

**Josh Malihabadi's Nazm: Aye Malihabad Ke Rangeen Gulistan Alvida
Memory, Watan, and Gham of Separation**

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Abstract: This article offers a close reading of Josh Malihabadi's Nazm, *Ai Malihabad Ke Rangeen Gulistan Alvida*, as a richly layered meditation on Watan, memory, and separation. Although Josh is widely remembered as *Shair-e-Inquilab*, the poem reveals another, more intimate dimension of his art: tenderness towards place, emotional vulnerability, and a profound attachment to the homeland as lived landscape. The article argues that the Nazm should be read not merely as a personal farewell to Malihabad on the occasion of the poet's departure for the Dakkan, but as a cultural text in which private grief acquires broader historical and collective resonance. Through recurrent invocations of Alvida, the poem structures leave-taking as a ritual of gradual detachment rather than a single moment of departure. Its imagery—Zinda Laash, Jaras, Khamoshi, Khule Maidan, Thandi Hawa, and Aam Ke Bagh—transforms the remembered homeland into a sensuous archive of sound, climate, and social feeling. The article further shows how Josh links nostalgia with ethical responsibility, especially in the poet's anxious questioning over who will tend, awaken, and cherish the garden after his departure. In this way, belonging is represented not simply as possession, but as custodianship. The closing plea to be buried in the soil of Watan intensifies the poem's emotional and philosophical stakes by binding body, earth, and identity into a single imaginative structure. Read alongside the later trajectories of Josh's life, the Nazm acquires added poignancy as an early articulation of exile's inner wound. Ultimately, the poem endures because it turns individual sorrow into a universal language of remembrance, rendering homeland as the formative ground of memory, sensibility, and selfhood.

Keywords: Rangeen; Gulistan; Alvida; Watan; exile; nostalgia; Furqat; Urdu Nazm; memory; belonging; landscape; cultural memory.

Introduction: Josh Malihabadi and the Idea of Watan

Shabbir Hasan Khan “Josh Malihabadi,” widely celebrated as *Shair’e-Inquilab*, composed *Ai Malihabad Ke Rangeen Gulistan Alvida* as a deeply affective farewell to his native town, Malihabad, at the time of his departure for the Dakkan. The Nazm is not merely a personal leave-taking; it is also a profound meditation on Watan, belonging, exile, and the painful dignity of separation. Retaining key Urdu terms while employing accessible English, this article reads the poem as a cultural text that preserves landscape, sound, and social memory. It argues that Josh transforms an individual journey into a wider experience of Yaad, attachment, and Furqat, thereby giving the poem both personal intensity and collective resonance.

In Urdu literary culture, Josh Malihabadi is frequently invoked as a poet of energy, defiance, and public utterance, hence the enduring epithet *Shair’e-Inquilab*. Yet *Ai Malihabad Ke Rangeen Gulistan Alvida* reveals a markedly different dimension of his poetic temperament: tenderness, vulnerability, and an almost corporeal attachment to place. In this Nazm, Malihabad is not represented simply as a geographical location; it appears instead as a living Gulistan—a garden of memory, beauty, and identity. An additional biographical irony deepens the poem’s emotional force. Josh left for the Dakkan, later returned, and in due course migrated to Pakistan, a decision he is often said to have regretted throughout the remainder of his life. Whether one treats this as biographical fact or as retrospective emotional context, the Nazm acquires added poignancy: its early farewell comes to seem like a prefiguration of later and more irrevocable separations.

2. The Nazm as a Ritual of Farewell:

From its opening lines, the poem assumes the structure of a repeated act of leave-taking:

Ai malihabad ke rangeen gulistan alvida

Alvida ai sarzamin-e-subh-e-khandan alvida

The repetition of *Alvida* functions both as refrain and as ritual utterance. It is not spoken once, because departure from a beloved place cannot be completed in a single moment. Rather, it unfolds as a gradual and painful detachment of the self from the world that has formed it. The poem’s structure therefore enacts the emotional difficulty it describes.

Josh addresses Malihabad through a succession of richly layered epithets: *Sarzamin’e Subh’e-khandan* (the land of smiling mornings), *Kishvar’e-Sher-o-Shabistan* (a realm of poetry and nocturnal gatherings), and *Jalvagah’e-Husn’e-Jaanan* (a place where beloved beauty manifests itself). These are not ornamental descriptions. They are terms of intimacy, uttered only for a place internalised within consciousness and affect.

3. Departure as Death-in-Life: The Image of the Zinda Laash

One of the poem's most arresting metaphors appears in the early lines:

*Tere ghar se ek zinda laash uth jaane ko hai
Aa gale mil lein ki aawaz-e-jaras aane ko hai*

The description of the departing self as a Zinda laash-a living corpse-is not merely hyperbolic. It articulates the emotional logic of exile: to leave one's Watan is to endure a form of inner death. Although the body continues its journey, something essential remains behind. The sound of the Jaras, the caravan bell, signals movement that cannot be delayed. Time and travel compel departure even where the heart resists it.

This trope belongs to a recognisable register within Urdu poetics, where separation often produces a division between bodily survival and spiritual desolation. Josh deploys that inherited idiom with particular force by anchoring it not in romantic separation from a beloved person, but in separation from homeland.

4. Landscape as Memory: Silence, Wind, and Open Space

The poem's emotional architecture depends significantly on sensory memory. Josh recalls the Nematen bestowed by Malihabad in terms that are deceptively simple:

Ye khamoshi ye khule maidan ye thandi hawa

Silence, open fields, cool air, and luminous atmosphere are invoked not as incidental details but as constitutive elements of belonging. The realism of these images is important. Love of Watan here is not confined to social relations or inherited lineage; it extends to climate, horizon, and ambience. In this respect, the poem records place through the senses.

Josh then imagines a future moment in which the call of the Koyal in the valleys of the Dakkan will awaken remembrance of Malihabad. A sound heard in one landscape becomes the trigger for the return of another. The poem thus offers a subtle psychology of memory: exile does not erase the homeland; rather, it renders it newly vulnerable to sudden reactivation through sensory association.

5. The Anxiety of Care: Who Will Tend the Garden?

A particularly powerful movement in the Nazm is built through a sequence of anxious questions:

*Kal se kaun is bagh ko rangeen banane aayega
Kaun phoolon ki hanshi par muskurane aayega*

These lines mark an important shift. The poet is not grieving only for himself; he is also grieving for the place he must leave behind. The repeated Kaun gives formal shape to an anxiety of care: who will love this landscape with equal attentiveness, and who will respond to its vitality with equal devotion? The garden is not merely admired; it must be tended, awakened, and cherished.

Within this lyric movement lies an ethical insight. Attachment to place is not only emotional possession; it is also responsibility. The one who loves a place becomes, in some measure, its custodian. Josh's lament therefore joins nostalgia with stewardship.

6. Mango Orchards, Rain, and the Cultural Identity of Malihabad

No reading of Malihabad can ignore its association with mango orchards, and Josh turns that association into a dense site of cultural memory:

*Aam ke baghon mein jab barsat hogi purkharosh
Meri furqat mein lahu roegi chashm-e-mai-farosh*

The Aam Ke Bagh are not scenic embellishments; they are emblems of local identity. Rain, orchard, fragrance, and seasonality collectively form a lived cultural world. Against that continuity, the poet's absence appears as rupture. Nature will endure, but it will do so under the sign of loss.

The image of the Mai-Farosh weeping blood extends this emotional intensification into a recognisably Urdu mode. Even a figure conventionally associated with pleasure, conviviality, or intoxication is absorbed into grief. The sorrow of separation thus exceeds the private self and spreads across the social and symbolic world of the poem.

7. Patriotism Without Slogan: The Final Plea for Burial in the Soil of Watan

In its closing movement, the Nazm turns from lyrical recollection towards solemn supplication:

*Hashr tak rahne na dena tum dakkan ki khaak mein
Dafn karna apne shair ko watan ki khaak mein*

These lines are not couched in overtly political rhetoric, yet they register a deeply felt patriotism. The poet asks that even after death he should not remain in Dakkan soil; he wishes to be buried instead in the soil of Watan. Here, body, land, and belonging become inseparable. In South Asian cultural imagination, burial in one's own earth signifies more than geographical return: it embodies spiritual completion and affective homecoming.

Read in the shadow of Josh's later life, these lines become especially poignant. The desire expressed in the poem gestures towards a mode of belonging that history would complicate, if not deny. The pathos of the ending lies partly in that tension between poetic desire and historical fate.

8. Voice, Recitation, and Popular Reception

The Nazm also invites consideration as an oral text. Its affective power is intensified in recitation, especially in Tarannum, where repetition, cadence, and tonal inflection shape reception as much as semantic meaning. This is significant for literary analysis, because Urdu poetry often circulates simultaneously as text, recited performance, and recorded sound.

The poem's continued appeal in audio rendition demonstrates that its afterlife exceeds the printed page. Such circulation allows the Nazm to reach audiences who may not read Urdu script fluently but nonetheless encounter and interpret it through rhythm, voice, and affect. Its reception further suggests that the poem has become part of a shared emotional archive: readers and listeners respond to it not only as admirers of Josh, but also as migrants, lovers of Urdu Adab, and participants in wider cultures of remembrance. In this sense, the Nazm becomes a collective site for Yaad'e-Watan.

9. Conclusion

Ai Malihabad Ke Rangeen Gulistan Alvida endures as a major Nazm of farewell because it performs several literary and emotional functions simultaneously. First, it preserves Malihabad as a sensuous and living landscape-Gulistan, Sarzamin, Aam Ke Bagh, Thandi Hawa. Second, it imagines migration not as mere travel but as emotional rupture, captured with devastating economy in images such as the Zinda Laash and the experience of Furqat. Third, it elevates personal grief into an ethical and spiritual claim about belonging, most powerfully articulated in the plea for burial in the soil of Watan. At its deepest level, the Nazm suggests that Watan is not simply the place of one's birth. It is the place in which one's senses, memories, idiom, and inner life are formed. To say Alvida to such a place is therefore to part from a portion of the self. The lasting power of Josh's poem lies in the fact that it renders this truth with both intimate immediacy and universal force.

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