

Diasporic Studies in the Novels of Khaled Hoseini

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Abstract

Diaspora is a form of dislocation like exile and migration. Diaspora may also be defined as the migration of population or a section of it, along with their ways of life to the place of destination or the receiving nation. They generally maintain their ways of living and cultural patterns, and get integrated into the host country. Looking into the novels of Khaled Hosseini, we can see a diaspora is used as a term to describe migrants who live outside of their homeland or native country for multiple reasons. We can see the varied reasons related to the characters migration. As migration is the heart of diaspora. People migrate due to a number of reasons. It is not a new term. People from Ages migrated from one place to another; undoubtedly it's a part of civilization. People displace themselves from a number of reasons, some because of education, business, labor, war, natural disaster, political violence etc. But in Hosseini's novels, war and violence is the rudiment cause of displacement among characters. Hossini's novels are engulfed with Afghan history and politics; it provides us a glimpse of a daily life in Afghanistan; a country known to most of the world only through news account of war and terrorism.

Key terms: violence, migration, loss of belonging and identity, Nostalgia.

Great literature has come from notable writers, who live in a state of displacement. They have displaced themselves in order to come to know about the situation of the whole world. They with the imagination, insight, media and temporary visits to displaced places, feel the pain of the people, who are living in exile. The writers get the firsthand information and also with their observation, they put it in their writings. Through the mode of observation, they give it shape through their writings. Through their writings they bring the life of the people, who are living in miserable conditions. Hosseini has also used the same weapon 'writing' through which he highlights the social stratification, reasons of migration, problematic life of refugees, cultural clashes, identity crisis, adjustment problems, loss of identity, nostalgia and diaspora. Hosseini,

“As a writer, being miles away from his homeland, Hosseini’s memory of his nation and writing back to visualize his past is certainly what we seek in diaspora.” (Devyani, from the webpage)

The people who fled from Afghanistan are the main concerns of khaled Hosseini’s novels; he reflects in his novels their misery, longing, loss of belongingness, identity, pain, isolation and many kinds of problems in settling in the host countries. The Afghan people escaped from Afghanistan to save themselves and their families from torture, violence, killings, hangings and rapes. They lost everything behind and Baba was accompanied only by, “One disappointing son and two suitcases.” (*The Kite Runner* p-108)

Not only personal belongings, they also lost their peace of mind, social life, property and became migrants in different parts of the world. During the Soviet invasion, Amir and Baba fled secretly from Afghanistan without telling even their servants in a truck full of refugees to save their lives. Because,

“You couldn’t trust anyone in Kabul any more--for a fee or under threat, people told on each other, neighbor on neighbor, child on parent, brother on brother, servant on master, friend on friend.” (P-98)

The Afghan people who fled from Afghanistan to save themselves and their families from violence, killings, hangings and bombs, lived as migrants in different parts of the world. After being uprooted from Afghanistan, these refugees had to start a new life in new situations with its new problems. For newly arrived Afghans, the most critical problems were the physical and psychological trauma, economic hardships and the education of their children. These refugee camps were infested with diseases like malaria, cholera, dysentery and malnutrition. There was shortage of food, shelter, money and much needed medicines.

In the autobiographical part of the novel *The Kite Runner* reflects the immigrant experiences in which Hosseini and his family has experienced in America. In an interview with Razeshtha Sethna, Hosseini specified that the most autobiographical parts of *The Kite Runner* are those about,

The difficult task of assimilating into a new culture...My father and I did work for a while at the flea market and there really are rows of Afghans working there, some of whom I am related to. (Sethna, from the webpage)

Amir and his father fortunately arrived in Fremont, California; part of an Afghan immigrant community. America is a destination place for immigrants from many countries. Many immigrants stay in U.S for different reasons such as studying, working, or running away from economic or political crisis, religious conflict and warfare in their homeland.

Now living in Fremont doing a menial job at a gas station, Baba faced different kind of adjustment problems in the host country. The first difficulty the Baba faced while adjusting in America, when he got into a scuffle with Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen, the owners of the grocery store across the street.

It turned out that Baba had no cash on him for the oranges. He'd written Mr. Nguyen a check and Mr. Nguyen had asked for an ID. He wants to see my license, .Baba bellowed in Farsi. .Almost two years we've bought his damn fruits and put money in his pocket and the son of a dog wants to see my license. (*The Kite Runner* p- 111)

Baba was insulted when Mrs. Nguyen asked him for ID when he paid with a check, because they did not believe Baba's check. There is no wrong in it, it's common in America, but Baba felt hurt with the owner of the store. In Kabul, if the Afghans want to buy something, they just take the wooden stick as credit card to the owner store and he carves notches on their sticks with his knife. At the end of month, they pay him for the number of notches on the stick. No ID. In this case, Baba never had undergone it in Kabul where all of the people recognize and know him. Baba can get anything easily because in Afghanistan, the Pashtun is the richest ethnic group. This situation makes Baba to miss his homeland. Amir explained then, "My father is adjusting to life in America" (*The Kite Runner* p-112)

Hosseini shows through the character of Baba how Afghan refugees are living a miserable life. Baba realized that he is different from the local people by having different name, physical appearance, custom, culture, ethnicity, religion and many other things. The concept of homeland is activated in Baba while adjusting in the unfamiliar land of America.

The characters created by Hosseini in this novel reflect how they remain connected to their culture, religion and many other things despite being away from homeland. One of the incidents in the novel is when Amir graduated from high school; Baba took Amir to Afghan kabob house. It shows they preferred their taste of food. Afghan refugees living in America has formed their own community in San Jose the Flea market. This market was the epicenter for Afghan families. Afghan music, food and tea and gossip are shared. "Tea, politics and scandal are the ingredients of an Afghan Sunday at the flea market" (*The Kite Runner* p-120)

The blood of Afghan culture is injected in Afghan people who are living in America like Baba, Amir and Taheri's. The honor for woman was same among the Afghan people even in America. They think it offensive for an unwed girl to talk to a young man. When Amir meets Soraya and start talking to each other, the people who were present there they started talking about their whereabouts. The traditional system was same as Amir said,

I was fully aware of the Afghan double standard that favored my gender. Not did you see him chatting with her? But wooy! Did you see how she wouldn't let him go? What a lochak! (*The Kite Runner* p-128)

Later they were engaged and according to the Afghan ceremony they did 'Ayena Masshaf' a mirror given to them and a veil threw over their heads, so that they could gaze each other's reflections in a mirror. Amir says,

Looking at Soraya's smiling face in the mirror, in the momentary privacy of the veil, I whispered to her for the first that I loved her. A blush, red like henna, bloomed on her cheeks. (*The Kite Runner* P-149)

Through Amir's attachment with Soraya, we see a stark contrast between American and Afghan culture. In Afghanistan Amir was grown up among men, there was complete absence of women, but in America he felt first time the delicacy of a woman.

In the novel *A thousand splendid suns* again the depiction of never ending war has entirely ravaged every part of Afghan lives. This cruel war forced many Afghan people to leave from their country. The love of homeland got activated in Babi, after he packed the necessary things and Laila assured him that they will come back home soon after the war is over. Laila looked up, she saw Babi,

He was weeping. She put an arm around his waist, "oh, Babi. We'll come back. When this war is over. We'll come back to Kabul, inshallah. You'll see." (*A Thousand splendid suns* p-186)

This novel mostly gives a peep of Afghans wretched conditions in refugee camps. Later in the novel, its Tariq, who presented his experiences as a refugee in Pakistan. Tariq's appearance played both havoc and joy into Laila's life. After a gap of ten years, when Tariq visits Laila at Mariam's house, Tariq informs her about his life in refugee camp, its miseries, diseases, its hunger and frequent deaths in that camp. The conditions of living outside homeland as homeless depict the miserable conditions of Afghan refugees. He tells her about his stay at the Nasir Bagh refugee camp for some time. He also enlightens her that there were already sixty thousand Afghans living there, when he and his parents arrived. There he watched the refugees lying about in the sun, their sores and stumps in plain view.

Nasir Bagh' is tents, dust, and open sewers. When we got there, they handed us a stick and a sheet of canvas and told us to build ourselves a tent. (*A Thousand splendid suns* p-326)

Living a life as a refugee is hard for everyone. Mostly Afghans migrated themselves due to war for safety in different countries of the world. Like Tariq who comes back to his homeland after ten years living outside as a refugee and in a Jail.

Naturally every refugee keeps himself laced with the knowledge of one's homeland. In the latter part of the novel, the news about the restoration of Afghanistan distracts Laila's mind. Now she misses her country badly, the city of her childhood. The memories of her homeland brings homesickness in her like,

She misses the bustle of shor bazaar, the gardens of babur, the call of the water carriers lugging their goatskin bags. She misses the garment hagglers at Chicken Street and the melon hawkers in Karteh- parwan. (*A Thousand splendid suns* p-378)

It's quite obvious that the people who are living as expatriates due to political instability or any other cause are connected to the people of their place and keeping themselves abreast with the information of homeland and are desperately waiting for the restoration of peace and normalcy in their homeland, so that they become the part of country's restoration and live forever in their homeland. Laila after hearing the reconstruction and rehabilitation process that is being happening in her homeland like,

She hears of school built in Kabul, roads repaved, women returning to work, and her life here, pleasant as it is, grateful as she is for it, seems...Insufficient to her. Inconsequential. Worse. yet, wasteful. (*A Thousand splendid suns* p-378)

Equally in his third best selling multigenerational novel *And the Mountains Echoed*, the elements of diaspora are ingrained in it, if we read it from diasporic point of view. Like Idris's visit to Afghanistan and its impression changes his mind set to some extent. After his visit the feeling of diaspora gets activated in him when he suggests that the family should get lunch at an Afghan deli rather than acted on Nahil's suggestion, who says, at the deli. Idris notes that the owner is a man named Abdullah, who is from Afghan acquaintance.

Afghans who are living as expatriates across the globe are waiting for the end of the decades of war and better conditions in Afghanistan. Displaced people are keeping careful supervision and are in touch and laced with the conditions of homeland. After America's occupation of Afghanistan, the cousins Idris and Timur returned to Kabul, their homeland. Their arrival to their homeland makes us force to think that the people who are living outside their homeland are desperately longing for their birthplace. Their minds are like vessels filled with the memories of their homeland despite living in alien lands, that feeling is called Diaspora. Although Idris and Timur's purpose of visit is to reclaim their property which they shrouded, but when we deeply analyze their purpose of visit, it educates us that they yearn to visit their land after being away from twenty years. Idris feels the pang of guilt after seeing huge destruction and himself remained away from all those years of bloody war. Amra, a Bosnian nurse who stands in the hospital surveying a young girl named Roshana, who is very ill. He pays respect to the people who with their determination bear witness and helps the helpless people during the years of war, like Amra. Idris thinks,

These people, everything they have been through, we should respect them. By 'we,' I mean people like Timur and me. The lucky ones, the ones who weren't here when the place was getting bombed to hell, we're not like these people. We shouldn't pretend we are. (*And The Mountains Echoed* P-148)

Back in the United States, where Timur lives, Timur is known by Tim in America. He has changed his name following the events of September 11, a decision that he claims, doubled his real estate business. Idris, in contrast to his brother, is quiet and sensitive, and works as a doctor. When Amra asks Timur and Idris what they are doing in the hospital in Kabul. Timur explains,

They have come back "to reconnect", to "educate" themselves, "bear witness" to the aftermath of all these years of war and destruction. They want to go back to the states, he says, to raise awareness, and funds, to "give back. (*And The Mountains Echoed* P-136)

Timur and idris are cousins, whose families fled to Pakistan following the Russian invasion of the 1980s, and moved to California. This is the first time they have returned to their home in twenty years. They have decided to reconnect with their heritage, and in the long run, donate money to Afghan charities.

Conclusion

While opening the windows of Hosseini's novels deeply we get a better understanding to place Khaled Hosseini into the realm diasporic writers, who has shown in his works how his characters are imbued with the feelings of diaspora, means sentimental longing to their homeland who maintained deep ties with their homeland and how they remained connected to their culture, religion and many other things despite being away from homeland.

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