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Echoes of Silence: Postcolonial Feminist Voices in Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed*

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Abstract

This paper examines the silenced yet resonant voices of Afghan women in Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory. By foregrounding both diasporic and localised female experiences, the article interrogates how gendered silence are inscribed, resisted, and reimagined within the novel's multinational and multigenerational narrative. Drawing on the works of C. T. Mohanty, G. C. Spivak, and D. Kandiyoti, the study explores the interplay between patriarchal structures, cultural memory, and geopolitical displacement. It argues that Hosseini's portrayal of female characters somehow creates a textured tapestry of various levels of resistance - from silent to rebellious, deferred agency, and challenging dominant monolithic representations of Afghan womanhood.

Keywords: Postcolonial feminism, Afghan women, diaspora and displacement, resistance, and multinational and generational narrative

Introduction

In Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*, silence reverberates not as absence but as potent narrative force, shaping memory, identity, and agency. Afghan women in the novel often occupy liminal spaces where they are spoken about rather than speaking for themselves; they are present nevertheless peripheral. This article explores how postcolonial feminist theory can illuminate the subtle, often muted voices of Afghan women in

Hosseini's novel, revealing ideological tensions among representation, erasure, and resistance.

The significance of this study lies in its interrogation of literary silence as a gendered and political construct. Drawing on the works of G. C. Spivak, C. T. Mohanty, and D. Kandiyoti, the paper foregrounds how Afghan women's subjectivities are shaped by intersecting forces of patriarchy, displacement, and global spectatorship. Thus, instead of treating silence as passivity, this research repositions it as a site of interpretive richness, where voice is not always audible but always meaningful.

Hosseini's novel has been received with considerable attention for it emotional depth and diasporic scope. Critics have praised the novel's ability to portray the complexity of familial bonds and cultural displacement through a polyphonic structure that resists linear storytelling (Sharma, 2017). Majeed and Akhtar (2020) further argue the novel captures the perennial predicament of diasporic identity, straddling the vulnerable guideposts of home and exile, and reflecting the impossibility of return as a central emotional and thematic concern. Nevertheless, existing scholarship often centers on trauma and familial bonds, overlooking how Afghan women's narratives are mediated, fragmented, or silenced within broader cultural and geopolitical frameworks. Therefore, this article seeks to bridge the gap by analysing key female characters whose stories echo across generations and borders.

Methods

This paper employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on postcolonial feminist literary criticism. The primary material analysed was Khaled Hosseini's novel *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), selected for its transnational narrative structure and its diverse depiction of Afghan women across generational and geographic boundaries. The research focused mainly on female characters as well on male characters whose life experiences reflect broader themes of displacement, silencing, memory, and agency.

No statistical methods were employed, as the analysis did not involve numerical data or quantitative studies. Instead, the research relied on close reading techniques and thematic analysis to examine how silence, voice, and identity are constructed within the novel. The analysis was guided by four thematic axes: gendered displacement and silencing, rebellion and contradiction, diasporic identity and fragmented memory, and sisterhood and solidarity.

Each theme was informed by established postcolonial feminist scholarship. Brickell and Speer's (2020) work on gendered displacement provided a framework for analysing spatial and emotional dedication.

Govindaraj's (2013) study of female contradiction and resistance shaped the interpretation of agency and rebellion. Shameem's (2021) insights into diasporic memory informed the reading of fragmented identity, while foundational texts by Mohanty (2003) and hooks (1986) supported exploration of female solidarity and transnational sisterhood.

The subjects of the paper were fictional characters from Hosseini's novel, analysed through their narrative roles, relationships, and symbolic functions. Particular attention was paid to silences, indirect representations, and narrative gaps, which were treated as meaningful sites of feminist inquiry. The researcher's postcoloniality was acknowledged throughout the study, recognising that interpretation is shaped by cultural, academic, and ideological contexts.

This method allowed for a nuanced understanding of how Afghan women's voices were constructed, mediated, and sometimes silenced within diasporic scholarship. The findings were synthesised thematically and interpreted within the broader framework of postcolonial feminist theory.

Results

This paper analyses Hosseini's novel to reveal a layered portrayal of Aghan women whose lives are shaped by collective forces of patriarchy, displacement, and transnational identity. The novel, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, presents female characters whose agency is often oppressed, muted, fragmented yet resonant within broader cultural and historical contexts.

One of the most striking findings concerns the gendered nature of displacement and silencing. Characters such as Parwana and Nila embody the emotional and social consequences of forced movement and exile. Parwana's internalised guilt over separating Pari from Abdullah, as well as her decision to abandon her disabled sister Masooma, reflect how women are positioned as both victims and reluctant agents within patriarchal structures. Parwana's silence throughout the narrative is not merely an absence of voice but a manifestation of embodied trauma, reminiscent of Brickell and Speer's (2020) argument that displacement is often accompanied by emotional silencing, particularly for women. Moreover, Nila's relocation to France further complicates this theme. While she gains physical autonomy and artistic expression, she remains emotionally estranged from her daughter and homeland. Her poetry becomes a vehicle for expressing suppressed desires and a critique of Afghan gender norms. Yet, her voice is propagated and mediated through male characters and Western readers, raising questions about representation and authenticity (Govindaraj, 2013).

Female rebellion is portrayed in the novel as subtle, fragmented, and often contradictory. Nila's rejection of traditional motherhood, abandoning

her husband Suleiman Wahdati, and embracing of sexual autonomy challenge dominant narratives of Afghan femininity. However, her rebellion is complicated by her sense of emotional instability, suggesting that resistance is not always empowering and coherent. This aligns with Govindaraj's (2013) assertion that postcolonial female agency often exists in tension with internalised oppression and cultural expectation. The decision to forsake Masooma, framed as a moment of liberation, haunts Parwana and results in her silence and a constant feeling of guilt, which reveals the ethical complexities of female agency in patriarchal contexts.

The novel's transnational dimension, spanning Afghanistan, France, Greece, and the United States, reflects the fragmented nature of diasporic identity. Characters such as younger Pari and Idris grapple with inherited memories, cultural dislocation, and burdened representation. Pari's quest for her origin is mediated by letters, photographs, and second-hand stories, underscoring Shameem's (2021) claim that diasporic memory is often fractured and reconstructed through symbolic artifacts. The motif of the term "echo" in the novel's title becomes a metaphor for this fragmentation: voices reverberate across time and space but are never fully recovered or unified. In this respect, Afghan identity, particularly for women in diaspora, is portrayed as a mosaic of longing, rupture, and partial belonging.

Finally, while the novel does not provide express feminist alliances, it comes across moments of empathy and connection among women. For instance, the bond between Parwana and Masooma, though fraught with resentment, reflects a complex form of sisterhood shaped by survival and duty. Similarly, the relationship between the two Paris, though separated by decades and continents, suggests a symbolic continuity of female experience. These moments appeal to Mohanty's (2003) and hooks' (1986) calls for transnational feminist solidarity rooted in lived experience rather than abstract universalism. Thus, women's relationships in the novel - often marked by silence, emotional labour, and sacrifice - offer a counter-narrative to patriarchal fragmentation foregrounds the potential for feminist connection across borders.

Discussion

The sale of Pari to the Wahdatis serves not only as the novel's emotional and narrative fulcrum, but also an act of gendered displacement and silencing. This transaction initiates a cascade of incidents throughout the novel - familial and cultural ruptures that disproportionately affect female characters, particularly Pari and Nila. Their trajectories reflect what Brickell and Speer (2020) term "multi-scalar politics of (im)mobility" (p. 133), wherein displacement is not merely geographic but deeply gendered and epistemic. Pari's removal from her natal family and subsequent erasure from

memory exemplify the silencing of female agency within patriarchal structures, entailing suppression of female voice, autonomy, and memory.

Although Nila relocates to Paris along with Pari and leaves behind her ill husband, the idea of offering Pari to the sterile Nila is Nabi's. His words sum up the commodification of Pari: "I thought only of the fact that I was offering her a gift that men with far greater prospects could not" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 101). Having discovered the source of Nali's unhappiness, Nabi knows the antidote, Pari - assuming that he and Nila can later become lovers. Thus, the idea of commodifying Pari is well calculated by Nabi, for he knows both Saboor's dire straight and Nila's void life and need for a child, not forgetting Afghan norms that are lenient toward such practices.

The moment Pari is taken by her father to hand her to the Wahdatis is heartachingly difficult one. Pari shouts "Abollah! Abollah!" as Nabi whisks her away from her brother Abdullah. Nabi confesses to Markos the long-lasting weight of this event on him throughout his entire life by telling him, "I tore one from the other" (p. 102), signifying Pari and her brother.

Furthermore, the commodification of Pari begins not with her literal sale, but with Saboor's bedtime story about Baba Ayub, a poor farmer, who sacrifices his child to the div - a mythical beast - in order to save his brothers as an act of mercy. This introductory tale mirrors Saboor's own moral rationalisation of relinquishing Pari to a wealthy family as a form of deliverance from poverty and suffering. However, beneath the surface lies a haunting portrayal of how patriarchal structures sanctify the disposability of female bodies. In this vein, Ali, Hayat, Danish, and Azher (2022) argue that Hosseini's invocation of fable-like storytelling situates the novel within a cultural tradition that normalises female disempowerment under the guise of noble sacrifice.

Once Pari is settled in the Wahdatis' house, some matters need to be modified; in other words, Pari is subjected to a systematic brain wash. She is instructed to address her step uncle by his first name only in order to gradually erase him from her memory as a family member. Moreover, her parents, according to the deal struck between Saboor and the Wahdatis, are not allowed to see Pari anymore, a further step towards eradicating Pari from her past life. Her "new" mother, Nila sets about teaching her French - Nila's mother tongue. Pari's initial homesickness is soon replaced by gradual adaptation to her new luxurious surroundings; "she [Pari], with each passing day, more forgetful of her past life in Shadbagh and of the people in it" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 103).

Pari's commodification is layered - she is not only exchanged between families but symbolically possessed by figures who redefine her identity for their own personal, emotional, or social needs. Though influenced by paternal agony, Saboor's decision silences Pari's voice and autonomy.

Accordingly, Rudhra (2016) emphasises how Afghan women in Hosseini's fiction are often reduced to "salable commodities," instrumentalised within patriarchal dominion, rendering their personhood invisible. This objectification parallels literary precedents such as Mahasweta Devi's *Breast-Giver* (1997), where Jashoda's body is a tool of nourishment until it fails, and Perumal Murungan's *One Part Woman* (2013), where Ponnayi's body is offered to uphold her husband's honour.

Drawing on Spivak's (1988) notion of the subaltern, Pari becomes a figure spoken for by others: Saboor, Nabi, Nila, and eventually Western norms that mould her adolescence in Paris. The very act of selling Pari constitutes a symbolic colonisation of identity and potential. Foucault's (1977) theory of biopower is pertinent at this point: Pari's body is managed, transferred, and disciplined across socio-cultural boundaries to fit varying frameworks of motherhood, femininity, and civility. Consequently, Hosseini's depiction of Pari somehow embodies a transnational commodification, where female subjectivity is shaped by the power structures of both Global South patriarchy and Global North liberalism.

In this light, Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* does not merely depict a tragic separation but rather interrogates the ideological systems that commodify female bodies through economic desperation, cultural expectation, and patriarchal narration. When juxtaposed with Devi's and Murugan's texts, the novel contributes to a broader discourse on the systemic objectification of women in postcolonial literature, inviting readers to critique how female characters are often rendered tools of survival or symbols of cultural continuity rather than autonomous subjects.

Between Liberation and Collapse: Nila's Postcolonial Feminist Rebellion

Nila Wahdati's postcolonial feminist quest in *And the Mountains Echoed* unfolds as a complex negotiation between cultural rebellion, emotional fragmentation, and the pursuit of self-definition. She emerges as one of the most intellectually and emotionally provocative figures in the novel. As a woman of mixed heritage - half French and half Afghan, Nila exists in cultural liminality, challenging the rigid gender expectations of Afghan society and the romanticised ideals of Western feminism. Her mixed heritage allows her to straddle two disparate cultural backgrounds, which complicates her identity and positions her not as a bridge between two different cultures, but as a disruptive force that resists categorisation. Her refusal to conform to either Afghan domesticity or Western feminist expectations reveals the limits of both systems in accommodating fragmented, diasporic subjectivities.

Born to a French mother and an Afghan father, Nila's upbringing is steeped in cultural dissonance. With the absence of Nila's mother - as

Hosseini does not provide a detailed account of her life, it is presumed that she either died or left Afghanistan when Nila was still young - and her father's stern conservative, traditional character that is a part of Afghan patriarchal order, against which Nila would spend a significant part of her life resisting. As a result, their relationship is marked by emotional distance and ideological conflict; Nila's words in the novel reflect this ideological clash when she mentions in an interview that he accuses her of damaging the family's reputation beyond repair, describing the poems she has written as "the ramblings of a whore" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 211). Pari's father not only disapproves of her provocative poetry but also of her liberal behaviour in general including her extramarital affairs, drinking, and smoking. This paternal disapprobation is not just familial; it reflects the broader societal rejection of such acts that defy the normative roles of women in Afghan culture.

Suleiman Wahdati's marriage proposal arrives at a moment of profound vulnerability for Nila, who, following a critical surgical operation in Delhi, finds herself physically weakened and emotionally adrift. After the operation, Nila aware of her infertility, the operation symbolises both a confrontation with mortality and a rupture in her bodily autonomy, causing her disorientation and susceptibility to existential despair. In this fragile state, Suleiman's proposal becomes more than a social arrangement; it serves an escape for Nali from her father's patriarchal authority, a lifeline extended to a woman teetering on the edge of despair. Therefore, their reunion, though loveless and marked by detachment, provides Nila with a semblance of structure and protection from the oppressive authority of her father. Nabi sees Nila's marriage as "even an unhappy one such as this - is an escape from even greater unhappiness" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 90).

Paradoxically, Nila's acceptance of Suleiman's proposal, despite her rebellious nature, can be read as a strategic retreat into traditions, a calculated move to escape the suffocating grip of patriarchal structures. By resorting to this socially sanctioned norm, Pari appears to be circumventing her father's control while simultaneously gaining access to the privileges of Kabul's elite class. Eventually, this act of apparent conformity allows her to later subvert societal expectations from within, particularly by adopting Pari, pursuing writing poetry, and eventually leaving her ill husband to the care of Nabi and fleeing to Paris.

In one of the novel's most jarring depictions of patriarchal violence, a group of men discusses Nila's alleged promiscuity and poetic defiance. Zahid recounts that Mr. Wahdati's family disapproved of the marriage due to Nila's "poor character," claiming she had "no nang and namoos, no honor," and likening her to car that had been "ridden all over town" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 81). The men's reaction culminates in one person's response that in his

village “they would have slit her throat by now,” which exposes the brutal logic of honour-based violence and the cultural policing of female sexuality. This moment is emblematic of what Mohanty (2003) critiques as the construction of Third World women through reductive binaries: honourable versus dishonourable, silent versus outspoken. Furthermore, Nila’s refusal to deny these allegations and her choice to write poetry about them becomes an act of resistance, challenging both Afghan patriarchal norms and Western tendency to romanticise rebellion without acknowledging its risks. Her poetic voice, condemned by the group of men as shameful, can be viewed as a subversive articulation of agency, i.e., what Minh-ha (2004) might call a refusal to be “spoken for” or “spoken about.”

However, Nila’s life in Paris does not seem up to her expectation but rather a continued path of alienation and disappointment. Her life in Paris, though initially envisioned as a space of liberation and artistic fulfilment, devolves into a prolonged experience of existential estrangement. Her bohemian lifestyle - marked by poetry, alcohol, and fleeting relationships - fails to provide the emotional anchoring she craves. Moreover, as she ages, her sense of dislocation intensifies, and her relationship with her adopted daughter becomes increasingly strained, marked by resentment and detachment.

Therefore, Nila’s disappointment in Pari is not merely personal; it reflects her broader disillusionment with the ideals she once championed. This paradoxical rebellion - void of emotional fulfilment - is reminiscent of Trinh T. Minh-ha’s (1990) contention that the pursuit of emotional identity involves a longing for an imagined, untainted essence, one that excludes hybrid or Western-influenced selves. Thus, Nila’s hybrid identity - far from empowering her - becomes a source of existential dissonance, challenging the romanticised ideals of both Afghan tradition and Western feminism.

The mother-daughter tension reaches climax when Pari reveals that she is involved with Julien, a university professor who had previously been Nila’s lover. The revelation proves devastating for Nila, who responds with emotional estrangement and veiled hostility, telling Pari, “I don’t know who you are, what you are capable of… You’re a stranger to me” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 206). Thus, this moment encapsulates the rupture in their relationship, as Nila perceives the affair not only as a betrayal but as an eradication of her maternal authority and emotional agency.

Nila’s disappointment is further articulated in her interview with *Parallaxe*, where she refers to Pari as her “punishment” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 216). This harsh categorisation underscores the depth of her disappointment, resentment, and failure of her maternal aspirations. Despite having rescued Pari from what she sees as a life of servitude and poverty, Nila finds herself alienated from the very daughter she hoped to liberate. Her suicide shortly

after the interview marks the culmination of this alienation; a final act of withdrawal from a world that no longer reflects her ideals or offers her solace.

In sum, Nila represents a postcolonial feminist assertion that experiences of womanhood are deeply embedded in cultural, historical, and political contexts. Her inability to feel truly at home in either society highlights the emotional and existential challenges faced by women of mixed heritage in navigating spaces shaped by competing norms and expectations. Her eventual suicide at 44 - the symbolic closing act of a life lived in perpetual contradiction - stresses this failure to reconcile personal agency with emotional resilience. Ahmad and Khan (2020) frame Nila's trajectory as a critique of both Afghan patriarchy and liberal feminist frameworks. She is neither the submissive Afghan wife nor the archetypal liberated Western woman; instead, she disrupts these binaries. Nila simply refuses to be neatly categorised.

In this light, Nila's rebellion is not triumphant but rather a slow unravelling. Her character illustrates how acts of defiance, when unaccompanied by emotional support or communal understanding, may devolve into psychological distress. She stands as a testament to the complexities of hybrid identity and gendered resistance in a postcolonial context, critiquing not only Afghan repression but also the inadequacies of Western feminist romanticisation.

Postcolonial Silence and the Politics of Belonging in Pari's Wahdati's Journey

Pari Wahdati's character offers a compelling site for postcolonial feminist analysis, particularly in how her identity is shaped by silencing, displacement, and gendered politics of memory. The moment of Pari's separation from Abdullah - her beloved "Abollah" - is arguably the emotional fulcrum of the novel, as well as a deeply resonant site for postcolonial feminist study. It is not merely an emotionally tense moment; it is a symbolic act of silencing, commodification, and gendered dispossession.

Pari's removal is orchestrated under the guise of economic necessity. Saboor's resolution to give away Pari to the Wahdatis reflects the brutal calculus of patriarchal scheme of survival, rendering Pari a sellable commodity that can settle down his financial problems. This act, though framed as a sacrifice, reinforces the systemic devaluation of female agency in Afghan society. The conundrum of this act is compounded by the fact that Pari is too young to comprehend her father's betrayal, yet old enough to feel the severance. Her tender attachment to her brother Abdullah, whom she calls "Abollah," renders the separation moment intimately unbearable. It is not just a sibling bond that is severed but a sanctuary of emotional safety.

From a Spivakian perspective, this moment exemplifies the subaltern's erasure. Pari's voice is not heard; her fate is decided by Saboor and Nabi, who rationalise the act through patriarchal and economic logistics. Thus, she is spoken for, not spoken to. The novel's structure, accordingly, mirrors this silencing by delaying her narrative voice until adulthood; her childhood is narrated through other characters, reinforcing the idea that her subjectivity has been overwritten.

Abdullah's desperate attempt to follow her, his emotional heartbreak, and his lifelong mourning for his loss serve as a counterpoint to the silence imposed on Pari. He becomes the guardian of memory, keeping the feathers Pari loves in a tin box as relics of their bond. These feathers, particularly the yellow one, become symbols of lost innocence and enduring love. His grief is not just personal; it reflects the social and emotional cost of patriarchal decisions and their effect across generations. Hepzibah (2020) argues that adoption in Pari's case cannot be considered a benevolent act but a form of "abscission of familial bonding," where the child is severed from her cultural and emotional roots. The trauma, though muted in Pari's early life, affects her life throughout the narrative in the form of identity fragmentation, emotional detachment, and a persistent sense of absence.

Pari's long awaited reunion with her brother Abdullah unfolds not as a moment of catharsis but as a quiet elegy to memory, loss, and the irretrievability of time. Suffering from dementia, Abdullah is unable to recognise his sister, despite having spent decades suffering from her absence. This cognitive decline renders the reunion tragically absurd, as his lifelong yearning culminates in a moment where recognition is no longer possible. The emotional restraint of this scene underscores the novel's broader mediation on the fragmentation of identity and the silencing of familial histories. As Spivak (1988) argues, the subaltern's voice is often lost within dominant structures; in this context, Abdullah's mental deterioration becomes a representative of the erasure of memory and the impossibility of fully reclaiming the past. Pari's beside him, singing their childhood lullaby, becomes an act of resistance against this erasure, attempting to rethread the severed ties of kinship through affective memory.

In this emotionally muted landscape, young Pari, Abdullah's daughter, assumes the role of narrative conduit and emotional translator. Having grown up witnessing her father's grief and longing, young Pari internalises the absence of her aunt as a missing piece of her own identity. Her decision to personally take care of her father and facilitate the reunion of her father and aunt reflects a generational attempt to resist silencing by offering her aunt the lost part she has frequently missed: her brother, her origin, and the rupture that has shaped her. Young Pari becomes the vessel through which silenced histories are acknowledged and emotionally processed. This cross-

generational exchange resonates with Mohanty's (2003) critique of Western feminist frameworks that often overlook the layered complexities of familial and cultural memory. Through young Pari's emphatic mediation, Hosseini crafts a subtle feminist intervention, one that privileges emotional labour, intersubjective healing, and the reclamation of female agency across temporal and spatial divides.

When Feathers Become Testimonies: Abdullah's Role as Surrogate Parent

As Pari's brother and emotional anchor, Abdullah suffers the most from Pari's commodification. His lifelong grief and devotion highlight the emotional cost of patriarchal decisions, particularly as they not only affect female but also male figures - including himself - who sometimes serve as emotional anchors within fractured families.

In the opening chapters, Abdullah, after the death of their mother, assumes a nurturing and caring role for Pari. He gives her the best food, tells her their mother's lullaby, and even sacrifices his own comfort to make her happy, particularly when he trades his only pair of shoes for a feather to gift her; a gesture that reflects his kind affection and selflessness. Thus, Abdullah acts more like a tender parent than a sibling for Pari in Shadbagh.

Another important moment in which Abdullah appears as the only one who truly cares for his sister is when his father along with his step-uncle Nabi decide to sell Pari to the Wahdatis. Abdullah adamantly follows Pari and his father despite Saboor's orders to Abdullah not to follow them. He endures being hit hard by his father but never gives up following Pari. Joining their company, Abdullah sleeps next to his sister and continues the journey to the Wahdatis' house, where Pari is given away in return for financial improvement. Abdullah is devastated by this separation and Pari's voice is silenced. Pari and her beloved brother must go separate ways. This rupture becomes a metaphorical silencing, where Pari's agency and voice are removed, and Abdullah's grief becomes a proxy for her loss; when all people in Shadbagh refrain from mentioning her name, Abdullah is haunted by Pari's memory.

After losing Pari, Abdullah is faithful to his sister's memory. He keeps the box of the feathers that Pari likes for decades. Despite the geographical and social distancing, Abdullah remains emotionally tethered to his little Pari. In this sense, the final chapters of the novel portray Abdullah's unwavering memory to his sister Pari. The feather motif is used to reflect emotional resonance and a symbolic continuity of his love for her. The feather, collected from various birds throughout Abdullah's life, are placed in a tin box that become artifacts of memory, each representing a lost moment of childhood affection he and Pari once shared. Moreover, when

memory starts failing Abdullah instinctively safeguards these relics of memory, underscoring the idea that memory and love can persist even when cognitive skills fade. This gesture somehow reinforces the theme of emotional fidelity amidst diaspora and displacement, which reverberates strongly through a postcolonial feminist lens as a quiet form of resistance against erasure and forgetfulness.

Moreover, Abdullah naming his daughter Pari serves as an act of reclamation, continuity, and resistance against erasure. The choice bridges the past and the present, allowing his sister's memory to live on within his domestic life in the USA. Naming, in this sense, becomes both a cultural and emotional transmission, where identity is preserved not just through storytelling but through living tribute. His daughter, little Pari, becomes an echo of the original Pari, illuminating how love can ripple through generations and geographical locations. Beyond the act of naming, Abdullah actively constructs an emotional portrait of his sister for his daughter by narrating Pari's story in vivid details: how their father Saboor sold her to the Wahdatis, how she was his only true family, and how their bond was severed by circumstances rather than by choice. Thus, old Pari becomes the twin sister of young Pari, who writes postcards for her aunt and keeps them the way her father keeps the feathers. These stories, told repeatedly by Abdullah to his daughter, create a clear image of his sister in his daughter's mind that is imbued with sorrow, longing, and love. In doing so, Abdullah ensures that old Pari is not forgotten but lives on as an invisible presence within his daughter's inner imagination, a testament to emotional fidelity and a proof of the power of memory to transcend loss.

Abdulla's final act of resistance against erasing Pari from his deteriorating memory is the letter he wrote to Pari. Written shortly after his diagnosis with Alzheimer, the letter, though brief, is emotionally saturated. He metaphorically frames it as a message left "on the shore," a final offering before he goes "under" (Hosseini, 2013, p. 400). These words evoke themes of submersion and silence - an inevitable decline into forgetfulness, but the act of leaving the letter asserts emotional agency through his last attempt to communicate love beyond language and cognition. Thus, the note, the feathers, and naming his daughter all converge to depict Abdullah's enduring devotion, resistance, and devotion to forget despite internal and external forces.

From Silence to Self-Narration: Tracing Roshi's Resilience

Roshi's story, though marginal in the novel, showcases Afghan women's suffering from male violence. It begins with Roshi's catastrophic loss of her family. Her uncle does not only harm her with an axe blow on her head but executes her entire family for inheritance feuds. The act of wiping

out an entire family is not an instance of gendered violence but a sign of structurally failed society. This foundational trauma situates Roshi within what Spivak (1988) terms the "epistemic violence" of being rendered voiceless, stripped of identity, agency, and cultural memory.

Upon her arrival at the hospital in Kabul, Roshi's traumatic case is framed through a clinical lens; her suffering is scientifically documented but not understood. Medical care is provided for her, but institutional gaze remains limited. In postcolonial feminist terms, her body is visible, yet her story is invisible and reduced to a case, and her grief is quarantined within hospital walls. This period captures Mohanty's (2003) critique of Western feminist frameworks that focus on victimhood without context. Roshi's subjectivity is flattened; she is treated but not interpreted.

However, the nurse Amra emerges in Roshi's life not only as a healer but as a steadfast presence in her physical and psychological recovery. Amra appears as a figure of quiet yet persistent solidarity for Roshi. Though the novel does not explicitly attribute Roshi's authorship of her book to Amra's express encouragement, her unwavering care arguably lays the emotional basis for Roshi's articulation of her story after being let down by Idris. Both Roshi's ability to travel to the USA and her book dedication to Amra and Timur gesture toward the significance of the role Amra in the first place and Timur second in her journey from Afghanistan to the USA. Thus, with the help of Amra, Roshi's voice is heard through publishing her own story to not only make Western readers aware of Aghan women's suffering but aware of Afghan women's resilience, resistance, and voice.

Therefore, Roshi has completed a full arc - from silent survivor to authorial witness. Her resilience is not merely psychological; it is archival. She refuses to be footnoted in someone else's narrative. Her memoir disrupts the politics of forgetting and becomes what Mohanty (2003) terms as an expression of resistant agency, an intentional, situated act of defiance against both patriarchal violence and postwar amnesia.

Complicity and Redemption: Nabi as a Postcolonial Feminist Mediator

Nabi's character occupies a morally complex space; he is both complicit in the patriarchal transaction that separates Pari from her family and a reflective narrator who seeks to repair the rupture he helped create. His long letter to Dr. Markos, which forms the core of the fourth chapter, is not merely a confession but a postcolonial archive of remorse, memory, and attempted restitution. Nabi's initial role in facilitating Pari's adoption serves a dual purpose: it provides a solution to Nila's infertility and alleviates Saboor's poverty, while also subtly advancing Nabi's own desire to win Nila's affection and position himself as her confidant - if not romantic partner. However, the transaction itself, according to Ahmad and Khan

(2020), exposes the emotional and ethical costs of patriarchal logic disguised as benevolence.

Yet, Nabi's narrative arc complicates a reductive reading of him as merely a patriarchal agent. His letter reveals a deep awareness of the consequences of his actions: "I was the instrument of his [Saboor's] family's rupture," he writes, acknowledging the emotional violence embedded in his decision (Hosseini, 2013, p. 105). This self-reflexivity aligns with postcolonial feminist frameworks that emphasise the importance of male complicity being interrogated and transformed. Rather than defending his actions, Nabi seeks to transform and create a pathway for healing by entrusting Dr. Markos with the task of reconnecting Pari with her origins. His gesture of leaving the house and his belongings to Pari, along with a letter, serves as an act of restitution, a quiet act of resistance against the erasure of female memory and agency.

Moreover, Nabi's role as caregiver to Suleiman Wahdati and later as a host to Dr. Markos positions him as a facilitator of transnational solidarity. His emotional labour and decision to remain in the house long after Suleiman's death reflect a form of masculine caregiving that challenges dominant patriarchal norms. In this sense, Ashghari et al. (2021) note that Nabi's character "circulates power through service and emotional attachment rather than domination," offering a counter-narrative to hegemonic masculinity. In postcolonial feminist terms, Nabi is not a hero but a mediator, a figure who bridges ruptured histories and facilitates the reconstruction of silenced narratives. His remorse, though not performative, is embedded in a lifelong effort to repair what was broken. Through his letter, he becomes a witness to the consequences of patriarchal exchange and a quiet agent of feminist restoration.

Despite these insights, the study is not without limitations. First, the analysis is confined to a single literary text, which restricts the generalisability of its conclusions. While *And the Mountains Echoed* provides a compelling case study, Afghan women's experiences are diverse and cannot be fully encapsulated within one narrative. Future analyses could benefit from comparative approach, examining multiple texts by Afghan authors, particularly women writers, to broaden the scope of inquiry.

Second, the article relies heavily on interpretive analysis and theoretical frameworks, which - while rigorous - are inherently subjective. Moreover, the researcher's personality, shaped by academic training, cultural background, and ideological commitments, inevitably influences the reading of the text. Although this subjectivity is acknowledged and embraced within postcolonial feminist methodology, it nonetheless limits the the study's neutrality and reproducibility.

Third, the absence of empirical data such as interviews with Afghan women or comprehensive critical studies of the novel, means that the analysis remains within the realm of textual interpretation. Furthermore, incorporating reader responses or authorial intent could offer additional layers of insight into how the novel is received and understood across different cultural contexts.

Finally, the study focuses primarily on gender and postcoloniality, leaving other intersecting dimensions - such as class, religion, and ethnicity - less explored. These factors undoubtedly shape Afghan women's experiences and representations, and their inclusion in future research would enrich the analytical framework.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to postcolonial feminist literary criticism by foregrounding the nuanced ways in which silence, voice, and agency are constructed in the novel. Consequently, it invites readers and scholars to reconsider how Afghan women are imagined in literature, not as static symbols but as dynamic subjects, navigating complex histories and identities.

Conclusions

Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* constructs a multi-voiced tapestry of ruptured familial ties, gendered silences, and complex paths toward reclamation. Through the fragmented yet converging narratives of Pari, Nila, Abdullah, Roshi, Nabi, and others, the novel refuses a singular narrative of victimhood or agency. Instead, it gestures toward the layered ways in which Afghan women and their allies negotiate trauma, memory, and identity in patriarchal and diasporic landscapes.

Pari's emotional repression, Abdullah's mnemonic caregiving, Roshi's textual testimony, and Nabi's lettered remorse each embodies facets of postcolonial feminist resistance - often subtle, occasionally ambivalent, but always resonant. As Mohanty (2003) and Spivak (1998) argue, reclaiming agency requires not only vocalisation but a situated understanding of history, power, and relational solidarity. In this context, voice is not merely a spoken utterance; it is an archive of loss, endurance, and ethical reconstruction.

Ultimately, the novel's echoes do not fade; they reverberate across time, reminding readers that in the aftermath of fragmentation, healing begins with the courage not only to remember but to narrate. Hosseini's layered storytelling invites readers to listen closely to the murmurs of the silenced, to honour the emotional labour of restoration, and to affirm that agency, however delayed or silenced, is always political.

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