



***khwabistan* (noun, Urdu)**

'The country of dream'¹ or *khwabistan* is colour-blind. Its people can't identify the exact shade of red because when they think red, they are also thinking blue, green, black and pink. It is tone-deaf. Its people can't get their pitch right and prefer to mistake one note for another (chump, dump, trump). It's direction-phobic. When its people say north they mean south. It's a blur. When they say woman they also mean, in large measure, man and much else in-between. It refuses to suffer from the epidemic called the Other. Each of its selves is an-other. It is time-challenged. It gets its temporalities mixed up: guests from the future accidentally collide with ghosts from the past, and the present is forever unsure whether it is, was or will be. It does not suffer from the Kalki complex. There are no messiahs who will rescue *khwabistan*. It does not murder people for keeping beef in their refrigerators ("The mob dragged the entire family outside and Akhlaq and Danish were repeatedly kicked, hit with bricks and stabbed")². Instead, its people are on a permanent sensory diet: sniffing spices, the salted wind, the nut-flavoured earth; choosing from a range of chewellery, soft to hard to lumpy and a spectrum of lights, blasting, ethereal, penumbral, last light, no light. It has no entries and no exits (women come and go talking of Adrienne Rich or Edward Snowden). It has no use for authoritarian *bewabs* (Egyptian Arabic for 'gatekeepers') –

khwab _____ *bewab*
saval _____ *javab*³

"The only interesting answers are those that destroy the questions"⁴.

Khwabistan can be hyperbolic at times, it claims to know the colour of the wind, the temperature of moonlight. It is a fevered, leaderless, faithless, fluid place, brimming with love. It helps to be colour-blind, tone-deaf, direction-phobic, time-challenged, to *not* suffer from other-ache. Are you telling me *khwabistan* is a mistake, a delirium, a meltdown? *Au contraire*, it is right because it is wrong. It is unclear because it is clear about what it wants. It exists because it is a dream.

If art is the last country on earth that can choose to fly under no flag, let that country be *khwabistan*, one that nurtures shamans, lunatics, clairvoyants, but also everywo/man, the less-seeing, the more-seeing, the under-hearing, the over-hearing, the mute and the logorrhic.

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1. I have decided to translate *khwabistan* as 'the country of dream' rather than of 'dreams'. In its plural form, it lends itself very easily to the commercialized rhetoric of the neo-liberal economy. By using the singular form, I allude to 'dream' as a state, a condition, not as a piece of merchandise.

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Dadri_mob_lynching

3. In Urdu, '*saval*' and '*javab*' mean 'question' and 'answer'.

4. Borrowed from Susan Sontag

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