

**MAHMOUD SALIM DARWISH AN ARAB POET OF NATIONAL IDENTITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The poetic contribution of Mahmoud Salim Darwish is presented in this paper. He is among the best Arabic language poets for national identity and patriotic literature writers and poets. This paper is meant to delve into connotation of acquired knowledge about his work and his poetry for understanding the significance of national identity and patriotism in his poetry. The study is based on literature available on his work as appreciation or criticism for his individual work, Arabic poetry and literature on Palestine issue. Further, paper demonstrated the importance and uniqueness of Darwish literary contribution in Arabic poetry and national identity. At the same time, paper presents the meanings of patriotism described by Darwish and the issue of Palestinian. The conclusion of literature review on poetic contribution of Darwish has narrated the pain of being refugee in your own homeland and the Journal is characterized by its sarcasm especially stating the law.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Mahmoud Darwish, National Identity and Patriotic Literature, Palestine Issue, In the Presence of Absence, Palestine as Metaphor, Journal of an Ordinary Grief.*

**Introduction:**

This paper presents the poetic contribution of Mahmoud Salim Darwish, an Arabic language poet from Palestine. He is among the best Arabic language poets for national identity and patriotic literature writers and poets. He has an outstanding contribution in modern Arabic poetry as he is the first poet who paid attention towards the issue of Palestinian. Along with patriotism, national identity, he has also considered the agendas of gender consideration, Islam and self-identity (1). His poems reflect his concern for the homeland, woman, self-identity and land of Palestine. The world is not paying as much attention as the issue of Palestine occupation needs to be given and these issues are expressed in an effective method reflecting dignity, humanity and feelings of people of Palestine(2). This expression of Darwish towards Palestine issue has left a deep imprint in Arabic literature and history. His approach of poetry writing was novel way that is famous in Arabic Literature and consideration of this poetry writing approach by Asian poets would contribute is writing about woman, patriotism and self-identity(3).

Darwish has left a great heritage for Arabic Literature for the world and scholars and researchers are not devoted to study his work and explore the artistic experiences of poet. In poetry of Darwish, the hometown and motherland are symbolized in terms of women expression that reflects the feeling of tenderness and warmth (4). Moreover, he has presented women is different than in other modern poetry. His expression of women is meant to reflect that woman is a human being not only an element of beauty that almost poets have considered (5). This paper is meant to delve into connotation of acquired knowledge about his work and his poetry for understanding the significance of national identity and patriotism in his poetry. The study is based on Literature available on his work as appreciation or criticism for his individual work, Arabic poetry and literature on

Palestine issue. For the beginners of Arabic poetry or the language readers, poems of Mahmoud Darwish are useful because the words of his poetry are not only beautiful but also easy to understand with profound meaning and suggestiveness, at the same time the poems possess a high artistry level (6).

#### **National Identity:**

Classic and modern Arabic poetry has considered national identity but Mahmoud Darwish has characterized by originality and novelty at the same time (7). Researchers and scholars have focused the literary, poetic and aesthetic value of Darwish work but studies have neither specify a research to monitor the national identity image in detail nor studied the dialectical deep relationship between patriotism and national identity (8). Further, he has composed human values and intellectual maturity of women which has been neglected in previous literature. This paper focuses on books of Darwish about national identity and patriotism and key literary work analyzed in light of literature for this paper are *In the Presence of Absence*, *Journal of an ordinary grief*, and *Palestine as Metaphor*. Current paper demonstrates the importance and uniqueness of Darwish Literary contribution in Arabic poetry and national identity. At the same time, paper presents the meanings of patriotism described by Darwish and the issue of Palestinian. There are verities of stages in Darwish' poetry, so the author of this paper would sail a study on comparing the poetry of same poets to develop deeper understanding of Arabic literature to develop patriotism among nationals (9).

The key concept of the paper is national identity and the phenomenon is described in light of poetry of Darwish. Literary contribution of poet is described under the available studies on work of Darwish. In literature the concept of national identity is referred to a national group. The national group bases on different elements, these are: origin, country, religious or ethnic, residence, affinity of nations with the nationality and religious affiliations (10). The nationality is different than individual or personal identity as it is given in regards to his home country or nation. In terms of national identity concerns, Darwish is among top list Arabic Poets as most of his work shows his concern for the Palestine, his homeland. For Darwish, Palestine is not only homeland or origin but his identity and this all is portrayed in his work which has led him to be the national poet of Palestine. He is known as the poet of hope, longing and anger. This paper critically scrutinizes and critically investigates how he has portrayed and quested the national identity in his poetry (11). All of the above, Darwish as an Arabic language poet is presented.

#### **Biography of Darwish:**

Mahmoud Darwish is known as Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish, he was born the village al-Birwa which was occupied by Israeli Armed forces and it was later razed in light of Israeli government policies. Mahmoud Darwish family was missed Israeli census which was official that's why his family was considered as refugee (12). Thus, Mahmoud Darwish family was lived firstly in exile and later in Beirut as well as in Paris. Mahmoud Darwish

is renowned because of his thirty books of poetry along with eight books about prose. That's why Mahmoud Darwish won the *Lannan Cultural Freedom prize* which was organized by Lannan Foundation along with this he won the *Lenin Peace Prize*. *Knight of Arts* and *Belles Lettres Medal* given by France are some other renowned success of Mahmoud Darwish (13).

1960s was brought the crisis time for Mahmoud Darwish because of imprisonment due to the reciting poetry and the second reason was the travelling in different villages without getting government permit. Mahmoud Darwish was also known as the resistance poet so when his poem "Identity card" was taking a form of protest song he was placed in house and arrested (14). He spend almost one year in Moscow University in 1970, and he worked at the "AL-Ahram" newspaper in Cairo. Later from 1973 to 1982 Mahmoud Darwish was lived in Beirut, in this time period he edited *Palestinian affairs* which is a journal about Palestinian matters and dealings. Later in 1981 he joined "Al-Karmel" as an editor. One of the main careers of Mahmoud Darwish started in 1987 when started to serve the executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) for almost six years till 1993. In 1996 he was permitted to revisit his town, friends and family in Israel and Palestine regions that's why this period is known as the good time in Mahmoud Darwish life (15). Mahmoud Darwish was started his poetry in 1960s and almost all the poetry written in 1960s to 1970s is clearly depicting that he was unhappy with the occupation of his native land and the situation which was created by Israeli forces(16). It can be estimated through different writers for example Forche Carolyn and Akash Runir claimed in their work "Unfortunately it was Paradise (2003)" Mahmoud Darwish is the Palestinian voice and it was claimed as Palestinian Diaspora and also called Mahmoud Darwish as voice of fragmented soul (17). Later Forche Carolyn and Akash Runir noted in 20<sup>th</sup> volume of Mural that Mahmoud Darwish is assimilating the centuries of unique Arabic poetry, and using it's richly veined literary past in poetic form. Thus, Mahmoud Darwish is using its arts for his country and impressing of exile, Mahmoud Darwish is true to his work as well as keeping him independent about the critical reception (18). Later another poet Naomi Shihab Nye also gave similar comments on the poems written in *Unfortunately It Was Paradise* lyrics is imaginative as well as Mahmoud Darwish haunting people through his passionate poetry. His poetry is elegant and depicting that never anything less than free, Mahmoud Darwish is also describing that he is dreaming for all people. At the age of 67 years Mahmoud Darwish died in 2008 in Texas Houston (19).

#### **Books of Darwish:**

Mahmoud Darwish has written over 30 Books of Poetry and for Prose he has written eight Books and earned award from Lannan Foundation, Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize, and from France, author earned the Knight of Arts and Belles Letters Medal and the Lenin Peace Prize (20). Here is the list of his most famous books; 1. *In the Presence of Absence*. 2. *Memory of Forgetfulness*. 3. *Unfortunately*. 4. *It was Paradise*. 5. *Why Did You*

*leave the horse alone? 6. Journal of an ordinary grief. 7. A River Dies of Thirst. 8. Mura. 9. The Butterfly' Burden. 10. The Adam of Edens. 11. Palestine as Metaphor. 12. If I were another: Poems. 13. State of Siege. 14. Psalms (21).*

This paper focuses on books of Darwish about national identity and patriotism and key literary work analyzed in light of literature for this paper are *In the Presence of Absence*, *Journal of an ordinary grief*, and *Palestine as Metaphor*. Current paper demonstrates the importance and uniqueness of Darwish literary contribution in Arabic poetry and national identity. Each book is analysed in light of literature on the field of National Identity and work of Darwish in modern Arabic Poetry.

**(1) *In the Presence of Absence:***

The Book was the last publication of poet before his death in 2008 and the book is known as summary work of Darwish which revise and revisit the central dramas of his literary career of fifty years (22). The book presents the fruit of elegy investment as poet has taken two lines of the Malik bin al-Rayb, the seventh century poet “*Do not go! they say as they bury me / But where, if not far away, is my place?*” The lines are from the most canonical poems of Al-Raby, the poem is self-elegy because it was written after being poisonous snake bite. The self-elegy or Ritha' Al-Nafs is a discrete type of Arabic poetry that is based from pre-Islamic period. The poetry in '*In the Presence of Absence*' does not address posthumous and the poet does not claim to speak from the grave but the self-elegy is called as an occasion for uttering the last words, Poem written in the death shadow (23). These conventions are honored in the book and then poetry moves swiftly beyond them as the poet has called his book '*In the Presence of Absence*' as *nass* means text rather than a collection of poetic verses, *Diwan* (24). This book has some episodes of poetic verses but most of the content is composed in thick symbolic prose which opens eulogy scene. Darwish addresses the crowd of mourners as he has composed the words '*Let us then go together, you and I*'(25). The content of book is about the patriotism and the national identity to provoke Palestinian and the world for the issue of Palestine occupation by Israel (26).

**(2) *Palestine as Metaphor:***

This book is poetical progression of Darwish for his concept of national identity and patriotism which has elaborates Palestine as a Metaphor (27). This Book resonates through observation to the author about Palestine issue is based on five interviews with the poet which led to compile this book. In this book the confrontation, conflict, exile, love, loss and return is narrated in a sensitive, assertive and profound tone which elaborates both his attachment to people of Palestine and his patriotism for the homeland (28). Wadi, (2020) has stated that Darwish has illustrated his patriotism and how he presents his identity as a national of Palestine (29). This narration of in-depth interviews of Darwish provides an opportunity for the readers to move closer to the thoughts and essence of Darwish for his homeland. He has revealed an experience of exile by Palestine navigating within and

without. His Palestine articulation is not only about the diplomatic or militant perspectives but the language of his interviews is closer to the Palestine' metaphor which encourages to read poetry of Darwish (30). Poet said that the poetry and land as inspirable entities as both are continuing and rupturing.

Darwish insisted to consider the wider interpretation of nationality that allows his expression to return and roam for Palestine. As he said *"The land of Palestine is fragile and the sea is not white which made me realize that metaphor and language are not sufficient to bestow place upon a place"*(31).

The accomplishment of nationalism in terms of poetry is defined by continuous expression seeking as the one who dissociates, defines and seeks union. Palestine is present in all his poetry because Darwish was aware of the culture, rupture and history of his homeland. Therefore, the definition of Palestine is associated with Darwish as he is concerned that how his homeland needs to be revealed and it should not only be associated through politics. Shatz, (2001) has narrated the words of Darwish *"The theme, the image and the happening dwell together in a place which historical landscape"*. Further, Darwish believed that conventions needs to be surpasses by poetry as his words reflects *"The one who presents the perfect observation is a poet of the moment who feels the depth of his being and ready to go and compose poetry"*. (32)

### (3) **Journal of an Ordinary Grief:**

*His first attempt to an artist, a poet and a patriotic Palestinian work is the 'Journal of an Ordinary Grief' and the book was written during the house arrest in Haifa of Darwish before his exile in 1971 from Israel. He narrated that meaning of 'Homeland' as how can Palestinian identified without his country or even not having the physical memory of his homeland (33). In the second chapter of the book named 'The Homeland', Darwish wrote "the answer of homeland is not constituted in a map because it presents more of an abstract painting and the grave of your grandfather also not states the limits of homeland because planting a small forest can disappear that place" (34). The book is re-telling of Darwish' family loss and the lands of ancestral near Haifa, in Al-Biwra and he presented it through a mixture of imagined and soliloquies dialogues with his own younger self (35).*

*Poet has told the story of his grandfather who took his family on a 'picnic' in 1949 to Lebanon and as they return, the reality of their situation was sunk in just a few months later that are actually the story of millions of Palestinian. Their land is confiscated and occupied and orchards plundered which led his grandfather to lease his own fields from the new owner just to live at their place. It sealed the fate of family and it led to no-man' land of un-citizenship for Israel Arab families' concept (36). Darwish has narrated the pain of being refugee in your own homeland and the Journal is characterized by its sarcasm especially stating the law, here is an example; "You sit facing the officer. He says politely, sitting under a photograph of Herzl, "I'm honoured to put you under arrest" You exchange pleasantries, "And I'm honored to grant this honour. But would you kindly tell me what I am*

*accused of?" He says, "You are accused of exploding a watermelon at the entrance to the circus and threatening the security of the state"*

It reflects the meaning of patriotism for Darwish and for most of the Palestinians.

### **Philosophy of Darwish:**

In 1971 Chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization Yassir Arafat stated about Mahmoud Darwish that he is a Great Poet and he also said that "I can smell the fragrance of homeland on you." It was claimed by Yassir Arafat because of his observation which was captured by a leader and love with his homeland was the main part of Mahmoud Darwish philosophy and his philosophy has left very beautiful traces in the Palestine air and this concept cannot be forget (37). Mahmoud Darwish work is known as the fight for freedom and loss of Eden is common metaphor of his poetry. Constructed paradise is also a common reflection Mahmoud Darwish poetry. The common philosophy of Mahmoud Darwish is that a person himself feels the need when just when deprived of home. The state can be explained by some of his lines (38); *"This jasmine in the July night is a song for two strangers who meet on a street leading nowhere. "Who am I after your two almond eyes?" the male stranger asks. "Who am I after your exile in me?" the female stranger asks."* (Night That Overflows My Body)

His philosophy is describing his perceptions that how at the age of six he experienced sad as fled from the home which was in Upper Galilee. He left because the city was bombed by Israeli Armed forces. Later in the age of seven he came back with his family after settlements about remnants of their city and area (39). Mahmoud Darwish was feeling that his family is being deal as a refugee family in their own country which was creating sensitive feelings in his childhood. It was because Palestinians were deal as second class in Israel even in School at the Israel Independence Day, Mahmoud Darwish wrote a letter to his class mate (Jewish Boy) in which he explained that he could not be happy because of discrepancy and differences and he would not be happy until he will not have the things like Jewish boy (40); *"You can play in the sun as you please, and have your toys, but I can't. You have a house, and I have none. You have celebrations, but I have none. Why can't we play together?"*

An identity card was written by Mahmoud Darwish at a poetry festival, it was written in the scenario when he visited Israeli police for renewal of travelling pass and later he published this identity card was published with his first poetry collection (41); *"Write down! I am an Arab you have stolen the orchards of my ancestors and the land which I cultivated Along with my children and you left nothing for us Except for these rocks..."*

It is always demanded to encores the Mahmoud Darwish poetry which is considered the success of his philosophy. Another factor which can determine the Mahmoud Darwish success is that his one poetry reading in Beirut drew more than 25 thousands of audience (42). In the same another event of Mahmoud Darwish which was organized in University auditorium the number of audience was not possible to adjust because no space was left to

sit in stadium (43). Mahmoud Darwish is explained as the laureate poet of Palestine, and also known as the poet of resistance. He described the Palestine as land where olive groves and orchards can be seen, the rocks and the beautiful planet can be seen through his work. He declared the Palestine as heaven and described his pain in his poetry while talking about the country as well as he described that how he feel the differences and inequalities in the country (44). In the same way he although described his poetry as his shake off his desires and to share his pain through poetry which was his right. His purpose was not to use his poetry as political purpose and not write to serve political aims. In this regard after 1967 appreciated the poetry of Palestine either it was good or bad (45). It was the marvellous impact of Mahmoud Darwish words on human mind which strongly impact the Arab people. That's why his words are still vibrating in human memories and considered it as the middle-east art as well as developing the Arab people connection with Palestine history and with their home land (46).

Mahmoud Darwish was one of those people who believe on peace that's why he always advocated dialogues with Israel and this favour for dialogues was always criticized which also humanized the enemy by controlling enmity with Israel (47). In his dialogue he claimed that "I didn't see Jews as devils or angels but as human beings," he stated that soldiers are also dream about white tulips as Israeli soldiers also. He stated about the Israeli soldier that: *Like a tent he collapsed and died, his arms stretched out like dry creek-beds.* He also explained that when he searched the pockets of soldier I founded one picture of his wife and one of his daughter. Later Mahmoud Darwish fall in love with Jewish girl so he wrote his poem about his girlfriend "Rita and rifle" for his lover (48). *Ah, Rita! What before this rifle could have turned my eyes from yours Except a nap or two or honey-coloured clouds?*

His main philosophy was about the freedom and about his pain which represented the whole Arab community pain about their country. His initial poetry cause different issues for Mahmoud Darwish as after secondary school he worked for two newspapers Al-Ittihad and the second is Al-Jadeed which was Israel owned newspaper mainly Israel communist party, and he was arrested as well as released without trial in each year (49). He was accused because of some hostile activities against Israel state that's why he was not allowed to leave Haifa for 10 years. Thus he was confined while 1967 to 1970 in his own house, so he stated "*eventually I had to get away*" (50)

He could not change his philosophy so he left for Soviet Union where he shared his ideas about Palestine in form of communism and Marxism. He used different ways to share his ideas to describe the Palestine situation in this regard Moscow declared ideas by claiming about Palestine "*There was a huge gap between what we imagined; the idea portrayed by the Soviet media about Moscow, and the reality that people lived in*" (51). Later in 1973 Mahmoud Darwish joined the Palestine Liberation Organization so Israel banned for 26 years but in 1993 he resigned from PLO because he was founded Oslo Accords sceptical

(52). He was believing that poetry has power to change but in 1982 he left the Beirut because of Israel attack on Lebanon by expelling Palestine liberation organization which resulted in form of slaughtering refugees in Sabra Shatila camps. Mahmoud Darwish lived in the Amman for one year before his death because it was close to Ramallah. His philosophy was widely accepted and success of his philosophy can be seen by the translations of his poetry because it was translated in more than 20 languages (53). He worked as journalist and editor mainly as poet while living in Palestine, Syria, Cairo, Paris, Cyprus, Tunis and Russia as well. Despite the other career he got fame because of his poetry which was the result of his love for his home land and resulted in form of sharing pain through poetry (54).

**Impact of Darwish' Poetry: Influence of Darwish's Work is Clear as his Poems are Included in Israeli Curriculum:**

The first and main impact of Mahmoud Darwish poetry is gotten from his poetry, which was written about the Palestine that's why he is called a poet of Palestine. In "A Poet's Palestine as Metaphor" Shatz stated in March 2000, education minister of Israel recommended his some poems in designed school curriculum of Israel school system (55). It was later claimed by some opponents that it is not good to add his work in curriculum later president constituted through alliance so later it was stated that Israel is still not ready for Mahmoud Darwish work because of suspected vote for no confidence (56). The statement about Mahmoud Darwish poetry was because of the opponent concept; most of the people considered that his poetry is for Palestinian voice most importantly it is depicting exile and forced occupation of Palestine including infighting (57). In different occasions he raised different voices for rights of Arab people he claimed that Israel does not want to teach students about the love story of Arab people with their land (58). Whereas he states that this poetry will only create dreams and will enjoy the poetry moreover, it is not representing of enemy. Mahmoud Darwish his known because of his poetry and it is because of poetry and reading about poetry that's why it caused serious chaos in Israel parliament. Mahmoud Darwish argued that although I am not a lover of Israel but I do not hate Jews because I have no reason for hate. Moreover, after his death the debate about inclusion of Mahmoud Darwish poetry in Israel curriculum is again opened after his death but still it is not answered positively (59).

**Influence of Darwish is clear Through His Familiarity in Palestine and Israel:**

Mahmoud Darwish poetry is equally popular in Palestinian Arab and Jews equally and he wins the Israeli people heart in a very smart and effective way by using his smart words (60). He used his poetry to change the Israeli people mind toward the Arab people in this regard Bar'el commented that Mahmoud Darwish poetry strongly accustomed the Israeli experience. Mahmoud Darwish confessed that he like Yehuda Poetry and previous poetries make it recognize that Palestinian and Jews are having literary and cultural conflicts not only armed conflicts (61).

Mahmoud Darwish believed that Hebrew poetry is positively influencing the Jews about Palestine that Jews should have the Palestine as their mother land and country, whereas Palestinian national poetry is depicting that they will be excused if they would not seek freedom and fight for their land (62). Thus, Mahmoud Darwish and other Palestine poetry are forcing Arab people to treat the Israeli people nicely so the both can live in a peaceful environment. Moreover Mahmoud Darwish poetry is describing that if Palestinian people will not fight with Israeli people so latter both can respect and would be successful to create friendly environment (63). Till the end Mahmoud Darwish was hopeful about the Palestine and Israel alliance and he gave the same concept through his poetry that this alliance can be attained. Till the end of his life he was not disappointed about this alliance, so Mahmoud Darwish was not give up his hope and kept the patient and wait for his wish and for a deep upheaval in the mind of nation which is fighting with his people (64). Furthermore Arabs are ready to accept the Israel but in case of strong power which is created through weapons and peace. Most importantly Arabs are seems peaceful in their poetry which is depicting their state of mind. Arabs attitudes can be seen through their poetry mainly through Mahmoud Darwish, that's why it is leaving strong impact on Israeli people so they are frightened that it can show the Arab history to the Israeli people (65). Mahmoud Darwish used different ways and metaphors in his poetry to minimize the cultural and literary conflicts in Palestine and Israel he stated these differences as myth by addressing his Jewish lover in his poem (66).

**Conclusion:**

This paper is meant to delve into connotation of acquired knowledge about his work and his poetry for understanding the significance of national identity and patriotism in his poetry. The study is based on literature available on his work as appreciation or criticism for his individual work, Arabic poetry and literature on Palestine issue. For the beginners of Arabic poetry or the language readers, poems of Mahmoud Darwish are useful because the words of his poetry are not only beautiful but also easy to understand with profound meaning and suggestiveness, at the same time the poems possess a high artistry level. Further, paper demonstrated the importance and uniqueness of Darwish Literary contribution in Arabic Poetry and national identity.

At the same time, paper presents the meanings of Patriotism described by Darwish and the issue of Palestinian. There are verities of stages in Darwish' poetry, so the author of this paper would sail a study on comparing the poetry of same poets to develop deeper understanding of Arabic literature to develop patriotism among nationals (67). Darwish has illustrated his patriotism and how he presents his identity as a national of Palestine. This narration (Palestine as Metaphor) of in-depth interviews of Darwish provides an opportunity for the readers to move closer to the thoughts and essence of Darwish for his homeland. Moreover, in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, poet has told the story of his grandfather who took his family on a 'picnic' in 1949 to Lebanon and as they return, the reality of their situation was sunk in just a few months later that is actually the story of millions of Palestinians. Their land is confiscated and occupied and orchards plundered which led his grandfather to lease his own fields from the new owner just to live at their place. It sealed the fate of family and it led to no-man' land of un-citizenship for Israel Arab families' concept (68). Darwish

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