

Book Review on Khurshid Alam's *Investigative Poetry & Other Poems*

Khurshid Alam, sees his own simplicity of complexity, but also expells with poetic reminiscences, as a compound of simple directions. Towards human, first and foremost. In order to understand exactly what makes him human.

Sabahudin Hadžialić, Editor in Chief, DIOGEN pro culture magazine

Kanchan Bhattacharya picks three poems from Khurshid Alam's debut poetry anthology titled *Investigative Poetry & Other Poems* and makes an exploration.

Sacrilege: The Babri Mosque

The Babri Masjid events have induced anguish in all intellectual and right thinking Indians – it was an event that should not have happened. It is largely viewed as a political non-entity's quest for power, and a compounding of the national sense of shame and hopeless anger at the political leadership's ability to make capital out of non-issues.

Set against this background, Khurshid Alam analyses the event in a very detached manner – as an observer,

distancing himself from rancor and ill feelings. He has added an explanatory note:

This poem expresses anguish on the demolition of the Babri Mosque, Ayodhya (UP) on December 6, 1992. The poem depicts also the condition of a people who are pushed to a corner of uncertainty and fear.

India has seen political and religious upheavals and pogroms throughout its history. Never united as a nation in the past, the Hindu collective memory has seen Muslim invasions, demolitions of its own icons like Somnath and other places of worship – all within the conqueror's sense of being right! And yes, the invader's successors have become Indians.

Khurshid brings out a simple agony felt by those Indians whom the majority feels are aliens through no fault of their own. A misdeed of the past cannot be representative of the present inequalities. This is the essence of his poem, xenophobia in people...

*The hatred bared one people to come near
To save the edifice or beat the heart
They must scream in some corner in the dark
They must not memorize the Day
And if they do they risk their patriotism
They should be kept away at a distance
They are strangers, they are from other nation.*

In India, we of the majority, are wary of Abrahamic religions, especially those sects that owe spiritual allegiance beyond the borders. Yet to say that they are aliens, not Indians is a very harsh judgment, as they have contributed to the country's progress in the times past.

The basic question is very relevant...

A nation within a nation, a dual nation

Can't work for a great nation

Who are patriotic? Who are nationalists?

Those who create nations of a nation

Those who create alienation

Among the people of their own nation?

Khurshid feels for the country as much the others do. His poem is a statement – awake, India, rid of biases.

I wish he had spoken more of the anguish in his poem, a little more of the fear.

His is a call to rational nationalism...I do not seek the meaning of "investigative" poetry – the poem narrates a fact in a mildly but admirably restrained interpretative manner. The questions are raised in narrative, in a prose verse format. The flow is there, and a stark simple way of speaking the truth.

Demolition: The Bamiyam Buddha

Khurshid Alam has made an interesting protest against the Aniconic Wahabi method – the meaningless and

wanton destruction of the priceless treasures of the Bamiyan Buddha, in his poem, *Demolition: The Bamiyan Buddha*. In a fanatic attack at the turn of the millennium, Taliban troops blasted the Bamiyan Buddha caves that had sheltered intellectual coexistence for centuries along the Silk Route:

*The first cultural melting pot on earth
That united the West with the East
And stood a resort for all -
Tourists, schools and connoisseurs of arts*

Islamic fanaticism is twofold — a perception of persecution and therefore revenge, and the propagation of Islam at any cost, even elimination of the faithful, despite the teachings of the benign kind: the religions that preceded the arrival of the Prophet.

*Oh heaven! Cease to exist there.
And fall on them...the abbot of unreason!
But there is a silver line that shines
From under the dust clouds. He'll reincarnate
And the hands will rise for blessing again
For he who grew wide ears to lend ear
To people's misery, and brooded on to ease
People from grief. He had the heart
That did no harm to any and professed
No Godism and no atheism.*

Much beyond the narrow thoughts of the Taliban that seeks to propagate Islam through the gun as its Prophet, Khurshid asks them to note that the resurrection of the becalming Messiah, Buddha will happen eventually, a hope and a prayer for the Sakya Muni to return...

He'll live through the Turkish and Afghan folktales

*Forever in the form of male Salsal or female
Shamama characters*

*People will remember him as Sakyamuni, or
Dipankara munis.*

Khurshid adds in his epilog note, "the abbot of unreason" expresses the strongest opposition to those who claim to guard one's own culture but destroy others for mean logics.

This poem is again an appeal to rational thought!

House Arrest: The Mumbai Attack

It was an event that shook India in November 2008. The killers, except one, were killed. There was an immense "collateral damage" and a few martyrs too laid down their lives. The invasion of a goofed up Pakistan, and an incredibly inadequate juggernaut called the security forces became highlighted.

Khurshid speaks of this event exactly as the Indian felt.. helpless but not without hope.

A sea of emotion, commotion, and anguish

The people have suffered a lot

*They can't forget the burns they've got at their back
For what fault they are to buy the pains.*

*Fanaticism has a color, the color of lead...
Each bullet shouted the name of God
Before tearing the dreams of the victims
They killed in the name of religion!*

*And it seeks its prey, the perceived persecutors...
The terrorists looked for British and American
tourists.
But can you see? They took people of all religions
Hostage. There were Khans, Singhs, and Williams*

The death toll was immense, three days of carnage in the name of religion... gently, he reminds

*'What religion do you follow, can you tell?
'What faith do you have, can you spell?
'Which religion can be as senseless?
'To preach killing of all innocent people.'*

*If each religion wages war against others
What a world of hatred we can have
Each person with a sword in a hand
And the Holy Book in another to say*

This can be the only book that you can have

There are many who have written of this. A general peace loving Indian would seek this poem too, as a way to wade out of the tragic events of November 2008.

In these three poems, we see a poet who seeks reason to end the irrationality of human hatred. This poem is a big one by way of understated agony. The more we have poems of this genre, the better.

Title: Investigative Poetry & Other Poems

Author: Khurshid Alam

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About the Author



Khurshid Alam, (MA in English literature), is a professional writer, editor, publisher, and technocrat. He has been working as technical author for over 13 years and currently he is working as a team lead in technical documentation department with an IT company based in Pune, Maharashtra (India).

Khurshid writes poems, stories, and on literature and culture. More than 100 poems, several stories and critical essays have been published in various journals and anthologies in India and abroad. He has three books including *Learn Markdown* (ISBN-13: 978-8193554319) and *Investigative Poetry & Other Poems* (ISBN-13: 978-1499755718) to his credit until now.

About the Reviewer

Kanchan Bhattacharya, a prolific poet, served in the Army for thirty years before becoming a teacher of electronics, and settled in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India. An incurable romantic, he writes poems, sonnets and haiku, almost all day. He dabbles in solar energy and engineering, and is fond of teaching children. With two books of poetry - *Arrival* and *Opus* (2013), a book of cartoons (1990), his poetry has been anthologized in India and abroad.

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