



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Reclaiming Home: Ecological Memory And Identity Through Afghan Practices In *The Kite Runner*

Deekshetha R

Ph.D. Research Scholar in English

RVS College of Arts and Science

Sulur, Coimbatore.

Dr. K. Nagarathinam

Associate Professor & Head

Department of English

RVS College of Arts and Science

Sulur, Coimbatore.

Abstract:

Afghanistan is composed of diverse ethnic groups, religions, and languages, which makes its identity very complex. Afghanistan, being the site of major political tension and prolonged conflict, people often feel separated from their tradition and modern life, especially when they live in other countries as refugees or migrants.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is often interpreted through the lens of trauma, guilt, and migration. This paper instead considers the novel as a repository of Afghan environmental memory and eco-cultural identity. It argues that the author stages everyday practices like kite-fighting, oral storytelling, hospitality codes, foodways, and neighborhood sociability as identity-making rituals ecologically embedded that persist even during war and exile. This study employs qualitative textual analysis to explore how the characters' engagement with indigenous practices shapes their identity. It reveals how afghan cultural memories can serve as sources of renewal rather than symbols of loss, extending Hosseini's work beyond trauma toward a culturally ecocritical reading of Afghan resilience and belonging.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner, Ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell, Cultural Memory, Environmental Imagination, Identity, Redemption, Afghan Landscape.

Introduction:

Literature is seen as an entity of verbal expression through words, that encompasses not only the emotions or thoughts but also serves as a platform to reflect real experiences, but also highlighting the subtle details of life that often go unnoticed. In the earlier literary period, nature was just used as a backdrop for the story or a poem. Over time, writers began to recognize that nature was not just a passive background but an active participant with more significance symbolically and emotionally. In the 1990s, a growing number of individuals were worried about the environment and the consequences of the destruction it was experiencing. As a result, ecocriticism evolved.

The study of ecocriticism is crucial in understanding how literature not only reflects but also shapes human perceptions of nature. Literary works have the power to evoke emotional responses, foster empathy towards the environment, and inspire action (Tajane et al. 2163)

It is a field of literature focusing on the text in relation to nature. Literature plays a vital role in changing the perspective of people; In the context of ecocriticism, it also tries to address the environmental issues that society has been facing in recent times. The study of environmental perspective on literary works helps us to understand the ecological side of a text, knowing that it is not just a story, but it is beyond that.

Afghanistan is often described by its striking contrast of rich cultures, yet it is often burdened by societal and political conflicts. It possesses a unique history of diverse traditions, languages, and different forms of artistic expressions that deeply express its cultural heritage. At the same time, the country has endured continuous wars and political upheavals that disrupted daily life and displaced millions of people. Yet amidst these struggles, Afghanistan's breathtaking landscapes, its towering mountains, vast deserts, and fertile valleys stand as symbols of endurance and continuity. These natural surroundings not only provide a sense of belonging but also preserve the identity of its people, reminding them of their roots even in times of turmoil. In many ways, the Afghan landscape is more than just scenery; it is a living reflection of the nation's spirit and its identity, acting as a silent witness to both suffering and resilience.

Afghan American novelist Khaled Hosseini is known for his writing style, intertwining personal stories with Afghanistan's broader cultural and historical context. Through his writings, the author convinces the readers that there is another side of Afghanistan that is different from what is being portrayed in the news.

"If you look up stories about Afghanistan," he said, "it's always about violence, it's about displacement, it's about the drug trade, it's about the Taliban, it's about the U.S. initiatives. There is precious little about the Afghan people themselves." (Hosseini, phone interview, 2021)

His novels include *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), and *Sea Prayer* (2018). Throughout his works, he established himself as a writer who consistently weaves together themes of memory, familial bonds, and the connection between people and their homeland. Across all his writings, a distinct style emerges, his narratives are simple yet gives vivid imagery, symbolic landscapes. This narrative pattern is found strong in *The Kite Runner*, the novel that not only introduced to the world but also revealed a distinct side of Afghanistan.

While existing scholarship on Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* has predominantly focused on themes of trauma, guilt, and migration, the ecological dimensions of the novel remain largely unexplored. This paper addresses that gap by looking at everyday practices such as kite flying, foodways, hospitality, and oral storytelling as activities closely linked to the environment. These eco-cultural practices help characters in the novel preserve their identity and sense of belonging. By highlighting this dimension of his work, the study offers a new perspective on viewing Hosseini's work that can be seen beyond the lens of trauma and displacement.

Literature Review:

Since its publication in 2003, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* has drawn a wide range of critical interpretations. Most scholarly studies have focused on the themes of migration, guilt, and trauma, leaving other dimensions of the novel unexplored. A review of the existing scholarship, therefore, provides the necessary foundation for this study, which gives a shift towards the ecological and environmental dimensions of Afghan identity in Hosseini's narrative. "Afghanistan does not belong to one but to all different ethnic groups, and uprightness empowers what is justly redeemable and truly human." (Shaan 372)

interpreting the concept of the 'other.' Shaan argues that recognizing marginalized groups as equals to the characters' moral growth and the novel's emphasis on empathy.

Hosseini's novel explores the historical background of Afghanistan's refugee crisis. It depicts the three separate regimes as well as the reasons for their shift. Hosseini paints a vivid image of refugees and the obstacles they face as they escape to a new country. (Rasheed and Hamad 126)

A postcolonial analysis of the refugee situation and Western stereotypes of Afghanistan is conducted using Edward Said's Orientalism, highlighting the significance of true cultural representation.

Khaled Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner*, is a highly praised coming-of-age narrative that describes the intricate friendship between Amir, a privileged Pashtun boy, and Hassan, the son of his father's servant.

This childhood bond is characterized by customs that are instilled in Kabul's landscape, like Kite-flying, storytelling, and neighbourhood sociability.

From Cultural memory to Environmental memory: Contextualizing *The Kite Runner*

A pivotal act of betrayal by Amir to Hassan leaves him concerned. With guilt, he returns later to Afghanistan, not only for his redemption but also indirectly serves as a re-engagement with the memories of his homeland, practice, and its environment that continue to shape his identity as an Afghan. The novel offers a reading that emphasizes the resilience of environmental memory despite exile and conflict by emphasizing how cultural practices are ecologically rooted.

In the early chapters of the novel, Baba is portrayed as a man of stature who frequently organizes lavish parties at his Kabul home. "The dominance of *Pashtunwali* is evidently noticeable in the characters of the novel, like the character of Baba used to give parties and the way he shows dominance is a true example of his *Pashtun* instinct, i.e., *Milmasty*" (Kabeer 89). Baba's generosity and the grand parties he throws reflect the code of hospitality, which is a key aspect of Afghan identity.

Applying Buell's framework to *The Kite Runner* allows us to see the novel in a different imaginative reconstruction of Afghan landscapes and cultural practices. Storytelling emerges as one of the most important cultural practices shared between Amir and Hassan. After school, every day they spend time beneath the pomegranate tree, sharing stories in the open spaces of their neighborhood, acting more than a backdrop. The storytelling practice acts as a tool that binds people together through shared narratives that also shape their relationship to the environment.

As Amir recalls, "We sat for hours under that tree, sat there until the sun faded in the west, and still Hassan insisted we had enough daylight for one more story, one more chapter" (Hosseini 24). Although Hassan is illiterate, he actively listens, reacts, and urges Amir to continue the story they share beneath the pomegranate tree. This practice bridges the gap between social and ethnical divides, showing storytelling as a cultural act that brings together individuals, building a community of memory.

In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) Lawrence Buell emphasizes the literature in playing a central role in shaping how humans perceive and engage with the natural world. He argues that environmental problems cannot be addressed without first cultivating "better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it" (2).

Hosseini reimagines Afghanistan as a site of trauma and a landscape alive with ecological practices like kite-flying under Kabul's winter sky and the winds that make the sport possible. For Amir and Hassan, the memory of chasing kites possesses personal identity and Afghan cultural belonging. The rooftops, open air, the colourful sunrise and sunset turn kite-flying into more than a childhood pastime. They transform it into an eco-cultural ritual rooted in the environment.

"Even the term 'Kite' used in the novel is the symbol of liberation of the country from Taliban and even a free Afghanistan" (Kabeer 105). The Kite-flying tournament represents a connection to the land and the shared cultural practices that define Afghan identity. Through this lens, kite-flying becomes a powerful instance of environmental imagination, a practice of interweaving culture and environment to preserve identity even amid displacement.

Baba and Amir's relocation to America represents a disconnection from the cultural and environmental memory of Afghanistan. A rupture in Buell's terms, reflects the loss of place-based identity and ecological belonging. Amir embraces America as a place to escape from the past; for Baba, it became a constant reminder of loss and mourning (Hosseini 112). Their exile illustrates the importance of place in memory; landscapes and environments are not passive backdrops but active sites of belonging.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 displaced families, forcing them to abandon not only their homeland but also the environment that had been the anchor of their cultural practices. In a research paper, *An Eco-Critical Study of Khaled Hosseini's And the Mountains Echoed*, Shah and Kumari observes that Hosseini's portrayal of war also reflects the ecological devastation inflicted on Afghanistan (2). This ecological loss mirrors the inner disintegration of the characters, whose identities are fractured by exile and displacement. Hosseini presents war not merely as a political crisis but as a force that dismantles ecological

belonging, demonstrating how the deterioration of physical spaces leads to a parallel wearing away of cultural memory and identity.

Hosseini illustrates how Afghan identity is reshaped in exile. Baba mourns the loss of Kabul's familiar landscapes, unable to reconcile American soil with the memories of Afghan gardens, bazaars, and communal traditions. Majeed and Akhtar argue that Hosseini's characters confront the harsh truth that the idyllic past of their homeland cannot be reclaimed. (101). Yet the Afghan community recreates fragments of home in exile through markets, weddings, and hospitality practices, trying to endure their cultural memory through rituals.

Amir's return to Kabul in search of redemption can be read as a confrontation with his past guilt and an ecological and cultural homecoming. Tadjbaksh observes that "victims on all sides of the many wars in Afghanistan have the same feelings from similar personal experiences: hatred, pain, loss, fear" but suggests that these wounds can be healed only by showing compassion and recognition of shared suffering (Tadjbaksh).

Amir's act of rescuing Sohrab can be read in this light; he breaks the cycle of guilt and betrayal by choosing empathy and responsibility. He reflects on his betrayal of Hassan at the age of twelve shaped the course of his life, later he realizes "there is a way to be good again" (Hosseini 168).

Conclusion:

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is viewed beyond trauma when read through the lens of cultural and environmental memory. Rituals such as kite-flying, storytelling, and hospitality reveal how Afghan identity is tied to both tradition and place. Jan Assmann's cultural memory explains how these practices endure even in situations like exile, while Lawrence Buell's *Environmental Imagination* highlights the role of landscapes in shaping belonging. Amir's return to Kabul, culminating in Kite-flying with Sohrab, symbolizes redemption as an environmental and cultural reconnection. The novel, therefore, illustrates Afghan resilience, showing that identity and memory remain inseparable from the environment.

WORKS CITED

1. Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard UP, 1995.
2. Harris, Elizabeth A. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/books/khaled-hosseiniafghanistan.html>
3. Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Books, 2003.
4. Kabeer, Haseena. "Pashtunwali and Afghaniyat: A Code of Conduct and Religious Cultural Codes." *Decoding Socio Ethnic Dynamics in the writings of Khaled Hosseini and Nadia Hashimi*, 2022, hdl.handle.net/10603/381597.
5. Majeed, Munazza, and Rizwan Akhtar. "From Roots to Routes: Diasporic Sensibility in and the Mountains Echoed." *Journal of Research in Humanities*, by Journal of Research in Humanities, pu.edu.pk/images/journal/english/PDF/06_LVI_Jan_20.pdf.
6. Rasheed, Lamiaa Ahmed, and Reem Adnan Hamad. "The Representation of Refugees' Crisis Through the Lenses of Edward Said's Orientalism: A Post-Colonial Study of Khaled Hosseini's the Kite Runner." *JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 120–33. <https://doi.org/10.25130/jls.5.1.9>.
7. Shaalan, Ban Salah. "The Kite Runner: A Journey of Growth." *Journal of Arts, Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences*, <https://doi.org/10.33193/JALHSS.52.2020.95>.
8. Shah, Sadaf, and Pooja Kumari. "AN ECO-CRITICAL STUDY OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED." *GAP BODHI TARU*, vol. II, no. December 2019, Dec. 2019, [www.gapinterdisciplinarity.org/res/articles/\(1-7\)%20AN%20ECO-CRITICAL%20STUDY%20OF%20KHALED%20HOSSEINI%E2%80%99S%20AND%20THE%20MOUNTAINS%20ECHOED.pdf](http://www.gapinterdisciplinarity.org/res/articles/(1-7)%20AN%20ECO-CRITICAL%20STUDY%20OF%20KHALED%20HOSSEINI%E2%80%99S%20AND%20THE%20MOUNTAINS%20ECHOED.pdf).
9. Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou. "Conceptualizing Love for Peace From Below: Humane Security in Afghanistan." *Open Democracy*, 12 July 2019, www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/conceptualizing-love-peace-below-humane-security-afghanistan. Accessed 26 Sept. 2025.

10. Tajane, Suchitra Sharad, et al. "Ecocriticism in Literature: Examining Nature and the Environment in Literary Works." *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, May 2024, pp. 2162–68. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i6.5675>.

