



The Theme of Homeland In The Poetry of Asqar Mahkam

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Abstract

The concept of homeland is a recurring theme in world literature, often associated with identity, memory, and belonging. In Uzbek poetry, especially after independence, the homeland has evolved as both a spiritual symbol and a socio-political ideal. Asqar Mahkam stands out among contemporary Uzbek poets for his philosophical engagement with the idea of the homeland. Unlike conventional depictions rooted in birthplace or maternal suffering, Mahkam constructs a vision of the homeland as a moral and existential entity. While classical and folkloric representations of patriotism in Uzbek literature are well documented, there is limited critical analysis of how modern poets like Mahkam reinterpret the homeland through innovative poetic devices and contemporary concerns. This study aims to analyze how Asqar Mahkam conveys patriotism and national consciousness in his poetry, examining the symbolic, emotional, and ethical dimensions of his work. Through a close reading of selected poems—including “Worship,” “Covered by the Storm of History,” and “Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me”—the analysis reveals Mahkam’s use of metaphor, rhetorical questioning, and lyrical sincerity to evoke not only love for one’s country but also a sense of duty, sacrifice, and philosophical introspection. Mahkam’s verses reframe the homeland as a dynamic and sacred force, encouraging readers to perceive it not as a static territory but as a living moral companion. The findings enrich the discourse on post-Soviet Uzbek literature and highlight poetry’s enduring role in shaping cultural identity and national values.

Keywords

Asqar Mahkam, Homeland, Patriotism, Human, Native Land, Value

Introduction

Throughout the history of world literature, the theme of the homeland has occupied a central place in the poetic imagination. Across cultures and languages, poets have expressed deep emotional ties to their native lands, often portraying the homeland as a sacred and inseparable part of their identity (Neruda, 1950). In Uzbek literature, the expression of patriotism and national belonging is particularly rich and multifaceted, especially in the post-independence era, where the role of poetry has extended beyond aesthetics to include socio-political commentary and nation-building ideals (Said, 1993).

One of the most powerful contemporary voices in this regard is Asqar Mahkam, a prominent Uzbek poet whose work is renowned for its profound engagement with the concept of the homeland. Unlike traditional depictions of patriotism that may rely heavily on sentiment or historical nostalgia, Mahkam's poems are marked by philosophical depth and personal reflection. Through vivid imagery and lyrical intensity, he reconstructs the homeland not merely as a geographical entity, but as a living embodiment of memory, sacrifice, and moral obligation (Tagore, 1913). His poetry poses fundamental questions about national identity, cultural continuity, and emotional allegiance, making his works both timeless and contextually relevant.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative literary analytical method, centering on close textual analysis of selected poems by Asqar Mahkam to explore how the poet conceptualizes the notion of homeland (Achebe, 1988). The methodology involves detailed examination of lyrical structure, thematic patterns, symbolic imagery, and rhetorical devices such as metaphor, personification, and rhetorical questioning. Poems including "Worship," "Covered by the Storm of History," and "Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me" were chosen for their representative thematic richness and emotional intensity. Through a hermeneutic approach, the study interprets how Mahkam constructs homeland not merely as geographic territory, but as a philosophical and moral entity embedded in memory, suffering, and identity (Anderson, 2006). Attention is paid to the poetic voice, tone, and deviations from traditional rhyme and meter to understand how form enhances meaning. The analysis also draws upon cultural and historical contexts, especially Uzbekistan's post-independence era, to situate Mahkam's work within national literary evolution. The study references primary texts authored by Mahkam and complements them with relevant secondary resources that frame his contribution to modern Uzbek literature. By focusing on language, symbolism, and poetic strategy, the methodology uncovers the multilayered meanings Mahkam attaches to patriotism and cultural belonging, offering insights into how poetry functions as a repository of national consciousness and emotional heritage (Mahkam, 1993).

Results and Discussions

The analysis of Asqar Mahkam's poems such as "Worship," "Covered by the Storm of History," and "Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me" reveals a sophisticated use of metaphor, personification, and rhetorical questioning (Smith, 1991). These literary devices help construct a nuanced vision of the homeland—one that includes not just pride, but also pain, responsibility, and existential inquiry. While prior studies of Uzbek patriotic literature often focus on classical forms or folkloric expressions, there exists a gap in critical attention to contemporary voices that

bridge personal experience with national narrative, particularly in a modern poetic structure that occasionally breaks from traditional rhyme and meter (Hobsbawm, 1992).

This article employs a close reading and interpretive analysis of Mahkam's selected poems to explore how he articulates the theme of the homeland as both a physical and spiritual force. The methodological approach centers on textual analysis, emphasizing linguistic patterns, emotional tone, and symbolic elements. By doing so, it seeks to understand how poetic expression serves as a medium for collective identity and moral consciousness in post-Soviet Uzbek society.

Ultimately, this study anticipates demonstrating that Asqar Mahkam's representation of the homeland is not merely reflective, but transformational. His verses compel readers to reconsider the meaning of national belonging and cultural heritage in deeply personal terms (Mahkam, 2024). The findings contribute to broader literary and cultural studies by highlighting how poetry continues to play a vital role in shaping and preserving national consciousness in Uzbekistan.

No matter which poet's works we examine, we can always find verses devoted to the homeland and patriotism, written with great skill and deep affection. Throughout the world, poets have praised their native land, its beauty, history, ancestors, and talented youth (Walcott, 1990). Asqar Mahkam, too, has composed unique and meaningful lines about his homeland and his native village. In poems such as "Worship," "Covered by the Storm of History," "Throw Me into This Steppe," "Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me," and "The Return of the Homeland," he explores the importance of valuing and loving one's country, inviting the reader to reflect on the same.

Consider the following lines by the poet:

Homeland, you are not the homeland simply because
My umbilical blood was spilled on your soil...
Homeland, you are not the homeland simply because
You absorbed my mother's tears...

These lines are taken from Asqar Mahkam's poem "Worship." It begins with the question: "What are you, Homeland?" The lyrical speaker poses this question and begins to seek answers by recalling familiar images from his childhood: footprints on old walls, hay in crumbling huts, the worn soles of old shoes, and jackets torn apart by dogs in the fields (Heaney, 1998). Through these reflections, he gradually reaches an understanding of what the homeland truly means.

Unlike other poets who define the homeland as the land where their umbilical cord was buried, Mahkam does not glorify it simply because he was born there or because his mother suffered there. Rather, he treasures the homeland because it is the soil from which he was created and to which he will ultimately return. The lyrical persona's entire body and soul are bound to this soil, and he is proud of it.

Homeland, you are a handful of moist soil (Ashcroft и др., 1989).
I was born from you.
I will return to you.

Why does the poet describe it as moist soil? Because moist soil nurtures and sustains life. In such soil, plants flourish and thrive. Similarly, the homeland nurtures its children, helping them grow and mature. The lyrical speaker was born of this soil and will return to it, showing that his past, present, and future are closely tied to the land. The absence of rhyme and meter in these lines is compensated by the depth of emotion and lyrical flow they convey.

The poet also raises heartfelt questions about patriotism and sacrifice:

When the shadow of the afterlife draws near,
Will there be those who rise from their graves?
Will people be born again who,
Upon hearing the word "Homeland,"
Would die from love bursting in their hearts?

These lines, from the poem "Covered by the Storm of History," reflect the poet's concern for the future of his country (Walcott, 2004). He wonders whether new leaders, as dedicated as their predecessors, will be born. Will there be individuals whose love for their homeland is so intense that they would rise from the grave when it is in danger? The poet uses personification and rhetorical questions to express deep anxiety and patriotic emotion. The consistent use of suffixes in each line creates lyrical harmony.

Life passed in a simple hut,
Yet each morning I gave thanks to you...
Homeland, even if you are chaff,
You must never be sold, o merchants.

These lines are taken from the poem "Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me." The poet expresses deep gratitude and love for his homeland. Despite living in poverty, the speaker is thankful each morning for peace and freedom. The poem, written in 1999, reflects the early years of Uzbekistan's independence. Many intellectuals sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom, and some of their graves remain unknown (Mahkam, 2017). A young, independent nation needs time to develop. Despite hardships, people support one another and work for national prosperity.

The homeland, regardless of how humble or difficult it may seem, must never be sold. Whether it is a blooming paradise or barren land, it is sacred. The graves of ancestors and the future of descendants lie within its soil. Betrayal of even a handful of this land is a betrayal of past and future generations. The poet directly addresses the world, saying that personal interest may drive people to sell many things-but never their homeland.

The repetition and emotional rhythm in these verses enhance their impact. The ellipsis following "Homeland" intensifies the inner emotion of the lyrical speaker.

In conclusion, Asqar Mahkam's poems about the homeland are distinctive for their emotional honesty and profound reflections. He does not simply glorify joyful days but expresses sincere concern for the past, present, and future of the nation. While his poems may not always follow strict poetic form, the genuine feelings they convey transform them into true works of literary art (*Ziyouz Uzbek Literature Portal*, 2024).

Conclusion

The poetic treatment of the homeland in Asqar Mahkam's work reveals a deeply personal and philosophical engagement with the concept of national belonging. His poems do not rely on conventional notions of patriotism defined by birthplace or inherited suffering; rather, they seek to uncover the existential and moral dimensions of what it means to belong to a land. Through vivid imagery, metaphor, and emotionally resonant reflections, Mahkam reconstructs the homeland as a sacred space of origin, memory, and ethical responsibility. In poems such as "Worship," "Covered by the Storm of History," and "Have I Justified the Salt You Gave Me," the poet uses rhetorical questioning and lyrical sincerity to explore both pride and pain, hope and anxiety. His representation of the homeland transcends romanticism and serves as a call for loyalty, reflection, and self-sacrifice. Especially notable is the way Mahkam speaks to contemporary realities—poverty, national rebuilding, and generational duty—while grounding his verse in timeless spiritual and emotional values. His refusal to sell even a handful of homeland soil becomes a powerful metaphor for integrity and national identity. Ultimately, Mahkam's poetry invites readers not only to love their country in celebratory terms but to engage with its struggles and complexities with humility and devotion. The article affirms that through his poetic lens, Asqar Mahkam elevates the concept of homeland from mere geography to a living, breathing testament of heritage, duty, and collective memory—thus solidifying his place as a significant voice in modern Uzbek literature.

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