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## Homelessness and Identity Crisis in Poetry of Tabish Khair

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Tabish Khair is an English writer in English whose concerns are about India even though he has settled in Denmark. He belongs to state of India which is entirely different in language, culture and tradition as compared to the European nations. He is a poet whose poems deal with small town culture, and experiences. His style is simple, rich in metaphor and irony. Concept of identity crisis and anxiety is a new emerging trend in world literature and every writer makes it his particular genre. World literature is that which is accepted and read in the whole world which deals with diversified issues and identity dilemma is one of them. Khair's poems reveal his nostalgic feelings for his homeland and dilemaic feeling for his identity. Being an Indian Muslim who has migrated to a European country his whole identity has changed but his feelings and memories for his own identity and home are still the same.

In his two collections of poems, he had deliberately shown his yearning for an ideal home which provide him a desirable feeling of homeliness, love, care, security, belonging. Through his poems he recalls his childhood days and also laments the present day life style of children who miss games of adventure and learning due to perforation and the like electronic gadgets. Today English poetry has overcome the subjugation to the influence of English, American or western poets and post colonial temperament.

The whole range of contemporary poetry projects the inner self of the poets. Their history, surroundings, culture, and inner self are revealed through a cluster of symbolic representation. They display their honest love for culture and heritage with comfortable strength on common themes, just as they explore "new horizon in contents", and at the same time maintain the Indian spirit. Of course they are conscious of the country's multi-lingual and multi-religious reality and seek to present the nation's diversity and differences.

Many examples of Indian poets are there who mourn for their identity and homelessness. This anxiety is also present in Tabish Khair which is found by readers. He is distinctly discernible that his roots are confined to his homeland even though he is far from it (his homeland). Through his memory he delves into past, lives his present and let the future determine his poetry. Despite of the fact that he is living with his own family in Denmark, Khair's first collection of poems "*Where Parallel Lines Meet*", (2000) (which is considered to be one of the most significant collections in recent years by an Indian writing in English.) reveal the nostalgia for India in general and town in particular. In this collection there are poems which propagate Khair's views, feelings and respect for India.

He uses very subtle words and unwraps the scenes, senses of small towns from the repertoire of his memory. He has highlighted these in his “Summer Senses”:

“The soft, sweet smell of his hookah,  
The starched smell of her sari,  
The smell of mangoes ripening in the straw  
Of cooling cement roofs, of khus” 3 (WPLM.15).

He intensely collects the rhythms from past to restore what is lost, that’s why in one of his poem he recalls his childhood days which give a meaning to his unsaid feelings:

“Roofs were the runaway of our flights, the cockpit  
From which we mentioned our dog fights of paper  
And tight skeleton of wood. Danger lurked  
In the corner of the eye with no computerized beep  
Of warning, and sometimes trees jumped at our kites (WPLM.76)

In the same poem, the poet mourns the condition of children, who become so mechanized with their electronic games that they don’t understand the true worth of traditional games which are the amalgamation of fun, adventure and learning.

Khair’s primary concern is for India and his poems deal with religion, culture, tradition and the spirit of nationalism. Sometimes he loses clarity in images and expressions but as a migrant he actively negotiates the factors of exile, despair, homelessness, disillusionment. He accepts himself firstly as a human being, not allowing any other identity to diminish his self perception as he says in his poem “*Rumi and The Reed*”:

And I, O Believers, cried Rumi  
(Having lost the man he loved),  
I who am not of the East  
Nor of the west, unchristian  
Not Muslim or Jew, neither  
Born of Adam nor Eve  
What can I love but the world itself. (WPLM 104)

In the above lines, he wants to focus on his primary identity which is most important because he also has various identities that he identifies with. He conveys the cry of Rumi in an attempt to match his personal response with proximity to the Persian poet's sensibility.

Khair not only suffers the dilemma of identity but also a severe stress of longing for his home town which interrupts his life. In his poems, he emphasises his homeland with its culture and its typical day to day life which he misses. In "Nurse's Tales, Retold" the poem describes a common scene of a typical and the regular interactions, activities of people.

In the same text the following stanza describes a beautiful scene of nature and nature of peacock which when it encounters the sweet smell of rain starts dancing in arrogance but the moment it sees his ugly feet he stops.

"Because the East wind bears the semen smell of rain,

A warm smell like that of shawls worn by young women

Over a long journey of sea, plain and mountains,

The Peacock spreads the Japanese fan of its tail and dances,

And dances until it catches sight of its scaled and ugly feet". (WPLM)

The word "Amma" in Urdu and Hindi context has great symbolic significance and this word strikes an intense emotional chord in people here. Tabish gave this title for his poem. In India, people call their mother "Amma" and the same term is referred to any elderly lady.

In following lines he describes the love, respect and concern for a mother in India:

"You never need glasses to mark the contours of your house

Though you can't see grandsons at a distance, once wore a blouse

Inside out. Nothing has changed, grandmother, no, not yet".

In the poem "Almost Sonnet" which speaks about the despairing feeling of homelessness, Khair mourns that his soul is fixed to the ground of his own country, where he has spent a number of years but now he laments that his homeland shall no future for him.

"But here my body's tied to a stake in the ground

Of many yesterdays and not one tomorrow.

And though it may implore and struggle, still it lies" (WPLM)

Another poem “Almost a Ghazal” defines the beauty of some exuberant creatures of nature like:

“A flock of sparrows leaves the mehndi bush like a shudder

Two squirrels chase each other around the trunk of a kathal” (WPLM)

In the same way, in some of his poems, he describes the voice of pigeon, gullar i.e. flower, seasonal fruits and the mushrooms. He describes the habitual cycle of country side which we find is common in India. The poems like ‘Muharram’, ‘Shobraat’, ‘Ganesh Stuti’, ‘Krishna’, ‘Snakes’ etc. reveal the mind and observation of Khair that he is not confined to the context of only the Muslim religion but he is essentially secular in his belief.

His second collection of poem “Man of Glass” (2010) contains poems which are mature but the mourning for home and identity is also present here. Khair is philosophical in a way that in “Man of Glass” he trans-created the works of writers like Kalidas, Ghalib, Rumi and H.C. Anderson which stretch across centuries, language, culture etc.

Khair must have chosen Kalidas for representing identity crisis through his famous play “Abhijnana Shakuntalam” because it is a tale of a daughter of a secular Muslim scholar brought up in an environment of entirely different religion and custom and is given a classical Hindu name by her parents. And the poetry of Ghalib and Anderson discusses and reflect on contemporary issues of immigration, war, love etc.

Khair’s personal voice and expression is transmuted and he shares his feelings with the classics. This is done through translation and trans-creation which is a mode in which the source text is as important as the target text. The translation which Khair has done is always in accordance with the original author and his thoughts. The selection of these verses, couplets or stories is done purposely which makes it a part of his search for identity.

In the poem “No Hope In The Morning Light”, he writes:

“No hope in the morning light,

All faces hidden from sight.

The day of death is fixed;

Why can’t I sleep at night?

I know the way to heaven,

But prefer to turn aside”.<sup>4</sup> (MOG.40)

These lines succinctly give the impression of helplessness and restlessness of the poet. In the nineteenth century, Ghalib must have written it in a spiritual sense but here if we notice the mindset of translator, we find the agonising yearnings for his home and identity.

He considers himself as an immigrant and finds new and strange his present surroundings. The same predicament is compared in the lines of H.C. Anderson's "The Little Mermaid":

"It hurts to walk on new legs:

The curse of consonants, the wobble of vowels". (MOG)

It is very clear here that he wrote these lines according to his own situation, where the place, people, language, everything is strange for him.

Myths, folklores, fairytales, historical senses occupy a decent place in his poetry. In his verses he reflects the imagery which is typically bound to his home, culture, tradition markers such as, "mud village", "dhaba", "murg musallam", "pulao", "ya Hassan, ya Hussain", "Ganesh Stuti", "rikshaws", "banarsi sari" etc. It goes to show that his sensibility is inclined towards local rather than higher aesthetic aspects.

To sum up, "poet demonstrates a migrant sensibility with a peculiar vision for his home, culture and identity" 5. Through his poetry, he is determined to restore the relation which identifies him with those he loves. He searches for identity which he found in none other than humanity.

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