dystopian novel, *The Giver* in 1993, comments in the context of the pivot of alienation.

"I feel sorry for anyone who is in a place where he feels strange and stupid". We have to heal our wounded world. The chaos, despair and senseless destruction we see today are a result of the alienation that people feel from each other and their environment".

Khaled Hosseini, a very cornucopian writer, born in Kabul, left Afghanistan in 1976 when he was eleven years old, and fidgeted to the United States in 1980 after spending four years in Paris. His attenuated absence from his homeland makes him feel like an outsider. The purpose of all his writing is not unavailing or inefficacious, but he always yearns to discover himself after escaped from the place besieged by a swarm of schism and dissidence. The author tries to paint this horrendous picture of estrangement through the dominion banishment and immigration. By taking multiple nations such as America, France, even the Greek island Tinos along with his home country Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini very industriously tries to substantiate different cultural spaciousness and perspective to ponder over the global world, and surpasses all the national extremity. Transnationalism including post colonialism, multiculturalism, globalization, interconnection between nations, and delves into, how certain cultures work on the Diaspora communities. Sometimes it also unravels the incongruity, when a migrant and non migrant undergo the same garrulous and social proficiency or experience but in their heart of hearts contain something miscellaneous.

Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* begins with a parable that a father tells his two children: A farmer who works hard to eke out a living for his family is coerced to give up one of his five children to an evil giant. He and his wife decide to choose contingently or randomly, and the unlucky and accursed one happens to be their relished son. Finally, the

farmer, half mad with dolefulness, tracks down the giant and finds his son in a lush garden full of happy children, with no memory of his birth family. The farmer, unable to summon the will to take the child from this place of plenty back to his own arid, desperate land, leaves without him. As a gesture of kindness, the giant gives the farmer a potion that makes him forget he ever had this son.

The novel picturesquely presents of what it is like to grow up rootless. There is an on-going battle within the lives of characters. This multigenerational novel takes place in Afghanistan, the place from where the author's life begins. He candidly pictures his experiences of living in Afghanistan, Paris and the U.S.A. through this novel, and this gives him an idiomatic and patented vantage to create a story. How beautifully and judiciously has Edward Said put it: "*I think that if one is an intellectual, one has to exile oneself from what has been given to you, what is customary, and to see it from a point of view that looks at it as if it were something that is provisional and foreign to oneself. That allows for independence—commitment—but independence and a certain kind of detachment*". Due to the cogency and impact of migration and revealing a diaspora identity, Khaled Hosseini connects Afghanistan to a worldwide link which constructs a multiplicity of thoughts from different nations in his works. It is this diaspora that acted as a bridge to connect these two domains (Afghanistan and the world).

And the Mountains Echoed paints a very harrowing picture of identity crisis and alienation. These two elements are the main proponents the writer laboriously delineates. The novel unmask and explicates the social, cultural and economic factors for the migration of characters. In other words, we can say the writer exposes the reason behind the migration. The novel also promulgates the view that in order to be alienated, it is not vital to leave the homeland. There are some characters who don't feel at home in their own country. The story of Abdulla and Pari is the foundation of the book, and their story has an interconnection with many other stories told by different people from different nations. Khaled Hosseini has revealed to us how a person feels when he/she is detached from his/her roots: But it is important to know this, to know your roots. To know, where you started as a person? If not, your own life seems unreal to you. Like a puzzle. The whole plot reflects their conditions after they cut off from their roots. Pari like Thomas Hardy's heroine Susan, who appears in his novel, the Mayor of Casterbridge, is sold to a very prosperous couple having a tidy fortune. Here we find the clear capitalistic sympathies of Khaled Hosseini. Why someone would sell his child to an affluent couple? The question can be answered without much effort. Since pari is borne by the penniless parents and the only option left to them is to sell their

child and rise above the scale of fatal poverty. The first reason of displacement, as we observe in the novel, is impoverished remunerative or economic posture. Although Saboor, an impoverished man, loves his daughter very much, yet the economic condition of his family doesn't allow him to have her in his home. She is a burden in her own family and needs to be eradicated or lighten. Saboor couldn't safeguard or shield Pari from the impending doom in the guise of cold callous winter. Saboor had already lost his one child due to the paucity of torrid clothes. The theme of the story is clearly explicated in the first chapter of the novel which is in form of a fairy tale, and which is narrated by Saboor to Abdulla and Pari on their way to Kabul. Sometimes people appease themselves emotionally as well as economically by distancing themselves from their roots. Pari survives and grows up in a culture which is not her. Her life first in Kabul and then in Paris detached her from her own roots. Although she lives a very Babylonian and opulent life, yet the feeling of alienation is always with her. It never leaves her and always hovers over her head in every milky day. Despite her being in a home replete with every luxurious commodity, but still she feels destitute and forlorn. Her remembrance of her homeland tantalizes her like a mirage. Her memories of her homeland seem beckoning her and she can't do anything, but mourn. Sometimes it was vague, like a message sent across shadowy byways and vast distances, a weak signal on a radio dial, remote, warbled.

“Well, it is hardly a mystery, mom amour, Maman had said. You miss your father. He is gone from your life. It is natural that you should feel this way. Of course that is what it is. Come here. Give Maman a kiss. Her mother's answer had been perfectly reasonable but also unsatisfactory. pari did believe that she would feel more whole if her father was still living, if he were here with her. But she also remembered this way even as a child, living with both her parents at the big house in Kabul. Other times it felt so clear, this absence, so intimately close it made her heart lurch”.(189)

She was utterly flustered about her mien. There is something very moving the way Pari feels somewhat different. “*Only that in my life something has been missing always. Something good. Something... Ah, I don't know what to say. That is all.*” (358) her smouldering interior never pacifies and keeps aggravating all the time since she was sold by her destitute penniless. There is something in her consciousness that keep rattling in her head. She is tantalized by her own invisible identity. She becomes a victim of the Machiavellian scheme and is a mirror through which one can see how one feels when diverged from her/his home. She always feels this emotional vacuity and bleakness and it is vigorously confirmed when her mother Nila Wehdati tells her that she is not acquainted about her identity and doesn't

know who she is and from where she has come. She tries to probe over her origin in Afghanistan. This state of identity crisis always keeps tantalizing and haunting Pari until she receives the call from Marko, and she comes to know about her persistent whereabouts. This call plays an important role in her life and acts as the prime agent in the further progress of the plot. This call is vital in bringing the sequestered events together like the “Handkerchief” in William Shakespeare’s play Othello. Pari gets abreasted and fully familiar with her homeland, her real parents and most importantly her brother Abdulla. First time she is gets acquainted about her identity. The author paints the abstruse and arduous problems in which an individual is terribly coerced to decamp and leave his root, his native land in order to safeguard a better thriving and booming future for himself and his family. The plot of the novel is adeptly and well concocted, and story is narrated through different perspectives. The novel seeks to vividly picture the conflict an individual comes across while living in a very distinctive and sundry culture. Most of the characters in the novel we observe have their anchorage in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a cradle from which they have started breathing in a very turbulent and agitated ambience. In the novel, we see there are various characters that had to bear the brunt of the vicious atmosphere in Afghanistan and were cajoled to flee. They had to leave their original home and hence became the victims of the confusion that swelled whole of Afghanistan. Pari is given to a very affluent and privileged couple in order to drain her from the curse of fatal poverty and give her a better and luxurious life. Sometimes human need comes in the deluxe way of human desire. Abdulla leaves Afghanistan because after the loss of Pari he doesn’t feel any connection. Home is something which connects our emotions to our identity. When Pari is taken to the Wedhati family, Abdulla loses everything. “There was nothing left for him here. He had no home here.” (49). In the middle of the novel we see Abdulla in the United States where he runs an Afghan restaurant. There is also a mystifying emptiness in Abdulla’s life, and he feels it throughout his life. Her daughter Pari, named after September 2017 his sister, observes this condition of her father.” His life, riddled with gaps, every day, a mystifying story, a puzzle to struggle through.” (356) Sometimes people don’t find their own way of life while living in native land. This means “to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself” (Tyson 421). Nila Wahdati, a gorgeous and talented poet in the novel, was born in Afghanistan. But we don’t see her having Afghan tradition and values in her personality. Her personality is largely different from that of traditional Afghan woman. Instead of accepting the social and cultural norms of the patriarchal Afghan society, controlled by men, she refuses to believe herself to be an Afghan. She doesn’t allow even her adopted daughter Pari to grow up in Afghanistan.

“I didn’t want her turned, against both her will and nature, into one of those diligent, sad women who are bent on a lifelong course of quite servitude, forever in fear of showing, saying, or doing the wrong thing”.

Women who are deeply eulogised by some in the West here in France, for instance\_ turned into heroines for their hard lives, admired from a distance by those who couldn’t bear even one day of walking in their shoes. Women who see their desires doused and their dreams renounced, and yet —and this is the worst of it, Monsieur Boustouler —if you meet them, they smile and pretend they have no misgivings at all. , As though they lead enviable lives.(182-83)Her mother’s culture is more embodied in her personality than Afghan values. Her mother, a French woman, met her father in Kabul. Thus we look at her as “half Afghan, half French”. Although she considers the Afghan root in her troublesome half. In Afghanistan, her prestige was not more than a Harlot. Even her father used to beat her accusing her of having illicit affairs with local boys. The kind of life she wanted to live, was impossible in Afghanistan, therefore she moved to Paris, her other half. She wanted to save herself as well as her daughter from the patriarchal kind of life. She exposes her disgust in her interview with Monsieur Boustouler. She is teetering on the edge of a sword, caught between two worlds, never finds her way of life, and ultimately commits suicide. In terms of homeland; Khaled Hosseini’s characters never get what they have once lost. Many people leave their countries and move into other nations because of the devastating condition of Afghanistan. The past three decades of war and disorder have had a devastating impact On the Afghan people. Millions have been killed, millions more have been forced to flee their homes and the country’s infrastructure and forests have all but been destroyed. The social fabric of the country is fractured and state institutions are fragile and weak. (Jackson, 3) There is an Afghan-American doctor Indris Bashiri who goes to Kabul in 2003. He has a very weird kind of experience. Although he is in his homeland, but he doesn’t feel as if he is in his homeland, and seems completely lost. His condition is extremely complicated. May be a long duration has passed since he left his Afghanistan to live in the United States and here he feels like a stranger. When he sees the impoverished condition of the country, he feels a kind of guilt for not being there during the war time. The discordancy and emotions of Indris are very redolent to propagate his sense of estrangement and alienation. He realizes that he is not one of them, and it is very difficult for a person to go back to his old way of life once he leaves his roots. “*We’re not like these people. We shouldn’t pretend we are* (147)”. The same thing happens with Amir in *The Kite Runner*, when he goes to Afghanistan to save Sohrab. By conglomerating these diverse nations in the novel, the author has produced the

heterogeneousness of cultures, languages, customs, living standards etc., but above all the feeling of humanity which supersedes everything. Of course he is sympathetic towards his country, but at the same time, he also demonstrates how the different nations can co-operate with each other. The involvement of other nations to carry the plot of the novel presents the global outlook of the author and his cosmopolitan view which is a major issue in the 21st century. In the novel, we see that most of the major characters are not national but transnational. As we know that the author himself has a transnational identity, and through this identity he puts in double vision in *And the Mountains Echoed*. On the one hand, he tries to get attached with his roots by representing his own country, on the other; he intends to have other's experience of life. Through the process of hybridization of cultures, the novel proposes a global phenomenon, and multiple identities of characters. Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from craz-paving. Instead, they remain perpetually in motion; pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription. (McLeod, 219)

“If we claim that great literature” writes Peter Berry, “has a timeless and universal significance we thereby demote or disregard cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly ‘universal’, standard”(185). *And the Mountains Echoed* is a literature of universal standard in which the author focuses on the universal aspects of human relationship.

## REFERENCES

- Abrams, M.H.A *Glossary of Literary Terms*. India: Thomson Business International India Pvt. Ltd, 2006.Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. UK: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Hosseni, Khaled, *And the mountains echoed*. London: Bloomsbury publishing India Pvt Ltd, 2013 print.
- Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction*. New Dehli: Oxford University press, 2013.Print.
- McLeod,John. *Beginning postcolonialism*. New York: Manchester University press, 2000. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Reflection on the condition of exile*. ed. Arvind N Das New Dehli.1999.