

From Roots to Routes: Diasporic Sensibility in *And the Mountains Echoed*

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ABSTRACT: *In this article I argue that the characters in Khaled Hosseini's And the Mountains Echoed reflect a unique diasporic sensibility: concurrently divided between desires for reclaiming Afghan roots and of exploring alternative routes to reach out their lost roots. I discuss the novel And the Mountains Echoed from the theoretical lens of discourse on diaspora, mainly by the diaspora theorists Stuart Hall and Edward Said. The characters in Hosseini's novel return to their ancestral homeland, both imaginatively and literally. For this two-fold journey they take manifold routes in order to restore and renew their ties with their Afghan roots. Thus the expatriates exhibit the perennial predicament of a diasporic subject straddling between the vulnerable guide-posts of home and exile. Their homecoming only makes them realize the impossibility of return. When the characters in the novel realize impossibility of return, the certainties of roots are replaced with the transnational contingencies of routes.*

Keywords: Roots, Routes, Home, Exile, Diaspora, Diasporic Sensibility, *And the Mountains Echoed*.

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Introduction

Diaspora literary discourse negotiates between two spatial polarities: exile and homeland. Characters in Khaled Hosseini's novels straddle between their lost homeland (Afghanistan) and their land of exile (America, Pakistan and France). Diaspora theorist Edward Said observes that "modern western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees" (159). Said's views about exile are important to understand the position of a diasporic writer. For Said the rift between a human being and his native place can be "a condition of creative empowerment" (Ashcroft, 42) because the writer living in exile has a double perspective, an awareness of at least two cultures, a plurality of vision. Thus exile brings alienation as well as empowerment. Although Hosseini experiences a sense of loss, in his Good Reads interview he acknowledges this distance as an "asset" (web). His distance from Afghanistan defines his perspective as a writer. He writes back of his roots. However, at the same time he "doesn't want it to occupy too big a space" (web). Hence, the present research will demonstrate that in *And the Mountains Echoed* (ATME) there is an appreciation of roots as well as routes.

And the Mountains Echoed is based on the memories of his native land. Culture and language of an exilic society are different from the culture of immigrant society. This cultural difference causes double consciousness among expatriates. Being both Afghan and American, they identify themselves in two social worlds. They experience, as Du Bois terms it, "two-ness...two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (869). Hence they view themselves simultaneously as insider and outsider in the exilic land. This leads to psycho- social tensions. Consequently they become peripheral creatures.

Stuart Hall states that past continuously speaks to the diasporans and is constructed through memory and fantasy. Diasporic people feel nostalgic and thus try to recreate that past by revisiting their homeland. However, on the psychological level they cannot do away with the feelings of being outsiders. They realize that absolute return to Afghanistan is impossible. Hall is of the view that there is no possibility to make "some final and absolute Return" (395). When the characters in ATME realize impossibility of return, the certainties of roots are replaced with the transnational contingencies of routes. Hall links the immigrant's dual desire for revisiting home with the notion of identity. He writes that "diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference"

(402). Hence, diasporic identity is not a stable category. By that very fact, in *ATME* there is an interminable process of transformation. The first generation of Afghan immigrants are conservative, and they adhere to their tribal traditions. However, the second generation of immigrants are culturally flexible, and they imbibe multicultural ethos more vehemently. In *ATME* there is often a group of characters who represent the second generation of Afghan diaspora and whose identity is multicultural but they are not inattentive to their native culture entirely. They take journey to their native land but find that absolute return is impossible.

Hosseini envisages journey as a metaphor as much as a literal experience. The trajectory of his fictional journey is quite expansive and geographically diverse. His narratives cover spaces which are culturally and epistemologically oppositional and conflating, and his characters take routes spreading between Afghanistan to Pakistan, from Pakistan to the USA, from Afghanistan to France, and from the USA to France. But other than being directed by symbolism of flag posts, maps, and itineraries, the actual journey is on a physical level, from one country to another country. On a psychological level, it is an interior journey leading to change and development of the personality. Going through these different routes transforms the personalities of the characters in Hosseini's novels. The physical ordeal of route-taking confides psychological trauma consequent upon roots split by war and exile.

Literature Review:

Exile, migrancy and diaspora are the focus and interest of postcolonial literature, criticism and theory. Etymologically the term "diaspora" is a combination of two Greek words *speiro* (to sow, to scatter) and *dia* (over) (Cohen ix). The Biblical use is one of "scattering," what the Lord would do as a punishment for not observing the divine laws (Deuteronomy 28: 58- 68). However, the expression diaspora is also used in secular, political, and colonial discourses and connotes discursive implications. Safran points out that the term Diaspora can be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members or their ancestors are dispersed from an original centre. They retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland. On the physical level, diasporic sensibility involves narratives of challenging journeys undertaken on account of economic/political compulsions. On the emotional level diasporic sensibility involves feelings of nostalgia, alienation and discrimination. Experience of expatriation physically disconnects the immigrants from their roots. However, emotionally they retain their connection with the

native land. In terms of practicality, these immigrants want to adjust in the land of exile. These contrasting feelings polarise the existence of diasporans. Consequently they have hyphenated identities, e.g. African-American, Cuban-American, and Afghan-American. They are not fully at home with their hyphenated/double identities. Hence diasporans struggle between regression and progression. This is to say that one facet of their personality shows nostalgic longing for lost homeland, while the other facet exhibits a desire to move forward.

Exile is a term closely related to diaspora, because both the terms refer to dislocation of people from their native land to a new land. Etymologically the word exile is derived from the Latin *exilium* or banishment. Shankar writes that in the Roman state *exilium* “referred to the stripping of one’s citizenship and voluntary deportation prior to a sentence being pronounced for crimes” (131). The terms such as diaspora and refugee describe voluntary as well as forced exile. In modern times exile does not just refer to physical displacement but also to psychological alienation.

Specifically, in the context of Afghanistan, diaspora started emerging especially after the Soviet invasion and consequent war (1978- 1989) by the former Soviet Union. The occupying army arrested as well as executed Afghan civilian population on a large scale. Consequently, thousands of refugees migrated from Afghanistan, especially to the neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran. Besides political upheavals, natural calamities result in large scale migration. In the case of Afghanistan drought is another major cause of large scale exodus of people. The earliest of Afghan diaspora in America can be traced back to 1920s. During the 1930s to the early 1970s Afghans, mostly young students came to the US for educational purpose and settled there and these were the times Soviet invasion was building up. It was after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that greater numbers of Afghans settled in America. Most of these refugees first took refuge in Pakistan or Iran, and from there they sought political asylum in the European countries and to America.

Khaled Hosseini is the first major Afghan American novelist whose novels have attracted the attention of fiction lovers all over the world. Hosseini’s family took political asylum in the US shortly after the Soviet war in Afghanistan. The family settled in San Jose, California. Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan American writer and presentation of Afghan diaspora is a major concern in his fictional works. Hosseini has written three novels. His debut novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) presents socio-political climate in Afghanistan and the Afghan community in northern California. A

Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) is the second novel by Hosseini. It narrates the intertwined stories of the lives of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila who are married to Rasheed during the years of the Soviet occupation, the Civil War, the Taliban rule and War against terrorism in Afghanistan. Hosseini's third novel is entitled *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). *Sea Prayer* (2018) is an illustrated short fictional work based on the refugee crisis.

Discussion:

ATME tells the story of siblings, Abdullah and Pari — a theme refracted through the lives of several pairs of brothers and sisters. Abdullah and Pari are the siblings haunted by the past, and by Afghanistan's cycle of misery. *ATME* is more global and less Afghan centric than his previous books. When Pari is only three years of age, her father Saboor gives her to a rich couple living in Kabul. He takes this painful decision in order to get money for the rest of his family. Saboor's baby boy Omar "had died of the cold the winter before last" (21). Hence he decides to give his daughter in order to save the rest of the family from atrocious winter. Thus, Pari is the finger cut to save the hand. The plan is made on the advice of Uncle Nabi who works for a wealthy couple, Suleiman and Nila Wahdati. Hence Pari is left with them to grow up with all the privileges of wealth. In the decades to come, Pari will grow up in Paris with Nila, who is a narcissist and a self-indulgent woman. Years later Pari suspects that she might have been adopted and resolves to travel back to Afghanistan to find out the truth about her past.

As for Abdullah, he ends up in California, running a restaurant called Abe's Kabob House. He and his wife name their only child Pari, after his long-lost sister. The plot centres on the affinity between two siblings, Abdullah and Pari. They settle in two different countries across the world, France and the USA. But they always feel some part of them missing just like the missing half of the nursery rhyme that they sung together in their childhood. The younger Pari will dream of reuniting her father with his missing sibling. Hosseini gives us an assortment of other tales that mirror the stories of Abdullah and the older Pari. The story of Abdullah and Pari acts as the central tale that connects the other stories in the novel. While the novel starts with the horrific separation of two young siblings, it expands across generations. Hosseini takes the characters beyond Kabul to Pakistan, France, America, India and the Greek Islands. The diasporans in *ATME* feel bound by their roots and travel back to their homeland, yet their return to Afghanistan does not come up as a final solution.

Exploring the Roots of Dislocation:

In case of Afghanistan political turmoil and natural calamity lead to migration. This process of migration is full of challenges and difficulties. These refugees reach exilic land after facing hardships. Moreover, this search for a secure place is an emotionally painful course. It brings loss of their birthplace and their social status. In *ATME* Abdullah takes the tea box containing feathers to Pakistan and later to America. The old tin box symbolizes Abdullah's emotional attachment with his sister and his native land. Hence he conjures memories of home and of her sister Pari through the feathers in the box. The box with feathers in it is like the broken mirror whose fragments have been "irretrievably lost" (Rushdie 11). Hence, it signifies both his connection and displacement from the motherland. In short, the process of migration is challenging and brings an emotional as well as an economic crisis.

The immediate experiences of displacement and homelessness lead the first generation of the Afghan refugees to an identity crisis. They are conservative and adhere to their tribal traditions. Culture and traditions of their homeland are deeply imprinted in their memories. Therefore, assimilating in the exilic land is quite difficult for them. Hence, they live as peripheral creatures in their exilic society. *ATME* begins with the separation between Abdullah and his sister Pari. Abdullah is deeply hurt by his father's decision of giving Pari to a rich couple; therefore he leaves the village Shadbagh. Later on in the wake of political crisis he moves to Pakistan and eventually takes political asylum in America. The experience of immigration intensifies his sense of loss; his personal loss of sister and the loss of his homeland become interconnected. Search for familial and national roots become intertwined when he says "Is she in Afghanistan? Then I'm going too! I'm going to Kabul" (351). In California, Abdullah opens an Afghan food restaurant and works hard to sustain his family. He names his daughter after the name of his sister Pari. In spite of all his efforts to start a new life in America, he never forgets his sister Pari. Hence, Abdullah goes through an agony all his life. He straddles between the vulnerable guide-posts of home and exile till he becomes a patient of dementia.

As an immigrant, Abdullah adheres to his past and thus holds fast to the norms of Afghan society. He believes that "you ended up wayward, without a proper home or a legitimate identity" (362). He represents the conservative diasporic people who try their level best to adhere to the traditions of their ancestral homeland. He plays the role of a typical Afghan father who is over protective and over caring for his daughter Pari.

This over protection is a way of keeping Pari detached from the western culture. He does not want Pari to imbibe American culture. Therefore, Abdullah keeps his daughter protected “like an aquarium fish in the safety of glass tank” (388). For instance, he does not allow Pari to go for an overnight school trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. He does not want his daughter to stay out of her house. That Sunday, Abdullah surprises his family. He closes his restaurant for the whole day and takes his family to Monterey Bay Aquarium. In spite of it, Pari does not enjoy the trip and feels a stomach ache. Abdullah feels “bruised” that his daughter is not happy. He does not realize that Pari wants to enjoy the trip in the company of her classmates. In fact, he fears that he will lose his daughter Pari. Therefore, he is unwilling to let her go to Baltimore when she gets admission on scholarship in one of the best art institutes of the country there. He “is like a child. Terrified of being abandoned” (376).

Since family is central to the identity of an individual in the Afghan culture, Abdullah follows this Afghan value. For him the Afghan identity and the family unit are the most important ties. His dedication to the family unit is obvious by the fact that he sends “a thousand dollars every three months” for his half brother Iqbal who lives in a refugee camp in Peshawar. Moreover, he remains devoted to his religion and his homeland. Therefore, he enrolls Pari in “Sunday school at a mosque” to attend Koran lessons (348). Being a conventional minded immigrant, Abdullah follows the culture and language of his ancestral land. Moreover, he believes that “if culture was a house, then language was the key to the front door, to all the rooms inside” (362). Therefore, Abdullah compels Pari to learn the language of her ancestral homeland. Every Tuesday afternoon Abdullah manages to take Pari for Farsi classes. In short, Abdullah maintains conservative Afghan way of living in California. Abdullah belongs to the first generation of immigrants who carries with himself the cultural baggage of his homeland. Aciman writes that “What makes exile the pernicious thing is not really the state of being away, as much as the impossibility of ever *not* being away – not just being absent, but never being able to redeem this absence” (12). Abdullah is never able to forget his ties with Afghanistan. He experiences pangs of separation from his homeland. Hence he remains in a state of constant restlessness and becomes a peripheral creature with a marginalized existence.

Reclaiming Afghan Roots:

In diaspora narratives past resurface as an acute signifier of present. The people living out of their ancestral land develop a desire to reclaim their

lost homeland. Therefore, past becomes an important presence in their lives. Hence, an acute presence of past is an essential feature of exilic writings. Hall states that “The past continues to speak to us. But it is no longer addressed as a simple, factual ‘past’ It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (395). All these aspects are present in Hosseini’s fictional narrative in *ATME*. Fantasy and dreams surface in the life of Pari junior. Pari and Abdullah follow a nightly ritual of imagining a dream that will bring peaceful sleep. Hence, fantasy is an imaginative mean of bringing comfort and happiness to the lives of these immigrants. The narrative of *ATME* opens with a myth that reflects the coming rupture in the lives of the siblings. A div, a demon, draws a father into a painful pact. The father can gift his favourite son a better life by never seeing the boy again. This is what Saboor, the poor Afghan father narrating the tale is about to do. He gives Pari to a rich family in Kabul. However, the fairy-tale ends with an act of mercy: the div gives the man a potion that erases his memory. With this magical tonic the pain of losing his son is gone. This opening myth is a substance that permeates a network of tales throughout the novel. Hosseini takes this idea of loss of a painful memory and shapes the end of his novel on similar lines. Hosseini says in Guardian interview: “this idea of memory...this amazing gift-to treasure all those things that matter to us the most, that form our identity. But it’s also very cruel because we relive those parts of our lives that are so painful” (web). The reunion between Pari and Abdullah is in such conditions; Abdullah becomes a patient of dementia before he is able to meet Pari. This Afghan folklore provides the initial structure to the novel. Hence, past resurfaces in the form of fantasy and myth Hosseini’s novels.

To borrow Rushdie’s words, *ATME* can be termed as “a novel of memory and about memory” (10) of the homeland. Abdullah in *ATME* is not able to do away with his childhood memories, until he suffers from dementia. His sadness at the loss of his sister Pari remains “like a birthmark on his face” (348). Abdullah brings to California a tea box containing feathers. The box was the most cherished possession of Pari when the siblings lived together in Shadbagh. The feathers in it are fragile remains of the old country. The box becomes a reminder of an irretrievable but unforgettable past for Abdullah. This tea box becomes a symbol of both connection and displacement from the motherland. Abdullah conjures memories of home and of her sister Pari through these feathers. Moreover, it becomes a symbol of hope in Abdullah’s heart that one day he will find Pari and will return to their ancestral land. Even in his hysteric attacks when he is almost on the verge of losing his memory, he desires to go back to his familial and national roots: “I’m going to Kabul” (351).

Unlike Abdullah, Pari is quite young when she leaves Afghanistan. Therefore, she does not miss Abdullah as intensely as he misses her. Nevertheless, all her life she feels “absence of something, or someone, fundamental to her own existence” (189). Pari recollects her memories about her foster father, Suleiman Wahdati. She remembers that he painted giraffes and long-tailed monkeys for her on the side of an armoire. She keeps her father’s pictures in her room.

Sometimes she gazes at a picture showing her in the lap of his father. In fact, Pari undergoes loss at different levels. She is twice removed from her homeland: firstly, from her ancestral village Shadbagh and secondly, from the city of her childhood Kabul. In personal terms, Pari faces a breach from her brother and her father. Moreover, she is separated from her foster father on account of his illness. All these incidents happen at a very premature stage of her life. Hence, she has a vague feeling of absence, but cannot logically explain this sensation. Her memory rekindles in occasional flashes that touch the chords of her heart. The missing episodes from her past life make her curious about her history: “see where I was born. Maybe find out the old house where my parents and I lived” (203). In short, the inability to overcome the presence of the past exposes Hosseini’s characters to a floodgate of nostalgia.

Nostalgia is an essential component of diasporic narratives. Loh thinks that nostalgic feeling becomes “paradoxically a source of comfort and inspiration” (152-53). Therefore, nostalgia for the lost homeland is a recurrent motif in Hosseini’s novels. His characters encounter a bitter reality of their inability of retrieving an arguably golden past of their country. Since writers from the position of exiles and immigrants are haunted by sense of loss, so they attempt to look back and reclaim their past. Salman Rushdie states that expatriate writers create “fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (10). Gul Daman in *ATSS* and Shadbagh in *ATME* are fictitious places. Shadbagh is the village from where the whole story of the novel *ATME* originates. *Shad* means happy and *bagh* means garden; so the name of the town is suggestive of the verdurous landscape and happiness which home provides. But Hosseini elaborates that he village is like many other villages in Afghanistan: far-flung and dusty, with small square-shaped houses and smoke arising from their roofs. This village is a lovely place for its inhabitants who return to it even years later. It has an immense oak tree towering over everything else in Shadbagh. It is the oldest thing in the village that might have “witnessed the emperor Babur marching his army to capture Kabul” (28 *ATME*). Another speciality of Shadbagh is “one

particular grape” (85) that is very sweet indeed and that grows only in this particular village. Moreover, the old windmill, looming stark and gray over the mud walls of the village becomes an important milestone in the memories of its inhabitants. Iqbal migrates to Pakistan and spends his major years of life there. Yet his love for Shadbagh does not lessen. He tells his children about this village as if “he was describing Paradise” (*ATME* 259). Hence, a common Afghan village gains the status of sacred homeland in the imagination of the diasporic writer. Diasporic writer’s experience of exile serves as a means of “profound creative empowerment” (Said 42) and converts an ordinary landscape into a special one.

Impossibility of an Absolute Return:

Stuart Hall writes that there is no possibility of an absolute return. In *ATME*, Timur and Idris, second generation immigrants, return to Afghanistan not simply because of nostalgia but for reclaiming their property. They do not intend to resettle in Afghanistan. But it is quite insulting to tell this selfish motive to others. Therefore Timur gives altruistic reason: ‘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...to raise awareness, and funds, to “give back.”’ (136). Ironically, this statement of Timur proves true towards the end of the chapter. Coming to Afghanistan and seeing the misery of Afghan people reconnects them intimately with their homeland. When Timur leaves for California he feels sad that local Afghans faced a multitude of tragedies: “A thousand tragedies per square mile” (159). Safran thinks that diasporic people become “committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity” (94). Homecoming enables Timur to look at the people of his homeland in an altruistic manner. After reaching Kabul, Timur’s personal motive moulds into a benevolent act when they see the miseries of his countrymen. The dedication page of Roshi’s book reveals that Timur develops commitment for the betterment of his homeland. In the coming six years he arranges the surgery of Roshi’s brain injury. The journey to the homeland becomes a means of transformation and maturation of the personality.

These two cousins represent two different categories of visitors. Timur tries his best to enjoy the trip to Afghanistan. He visits different places; for instance, Paghman and the town of Istalif, famous for its clay pottery. Idris thinks that Timur behaves “like the quintessential ugly Afghan-American”

(147) when he calls local Afghans as brothers, sisters and uncles. Timur donates them money from the *Bakhsheesh bundle* that he keeps. He is an extrovert who frankly talks to the local people. He records the tales of suffering of Afghan women in his camcorder. Contrary to Timur, Idris is quite introvert. He works as a doctor in California, and is happily married. Idris' stay in Kabul is characterized with an overwhelming feeling of guilt. Survivor's guilt forms the narrative of the whole chapter that is recounted by Idris. He feels guilty that when his countrymen were shelled, murdered and raped, he was living a peaceful life in California. "People like Timur and me. The lucky ones, the ones who weren't here when the place was getting bombed to hell...The stories these people have to tell, we're not *entitled* to them" (147-8). He thinks of Timur and himself as "the wealthy, wide-eyed exiles—come home to gawk at the carnage now that the bogeymen have left" (135). Idris is struck by how easily the locals can tell he is a westernized Afghan. He does not feel at home in his homeland. With this overwhelming feeling of guilt, he cannot enjoy his meal in the restaurant where grimy young faces peer through the glass. His first instinct is to help this person and that person. His promise to make arrangements for Roshi's surgery in California is merely to relieve his guilty conscience. Idris even claims that in case they don't get funding, he will pay the money. Hence, homecoming generates in him an overpowering sense guilt as well as responsibility towards his people.

Unlike Timur and Idris who come to sell their property in Kabul, Pari's homeward journey is to find her roots: her family and her birthplace. Pari revisits her homeland after a gap of fifty five years. She stays at her house in Kabul for one week. The house has merely vestiges of her childhood. The little armoire painted with giraffes is "one of the few surviving relics of her childhood" (289). She requests Markos to ship it to her home in Paris. The changed condition of the house gives her first indication that her homeland is no more the same. She returns to France only with Suleiman Wahdati's sketch pad, Nabi's letter and some poems by Nila. Unlike Timur and Idris, Pari is not here to cash her property. Rather opposite to them, she devotes her house in Kabul for the international aid workers who live there. Hence, as a person belonging to Afghan diaspora she contributes to the restitution of her country.

During this one week, Pari's visit to her ancestral village Shadbagh makes her realize that circumstances have changed totally. The old village of Shadbagh does not exist anymore. Hence, her desire to see her birthplace remains unfulfilled. Towards the end of the novel she shows her niece the picture of her birth place: "This is the place. Where your father and I were

born. And our brother Iqbal too” (378). Ironically, it is only the site that survives; all the other things have changed drastically. *Narco Palace* is erected at the location of the old village Shadbagh. The place is now occupied by an Afghan war lord, who runs the business of narcotics. The mansion with its green, pink, white and yellow coloured parapets and turrets gives Pari a feeling of woefulness: “A monument to kitsch gone woefully awry” (380). Pari goes back to Paris, with only a wistful longing to know where her old house was exactly located. Her craving to meet her half brother Iqbal remains unrealised. She goes to Shadbagh-e-Nau, built about two miles away from the old village. There she is able to meet an old man who is childhood friend of Iqbal. He says that he does not know where Iqbal is. His nervousness and evasion of any eye contact make Pari suspicious that “something bad happened to Iqbal” (381). Hence, visiting her homeland does not bring much delight for Pari. All her childhood relations are either dead or lost. Therefore she comes back to Paris with few mementos from her past. To sum up, Amir, Timur, Idris, and Pari stand for those members of Afghan diasporic community who travel to their native soil for various reasons. When they visit their birthplaces, they find those sites considerably changed. Sights of poverty and devastation are quite horrific. Hence, their idealized image of the homeland contrasts with the bitter conditions in Afghanistan.

Hall’s concept of no possibility of any absolute return is also demonstrated by the character of Iqbal who decide to come back and live the rest of his life in Afghanistan. Likewise, Avtar Brah states that ““home” is a mythic place in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no-return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of “origin”” (McLeod.209). Iqbal is an Afghan immigrant who decides to return to his ancestral land. By the year 2009, Warlords obtain influential position in the management, occupy property of poor villagers, run opium business, and have influence over judiciary of the country. Iqbal becomes victim of such a military leader. In fact, Iqbal loses his life in a desperate attempt to regain his land in Shadbagh. His terrible fate shows that the idea of returning to the paradise of homeland is merely a myth. Iqbal lives as a refugee in Pakistan. During his stay in Peshawar, he frequently talks to his children about Shadbagh. His saying to his son “Wait...wait until you breathe the air in Shadbagh, boys, and taste the water” (259) reveals an immigrant’s desire to return to his homeland. Eventually he returns to Afghanistan with the intention to settle in his old home in Shadbagh. The family comes back with the conviction that the place is theirs. But they find that it is occupied by a former military

commander. Iqbal and his son Gholam try to get back their family property through a judicial process. But a judge tells him that his ownership documents got burnt in a small accident. Hence, the case cannot proceed. The incident is a comment on the corruption present in Afghan courts, where judge takes bribe from the rich and deprive the poor of their rights. Contrary to Iqbal who has ownership documents is Timur. Timur comes from the USA to reclaim his property in Kabul. He does not have ownership documents of the house. Nevertheless, he is quite optimistic about his case because he has ample money to manoeuvre the ponderous Afghan bureaucracy and to “find the right palms to grease” (137). However, Iqbal tries to discuss the matter with the war lord but his guards push him away. At last, he makes a desperate and futile attempt to attack the ex-commander merely with lumps of rock. The newspaper reports the incident as a vicious “assassination attempt” by a former refugee with “suspected ties to the Taliban” (173). In short, homecoming proves lethal for him. Reclaiming his property shatters his delusion of the ancestral land as a nirvana. The tragic fate of Iqbal indicates that there is no possibility of an absolute return.

Conclusion:

This research looks critically on diasporic sensibility of the Afghan immigrant community as depicted in Hosseini’s *ATME*. They face identity crisis, alienation, estrangement, and loss. These immigrants straddle between two different cultures. Their lives become a blend of nostalgia and a desire to move forward. The research establishes that discourses varied as much as Afghan history, folklore, customs, food, and indigenous literature, continue to shape and recast the lives of people who have left Afghanistan. The geographical distance is re-negotiated through an imaginative attachment to home which the Afghan diasporic subject refurbishes from time to time. Living in a foreign land inspires them to make a well-knit Afghan diasporic community. They aspire to return to their homeland, but find it impossible to make any absolute homecoming. Resultantly, their journey towards ancestral homeland and then coming back to the land of exile enables them to come to terms with the contingencies of routes, though homeland retains an emotional influence over their lives.

As the research looks critically into diasporic sensibility present in *ATME*, this framework can prove helpful to analyze diasporic discourse present in the works of other expatriate writers. Similarly, this research can be used as an ancillary template to read the emergent and unexplored aspects of

contemporary Afghan literary narratives constantly shaping and reshaping diasporic consciousness of its citizens traversing different borders. The return to one's homeland is as complex a process as the moment of departure from one's roots.

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