

Mueyed Tayyab's Poetry of Identity and Alienation in the 1980s

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Abstract

This research tackles the Kurdish poetry of alienation and its long struggle for identity. The poems have been chosen carefully from a collection of poems by Mueyed Tayyab (1957). Tayyab's poems have been selected from his first book of poetry which is called: Songs, Snow, and Fire. It is written in the Kurmanji dialect which is one of the main dialects of the Kurdish language. The selected poet has lived under the Saddam regime and has composed his major and most popular poems during that hard times of estrangement and alienation. The alienation that the poet faced under the tyrannical regime was the strict censorship imposed on freedom of speech and Kurdish Freedom Movements. There are many symptoms of alienation present in his poems. The research is limited mostly to the poems written in the 1980s the distinguished decade of the twentieth century when the most inhuman atrocities have been practiced against the Kurdish minority. At the beginning of his career as the Kurdish poet, Tayyab tried to publish his work under self-censor through a metaphorical and symbolic language. Later on, they could not publish even a word in Kurdish and for this reason, he left Kurdistan and migrated to Sweden in the 1983. Almost all the poems in his first collection deal with the deep feeling of alienation and the struggle for identity to regain the lost Paradise. The following poems can be mentioned: as samples: "Siaband and Khaje," "Our Village" and "A Song for Kurdish Kids." Following the abstract and introduction, the study examines the psychological issues of alienation and identity searching in his vernacular language, followed by a conclusion and a list of references.

Keywords: Kurdish Poetry, Tayyab, isolation, estrangement, Kurdistan.

INTRODUCTION

The trend toward identity is a psychological aspect of human beings that is hidden in man's nature and unconsciously reveals itself. It is a quite natural instinct and feeling among human beings. Alienation is also a psychological disorder that is usually caused by mental or physical situations. Identity and alienation expose themselves to different levels of individual and national psychological disorders in Tayyab's poetry. The researcher tries to track the symptoms of alienation and the components of individual and national identities in the poems of Tayyab. Furthermore, it should be noted that many factors are seen in the background of this feeling in Tayyab's

poetry which will come under the spotlight of this research.

Weighing up the different poems of this poet shows that he has experienced a very difficult life full of ups and downs at home under the Baath regime in Iraq in the 1970s and early 1980s. There are a lot of signs and ciphers of alienation which gives his poems a severe nostalgic feeling. The political and social issues of the daily life of a people who have been marginalized in their own home drove him to the realm of poetry as a shelter. When the poet retreats to the ideal future, legend times, the unfulfilled love are all signs of escapism from the bitter taste of reality at his homeland.

When it comes to the theme of identity and alienation in poetry it must be indicated that such kind of poetry draws the psychological and physiological character of the poet in addition to other elements of the environment, the governing system of society which strengthens the personality of the poet. The poet of this research has reached a kind of progress in his poems under the pressures of the dictatorship of the Baath regime which is reflected in his poems. This research is seeking to answer two questions:

A What kind of insight to identity can be found in the selected poems of the poet?

B Whether the social and political factors of life under the pressure of sorrow and suffering has driven him to the deep feeling of alienation.

The research will use an analytical descriptive approach of document library method. This research is unique on the themes of identity and alienation in the poems of Tayyab. The importance of this theme made the researcher write on this topic.

1. Identity and Alienation

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the definition of identity is “the reputation, characteristics, etc. of a person or organization that makes the public think about them in a particular way.” (Cambridge Online Dictionary). In the same source, alienation has been defined as the following: “the feeling that you have no connection with people around you.” (Cambridge Online Dictionary) This is a simple definition of alienation which refers only when an individual loses connection with people around them,” but in a more complex way of tackling with alienation in Marx’s theory, he mentions four features of alienation which are: “one is the alienation from the product of labor, another is alienation from the activity of labor; a third is alienation from one’s own specific humanity; and a fourth is alienation from, others, from society” (Horowitz). In Tayyab’s Poems mostly the all the features of alienation come to mind of the reader: but the focus of the study is on the alienation from homeland and others. As Wood

says: “Karl Marx (1818-1883) is often understood to have suggested that one of the systematic forms of alienation somehow explains all other ones” (Wood, p. 4). In the first collection of his poems, the alienation of the poet reflects in many poems which are the manifestations of all features of alienation, the poet appears as a hero of his oppressed nation as Bill Moyers states:

... it's feasible to me that these stories of heroes could become sort of a tranquilizer, invoking in us the benign passivity of watching instead of acting. And the other side of it is that our world seems drained of spiritual values. People feel impotent. To me, that's the curse of modern society, the impotence, the ennui that people feel, the alienation of people from the world order around them. Maybe we need some hero who will give voice to our deeper longing.
(Campbell, p.314)

Saddam built many palaces in different places in Kurdistan in the 1980s when he was at the height of his power. He also gave to his mercenary forces the vast, fertile lands, which caused the big migrations of landowners and the ordinary people to neighboring and European countries as asylum seekers. During this decade many people especially Kurds and Shiite were displaced and alienated from their homeland. The poet was one of those people who left Iraq in 1983 and settled in Sweden as a political refugee. The majority of the poems of the collection of Songs, Snow and fire, written in the 1980s like “Mirza” (1980), “Our Village” (1980), “A Letter not Fallen in My Postbox” (1983), “A Song for a Kurdish Kid” (1984), “A Dream” (1984), “Martyr” (1985), and “Duhok” (1985) contain the deep psychological feelings of Alienation, nostalgia and the search for identity.

1.1. The Psychological Components of Identity and Alienation in Mueyed Tayyab’s Poetry

The important landmarks of Tayyab’s poetry connected to Identity and alienation are the following: The general memory of the nation which goes back to national epics and legends, the national identity and patriotism, and not

reachable goals and desires. In his first published collection of poetry *Songs, Snow and Fire*, his thoughts and outlooks toward ethnic and national realities have a great frequency and repetition. The tyrant rulers who were governing the society under the Baath regime had a great impact on him and consequently on his poems. In this section of research for every component of identity which is in one way or another the cause of alienation, some samples are mentioned from his poems to be analyzed. The poet has done to give a clear picture of the brutality of Saddam's regime against his nation, but as Jung mentions in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* it is not easy to show all the psychological problems that exist in the general memory of a nation:

Toute passe — yesterday's truth is today's deception, and yesterday's false inference may be tomorrow's revelation. This is particularly so in psychological matters, of which, if the truth were told, we still know very little. We are still a long way from understanding what it signifies that nothing has any existence unless some small — and oh, so transitory — consciousness has become aware of it. (Jung, p. 215)

The poet grasps the partial truth and he reflects it in his poems. The poets usually believe in a utopian society in their imagination. In this collection of poems, almost all of the poems criticize the Baath regime and glorify the Kurdish freedom movement. As it is clear the poet aims to show through his poems the dilemma of his nation which is caused by the unjust political system. He believes that the liberty of his nation is the most important psychological goal and without liberty, the Kurds as a nation cannot have their own identity. The poet found himself destroyed both physically and psychologically by the Baath regime. The cruel regime has demolished all his dreams as an independent nation. As it is clear in the optimistic poems of this collection despite all the problems and the sufferings, the poet is not defeated and destroyed psychologically.

1.2. Getting Back to Legends and Myths for Identity

From the beginning of human history, the myths had a great impact on man's life. They put all their sorrows, happiness, failures, and successes in their myths. The identity of the people cannot be separated from their cultures, traditions, and the way of their lives and their habitats. Accordingly, the most appropriate way for the writers and the poets to express their lives is through the myths and stories, in this method, they connect the present to the past of the nations' cultural, social, and political identities. A lot of myths reflect the suffering and the struggling of the nations against their people. In the search of national identity, the poet employs the Kurdish mythological symbolism. The definition of myth is more connected to the realities of life: "The myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life" (Campell, p.5). The myths are the dreams of the people throughout history. They are the display of the power of a nation over time. The poet tries to show the cruelty of the Baath Regime against his people by comparing the Regime to monsters, snakes and, so on. As Eliade says: "There is no myth which is not the unveiling of a mystery, the revelation of a primordial event which inaugurated either a constituent structure of reality or a kind of human behavior" (Eliade, P.16). There are different anthropological approaches toward the myth, but the one that goes well with this study is the psychoanalytic theory of myth. In psychology the myths are connected to dreams and symbols as Carl G. Jung refers to this reality in the following way:

One cannot afford to be naïve in dealing with dreams. They originate in a spirit that is not quite human but is rather a breath of nature—a spirit of the beautiful and generous as well as of the cruel goddess. If we want to characterize this spirit, we shall certainly get closer to it in the sphere of ancient mythologies, or the fables of the primeval forest, than in the consciousness of modern man. I am not denying that great gains have resulted from the evolution of civilized society. But these gains have been made at the price of enormous losses, whose extent we have scarcely begun to

estimate. Part of the purpose of my comparisons between the primitive and the civilized states of man has been to show the balance of these losses and gains. (Jung, p.75)

The central point in the myth's psychoanalytic theory is the idea that the symbols of myth are constructed in the unconscious mind. The other reason that the poet has used the Kurdish myths is to eternalize the great events of his nation. The human beings for spiritual reinforcement immortalize their victories in the epics and legends. The alienation of the poet happens when he lost his paradise and consequently his identity. The Poet's struggle for a national identity is a means to escape from his alienated existentialism. He seeks his identity in his language and traditions and for this reason, the poems are written in Kurdish. By writing poems in his mother tongue the poet feels the wholeness as a human being.

2. Alienation from Others: Siaband Changes the Khabor's Course

During all the decades of Saddam ruling, the country the Kurds as a minority were absolutely alien. For indicating the alienation recurrently Meuyed uses the Kurdish old myths. In this poem, the poet uses the myth of "khaj and Siaband" to show the disintegration of the lovers which is also reflecting the alienation of the poet in exile. Here in this myth, the two lovers have been separated from each other, therefore it shows the fourth feature of alienation in Marx's theory of alienation. There are many complications involved in alienation like hopelessness, the meaninglessness of life, and so on which in severe cases lead to suicidal thoughts. Mueyed explains the ending part of Siaband and Khaje's myth in the following paragraph:

When the two lovers dropped from the sky of love, after the two flowers fell from the Sipan's peak into Van's lake, the roots of an amorous Sycamore took Khaje's hand and passed her to its world. The hand of plane-tree could not get poor Siaband. Then the mad waves of Khabor took Siaband downstream. In a Friday afternoon fairies descended from heaven and took Siaband's body from Khabor and put his

corpse on the bank of the river. Because of a remote spark and the elegies of reeds and nightingales, Siaband opened his eyes from death sleep. Khaje did not see him. He called her, but no use. He waited but she did not come. A letter, greetings never came. Then he shouted three times and all the vast vales and deep dales echoed his yelling. (Tayyab, 2010, p. 47).

Like almost all the tragic love stories when the two lovers have been isolated from each other and there is no way to unify, they decide to commit suicide. Here the two lovers decide to jump from the peak of Sipan mountain into the Lake of Van. The alienation of the lovers in the myth of "Siaband and Khajie" leads to psychological trauma. The barriers between the lovers cause emotional and psychological traumas in which the lovers feel hopeless and this helplessness feeling leads to the feeling of meaninglessness of the world and finally it ends up with suicidal efforts.

My Khaje:

*Our separation lasted so long that
Approximately,
I have forgotten color of your eyes
And because of this
I take an oath and never regret
To convert myself into mountain
I will wall the way of wrathful Khabor
Not let its flow downstream go
I'll roll up sleeves of strong will
I will go across the Khabor's flood
I will blow up its eddy billow
Then I'll be able to see you Khaje
Far from all eyes I will kiss you
Our kiss turn into fire
Into flame
It will shine again
The land that has been darkened
By demons.*

(Tayyab, p. 49)

As it is clear in this stanza the poet for showing his alienation uses the Kurdish old myths and love stories in which the lover and the beloved have been separated from each other. The importance of isolation of the beloved and the lover in Khaje and Siaband leads to a tragic end

of the hero and heroine. The lovers cannot tolerate the isolation therefore they committed suicide. They killed themselves by jumping from Sipan Mountain into Van lake. Here the poet is not isolated from his beloved but he has been separated from his homeland that is considered as his beloved. This feeling of distance and estrangement occurs for being away from his homeland.

Oh, Siaband,

*I am not afraid that our partings
lose our clues
This homeless feeling
Will bring us hope
But I am afraid
My love has driven you irrational
If not how it comes
Without mountain
To change the course of
Furious Khabor?
How can you grind
The millstone of whirlpool current?
Don't you remember
The horn of the ram,
Bad omen arrow,
And the cruel foe
Became mountains
And seas between us.*

(Tayyab, pp. 50)

Although Khaje explains in the above stanza that the isolation is not a big deal for her but she addresses Siaband that I am afraid that our isolation has made you mad otherwise how you can change a rivers direction? Tayyab wants to emphasize that the feeling of isolation drives the lover to insanity. The last lines of this stanza mentions the horn of the ram, the bad omen, the cruel foe, and the mountain as barriers between the lovers. All the barriers that have been mentioned in the legend are used as symbols to show the difficulties and the hard times that the poet face away from his homeland.

My Khaje:

*I did not know our parting
Make you so weak
That you doubt my abilities*

For changing the course of Khabor

I remember

The foe

And bad omen arrow

But it seems you don't remember

"The glory of young men is their strength."

For your eyes and love,

I am one of them

I am one of them.

(Tayyab, pp. 50-1)

When it comes to the national Kurdish myths and legends, the poet revives the ancient time in the mind of readers. The poet identifies himself with national myths and legends whenever he alludes to the mythological characters like Mam, Bekrok, and Alan. Tayyab epitomizes the legends and the myths of the nation in his contemporary poems as a runaway from his unfulfilled wishes in the real world. In this way, the poet expresses his current situation by the means of the national mythology.

As it has been mentioned earlier in addition to myths the poet sometimes identifies himself with the geographic peculiarities of Kurdistan like the high mountains covered with snow, in a poem titled "The Snow" he identifies himself with snow instead of clay:

If it's true

Adam was made out of clay

And Eve from his (left) rib bone

Fellows, comrades

Then you must know

I am not the son of Adam

Since his descent is the clay

And mine snow

Then villagers

When I perish

And you lined up to carry me

The following will be my will

On the snowy rocky peak

Covered always with glaciers

You bury me

If the Summer and hot weather

Drive so mad

Like Adam let me to return

To my breed

*The cycle
of falling snow.*

(Tayyab, pp. 39-40)

Although the poet starts the poem with a religious allusion when he refers to the story of Adam and Eve, later on he identifies himself with snow instead of clay. This is a kind of opposition and objection to the regime that has alienated him in his homeland. The poet used the opposition binaries to indicate his homeland where is mountainous against the opponents' land where is the vast desert. He identifies himself with snow instead of clay to be differentiated from the dictatorial regime of Saddam and his cruel Baath Party.

2.1. The Loss of Identity and Homesickness

One of the most painful experiences of life throughout history is the homesickness. Every individual is attached in one way or another to his homeland. When this attachment to the motherland comes to the poets, it will be multiplied because the poets are passionate people, who are more sensitive to their identities and patriotism. Tayyab explains in his poems of diaspora his deep home feelings which are very nostalgic. The word nostalgia means: "a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness when you think about things that happened in the past" (Cambridge Online Dictionary). In other words, the word "nostalgia" has Greek roots. It's made up of the words *nóstos*, meaning "return home," and *álgos*, or "longing" (Online Etymology Dictionary).

The two words of homelessness and alienation are semantically related. Many psychologists like Anna Freud and John Bowlby define Homesickness as a "separation anxiety disorder" (Bowlby, p. 290). Tayyab has frequently emphasized the sorrows of homesickness in his poems. Tayyab tries to show the alienation, injustice, and the suffering of his nation whenever he expresses his nostalgic feelings toward his motherland. Therefore, the sense of homesickness which has been mentioned constantly in his poems indicates his objection against the cruelty of the

Baath Regime against his people which is very clear in "Our Village" when he utters:

*In our village
Shepherd is naked
No woolen jacket
The wool is the rope
For the gallows' loop.*

*Oh, fellows, fellows
In our village
lullabies ... cries
Melodies ... elegies
Cradles ... ashes
And the babies burnt.*

*In our village
All hearts are the suns
They are daffodils, pansies, blossoms
But still is night
Escaping is tight
And still between us and spring
A far-fetched dream.*

(Tayyab, pp. 36-7)

In this poem "A far-fetched dream" refers to a dream in an uncertain future. These kind of dreams are unlikely to be true. The date of writing this poem is 1980, when the regime was at the peak of his power. Therefore the fulfilment of the poet's dream has a long way to be achieved. As Freud says the unfulfilled desires are packed in a place in the mind which is called unconscious or id. The dream is a way to penetrate the unconscious mind to reveal the repressed desires. The dreams are symbolic fulfillment of the unfulfilled and repressed desires connected to near or far future:

*The idea that the dream concerns itself chiefly
with the future, whose form it surmises in
advance -- a relic of the prophetic significance
with which dreams were once invested -- now
becomes the motive for translating into the
future the meaning of the dream which has
been found by means of symbolic
interpretation. (Freud, p. 36)*

In this poem, the village refers to Kurdistan, the homeland where the poet has been alienated by the Baath regime. His sorrow is the sorrow of estrangement in his own town the beloved Duhok. The attachment to the motherland is

rooted in the deepest layers of his soul. He looks at homeland as a lost paradise and he tries to regain it in his dreams if he cannot do that in reality. As Nafisi mentions “there is an everlasting wish to return to the homeland for the alienated man” (Nafisi, p.60). Hence the homesickness of the poet is a painful sorrow in a chaotic and tattered motherland. There are two focal mechanisms in dreams to disguise unfulfilled desires as expressed by Klages:

...condensation and displacement.

Condensation is when a whole set of images are packed into a single image or statement when a complex meaning is condensed into a simple one. Condensation corresponds to metaphor in language, where one thing is condensed into another. Displacement is where the meaning of one image or symbol gets pushed onto something associated with it, ... displacement corresponds to the mechanism of metonymy in language, where one thing is replaced by something corresponding to it.
(Klages, p.38)

In “our Village” both of these mechanisms are used by the poet as a way of disguising the dreams. The mechanism of condensation begins at the beginning of the poem when the poet uses a sequence of metaphors like: “woolen jacket” to “gallows’ loop,” “lullabies to cries” “cradles to ashes,” “melodies to elegies,” and so on. The mechanism of displacement has been used at the end of the poem, where the poet has used the metonymy of the village for Kurdistan.

The poet has used many traumatic stories mostly taken from Kurdish old myths to refer to the causes of the alienation and consequently the suffering of his people. Racial inequality is almost present in all of his poems which is the cause of his self-estrangement, alienation, and his search for identity.

*Up and down
Night and blood.
Left and right
Fear, flight.
Seven head snake
Has blocked water
Thirsty for reaping*

*heads of villagers
The old magicians have cut all the ways
The fangs of serpent are so severe
Hey Mirza beware
Blood springs from all corners
Of our small and coziest hut.*

(Tayyab, p. 41)

Again the poet returns to the regional and national myths and legends. In this poem which is called “Mirza” the poet speaks about a snake with seven heads that prevents the water to run from the springs and makes the people thirsty. Instead of water the blood springs from fountains, indirectly through these images, the poet tries to show the cruelty of the Baath regime against the Kurds. In all of these poems the alienation happens after the trauma, first, the tyrannical actions of the Baath regime against the Kurds have been explained as abolishing the villages which cause traumatic situations for the people. Racial discrimination is the main drive in Tayyab’s poems to strengthen his identity and gives him a strong sense of nationalism.

2.2. The National Identity and Patriotism

The poet in this collection tries to give a moralistic psychological image of the Kurds as an oppressed people. They have lost their identity and they try to regain it. As it is mentioned earlier when the poet could not practice his basic rights as a Kurd under the ruling system of the Baath Regime he left the country in 1983 and settled in Sweden as an asylum seeker. The poems that written at the end of this collection in 1983-4, shows the deep nostalgic feelings of the poet toward his motherland. For Tayyab, the national identity becomes the main pillar of his poetry in exile. He has composed many patriotic and national poems and almost all his poems include some patriotic feelings. The regret of not having a state is a common feature of roughly all the Kurdish freedom-loving people, as an example, he compares the Kurdistan under Saddam Regime to the Sweden where he lives as a refugee in the following poem:

*My nephew
Shevan,*

*On birthday bashes
 In this country
 People burn candles.
 On the other hand
 In our Hamlets
 Villages are burnt.*

*For birthday bashes
 In this country
 Birthday cakes are cut
 But in our town
 The head of people*

*My nephew
 Shevan,
 On birthday bashes
 In this country
 Love and vino rain
 From the brim of shiny goblets
 And from the lips of lasses and lads
 Songs and melodies.
 But in our land
 Shells and bullets rain
 From the gullet of artilleries.
 And from the jaws of red jet fighters
 Spring to air our legs and arms
 But then again
 We will live on
 And will not die.*

(Tayyab, p. 127-8)

what is obvious in this poem is the oppression and cruel exercise of the Baath Regime against the Kurdish minority and comparing it to a European country where the people live freely. In this poem, the poet compares a democratic country like Sweden to an authoritarian regime like Saddam's regime. This comparison helps the poet to make the differences noticeable and visible.

Tayyab in his poems roars against the oppression repeatedly. He is shouting for freedom in to invite the people to stand against the dictatorship.

2.3. The Unattainable Ideals as Escapism

One of the repeated motives of Tayyab's poems is the unattainable ideals of his nation to the point that almost all of his poems based on thoughts for an ideal future when he sees himself unified with his family at home:

*Oh, Mum,
 Oh our sorrows are infinite*

*The black lash ...
 Ate my body
 And loneliness ...
 Had your liver
 This vast globe is a span
 And four high walls
 Days are stones
 They do not move (walk)
 Years are cycles
 Without ending
 However mum
 The change will come
 Forever jail won't be my home
 Crying will not be your doom
 Spring will not be silent (cannot be silenced)
 Ever in gut of monster.*

(Tayyab, pp. 17-8)

The bright optimistic message at the end of his poems exists nearly in all of his poems. It seems that he can predicate the future: the ending of his alienation, regaining his identity, and so on. The Baath system of ruling the country failed in keeping the different ethnic peoples together, and instead of making Iraq a prosperous country the regime faced the consequence of his failure in 2003 when the regime was collapsed by the operation of Iraqi freedom, and the exiled poet returned to Kurdistan.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that patriotism and nationalism are the central and prominent values in Tayyab's poetry. He has adorned his poems with national elements in which the sorrow of not having an independent state gives his poetry a nostalgic sense. The deep nostalgic feelings are seen especially in the poems of 1983 up to 1985 when he was in a self-exile in Sweden. His poems are more about the unattainable ideal of a nation and the admiring of the motherland which is an ideal phase and feature for him. He expresses his psychological alienation in a sincere and straight nostalgic way. He tries to regain his

identity in his patriotic and national poems. The identity crisis is the result of the Baath domination over the minorities who placed the others in a stage beneath human beings. The Poet tries to construct his national identity in environmental and social interactions. He identifies himself with mountains, rivers, trees, Kurdish songs, mother tongue, snow, and other Kurdistan's natural resources. His tendency toward the national legends, epics, folklore, cultural aspects, and history is due to the psychological traumas and unattainable desires, in the real world. Tayyab depicts the question of the Kurds' identity in his poems. The race discrimination under the political beliefs of the Baath totalitarian regime especially during the 1980s when the regime was at the peak of its power had the most destructive effects on the minorities. The poet who has been alienated from his society has the severe feelings of losing his identity. By refusing to be a member of the Baath Party, the poet refuses the imposed identity and he remains as a free thinker who does not yield to the oppressor's power.

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