
Dreaming of Fragments of Home Left Behind

Mehwish Mughal

Abstract

I have been away from Pakistan for almost 20 years now and only have been able to go back four times. I have daydreamed of reuniting with my mother since I stepped into the airport to leave her behind. I experience the constant longing to return to my mother, to home, when I am watching a sunset; from the sudden whiff of jasmine flowers on the footpath, from the smell of ittar I wear; while making biryani from shaan spices packed in Pakistan; on Eids, on birthdays, on my leaving home anniversary date and month; on labels on towels reading made in Pakistan in our local supermarket shelves and in the pages of Urdu novels and poetry; from the lyrics of songs; from twirling between my fingers the locket my mother gave me to ward off evil; when I raise my hands to pray at the end of the fajr prayer; when I get sick and want my mother to nurse me back to health – when living. I have a powerful unshakeable spiritual bond with my mother. The dream I share in this piece, as interpreted by my mother, is a desire to return home and the testimony of my love for her.

Keywords

longing, diaspora, home, kin

The sun is losing its hold, and the night is approaching fast. We are out in the wilderness, camping in a log cabin. There are 10 or perhaps 15 of us. No one is sitting still. They are picking up leaves, walking in and out, discussing if they want to follow the stream adjacent to the cabin, lighting the fire in front of the cabin and debating the nutritional value of onion soup versus pumpkin soup.

I am the outsider. I am watching them and growing restless. They must all go inside so I can leave before the night completely devours everything around it.

I politely ask them to retire for the night. They have their minds and fail to notice that the wind has stopped, and the birds no longer have a song. They ignore me. I must warn them of something I do not know and cannot explain. All I know is that they must all go inside and lock themselves for the night.

I must get out of there to follow the other group as they have some information about my journey.

I cannot wait any longer. I try one last time. No effect. I pour the onion soup on the fire, throw the bowl, and walk away from them. I know they have taken heed and have started moving like a herd towards safety.

I am terrified. Should I have just stayed the night there and perhaps taken the journey in the morning? I know that I had to keep moving. The map of the whole area flashes in front of my eyes. It is infinite. The magnanimity of the forest reaffirms my doubts and spreads a shadow over my resolve. I realise that I am underprepared, wearing jandals and carrying a satchel which has one book and a red pen. Nothing else.

I should start marking the trees—the first reasonable thought. Something inside me warns me against it. The trees have life, and I should not disturb anything around me.

I start walking. It is a straight path until I reach an intersection. Is it left from here or right? Does it matter? I am lost.

Something begins to guide me. I am not sure who or what. I just know. I have to take a right turn. Time has stopped now, so I do not know how long I have walked. I just keep walking.

I eventually come to a clearing. I see an outline of a wooden built place with a veranda.

As I get closer, I find that it's a café. Three young people are engrossed in a conversation, oblivious to anything around them. Who are they? Why are they here in the middle of nowhere?

As I ponder these questions and decide to ask one of them, a cold, refreshing mountain breeze goes right through me and silences all these irrelevant questions.

I don't ask them anything, and they do not notice me. I keep on walking.

I reach a town. A deserted town. I come across a shopping centre, a school and a hospital—all abandoned and with no sign of life. It feels like a scene from an apocalyptic movie.

What happened to that second group? It does not matter anymore.

I finally see the boulder. It is huge. I climb to the top and want to sit there and be one with what is around me, but there's a nagging sense of urgency. I must get somewhere.

At the edge of the boulder is a rope ladder. I climb down, feeling the climax.

Descending into something I do not know.

I reach the bottom, and it is a clear green vast field. In the middle stands a tiny square house built with straws or wood. I start to move towards it. I do not know what is inside this house. All I know is that I have to get there.

“Remove your blanket NOW”, I hear my mother shout.

I am jolted back to reality in my bed, shivering and burning with fever. I remove the blankets immediately.

My mother does not live with me. I live alone.

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Author Biography

Mehwish Mughal is a sister to five siblings, a daughter to one of the strongest women alive, a 1.5 generation Pakistani activist, a feminist, and a researcher based in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Driven by a strong sense of social justice, her main areas of interest are mental health and gender justice. She has recently been awarded her Master's thesis in Sociology titled *An exploration of social construction of mental health: perspectives of Pakistani diaspora in Aotearoa*.