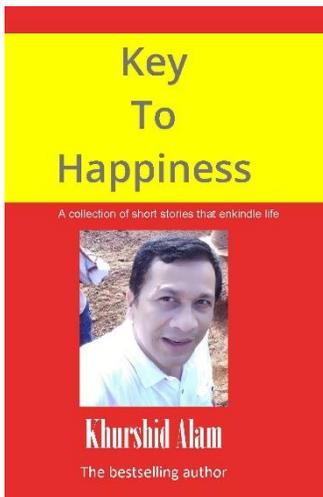


Book Review on Khurshid Alam's *Key to Happiness* by Mehak Burza

The Key to Happiness written by Khurshid Alam incorporates a collection of eight diverse short tales intricately linked together. Every short story begins with a one liner, which sort of operates both as a preface as well as the central theme of that story. The narrative of the book is carefully interwoven in a blend of first person and third person point of views. While the former enables the readers a sneak peak into the psyche of the narrator, the latter works as the omnipresent narrator. Sprinkled with a rich vocabulary, the plots of the stories are simple and underline everyday issues that may seem trivial to pay attention.



The metaphor of journey is what acts as the nexus of all the stories. Whether it is a character's simple journey to a wedding, the gate crashing in another, the home coming journey of a brother, or the monotonous train journeys, the author narrates the stories in a unique way, with a subtle

surprise in each. The triviality of the issues taken up, make the story relatable which in turn aid in fostering empathy. In the story regarding justice, the author raises a pertinent point about a lawyer's excruciating journey for his own justice. In "Pied Piper Revisits" the author yet again highlights important social issues and ends the story with a solution that can be interpreted as being symbolic of a metaphorical journey towards salvation. The careful selection of the last story by the author is remarkable and deserves special mention. It is the longest piece in the book, having six divisions. The focus on inner happiness and the subsequent transformation it can bring to a person and his family, this story not only gives the book its titular justification, but also is helpful during these difficult, trying and uncertain times of the pandemic.

Adding to the narrative technique is the start of the stories in *media res*. This technique immediately bonds with the readers and thus succeeds in gripping the attention. The author has transcended the Indian audience by placing footnotes for the colloquial words and also for the non-English words. For the purpose of easy identification, these words are italicized and well explained, which make these stories compliant for an international audience too. Considering the thematic quotient, the book can be categorized in multifold categories; a tranquil bedtime read, a self-help book of hope and happiness as well as an adult fiction. With a unique blend of imagination and reality, the magical realism of these stories indubitably captures the reader's thoughts.

About the reviewer



Mehak Burza

Mehak Burza is a Doctoral Research Scholar in the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia (New Delhi, India) and an Assistant Professor of English, University of Delhi. Her thesis title is *Literary Representations of The Holocaust; An Assessment*. Her primary interests include Holocaust/Genocide Studies, Jewish Studies, Gender, Identity, Trauma Studies and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). She presented papers at national and international conferences. Her translations have been published in *Purple Ink*, the online journal of Brown University, Los Angeles. On the creative front, her short story and several poems have been published.

About the author



Khurshid Alam

Khurshid Alam is a professional writer, editor, publisher, and technocrat. He has been working as a senior technical author for over 15 years. Currently, he works as a team lead in technical documentation department with an IT company based in Pune, Maharashtra (India).

Besides, he has got more than 100 poems, several stories and critical essays published in various journals and magazines in India and abroad. He has four books including Master RoboHelp in 1 Day, Learn Markdown and Investigative Poetry & Other Poems to his credit until now. His books Master RoboHelp in 1 Day and Learn Markdown are the best sellers on Amazon while Learn Markdown has been rated among 7 Best Markdown Language eBooks of All Time in the world by Bookauthority.

He runs a number of journals and publications including Contemporary Literary Review India, Leaf Press and Authors & Books.



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