

*Tabish Khair***O, Bard of my Land**

What happens when a necklace of songs snaps
And its beads pour like raindrops on the earth
And you cry out baffled
At the mess this has made of your music?

The hungry earth, starved of love, ravaged by human noise,
Drinks up each sound-bead, and you are left
With loud silence.

A deathly touch is on the soil, as farmers writhe
Having mortgaged their lands to banks
And consumed the last down payment of pesticide.

There are no flowers left to pluck
Though another poet, one of your butchered brothers,
Once prayed for the thorns to be spared
For they had played in the same dust with petals.

It is a sentiment you would have agreed with,
For in the largeness of your rich heart
You always understood the poorest,

The loneliest and the lost.

Would you have understood Trump or Modi?

It is a question that, like so many others,

I do not ask,

As I watch the beads of your song

Roll and disappear like raindrops in the sand of dead habits.

I will not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation of thy worship,

O Bard of my Land, no,

I will cup my hands into the blowing sand, and sip, and sip, and sip.

Born in 1966 and educated in Gaya, a small town in Bihar, India, **Tabish Khair** is the author of critically-acclaimed books. Winner of the All India Poetry Prize, his novels have been shortlisted for more than a dozen major prizes, including the Man Asian, the DSC Prize, the Sahitya Academy Award, and the Encore. He recently published a poetry pamphlet, *Quarantined Sonnets* (Kitaab, Singapore), on the pandemic, with profits being donated to a migrant worker charity.