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# A Study of Immigrant Diaspora in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer*

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**Abstract:** This paper is an exploration on how immigrant diaspora is portrayed in the *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer* by Khaled Hosseini. It dwells on the representation of migration as a psychological and cultural process but not a movement. The study uses the acculturation theory and diasporas identity theories to address the ideas of displacement, trauma, and fragmentation of identity. The qualitative textual analysis is employed to analyze narrative techniques, characterization, and symbolism in the two works. The results reveal that diaspora is introduced as an ongoing process of identity negotiation which is determined by war, exile and loss. Migration in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is presented as a slow change, which is shaped by social and political factors. In *Sea Prayer*, it is portrayed as a life and death emergency. The paper also concludes that the characters undergo marginalization and at least partial integration, which shows the challenges of being acculturated to new cultural settings. The paper ends by concluding that the Hosseini works point to the human price of migration by making the external displacement to be interconnected with the internal conflict. It states that diaspora is not a permanent state but a continued fight of memory, belonging, and identity. This work is significant to the research of literary diaspora because it integrates theoretical and close readings of modern writings.

**Keywords:** Identity, Diaspora, Psychoanalysis, Migration, Hossieni, Immigrants.

**Citation:** Alkhuzaie M. A. M. H. A Study of Immigrant Diaspora in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer*. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(2), 276-281.

Received: 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2026  
Revised: 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026  
Accepted: 19<sup>th</sup> Mar 2026  
Published: 09<sup>th</sup> Apr 2026



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## 1. Introduction

Migration is not the simple process of moving around and changing the location; it is a fundamentally transformative process that re-identifies, re-memories, and re-belongs [1]. In modern literature, the immigrant experience is depicted as a complicated process, which encompasses psychological struggle, cultural bargaining, and emotional displacement [2]. Khaled Hosseini is one of the contemporary authors who have explored the theme of displacement and exile so convincingly; in books like *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer*, readers get the feeling of being displaced without any need to labor on the topic [3], [4].

This paper will discuss how Hosseini reflects the experience of the immigrant life in terms of identity loss, trauma, and acculturation. Although the migration as a social phenomenon has been examined in previous studies, this paper concentrates on the psychological and cultural aspects of migration as depicted in literary works. The analysis can draw light on how migration is depicted as not a mere relocation to another geographical location but rather as a continuous conflict of identity and belonging by examining the characters and narrative devices used in the selected stories. This paper claims that Khaled Hosseini depicts the immigrant experience as a multi-layered crisis that

goes beyond physical displacement into identity fragmentation, emotional trauma, and cultural conflict, and thus, shows the more humanistic cost of migration.

## 2. Literature Review

The themes of war, displacement, identity and diaspora have gained more and more scholarly attention in the works of Khaled Hosseini [15]. Critics have discussed the ways his stories are both a commentary on the socio-political reality of Afghanistan and also an acknowledgment of the greater human experiences of migration and loss.

A number of works highlight how Hosseini portrays traumas and memories in his fiction. As an example, Imran and Ismail (suggest that the Hosseini narratives create a shared memory of displacement, which portrays individual and national trauma [8]. This viewpoint emphasizes the role of shaping characters by historical violence and forced migration especially in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

On the same note, the emotional and symbolic aspects of forced migration in *Sea Prayer* proposes that Hosseini delivers a lean narrative approach to express the urgency and vulnerability of the refugee life. The paper highlights how memory and loss affect the identity of displaced individuals and this is consistent with general arguments in the diaspora studies [6], [7].

Theoretically, Berry et al. suggests that model of acculturation is an effective model in explaining the adaptive mechanisms of migrants [8]. According to Berry et al., these are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization as the major ways that individuals can negotiate cultural identity in new settings. These ideas have been broadly used in literature study to examine characters in a displacement and cultural shift.

Besides that, other researchers like Bhabha and Said suggest that Hosseini works can be added to the postcolonial discourse because the author depicts the impact of war, exile, and global inequality in the long term. Their discussion places Hosseini in the context of the overall postcolonial literature, where the issues of identity disintegration and cultural bargaining play a pivotal role [2], [9].

In spite of these contributions, the gap in the comparative study of diaspora in various forms of narratives in the works of Hosseini still exists. Although the focus on individual texts has been quite high, not many studies have been done to see how diaspora has been portrayed in both the long stories such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the short, symbolic ones such as *Sea Prayer*.

Thus, the paper aims to address this gap by examining how the immigrant diaspora is represented in the chosen works by Khaled Hosseini, considering the identity, displacement, and narrative strategy. This study will make contributions to the current body of scholarship by merging theoretical knowledge of diaspora and identity studies and a close analysis of the texts.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The huge theoretical perspectives that this study is based on are the acculturation theory and identity theory. These theories give a basis on the psychological and cultural issues of immigrants. Berry model of acculturation expounds on how people react to a new cultural setting using four strategies of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization [8]. These tactics can be used to explain how the characters in Hosseini works balance between retaining their original identity and the need to adjust to the new society. Moreover, the internal conflicts of immigrants are investigated with the help of identity theory. Migration usually causes what is referred to as identity fragmentation or identity shock whereby people suffer confusion, loss and change of self [1], [2]. This is especially true in the literary exile descriptions, where the characters are torn between the past and the present, the homeland and the country of host. This paper uses a combination

of these theories to examine how the characters of Hosseini can be said to represent the psychological and cultural aspects of migration, focusing on the conflict between belonging and displacement.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The proposed research follows a qualitative methodology that relies on the textual analysis of the chosen literary works by Khaled Hosseini; *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer* [3], [4]. The study is aimed at defining and examining the outstanding themes of migration such as identity, trauma, displacement and acculturation. The approach includes the in-depth analysis of the texts to explore the ways in which characters, narrative structure and literary devices convey the experience of immigrants. Theoretical concepts based on acculturation theory and identity studies are used in the analysis and made it possible to interpret both the psychological and cultural aspects of migration [8], [1]. In this way, the study will be able to go beyond summarizing the plot but offer a critical interpretation of the way migration is portrayed in literature as a human experience that is complex.

#### 5. Narrative Representation of Displacement

The narration of the events by Hosseini is a key to the building of the image of the immigrant experience. Both pieces employ narrative elements to create empathy and portray the human aspect of displacement. The detailed characterization in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* gives the reader an opportunity to immerse themselves in the mental conflicts of Mariam and Laila. This is because their personal narratives turn abstract ideas like migration and war into a reality. This narrative style supports the notion that migration is not a statistic but a very human state [3]. *Sea Prayer*, on the contrary, is based on the poetic and symbolic style. The closeness of the first-person narration between the father and the reader makes the displacement more personal and emotive [4]. The fact that the author uses memory as a narrative tool also highlights the influence of the past on the immigrant identity [4], [6]. Also, Hosseini uses imagery and contrast to emphasize the impacts of war and migration. The change in peaceful landscapes to the destruction scenes indicates the abrupt break in life of refugees. This method enhances the emotional effects of the story and supports the unsteadiness of the immigrant state. These forms of storytelling help Hosseini to communicate the intricacy of migration as an individual and a shared experience [1]. His works also compel the reader to see the immigrants not as remote people but as people with their own histories, feelings, and identities created by displacement.

#### 6. Comparative Analysis of Characters' Diasporic Experience

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini portrays the immigrant experience that is highly psychological and cultural as influenced by war, displacement, and fragmentation of identity. Migration is no longer presented as a physical movement but as an emotional instability and existential uncertainty through the characters of Mariam and Laila [3].

What the identity theory describes as identity shock is the experience that Laila goes through. Her sense of self-identity is suddenly changed after losing her parents and having been forced into marriage with Rashid. This is not a voluntary change but a change that is forced by external factors like war and patriarchy. Consequently, Laila loses control over her identity and this depicts internal conflict of displaced people [12].

Moreover, the fact that Laila finally escapes to Pakistan indicates her effort to do what Berry calls as integration. She tries to reconstruct her life keeping the aspects of her previous identity especially through her attachment to Tariq and her recollection of Kabul. Nonetheless, this integration is not exhaustive, since the fact that she comes back to

Afghanistan proves that migration is not a straight line but an on-going negotiation between the past and the present.

Mariam however is a variant of displacement. Though not geographically, as Laila, she is in exile in her country. Her unwanted marriage and social exclusion put her in the situation, which the acculturation theory describes as separation when the person is deprived of personal identity and social belonging [1]. The act of sacrifice she commits in the end can also be understood as reclaiming agency, which indicates that identity is reconstructible even in the face of extreme oppression

In *Sea Prayer*, Hosseini does not focus on detailed narrative but symbolic and emotional depiction of forced movement. It focuses on the journey of a refugee father and son who are about to go into the Mediterranean Sea and highlights how urgent and intense displacement can be [4].

*Sea Prayer*, in contrast to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, in which migration is a gradual process, displays it as a crisis. The narration of the father shows the feeling of great loss, not only of homeland but of identity and stability. This is consistent with the identity theory which opines that displacement breaks the continuity of self, leaving people in a state of suspension between the memory and the unknown [12].

The memories of Homs by the father can be taken as the comparison between the old stability and the new disorder. This opposition indicates the emotional aspect of migration in which the loss of home translates into a loss of identity. This experience is further enhanced by his fear of his son since migration is not an individual struggle anymore but the struggle of a generation [11].

The refugees in the *Sea Prayer* are marginalized as per the acculturation theory. They have not been assimilated in a new society and cannot lead their own original lifestyle. The fact that they are constantly implied to be unwelcome strengthens this state, as the external rejection serves to trigger internal division [1].

In addition, the sea itself is a potent symbol of uncertainty and change. It is also a symbol of hope and danger, and it is associated with the duality of migration as a process of safety and a threat of loss. Hosseini focuses on this symbolism to emphasize that migration is not merely the answer but the suffering of another shape [13].

In such a way, the book *Sea Prayer* describes the process of migration as a sudden, life-threatening situation that reveals the helplessness of displaced people and the lack of sympathy to their plight on the part of the world.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined how the immigrant experience is portrayed in the works of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer* by Khaled Hosseini as per the acculturation and identity theories. The analysis shows that the theme of migration in the works by Hosseini is not only an issue of physical movement but also a deep psychological and cultural conflict [10], [2]. The results indicate that characters undergo identity fragmentation, emotional trauma and a state of constant tension between belonging and alienation. The narrative style and the character growth are used by Hosseini to show the human price of war, exile, and forced migration, and to point out that the immigrant experience is formed by the internal struggle and the external forces. After all, this paper demonstrates that the literary works by Hosseini can help understand the concept of migration as a multidimensional phenomenon better, with the pursuit of safety being inseparable with the pursuit of identity and meaning [9], [12].

### Key Findings

As it has been discussed, the portrayal of the immigrant diaspora in the selected works of Khaled Hosseini is premised on the motif repetition of displacement, identity

negotiation and cultural fragmentation. Migration is continually represented in the stories as a geographical movement and as a multidimensional process, as a psychological displacement and the re-definition of identity [15].

The diasporic identity in these works is observed to be characterized by instability and hybridity [2], [15], since the characters are put at a place between two competing structures of culture. The situation falls into the theoretical approaches to the analysis of the diaspora and postcolonialism, particularly, regarding the non-essentialist and fluid nature of identity formation. Moreover, the use of acculturation theory indicates that the main strategies of marginalization and partial integration are used by the characters, which could be explained by the difficulties in adjusting to new socio-cultural conditions [11].

The results also show that the narrative strategies, such as focalization, symbolism, and time transitions, are used to support the themes of loss, memory, and belonging. These aspects add to the creation of diaspora as a process and not a status quo. Also, the analysis of the comparison of various works shows differences in the strength and depiction of the diasporic experience, which argues that genre and narrative scale affect the development of the theme [6], [7].

### Recommendations

Following these results, it is suggested that future studies should enlarge the scope of analysis to cover a wider scope of diasporic texts to enable comparative studies in various cultural and literary contexts. The intersection of diaspora and gender, language, and trauma is also implied to be the subject of further research, as the specified aspects are not thoroughly developed in the given study.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary methodologies and especially the sociological and cultural ones are suggested to deepen analysis of diaspora literary studies. Quantitative or mixed methods can also be taken into consideration as a supplement to the qualitative textual analysis in order to offer a more overarching picture of the diasporic representation.

lastly, it is recommended that future studies incorporate different theoretical frameworks including global mobility studies and transitional approaches for a better understanding for the developing dynamics of identity and migration in contemporary literature.

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