

# Examine Cultural Identity, Social Change, Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary India through Khair's *The Bus Stopped*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 03 Feb 2026; Received in revised form: 08 Mar 2026; Accepted: 12 Mar 2026; Available online: 15 Mar 2026</p> <p>©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords— Rural life, Culture identity, Social Change, Tradition, Modernity, Social discrimination</b></p>	<p><i>This paper deals with class racism and cultural identification in the modern society. We analyse the Khair's The Bus Stopped with the theme of cultural identity, social change, tradition and modernity in contemporary in India. Through these perspectives, we investigate how to change culture identity and social class discrimination and make a connection between humans and modernity in contemporary society. This research is contributing to the fields of a study of class, tradition and modernity in society, culture and social change. Moreover, the extreme conditions of poverty and deprivation lead foreigners to look with bewilderment, how society is moving on its journey in time. The Bus Stopped depicts the story of a bus journey on a particular route (from Gaya to Phansa) and a kaleidoscope of Indian life. In this work, there are certain characteristic features of narrative which highly raises the regional spirit of region, culture and class. The aspirations of middle-class families and the village-town division are creating, individual grief and damaging inter-community relations. By analysing how cultural identity and social class have engaged with these themes. We can insights remarkably into the challenges and opportunities facing contemporary Indian society. Indian's diversity, rich history and evolving existing cultural and heritage make it complex and unique. India's modernization as balancing tradition and modernity where cultural values are shaping and bringing up in the society.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The investigation of cultural identity and social change is a very important topic in contemporary Indian literature because it reflects the changing in the society. Tabish Khair's *The Bus*

*Stopped* is published in 2004, it is deeply focusing on transformation of class, tradition and modernity. The novel's theme is about a long bus journey across the countryside in a particular route (From Gaya to Phansa) and it also brings diversities of cast of

characters along with Khair delves how to develop traditional values, modernity and the struggle between rural and urban. This novel exploring the deep inspection of cultural identity variables in India.

In *The Bus Stopped*, Tabish Khair paints a vivid and insightful picture of India's changing social and cultural identity. Set on a simple bus journey, the novel serves as a metaphor for India's larger social journey through time. Khair introduces us to characters from different walks of life, each with unique experiences and backgrounds. These characters reflect the complex mix of caste, class, and tradition that make up Indian society, as well as the challenges of keeping up with the fast pace of modernization.

Khair's characters come from different parts of Indian society, and they show how traditional values often clash with modern life. Through colorful descriptions and symbolic storytelling, Khair brings to light the deep social divisions and cultural changes happening in today's India. The bus journey represents the bigger shifts that the country is experiencing, making it a fitting setting for the novel.

India is a one of the greatest countries in the world where we find world's greatest heritage, cultural and society. Its cultural identity is significant but now-a-days Indians follow western cultural so we are losing our culture. Our society is getting change in many ways. There are two aspects of the society one is that we look around ourselves and feel that we are Indians and another one is we are Indians but doing, eating, playing, listening, watching, behave and wearing clothes like Britishers, Europeans and foreigners Indian cultural identity is greatly sown by our ancestors which is imitable we need not to follow others. Many authors have described about the culture. Our culture is as mother's breast. Modern cultural is an indefinite multiplicity of people wants. Our cultural depends on moral fibre and it's our sheet anchor. Mahatam Gandhi said:

I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. (Gandhi 1)

In the midst of all this, India remains immovable and that is her glory. It is charge against India that her people are so civilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found on the anvil of experience. We dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the sheet anchor of our hope. (Gandhi 6)

We did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and loss our moral fibre. (Gandhi 6)

It behoves every lover of India to cling to the old indian civiliation even as a child clings to the mother's breast. (Gandhi 8)

This paper explores how Khair's story showcases the struggles of people from various social backgrounds and regions in India, as they try to find a balance between tradition and the fast-changing world. The novel also highlights the challenges of urbanization and globalization, making *The Bus Stopped* an important reflection on India's ongoing transformations.

Dr. Tabish Khair (Born 1966) is an Indian poet, novelist, critic, reviewer and journalist. He is an associate professor in the department of English at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. His birthplace is Gaya, Bihar and he mostly received his educated there. He has taken his Master of Arts degree from Magadha University, Gaya, Bihar. He completed his Ph.D. in English (1999) from Copenhagen University, Denmark. He has won the All India Poetry Prize For the poem *Birds of North Europe* in 1995. He is awarded The DSC Prize for South Indian Literature in 2016.

This award is for Tabish Kair's *Jihadi Jane*. He is shortlisted for many awards Sahitya Akademi Award, Encore Award and Man Asian Prize. He is acclaimed as an international poet and novelist for his poetry and novels and was made honorary fellow of creative writing of the Baptist University of Hong Kong in 2004. He got Fellowship at New Delhi University and a by-fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge University, United Kingdom. He is a well-known contributor to well-known international and national research journals, social media, newspapers and magazines. His most important poetry collections are *My World (1991)*, *A Reporter's Diary (1993)*, *The Book of Heroes : A collection of light Verse and Much Worse (1995)*, *Where Parallel Lines Meet (2000)* and *Man of Glass: Poems (2010)*. His other marvellous works are *Babu Fictions (2001)*, *The Bus Stopped (2004)*, *Other Routes (2006)*, *Filming: A Love Story (2007)*, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness (2009)*, *The Thing About Thugs (2010)*, *Reading Literature Today (2011, Co-authored with Sebastien Doubinsky)*, *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position (2012)*, *The New Xenophobia (2016)*, *Jihadi Jane (2016)*, *Just Another Jihadi Jane (2016)*, *Night of Happiness (2018)* and *The body by the Shore (2022)*.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of how Indian literature deals with cultural identity, social class, and the impact of modernization is a growing area of interest. Many scholars have looked at how Indian novels represent the realities of caste, class, and gender in a post-colonial world. For instance, Mukul Kesavan (2004) discusses how modern Indian novels often show fractured cultural identities, as people struggle with the pressures of globalization. Similarly, Arvind Rajagopal (2010) has written about how globalization has widened the gap between traditional values and modern lifestyles in Indian society.

Tabish Khair's novels, including *The Bus Stopped*, have been recognized for their focus on how social hierarchies interact with modernization in India. Priya Joshi (2011) argues that Khair's fiction often touches on themes of migration, social mobility, and the diverse experiences of Indians. According to her, Khair's work offers a thoughtful critique of India's progress, while also highlighting the unresolved tensions from its colonial past.

In the novel of Tabish Khair's *The Bus Stopped* is centralised through class and cultural divisions that social economical different is the parameter of discrimination among the class and caste in the contemporary India. In the novel a lot of bus passengers who are travelling, they are from different religion, class and caste. This travelling is the symbol of Indian class and the social construction based on caste. Through the conversation and the life experience of the travellers Khair critics the root of class and caste division but it is continuing in modern India.

Other studies focus on how Khair uses everyday settings, like a bus ride, to reflect the larger struggles in India. Arjun Appadurai (2006) highlights the use of symbols in modern literature, pointing out how objects like the bus in Khair's novel stand for broader social changes. Nivedita Menon (2017) looks at how women in Indian fiction often face the challenge of balancing traditional roles with modern life, a theme that is clearly seen in Khair's female characters.

This review will look at how *The Bus Stopped* connects to these studies on class, caste, and modernity, placing Khair's work within the larger conversation about socio-cultural change in India.

### Problem Statement

India is undergoing rapid modernization, with cities growing quickly and the country becoming more globalized. These changes are having a huge impact on the country's traditional social structures, including class and caste. Old ways of living are coming into conflict with new expectations, creating tension within Indian society. In this context, figuring out one's cultural identity is becoming increasingly important.

*The Bus Stopped* brings these challenges to life through a range of characters and events that reflect the complex social dynamics of a changing India. The novel highlights the divisions between caste and class, showing how difficult it is to reconcile these age-old social identities with the pressures of modernity.

In Indian culture has one of the biggest problems which is class division. There are many classes in our society like gender, caste, religion, estate, language, slavery etc. But there are two major problems that one is Upper Class and another is

Backward Class, and this discrimination is fatal for our society, culture and morality. Because from the past upper caste robbed the Back caste in any religion. Indian traditions are culture and modernity dependent on environment and circumstances. In contemporary India, people are not rituals, devotee and followers the seeds of our forefathers.

This paper addresses the question of how Khair's novel portrays these social tensions and what this reveals about contemporary Indian society. Specifically, it examines the ways in which *The Bus Stopped* explores the negotiation of cultural identity, the persistence of social hierarchies, and the ongoing clash between tradition and modernity.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a literary analysis approach, focusing on a close reading of *The Bus Stopped* by Tabish Khair. The study examines the text for themes of class, caste, tradition, and modernity.

The analysis is based on three key theoretical frameworks:

1. Post-colonialism – This framework helps in understanding how colonial hierarchies continue to affect modern India and how these influences are portrayed in Khair's novel.
2. Eco-criticism – This approach will be used to analyze how Khair portrays the divide between rural and urban spaces, and how landscapes and settings reflect larger social and cultural concerns.
3. Feminist Theory – This framework will guide the examination of how women in the novel deal with their roles within traditional structures while also confronting the challenges posed by modern life.

Additionally, the study draws on secondary sources such as scholarly articles and critiques of Khair's work. These sources will supplement the primary analysis and provide broader context for understanding the cultural and symbolic representations in the novel. The bus journey, central to the story, serves as a key symbol for exploring social divisions and transformations in India.

### IV. DISCUSSION

In *The Bus Stopped*, Khair provides a layered commentary on India's changing social landscape. The discussion starts by looking at the central theme of social stratification, particularly the tensions between caste and class. Khair uses characters like the bus driver, wealthy passengers, and rural villagers to show how traditional social hierarchies remain strong, even in the face of modernization.

Religion and cultural traditions also play a crucial role in the novel. Khair's characters take part in religious rituals and festivals, which tie them to their roots. However, they also have to navigate the pressures of modern life, particularly urbanization and globalization. The novel illustrates how these traditional practices coexist uneasily with modern values, creating tension and conflict.

Gender dynamics are another significant focus in the novel. Khair portrays how women face the double challenge of living up to traditional gender roles while exploring the opportunities offered by modern life. Female characters in *The Bus Stopped* embody the struggle to balance these two worlds, especially rural women who are caught between family expectations and the desire for personal freedom.

Such as Mangal Singh is a rude and drunken person and his appearance is uncomfortable but he is gentle, kind hearted and lovely person from his inner-side. A village woman who has an infant child, the child is dead. The lady left the bus without reaching her destination. The bus conductor, Shankar does not want to return her rest amount that time driver, Mangal Singh return her money from his own pocket. This act reflects his humanity. He is also a big fan the Bollywood actresses that's why he hangs a lot of pictures of them in his cabin. Khair has shown in these lines.

"But this Driver Mongal Singh, he is different. Rapacious, a womanizer, a drunkard. He has a poster of an actress hanging behind his driver's seat; not a poster of Madhubala or Nargis or Hema Malini or even Rekha but of some half-naked two-chit starlet of today" (Khair 149).

Lastly, the bus itself stands as a symbol of social mobility. The bus is a shared space where characters from different backgrounds come together. However, even within this confined setting, social divisions remain clear, with wealthier passengers sitting separately from those of lower status. This reflects the broader limitations of social mobility in Indian society, where opportunities for change exist, but are constrained by deep-rooted hierarchies.

## V. FINDINGS

Through an in-depth analysis of *The Bus Stopped*, several important findings come to light:

1. Class and caste divisions remain entrenched in Indian society, even as the country modernizes. Khair shows that while characters may confront new realities, social barriers are not easily broken down.
2. Cultural identity is fluid and constantly evolving. Khair illustrates this through his portrayal of religious practices, festivals, and language, highlighting the complexity of cultural identity in a diverse and pluralistic society like India.
3. Women face a dual burden. Female characters in the novel struggle to navigate between traditional expectations and the freedoms promised by modern life. This highlights the tension between gender roles in contemporary Indian society.
4. The bus as a symbol of social mobility reflects both hope and limitation. While it brings characters from different social classes together, the physical separation within the bus mirrors the larger social divisions that persist in India.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Tabish Khair's *The Bus Stopped* offers a profound and nuanced exploration of the social dynamics shaping modern India. Through the lens of a simple bus journey, the novel delves into the ongoing struggle between tradition and modernity, caste and class, and rural and urban identities.

Khair's portrayal of cultural diversity, social hierarchies and the particular challenges faced by women presents a valuable commentary on the

evolving nature of Indian society. The bus, as a symbol of mobility and change, encapsulates both the promise of progress and the persistence of inequality.

The novel, *The Bus Stopped* explores a rich and vast investigation cultural identity and social change in contemporary India. Along with its characters of the novel delves into the complexities class, tradition and modernity, highlighting the contradiction of today's Indian society.

In conclusion, *The Bus Stopped* serves as a powerful metaphor for the broader journey of modern India, reflecting the nation's efforts to balance its rich traditions with the demands of a rapidly changing world. Khair's novel provides insightful commentary on the complexities of cultural identity and social transformation, offering readers a window into the ongoing changes that continue to shape India today.

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