



Agha Shahid Ali as a Poet of Agony

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ABSTRACT

Agha Shahid Ali, born in New Delhi on February 4, 1949 to mother sufia Noumani and father Agha Ashraf Ali. He was brought up in a well-educated family, where everyone loved poetry and Persian literature, Urdu and English. He spent his childhood days in Kashmir. Agha Shahid Ali came in contact with different cultures and societies while moving from one place to another. These cultures influenced his personality. He had Muslim, Hindu, and Kashmiri culture and was also exposed to Indian culture and tradition. He was also well familiar with the western culture, as he spent a few years there with his family in his childhood. While living in diaspora he wrote about his homeland, his people and the prevailing situation. He presents Kashmir in his poetry a devastated land. It was once said about Kashmir that if there is Paradise on earth it's this, it's this, it's this.

Key words: Agha Shahid Ali, Kashmir, Nostalgia

Introduction

His poetry is full of imagery where a mental picture gets created in the minds of readers. While living in diaspora he wrote about his homeland, his people and the prevailing situation. He presents Kashmir in his poetry a devastated land. It was once said about Kashmir that if there is Paradise on earth it's this, it's this, it's this.

Ali was a Kashmiri American poet. He wrote in free verse. His poetry replicates his Hindu, Muslim, and Western Legacy. In contemporary poets, critic King Bruce commented that Ali's poetry whirls around uncertainty and "obsessions with.....memory, death, history, family, ancestors, nostalgia for a past he never knew, dreams, hindu ceremonies, friendship and self-conscious about being a poet. Iffat Maqbool gave her statement regarding the death of a young Kashmiri poet writing in English as:

"The passing away of Agha Shahid Ali in 2001 was a collective loss to Kashmir- the most eloquent Kashmiri-English poet, a writer of unmatched elegance and virtuosity, a chronicler of pain- his poetry is the very stuff of beauty, loss and redemption". (Maqbool Iffat 1-3)

One of his famous poems is 'The Country without Post office' in which he clearly writes about the disturbing situation of Kashmir where the peaceful atmosphere is disturbed due to the turmoil. People came to know about devastating situation in his homeland through his poetry Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is grim and sober, as we can see in it the dark side of Kashmir and its miseries. Instead of presenting Kashmir as a beautiful land of flowers and beauty, Ali presented it a place of turmoil and destruction. As per Iffat Maqbool:

"The poet tells the story of his tormented land in a way that only a poet can- through a breathtaking use of language. Kashmir becomes the imaginary homeland recreated by the poet-in- exile." (Maqbool Iffat 1-3)

The Half-Inch Himalayas, published in the year 1987 is early collection of Ali that brings out the diasporic experience of poet in America. He recalls his home in Kashmir. 'Postcard from Kashmir' talks of the exile, memory, longing, loss of retention, split self. It is an experience of memorizing the place or homeland with the help pictures, persons, their memories, deeds and relics. It is an exertion to connect the roots of origin. It crafts imaginary homeland mini universe of Kashmir. This poetry collection *The Country without Post office* is one of the best and widely acclaimed collections of Agha Shahid Ali. It imprints those poems that were written in the shadow of the enduring clash and eventually that reflected the ambition and the cultural feelings of Kashmir. Carol Muske writes:

"Ali's voice possesses this contemporary agelessness. Ali grew up in Kashmir, a citizen of that small mountainous country torn apart by violence, its colonial past and present status as disputed territory between Pakistan and India. In this book of poems, *The Country Without a Post Office*, he mourned the devastation visited on his childhood home — once a paradise, offering the legendary jewel of Dal Lake near the ascent into the Himalayas, just a few hundred miles from china". (Carol Muske, 23)

The beauty of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is that we perceive the situation of Kashmir with its cold weather and melancholy of its people around. Sometimes he uses the word that paints the picture of the land with its beautiful scenery. Claire Chamber says:

"In 'I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight', Rizwan is depicted as a shadow, roaming the streets of Srinagar, searching for his body. The boy's troubled ghost witnesses further atrocities, such as the torturing of a prisoner by dripping molten tyre on his back. Intimations are given that Rizwan is the poet's double; his other, who stayed in Kashmir and was killed. Shadows also intimate menace and threat, as with the shadowy figures of the Indian security forces, but also the shadows of boys 'disappeared' from their homes, their bodies never found". (Chambers 2012)

The Floating Post Office is also one of the known poems of Agha Shahid Ali. In this poem, a floating houseboat which is a floating post office carries the disdainful and pathetic message in Kashmir. By using the word 'dead' Ali presents the terrible violence of the Kashmir. He says that the floating post office is the messenger of death. He presents how the roads and streets are blood stained with the near and dear ones of the valley. In this poem the poet tells us about the tragedy which he himself and the people are suffering. The poet has used the image of blood stained city, which means Kashmir is portrayed as city where death and destruction is everywhere. By using the word 'city', he means Srinagar but it represents the whole Kashmir in its miniature scale.

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