

HUMAN SUFFERING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SILENCE: AN ECOCRITICAL EXPLORATION OF *AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED*

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Abstract

And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini (2013) is a powerful work that delves deeply into human suffering, displacement, and moral accountability in the fractured ecological and cultural landscape of Afghanistan. The novel goes beyond a traditional family narrative to show how family war-related wounds, poverty, and migration reverberate through time and space. Hosseini interweaves the lives of Abdullah, Pari and Nila Wahdati, each of whom represents the fragmentation of identity, place of residence and nature. Not just as a backdrop, but as a living being that is torn with human greed and historical violence, Hosseini reveals the Afghan landscape superbly. The silence of women, of the land, of memory become the recurring metaphor of alienation and ecological loss. This paper analyzes Hosseini's work through the lens of ecocriticism and existential humanism, arguing that the novel turns the geography of Afghanistan into an ethical and spiritual landscape that positions humanity as an outsider to nature. Finally, *And the Mountains Echoed* is an ecological allegory of redemption, implying that healing, whether personal, cultural, or environmental, starts with empathy and with returning to the world of the living.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environmental Silence, Human Suffering, Spiritual Ecology, Afghanistan.

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism examines the role literature plays in mediating the relationship between the natural world and human beings, thereby highlighting the ethical and emotional implications of environmental degradation. Due to the challenges of the twenty-first century, which have never been faced before, with ecological crises such as climate disruption, deforestation, pollution, and habitat loss, literary texts stand out as cultural reflections of human alienation from nature. In this discussion, *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini presents a heart-wrenching account of the alienation of the environment and existence. In the backdrop of a war-ravaged ecology in Afghanistan, the geography is altered to testify in the novel, where the land is portrayed as a victim of human tragedy (Aho, 2023).

The years of war in Afghanistan have washed away the soil and the spirit. The processes of desertification, deforestation, and water scarcity go hand in hand with the disintegration of society and the moral exhaustion of its inhabitants. Hosseini does not describe this environmental silence as a silence of sound, but rather as a silencing of the moral voice of nature — silence that accuses but does not consent (Serhat & Uzuncan, 2021). Through his interconnected tales, he connects personal remembering with ecological destruction, implying that the destruction of family ties replicates the destruction of the natural world (Køster, 2021).

This research is thus aimed at exploring *And the Mountains Echoed* as an ecological parable in which environmental silence serves as a metaphor for anthropological suffering. The paper builds

on ecocritical and spiritual ecological frameworks to argue that Hosseini creates an environmental awareness that challenges human control and points to reconciliation between humans and the living earth.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Ecocriticism and its Theoretical Bases:

The ecocritical theoretical roots go back to William Rueckert's argument that literature is a living ecological system in which the energy of a text circulates between human beings and the natural environment. This paradigm is expanded by Environmental Imagination and The Ecocriticism Reader, by Lawrence Buell and Glotfelty, and Fromm, respectively, in their relationship to environmental representation and responsible environmental stewardship. In this critical frame, Shah and Kumari (2019) state that ecocriticism is not just a form of nature writing but also an outcry against the anthropocentric mentality that is fueling contemporary disasters such as deforestation, species extinction, and global warming. According to their analysis, Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* is set in a landscape of spiritual ecology, as nature in the novel reflects human morality: their lack of empathy and spiritual roots leads to the barrenness of nature. Based on the liberal concept of ecocide by Higgins (2010), a lawyer, they see the war-torn ecology in Afghanistan as a moral crime that has been perpetrated against humanity and nature. To supplement this, Human Ecology by Marten (2001) emphasizes co-adaptation between society and the environment, which supports the implicit message in Hosseini that ecological balance cannot be addressed outside the concept of social justice. Together, these structures provide a dynamic perception of nature as a moral actor rather than a passive setting and form the conceptual basis for reading Hosseini's landscapes as ethical writings.

2.2 Previous Ecocritical and Sociological Researches on Hosseini:

In a complementary disciplinary perspective, Tooraj Zeynivand (2019) uses a sociological-comparative perspective to describe the characters of the novel (Pari, Abdullah, Nila, Nabi and Saboor) as symbolic representations of the socio-political trauma experienced by Afghanistan. His conclusions focus on the fact that the environmental devastation in the story of Hosseini is similar to the social breakdown in the war, poverty, patriarchy and ethnic violence. The sociological interpretation situates *And the Mountains Echoed* within a shared national consciousness of displacement and inequality, and, in this way, ecocriticism is applied to the moral geography of Afghan identity. The reason behind the convergence of the two studies lies in the fact that the fiction of Hosseini is a dual witnessing; of the maimed land as well as the maimed self. But neither of them completely explains the ways in which the mute silence of the environment echoes as a psychological reflection of trauma, which is an awareness gap to which this present paper aims to apply.

2.3 Existential Alienation and Ecological Deprivation:

Whereas ecological criticism anticipates the environment, Kondragunta and Usha (2018) relocate Hosseini's story in the realm of existential psychology and Nila Wahdati as a literary symbol of alienation and dislocation. They criticize that Nila isolates herself from Kabul to France to exaggerate the break between the self and the world, and the similarity between the spiritual

disconnection of the human and the natural. Her quest to live an artistic independent life challenges patriarchal restrictions, but, at the same time, loneliness further intensifies her loneliness, showing that being free and without ecological or emotional connection can result in emptiness. The authors define Nila's isolation as both gendered and metaphysical, arguing that ecological exile is impossible to discuss without existential estrangement in Hosseini's world.

2.4 Current Academic Analysis:

Recent studies continue to expand the interpretive range of *And the Mountains Echoed*, connecting it to world discourses on gender, power, and existential meaning. Ahmad and Khan (2020) examine the novel from a critical stylistic and feminist perspective, discussing how Hosseini reveals the conflict between patriarchal oppression and liberal feminist principles in Afghan society. Their work sheds some light on the linguistic and symbolic approaches that help pay voice to silenced female experiences, thus adding an ecocritical dimension to these readings.

On the same note, Ali et al. (2022) view the novel through the prism of a new historicist and transcultural approach, in which Hosseini's narration is placed within the spectrum of Afghan historical memory. According to them, the novel reimagines Afghanistan's identity by balancing individual trauma and generational history, intertwining Eastern and Western literature. Collectively, these new works support the multiperspectiveness of Hosseini's art, that is, the combination of environment, identity, gender, and history in revealing the ethical intricacies of the human condition.

When mixing these views, the existing literature confirms that *And the Mountains Echoed* summarises interconnected aspects of ecological, social, and existential sorrow. Shah and Kumari disclose the moral ecology of war; Zeynivand the sociological wounds of war; Kondragunta and Usha the psychological price of being disconnected. The combination of these works shows that national boundaries do not limit the novel by Hosseini, and that it is a universal reflection on how the silence of the environment, social fragmentation, and inner desolation resonate with one another and demand an ethics of care that should be regarded as universal.

3. Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical approach of this study comprises an interdisciplinary framework that combines knowledge of ecocriticism, spiritual ecology, and trauma-cultural ecology, offering a multidimensional perspective through which the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini may be viewed as both an environmental and an existential narrative. The combination of these points of view makes it possible to read the novel not only as a novel about the estrangement of families and war, but also as an allegory of the estrangement of human beings from the natural world itself.

3.1 Ecocriticism Literature and Environmental Ethics:

The core of this research is the ecocriticism which studies the relationships between literary texts and ecological awareness and ecological ethics. Literature operates in the same manner as

Rueckert and Buell postulate: it is a moral ecosystem that acts as a mirror and a way of reforming the attitudes of men and women towards nature. Hosseini, through his lens, makes landscapes into witnesses of anthropogenic violence: dusty plains, ruined orchards, or silent mountains. Via ecocriticism, the novel is therefore considered a locus of environmental ethics, which questions the impact of human ambition and greed to bring about ecological and emotional ruin (Mustafa, 2020).

3.2 Spiritual Ecology: the Divinity of nature and the Moral Agency:

Spiritual ecology holds that nature is not dead matter but a living moral entity with sacred meaning. In this context, the deserts of Afghanistan in *And the Mountains Echoed* represent Godly order disturbed by human discord. The quietness of the mountains serves as a spiritual metaphor — divine patience, human neglect. Roy and Banerjee (2022) argue that *And the Mountains Echoed* exposes the deeply embedded gender-power hierarchies within Afghan society. The spiritual ecologists would describe this element of redemption through memory and returning as a means of redemption, as portrayed by Hosseini in his characters, as the re-sacralization of the Earth: a moral awakening that would reestablish reverence for the natural world. Nature in the novel thereby gains theological agency, reminding humanity of its covenantal duty towards creation.

3.3 Trauma and Cultural Ecology: Parallel Wounds of Mind and Landscape:

The crossroads of trauma theory and cultural ecology allow for interpreting the Afghan landscape as the text of the psyche and the text of the environment. According to trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, the wounds which have not been resolved tend to replicate as silence, repetition or displacement, which are characteristic feature of damaged ecosystems as well. The destruction of human memory and the fragmentation of emotions are ecological counterparts to war-torn villages, drought, and displacement in Hosseini's narrative. This split is reflected in the divided brothers, Abdullah and Pari: their physical contact reflects the disrupted ecological and cultural continuity of Afghanistan. The loss of the environment can therefore be seen as a reflection of collective trauma, and the boundary between the pain of the people and the pain of the land has faded.

3.4 Social Ecology and the Theory of Domination proposed by Bookchin:

The socio-philosophical support of this analysis is found in Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982). Bookchin believes that the domination of nature is rooted in the domination of the human by the human, and she argues that social relationships —i.e., patriarchal, political, economic, etc. —continue to reproduce ecological domination. Shah and Kumari (2019) observe this dialectic in Hosseini's story, noting how the oppression between family members, the disparity of classes, and gendered silence are reflected in the degradation of the environment. The violence inflicted on people and the destruction of the environment as a form of domination are inseparable in *And the Mountains Echoed*: domination over people goes hand in hand with domination over the land. The moral universe of Hosseini is consequently in agreement with Bookchin's vision of ecological freedom: a society can only attain harmony with its environment when it breaks the frameworks of social inequality that uphold ecocide and oppression.

These overlapping structures have made *And the Mountains Echoed* a moral-ecological narrative in which nature, humanity, and spirituality are intertwined. Ecocriticism clarifies the ethical crisis of human-environmental interrelations; spiritual ecology corrects the sacred dialogue between man and nature; trauma ecology reveals the psychic price of ecological disruption; and the social ecology of *Bookchin* grounds understanding in structural criticism. They all disclose the art of Hosseini as a humane ecology of memory and demand that the restoration of the Earth and the restoration of the human soul are two inseparable efforts at redemption.

4. Analysis and Discussion:

4.1 Afghanistan: an Ecological Battlefield:

In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Afghanistan is not a setting, it is a living thing, a suffering thing. The bare mountains, dry hills, and ruins of villages are the symbols of the suffering of the whole nation. The land turns out to be a battlefield; the ground and the soul are both injured by decades of human warfare. Both invasions Soviet, civil, and Taliban have uncivilized victims as well as ecological victims.

Nature, which used to be the source of nourishment, has become covered with the wounds of gluttony and disregard. Hosseini uses striking imagery of flooding, drought, and withering orchards to make Afghanistan a moral commentary. The sterility of the land is the reflection of the moral fatigue of people, and this implies the inseparable nature of the violence of destruction of nature and conscience.

4.2 Environmental Silence and Human Alienation:

The novel is filled with silence, which can be described as the silence of the land, of women, and of memory. This stillness, paradoxical in itself, is reflected in the book's title, *The Mountains Echoed*. Mountains take in all the shrieks and only give back the silent rebirth, the disconnectedness between human beings and their natural habitat.

This silence in the environment symbolizes the death of dialogue between the planet and people. The land is no longer a nurturer; it survives. The individuals who were displaced by the war and exile cannot listen any longer; they just live. Through such mutual alienation, Hosseini makes silence the language of sorrow the lament that comes when people silence the earth is that they also silence themselves.



Figure 1. The Silence of Echoes in War and Environment in Afghanistan.

Figure 1 represent the barrenness of Afghan countryside life children in rubble and displacement repeat the human and nature misery of *And the Mountains Echoed*. They represent the innocence that is lost and life that continues to survive despite the destruction..

4.3 The Feminine Ecology and Estrangement of Nila Wahdati:

Nila Wahdati is the point of gendered, ecological, and exiled. Her artistic soul can not be defined in the patriarchal orders, but her leaving her home completely deprives her of the ecological and emotional sources that were the food of her spirit. The depiction of her life in Paris, where she is surrounded by art and feels no sense of belonging, becomes an allegory of modern man's exile into the world of nature.

The danger of Nila's isolation and subsequent self-destruction is dramatized as a process of liberation without reconnection. She represents an intellectually free, spiritually sterile ecology in disintegration. Hosseini builds a sort of feminine ecology through her, analogous to the Earth itself: silenced, misconceived, and exploited, yet possessing an unending ability to regenerate.

4.4 War, Trauma and the Broken Landscape:

Throughout the novel, Hosseini combines images of the surrounding landscape with those of psychological trauma. Dust, drought and decay are not elements of setting but moods. The land becomes a reflection of inner devastation: the demolished houses resonate with broken pasts, the dry wells are like exhausted hearts.

The war in Kabul is described as being full of mud, rubble and filled with the scent of burning, a place where even the wind appears to be filled with sadness. Nature is a dumb companion of human brutality. The reader has the impression that the land is crying, she is bursting like figuratively bleeding by erosion and destruction. Through this, Hosseini creates an ecological psychology in which war leaves a scar on the body and on the earth, where the body finds its shelter.

4.5 Redemption by Environmental Awareness:

Hosseini is the saviour from the destruction, manifesting compassion and eco-awareness. The reconciliation of Abdullah and Pari is the reuniting of the lost harmony, between the brothers and sister, the memory and the land, too. Their rejoining suggests that the individual mending leads to the healing of the environment and social existence.

The last scene in the novel shows that the laughter has returned to the village in Afghanistan, and the mountains that had no sound are heard humming with life. This symbolism signifies the resurgence of moral ecology: sympathy toward other people and respect for nature are synonymous with salvation. To begin to redeem ourselves, Hosseini discovers, it is time to learn to listen again—to one another and to the living earth, who has always been listening to them.

And the Mountains Echoed is in every way a moral consciousness ecological allegory. The Afghan landscape is reflected against an ethical divanion of the violence of domination, silence and greed. Hosseini's vision is geography-free and holds that human suffering and environmental degradation are not two tragedies that coexist but are threads of one moral fabric. It is not fighting or being a stranger, but in the mere recognition of the fact that, the future of the earth and that of man are not separate.

5. Findings:

Analysing And the Mountains Echoed through the prism of ecocriticism, spiritual ecology, and trauma theory, we can conclude that Hosseini did not limit his narration to local nature but was capable of conveying a universal ecological ethical principle. The major findings of the work are the following:

1. The Mirror of Environmental Silence the Desensitization of Human Beings:

This kind of environmental silence that prevails all over the novel, symbolized by the mute mountains, deserted fields, and deserted villages, is used as a metaphor by the novel to show the numbness of man. Not only deafness, but this deafness, the deafness to the long-

term violence and the environmental negligence. Hosseini makes the Afghanistan land a moral echo chamber, which absorbs human suffering but does not answer, a representation of the constantly growing apathy of the world towards natural and human tragedy..

2. Human Suffering and Ecological Degradation Depends on each other:

As the novel shows, human and environmental afflictions cannot be separated. The wars that destroy people of Afghanistan are at the same time polluting the land, de-foresting the valleys and silencing the rivers. This mutual ruin indicates that moral decay and environmental destruction share a common cause: disconnection, domination, and social injustice. Such redefinition helps Hosseini understand the ecological crisis not as a scientific problem but as a failure of ethical and humanitarian values.

3. Spiritual Ecology The Way to Redemption.

In the midst of despair, Hosseini points to the possibility of regeneration through spiritual ecology, grounded in the unconditional awareness of the divinity of nature and its right to act in human lives. Redemption in the novel is achieved not through conquest but through reconnection: recollection, compassion, and humility towards nature. As the characters such as Abdullah and Pari become compassionate and kinful once again they are also rekindled in their moral vitality within the land. The restoration of nature will be associated with the restoration of humanity.

4. The Geography of Afghanistan as Universal Ecological Parable:

Turning the geography of war in Afghanistan into a geography of the living moral, Hosseini elevates a local story of trauma into a global ecological allegory. The deserts, mountains, and ruins of the country appeal beyond their geography to a planet injured by exploitation, brutality, and silence. Through this, Hosseini turns the Afghan experience into a universal meditation on the sense of belonging, exile, and the dire urgency of ecological consciousness.

Put altogether, these findings confirm *And the Mountains Echoed* as not only a history of family- and nation-wide-suffering, but also a literary ecology of the moral responsibility. The novel by Hosseini requires the reestablishment of human and environmental ethics, encouraging the reader to remember that the restoration of society and the restoration of the earth are two inseparable aspects of the redemptive process.

6. Conclusion:

And the Mountains Echoed by Khaled Hosseini is one of the most striking evidences of the inseparable unity of the environmental vitality and human moral. The novel recreates nature as a moral consciousness, an active location defined by haunting landscapes and repetitive silence. The war-torn, drought-stricken, and displaced Afghan land turns into a natural reflection of the fractures of the human soul in an ecological sense.

Hosseini turns the silence of the environment into a symbol of moral burnout, in which the silence of the mountains and the barrenness of the fields resonate with an inability of man to live in a harmonious relationship with creation. However, in this silence, one can hear some hope: that pity, memory and compassion will be able to cure human soul, and ailing earth. By portraying the process of restoring lost relationships among brothers and sisters, groups of people, and the land,

Hosseini contributes to the evolution of a spiritual ecological viewpoint, according to which redemption is the result of the re-establishment of the moral order of nature.

Finally, *And the Mountains Echoed* is a novel that crosses national borders to express an ecological parable that is universal. It reminds the reader that the destruction of the environment is not an external disaster but an inner moral failure, and that what will help us get better is the restoration of our respect for the living earth. The mountains in the world of Hosseini not only cry out in pain but also in the possibility of renewal that will be eternal.

7. Future Research Directions and Recommendations:

The current study shows that *And the Mountains Echoed* is a moral-ecological story in which environmental degradation and human suffering are interconnected. These insights can be developed in future research in the following key directions:

1. Compare the themes of ecological trauma and moral decline with other postcolonial literature to highlight cross-cultural patterns of environmental concern.
2. Take a closer look at the intersection of gender oppression and ecological exploitation, using Nila Wahdati as an example and generalising to the feminist-ecological debate.
3. And examine the interaction of mental trauma and ecological destruction in displaced/war societies.
4. Discover the collision of power, colonization and ecology so as to create moral accountability to the land.
5. Ecocritical reading should be introduced into educational programs to promote empathy and awareness of ecological issues.

In general, future literature, ethics, and ecology research should continue to fill the gaps to make the point that environmental and human healing cannot be decoupled.

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