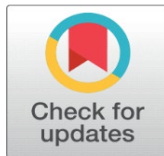


# NEGOTIATING IDENTITY ACROSS BORDERS: ALIENATION AND ESTRANGEMENT IN AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pervasive themes of alienation, identity crisis, estrangement, and uprootedness in contemporary literature, with particular focus on *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) by Khaled Hosseini. It explores how displacement and relocation contribute to a sense of unhomeliness, causing individuals to feel like outsiders in unfamiliar cultural settings. The study highlights how migrants often struggle with a fractured identity, caught between multiple cultural frameworks, which results in emotional and psychological dislocation. By analyzing key characters and narrative strands in the novel, the paper demonstrates how Hosseini portrays the inner conflicts of individuals negotiating belonging, memory, and cultural hybridity. Ultimately, the research underscores the complex relationship between migration, identity, and alienation in a globalized world.

**Keywords:** Alienation, Estrangement, Displacement, Dislocation, Identity Crisis, Inferiority Complex

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature frequently involves with the unsettling experiences of displacement, migration, and fractured identity. In an increasingly globalized world, the idea of “home” has become fluid, often leaving individuals suspended between places, cultures, and memories. This sense of in-betweenness gives rise to feelings of alienation, estrangement, and cultural dislocation, particularly for those who are forced or compelled to leave their native land.

Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) presents a deeply moving exploration of such experiences. Unlike a linear narrative, the novel unfolds through interconnected stories that span continents and generations,

reflecting the scattered lives of its characters. Their journeys reveal not only physical displacement but also emotional and psychological uprootedness. The struggle to belong, the burden of memory, and the negotiation of multiple cultural identities shape their inner worlds.

This paper attempts to examine how displacement and relocation contribute to a persistent sense of alienation and identity crisis in the novel. It also explores how individuals, caught between cultures, experience both connection and estrangement, ultimately redefining what it means to belong.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach to analyze the selected text, *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini. The research is primarily based on close textual reading, focusing on key characters, narrative patterns, and thematic concerns related to displacement, alienation, and identity crisis. Rather than treating the text as a fixed narrative, the analysis considers its layered structure and multiple perspectives, which reflect the fragmented realities of diasporic lives.

The study is informed by postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly the concepts of exile, hybridity, and unhomeliness as discussed by thinkers like Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. These perspectives help in understanding how cultural displacement shapes identity and produces a sense of estrangement. At the same time, insights from diaspora studies, including the work of Stuart Hall, are used to examine identity as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed essence.

In addition to primary textual analysis, the research draws upon secondary sources such as critical essays, books, and scholarly articles to situate the novel within a broader academic discourse. This combination of textual interpretation and theoretical engagement allows for a nuanced understanding of how alienation operates at both personal and cultural levels in the novel.

The methodology remains analytical rather than empirical, as it does not rely on fieldwork or data collection. Instead, it seeks to interpret literary representation and explore how narrative form and character experiences reflect wider issues of displacement and belonging in contemporary literature.

## 3. ANALYSIS OF AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED

Estrangement is a state where people find it difficult to discover where they belong to. This occurs when a person is not able to recognize himself to his surroundings. This concept of internal conflict arises when self-awareness is lacking. The search for meaning in one's home and identity is a manifestation of the feeling of isolation, being different from others or unfit from this place and people. Identity is always tied to one's home, places, culture, and customs, where one's physical and emotional needs are met. If one feels alienated while living in a place, this reflects their emotional isolation. He or she never stops searching for the purpose of life, and complexity and restlessness never go away. Dislocation, uprooting, and displacement cause a person to have multiple cultural aspects. It's normal for someone who has been displaced or dislocated to feel alienated, and over time, they may start to experience restlessness and an inferiority complex. Contemporary modern fiction has placed a lot of emphasis on the connection between alienation and displacement. This is the sense of alienation that comes from not sharing one's own language, culture, or customs. A person's life has purpose because of their roots. It helps us define who we are. It is an emotion or sentiment that is "ours."

Professionally he is a doctor but his urge to find out his root never stopped him so he chooses the writing medium to express his feelings about his homeland country and his settled country. Through writing, he tries to find out not only feelings, and emotions but also focus on the country's status. Afghanistan is a country that always suffers war and political trauma. Due to this harm, people leave their place and settle in another place. Khaled Hosseini presents these feelings of estrangement through the impact of immigration and exile. So, he tries to establish different perspectives towards the nations and peoples who have suffered the problems of war, colonization, political battles, cultural conflict, terrorism, and possession over man and nation. These all-issues studies are under the theory of post-colonialism and multiculturalism. A paradox can also sometimes arise when a non-migrant and a migrant have similar social experiences but feel different emotions.

The novel *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) portrays a striking image of what it's like to be uprooted and displaced. The characters' lives are filled with constant conflict. In this novel four generation has studied the feeling of alienation,

dislocation, and displacement. The author himself suffers from these problems so he narrates his painstaking experience through his writing and it gives him a unique perspective to create a story and that's why somewhere reader always relates the life of the narrator in his writing. As Edward Said puts in his ideas:

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 and commitment but independence and a certain kind of detachment. (13).

Owing to the effects of migration and his diasporic identity, author Khaled Hosseini connects Afghanistan, his home country, to a global network that creates a range of ideas, emotions, and sentiments from other countries in his writing.

This novel deals with the problems of migration, dislocation, and identity crisis. Through this novel, the writer highlights on economic, cultural, and social factors for the migration of characters. Even though they are expatriates, still there is something that ties them with their roots.

The idea that leaving one's native country is not a prerequisite for becoming estranged is also presented in the book. Certain characters are not comfortable in their own nation. The two main protagonists of this book, Abdulla and Pari, have a close relationship and form the basis of the book. Their tale is connected to numerous other stories told by various characters from various countries. This interconnection between different characters from different nations is the crux of the novel. Through this main plot, the writer has shown how a person feels when he/she is detached from his/her roots. At a certain age, everyone tries to find out their roots, and their identity. People suffer and lose their identity or roots for many different reasons. The central characters in the story are Abdulla and Pari and how they cut off their roots by situations in that time and place. Pari is sold to the rich couple when she was a child. The first reason behind that is poor economic conditions. The second reason behind that all parents want their children should get a better life compared to them. Although Saboor, is a poor father who has already lost his son, Omer, because of his economic condition and doesn't want to lose again one more child. He loves his children but he is not able to give them winter clothes. So as a reader, it is a very painful or heart-touching subject. Here, the writer wants to focus on the situation of why people migrate to different countries. The name 'Pari' is also symbolic. Without Pari Saboor's and Abdullah's life is without soul. They lost their soul and live like a Skelton. Selling Pari to the Wahdati family is described through a story. The novel begins with the story "Once upon a time.....".

Your son does not remember you, the div continued. This is his life now, and you saw for yourself his happiness. He is provided here with the finest food and clothes, with friendship and affection. He receives tutoring in the arts and languages in the sciences and in the ways of wisdom and charity. He wants for nothing. Someday, when he is a man, he may choose to leave, and he shall be free to do so. I suspect he will touch many lives with his kindness and bring happiness to those trapped in sorrow. (11-12)

Here, the writer wants to portray the good or positive sight of this critical situation in Afghanistan's people. 'Selling a Child' is here depicting the theme of displacement, and migration and gradually develops an identity crisis and tries to find out roots. Pari in her forties gets information about her biological family and then she takes action to find out her family and place. Meanwhile, she always feels to missing something in her settled life.

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)

She was confused about her appearance. There is something very touching 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)

She always feels an emotional vacuum because she doesn't have a strong relationship with her mother, Nila Wahdati. Even she doesn't get her father's affection and love because, in her childhood, her mother shifted to Paris. So, her upbringing has through single parents. She always feels something missing but she couldn't able to find out what it is until the call from Dr. Markos Varvaris the recipient of Nabi's letter, who has given information about her identity, and where she belongs to. During this chat, she learns who she is, as well as details about her native country, her biological parents, and—above all—her brother Abdulla. For the first time, she knows who she is. The author wishes to draw attention to the intricate issues that arise when a person must leave his roots and his homeland in order to provide a better life for himself and his family. Set in Afghanistan, the book spans four generations and fifty years, and it features a variety of narrative voices in addition to the main family.

The novel's distinctive feature is the use of multiple narrators, each of whom examines their own environment and the reasons for their life decisions while offering a variety of perspectives on the main family's epic story. The work seeks to understand the struggles people have when they live in a strange society. Most of the characters have their roots in Afghanistan. In the novel, multiple characters had to leave their roots due to various motives. No one can leave their place and family by choice. Khaled Hosseini portrays these crucial issues in each and every novel. He himself faces these issues so he is able to narrate the feeling of exile, alienation, dislocation, displacement, expatriate, estrangement etc. in his novels with different kind of family relationship. Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati, an affluent couple, adopt the main character Pari in order to provide her with a more comfortable and better life. Human desire can occasionally be impeded by human needs. Following the death of his sister Pari, Abdulla no longer feels a connection to Afghanistan and quits the country. Our sense of home is what ties our identity to our feelings and family ties. Pari's transfer to the Wedhati family causes Abdulla to lose everything.

"There was nothing left for him here. He had no home here." (49).

Abdulla runs an Afghan restaurant in the United States in the middle of the book. Abdulla too experiences a mysterious emptiness in his life, which he feels all his life. His daughter Pari even notices this state of her father.

He is so obsessed with his sister, his family is around her, but when she sold out to Wadhathi's family he is totally destroyed. He also named her daughter Pari.

"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 their own 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, daughter of a diplomat Afghan (Father is Afghani and mother is French) carries a half-Afghan and half-French identity, wife of rich Suleiman's wife, Pari's mother and poet in the novel was born in Afghanistan. However, her Afghan traditions and ideals are not evident in her personality. But we don't see her having Afghan tradition and values in her personality. She is not able to give birth to a child, so her infertility is symbolic here. She has everything in her life even the power to take the decision of her life but on the contrary, she always carries emptiness in her life.

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 quiet servitude, forever in fear of showing, saying, or doing the wrong thing. Women who are admired 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)

Rather than Afghan ideals, her personality reflects her mother's culture. Kabul is where a French mother met her father. She is therefore a "half-Afghan, half-French" person. The majority of her life, she finds her Afghan heritage to be irritating. Since Afghanistan did not allow her to live the kind of life she desired, she moved to Paris, where she met her partner. Her personality differs significantly from that of a traditional Afghan woman, to put it briefly. Rather of embracing the traditional and social mores of patriarchal Afghan society, she rejects the idea that she is an Afghan. Even her adopted daughter Pari is not permitted to grow up in Afghanistan. She moves to Paris, but she doesn't provide Pari with maternal care there. In her conversation with Monsieur Boustouler, she reveals her displeasure. She never finds her path in life, is torn between two worlds, and ends her life by suicide. Thus, the author attempts to convey that the circumstances of the people of Afghanistan are similar to those of Nila and Abdulla. The land is sterile, doesn't produce new things, and wants to make its own decisions, but others (political figures, the control of developed or powerful nations, religion, etc.) won't let them. The devastating state of Afghanistan has caused many people to flee their own nations and go abroad. Through the character of Abdulla, the writer highlights one of the reasons for immigration and the estrangement of their life and their land. When we lost our family or family bonding, our life became miserable. Physically we are not able to cope with our own homeland or settled land. Past is always attached to the present and due to this life becomes more miserable. That emotional, psychological, and Physical imbalance or trauma can't save themselves.

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)

Here is an Afghan-American doctor Indris Bashiri who goes to Kabul in 2003. He has a very outlandish kind of experience. Although he is in his homeland, after He appears totally bewildered and hasn't felt like he's in his native country for so long. Born and brought up in Afghanistan and raised in United States that time bonding doesn't allow him to feel comfortable in his own homeland that feeling gives him a kind of estrangement or detachment oh their homeland.

He feels somewhat guilty for not being present during the conflict as he observes the nation's dreadful circumstances. Indris's feelings and struggles are crucial in expressing his sense of exile or refuge. He understands that he is not one of them and that once one loses their roots, it is very difficult to return to their previous way of life. He maintains conflicting emotions of attachment and disengagement from his native land and homeland.

“We are not like these people. We shouldn't pretend we are” (147)

The same things happen with Amir in *The Kite Runner* when he goes back to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

*And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) is a unique novel where the author beautifully portrays the feelings, emotions, and conflicts of human relationships. He also discusses the exact situation of exile or refugees' feelings. Even though, he himself is a refugee. So, he is able to narrate their situation. Timing and different countries like the United States, and Paris give the global outlook of the novel. How do different countries cooperate and that cosmopolitan view adjusts each other? We note that the majority of the main characters in the book are transnational rather than national. Because of his transnational identity, which we are aware of, the author presents double vision in this book, and as we read it, we feel pity for him. So, through the process of transnational, people change their roots, cultures, customs, and language and somewhere they also change their religion that process is not easy for them, cutting their roots, and accepting another's lifestyle or country is not their choice but their compulsion. These people's status of feelings or conflicts are depicted in Homi Bhabha's concept of 'Hybridity'.

Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from crazy-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 e and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly 'universal', standard” (185).

The author of the universally acclaimed work of fiction, *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), concentrates on the universal elements of interpersonal interactions.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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