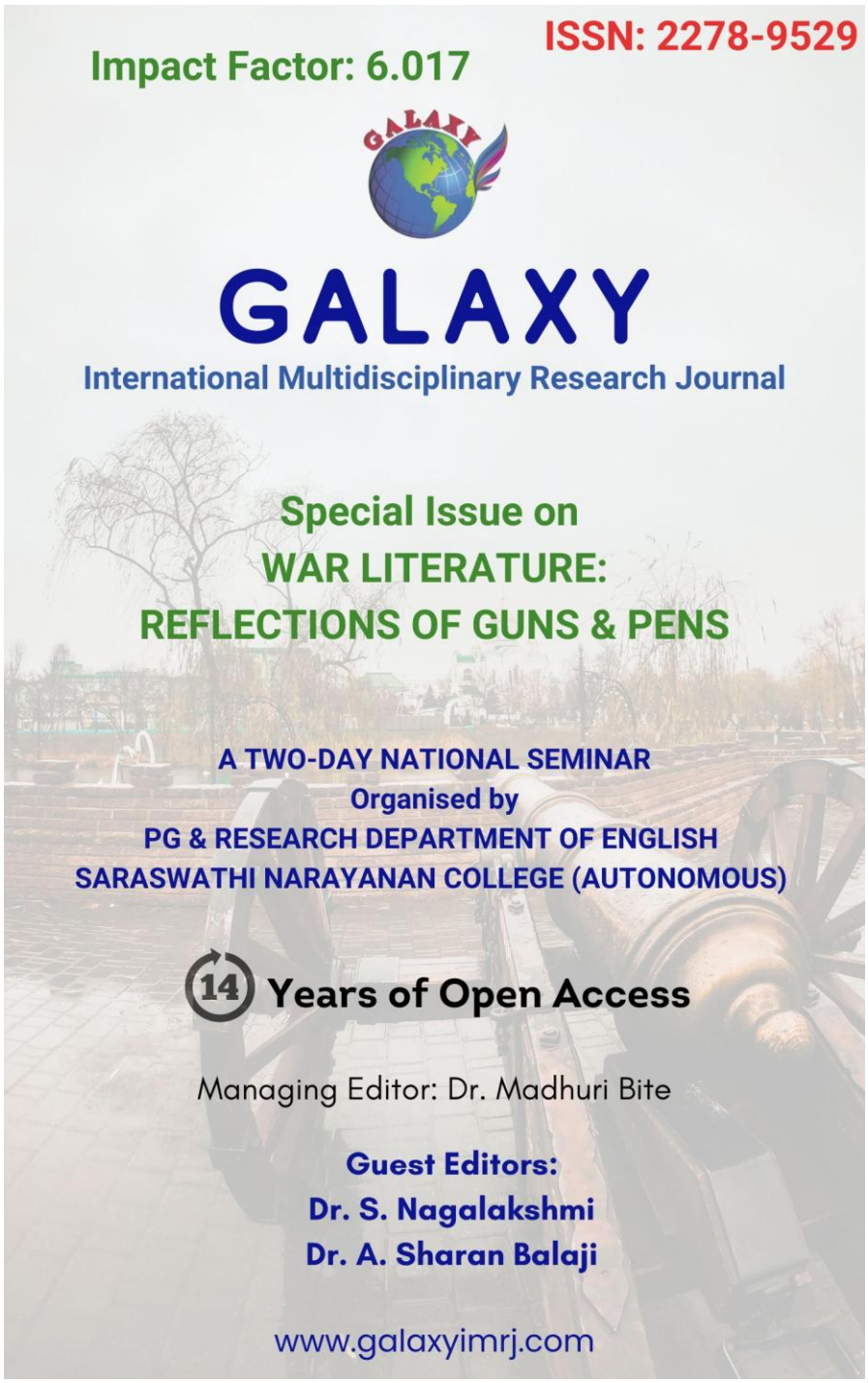


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The Saga of a Fatal Journey Embarked by Refugees in the Face of War in Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*: A Refugee Narrative

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Abstract:

Khaled Hosseini's illustrated novella Sea Prayer is a powerful narrative portraying the harrowing and heart-wrenching experiences of the Syrian refugees. Though it is a small book, it encapsulates the pain, suffering, trauma, and loss faced by individuals while leaving their land as a result of prolonged civil war in a profound way. The research will cover the past and present memories that haunt the protagonist and the fear of uncertainty that lurks ahead of their journey of survival. At the outset, they are unsure of a safe journey through the Mediterranean Sea. They have an unsettled question in their heart: will they make it, and even if they do, will they be received by the government of the new land and give them a sense of home in a foreign country? By touching the unspoken narratives of people who never reach a place of safety, Hosseini explicates the psychological agony and emotional cost of migration through Sea Prayer. He highlights the bleak hope of the refugees of returning back to their country safe in the future. Hosseini highlights the unfathomable loss endured by the refugees while interpreting the fragility of the human spirit in the face of war. This paper will examine the fatal journey undertaken by the individual while fleeing their war-torn country along with the memory of

their land, the haunting fear of the uncertainties in a new land through the lens of trauma theory, and narrative exploration of memory.

Keywords: Narrative, Refugees, Syrian civil war, Displacement and Trauma.

Refugee, Asylum seekers and global displacement have increased more in number in the recent decades. The source from UNCHR provides the fact that about 1% of humanity is displaced around the world. It states that "At the end of 2020, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations. This figure has doubled in the past decade, meaning that today 1 in 95 people on earth has been forced from their homes"-(UNHCR Global Trends 2020).The UNCHR further stream lined and found out that a two third of refugees are basically from Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, South Sudan and Myanmar. Among these the Syrian refugee's number is steadily in increase. These refugees basically seek asylum in their neighbourhood countries who share boarder with their home country. However, a small percentage of the population manage to make their way to European countries. Tragically the countries these refugees fleeing to seek asylum are low- or middle-income countries and they themselves are struggling to grapple the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on their economical. On the ground of humanitarian aspect, they welcome the refugees but they couldn't support them adequately in terms of providing proper shelter, food and employment. Thus, it creates a dire situation to both the displaced individuals and already struggling host countries.

The condition of refugees becomes even more vulnerable in certain cases when the neighbourhood countries, in spite of accepting them, display hostility or discrimination toward them. This hostile environment can worsen the challenges refugees face, it undermines their safety, well-being, and integration into society. This attitude adversely affect the hope of the refugees who are fleeing the horrors of their home country as the very place they turn becomes

a place of rejection and prejudice. When this is the case of bordering countries the high income and developed countries host comparatively a paltry number of refugees like it goes up to 14% percent a maximum when the actual number of refugees are more than 82 %.

The number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea has also substantially decreased. The Source from UNHCR's Operational Data Portal, Mediterranean Situation reports that an approximate of 1,401 people have lost their lives in 2020 while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea and this number shows an increase from the previous year. The need for safe settlement of these refugees has become an urgent issue to be resolved and brought to the attention of world leaders. As long as the problem of the refugees is considered as somebody else problem by the wealthier countries the humanitarian crisis will surge high without redemption.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American, is a great literary figure and a Goodwill Ambassador of UNHCR. He brings to the attention of the world the plight of the people in war-affected countries and the refugee experiences through his novels, and he is an active member of the UN Refugee Agency, helping millions of displaced people, particularly in Afghanistan. Hosseini, in one of his interviews, states that he himself has experienced the life of being a political refugee at the age of 15 in the United States, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. So his books offer a more intimate description of the refugee experiences. He is profoundly known by a worldwide audience for his bestselling novels, The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, and And the Mountains Echoed. His short novella Sea Prayer, with around sixty-four pages with illustrations, was published in the year 2018.

Hosseini in one of his interviews talks about his own refugee story. He states that he has the blessing to live through the final eras of what they say the 60 to 70's when Afghanistan was a country that was living in anonymity and peace. He happily records at that period of time

he had a very happy and cheerful childhood in Afghanistan, In the year 1976 his father was assigned a diplomatic post at the Afghan Embassy at Paris, he was a diplomat for foreign Ministry. So the family moved to Paris for four years and then return back to Afghanistan. But by the time the Soviet invasion was at its peak and they started hearing heart throbbing news about death toll, imprisonment and violence. The prisoners were subjected to tortured, beatings and brutally attack. Hosseini's own uncle was prisoned and endured harsh treatment from the hands of the invaders and his cousins were shot dead, his wife's father was arrested and later disappeared, never to be found. Thus, the family constantly heard such agonising news and it became clear that cannot return to their home hence his father had to seek had to seek a political Asylum in the United States. Initially his parents had to labour tirelessly to sustain the family and meet their daily needs. They had to rely on tokens and had to adapt to a humble lifestyle, in contrast to their previous well-to-do circumstances. The new culture, language and environment posed a significant challenge. Hosseini himself has witnessed and endured this horrifying situation first hand.

Hosseini chose to write about the refugee experience in his book because without it their experiences would go untold. He admits that millions of people had not the opportunity to live as comfortably as he and his family did in the country they turn for a refuge. He becomes very emotional and restless every time he heard about the suffering of refugees, especially his own people who were unable to flee and were left behind in their war-torn homeland. It would be unfair to his people if no one talked about these experiences because they would remain unseen and unreached. This compelled him to record the agony of people stranded in a war-torn nation.

Hosseini from his childhood was a talented story teller hence he decided to document the suffering of people trapped in a war-torn country. As for as Sea *Prayer*, he wrote after learning about the Syrian refugee crisis and being struck by the heartrending image of three-

year-old Alan Kurdi. The sight of the child, who drowned and was washed up on a beach in the Mediterranean while attempting to flee the perils of war, profoundly impacted him. The image of the lifeless boy lying on the shore resonated deeply with everyone who witnessed it. Deeply moved, Hosseini felt driven to compose the *Sea Prayer*, a poignant and emotionally powerful piece.

In *Sea Prayer* Hosseini captures the harrowing realities faced by the refugees through the tale of a father and the son on a dangerous journey. He uses here a lyrical style to capture the beauty of the land as well to capture the deep agony of the people after it was struck and destroyed by continuous firing and bombing. The Syrian citizen has no choice but to exit the country for security and ensure a safe life for their family. Hosseini here explores the emotional anguish of the father as he contemplates the challenging journey that awaits his family.

The people who have faced extreme condition of fear, guilt or stress, during war or under dictatorship or among relationship frequently endure lasting emotional and psychological repercussions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The refugees have no other choice but to embark the dangerous sea voyage which may help them temporarily to escape the perils of war. Here trauma is twofold where the individual is struck with the memory of the past of his or her native land, people, culture and language on the other hand the fear of unfriendly and hostile neighbourhood country, the way they would treat them. Sometime even when things get for its better the violence faced, the loss met and uncertainty may turn to trauma. Trauma is mainly caused due to fear or guilt which may reflect in dreams as Freud states in his The Interpretation of Dreams. The fear of what lies ahead, along with the trauma they bring from their home nations, worsens the life of the refugees. Their migration is an ongoing battle with profound psychological wounds inflicted by conflict and oppression, which is not only a physical expedition.

The trauma experienced by the refugees escaping war-affected nations, including Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, are not merely physical but also mental. The dangerous trips, frequently undertaken by these people in an overcrowded boats on one hand and the thought of being denied by the neighbourhood nations, intensify emotions of fear, doubt, alienation, and dislocation. The father who prays for the son's safe journey in the novel is in traumatized as he cannot assure safe journey nor have the ability to provide a happy and safe life in the place, they will begin their life. The father is traumatized as he is incapable to perform his fatherly duty and on the other hand have no other choice but to make the perilous journey though it is fearful and threatening. Even though they are in unfamiliar territories, the trauma of their history and the recollections of their nations endure. The current crises in Syria are true with any country facing unrest in their home country.

A multifaceted approach that addresses the immediate and long-term well-being of refugees is to be sorted out. They must be treated with dignity and the government can help them by ensuring access to food, clean water shelter and medical care upon their arrival. Providing opportunity for employment and education so that they integrate into the new environments. Especially reduce stigma and provide psychological support to help refugees cope up with trauma. This might give opportunity to the refugees to rebuild their life. Furthermore while, there are books and research articles on refugee crisis, they are scarce. . An increase in number of books and articles can bring the plight of the refugees to the global platform and continuously update their current situation. Refugees even from their homes, can use the android phones to share their specific needs, support or help they expect from the government or the public. Today many are willing to offer help and assistance at time of crisis and there are numerous NGO's and government organisation to support them. Refugees across the country are exposed to various forms of violence, sexual abuse, poverty and unemployment. These issues should be highlighted when portraying the Refugee crisis as they are very crucial

challenges and that must be addressed. There by their status can be improved and their voices heard on a much larger scale.

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