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## Through the Unreal City: A Character- study on Khaled Hosseini's and the Mountains Echoed

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### Abstract

In the days after 9/11, world saw a flood of literary works discussing frequently the cause and effect of the great catastrophe. The colossal status of the United States in the world economy was shaken. The writers made it a point to speak about the disastrous incident, the role of Taliban and more importantly, the pathetic plight of the victims. The victims included the people of Afghanistan as well, for the US troops were stationed in their native land with the aim of demolishing the Taliban. The war is still going on in Afghanistan, the mountainous landlocked country in central Asia, transforming it to an unreal city.

This paper attempts to reflect upon the past glory of Afghanistan and its fall post 9/11. It makes an in-depth analysis of the Afghan- American writer Khaled Hosseini's recent work, *And the Mountains Echoed*, bringing under scrutiny the character of Uncle Nabi. He serves as an indifferent witness to, and a link between the nation's glorious past and its catastrophic present. This paper thus attempts a psychological introspection the above said character with the aim of providing a glance into the post 9/11 Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Unreal City, Khaled Hosseini's, Mountains Echoed

### 1. Introduction

Unreal city,  
Under the fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many  
Sighs, short and infrequent were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (Eliot)

There were times in the history of mankind when the thought of death, however strange it might seem, appealed to the masses than being alive in a godforsaken world. Tremors shook them one after another. Battles were fought for reasons which were 'statistically proved right', leaving the victors and the victims beyond any difference whatsoever. Confusion and chaos ruled the lives and minds of men particularly during the post-world war years. Men were groping around in darkness, caught in a cloud of indifference. The two world wars in fact shook the world in the most disastrous way possible that the very reason to live has been wiped out of their life and thoughts. Happiness was unknown and unheard off; a stranger mocking at men, wandering beyond their reach.

Not so long ago, before the time took the world into its healing hands, world witnessed another horrific catastrophe, later pet named, the 9/11 incident. It had huge impact on the world. It caused the loss of millions of lives. The authority of the United States over the world economy was shaken. The fall of the twin towers and Taliban's role in the disaster took its toll on the Americans as well as the Afghani people. From then on, the land of Afghanistan is a battle field, which continues to be so even now. Needless to say, the literature post 2001 reflected their pathetic plight and the perilous life led by the people, as consequent to the crash of the World Trade Centre.

Khaled Hosseini is one among the literary pantheon who revealed the sterile inners cape of the natives while painting the desolate landscape of Afghanistan through his works.

Out beyond the ideas  
Of wrong doing and right doing

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There is a field

I'll meet you there. (Hosseini 1)

The above lines form the epigraph of his recent work *And the Mountains Echoed*. These lines foreshadow a tale of desperate men in a landlocked mountainous terrain which signifies the land of Afghanis- Afghanistan. The novel progresses in a fragmented manner foregrounding the character and their mindsets. Reason and rationality is thoroughly overrated, as a testimony to the post war sentiments. The external landscape echoes destruction and desolation, wearing out its temporal and spatial character thus proclaiming its universal nature. The mountainous terrain of Afghanistan as portrayed in the novel can be thus considered, a microcosm of the whole world, affected quite adversely by catastrophes one after another. The epigraph of the novel reflects a world where reason is beyond the reach of the right or the wrong. There is no law or moral to bind man to his conscience. Everyone is driven by his/her choices. Hosseini's novel begins narrating the story of the siblings Abdullah and Pari who journey across the desert to Kabul with their father Sabur. However the novel fragments to tell the tale of so many other characters; how their decisions and desires define and shape them; and how the choices they make resonate through history. The character we ought to focus here is that of uncle Nabi who, despite the presence of many other compelling characters, is significant due to very many reasons. It is through him that the novel recounts the glorious past of Afghanistan, its richness and tradition, its wealth and splendour. However an evil eye is cast upon the land post the 9/11 incident, which transformed it into a battle field. Palaces, streets and houses were destroyed and demolished and people were struck by the post war trauma. The character of uncle Nabi is the connecting link between the country's ideal past and its traumatic present. He tags along the reader taking them along the busy streets of Kabul, the well-furnished palaces, courtyards and corridors bustling with activity and all the lost luxury of his native land. As time hurries by, there occurs a change of scene. This time when the reader accompanies him to tour the land, the land echoes of disaster and destruction, desolation and loneliness. Demolished houses, empty courtyards, bullet marks, lost lives, refugee camps, and war casualties welcome the readers.

The street where we lived, once so quiet and pristine and gleaming, turned into a war zone. Bullets hit every house. Rockets whistled overhead. RPGs landed up and down the street and blasted craters in the asphalt... and then sudden bursts of fire would break it, rounds cracking off from every direction, people on the street screaming.... War was ruthless on the once beautiful house. Windows shattered by nearby RPG blast. A rocket pulverized the wall on the eastern face of the garden as well as half of the veranda. A grenade damaged the roof. Bullets scarred the walls (Hosseini 122).

The whole land has turned into a wasteland with old uncle Nabi left alone to tell the tale. He is the Tiresias mourning the lost splendor and richness of the land and sole survivor to the disaster fallen upon it. His thoughts and feelings are chaotic and indifferent. Like Tiresias in T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, he stands by and helplessly watches the destruction falling upon the land.

I found a band of militia men ripping the rug from the stairwell with a set of curved knives. I stood by and

watched them. What could I do? What was another old man with a bullet in the head to them? Like the house, Suleiman and I were wearing down. My eyesight dimmed, and my knees took to aching most days... (Hosseini123).

His whole life is like an illusion for he set his own pace despite the fast moving world around him. The novel talks about three generations of life and living and there is a constant dialogue taking place between them this exchange of dialogue is evident right from the start of the novel when Sabur tells Pari a story. It speaks of the long gone days of fantasy and myth while the children get carried away in the wings of their imagination. As the novel progresses fantasy gives way to reason and reality thus transforming the inners cape of the characters into an unreal city.

Thus the character of uncle Nabi playacts the Tiresias of T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*; connecting the past to the present, unifying all the fragmented elements and mediating the dialogue between generations; empathizing with the older generation while propelling the new.

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