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## **IDENTITY QUEST IN AGHA SHAHID ALI'S OEUVRE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Agha Shahid Ali, the Kashmiri American poet, in spite of being moved to USA raises above all geographical, national, and social limits by dint of his sheer idyllic brilliance. He expresses his diasporic experience of misfortune and outcast in his poetry and mingles the local as well as global. However scholars like Bhabha and Rushdie commend their diasporic status, Ali the prominent Indian poet tries to unravel the brutality confronted by his native people. In this paper my tendency is to bring to surface how Agha Shahid Ali imagines home, affirms his identity which is transnational, liquid and make a legitimate undertaking to change 'rough cartographies' to 'The Ghat Of The Only World'.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Shahid, Diaspora, Quest, unravel, Oeuvre.*

### **DISCUSSION**

The word 'Diaspora' finds its derivation from the Greek, meaning 'to scatter'. It is the dislodging of an individual or a community from their native country. In the circle of writing diasporic writers are the individuals who endeavor to struggle synchronize and come to terms from the trauma because of the constrained relocation and the state of 'postcolonial' migrancy. Their fair undertaking is to discover the connection and difference between their country and the domain which they dispersed into. The feeling of misfortune, the memory of 'home' and the agony of being estranged to another land and culture haunt them continuously. Thus because of the dread of losing the socio-cultural identity in their recently moved society they make cognizant endeavor to declare their ethnic identity and simultaneously endeavor to acclimatize

with the new culture of another domain. In this paper my concern is to introduce how Agha Shahid Ali, the Kashmir born poet through his poetry imagines home and declares identity which is trans-national, liquid and only his own. Agha Shahid Ali was born in Kashmir in 1949 in a multilingual family from Agha Ashraf Ali and Sofia Ashraf. After finishing his schooling from Kashmir he did his post-graduation from Delhi and after that went to the United States of America to seek Ph. D in English. Despite being born in a linguistically and culturally vibrant family, Ali figured out how to acknowledge poetry and writing in Urdu, Persian and English. So regular and immense was the effect of these dialects upon him that he considered Urdu his 'native language' and English his 'first language. But, curiously as he began writing only in exile, it is the feeling of loss that always dominated his literary world.

Guston Bachelard once commented that inhabited space transcends geometrical space' (47) and to Agha Shahid Ali crossing of the borders suggest the equivalent. In this manner being an individual from the diasporic community the trauma of 'unhomeliness' frequented him and, incited him to make an imaginary homeland. In spite of the fact that his identity is all the while verbalized among 'home' and 'away', his own, native and mutual encounters contribute into his poetry an all inclusive appeal. As an outcome of that the rain in Amherst helps him to remember Kashmir and Lahore, also, Karakoram ranges change into Hindu Kush and Arizona. Consequently Ali's poetic oeuvre is best reflected when he attempts to join diverse societies and adjusts to what R. Radhakrishnan has stated:

As diasporan citizens doing double duty  
[...] we have a duty to represent India to  
ourselves and to the United States as  
truthfully as we can. (212)

Nostalgia is a virtual wonder in diaspora. The poet, like other diasporic authors aspire to come back to his country. However as the return is outlandish, it at the same time represents to an unbridgeable separation between the poet and his 'unique home', also, functions as a controlling element behind the migrants agreeableness of the remote land and fills the psyche with a feeling of loss. Properly does Rushdie opine: ...the writer who is out-of country furthermore, level out-of-language may encounter this loss in an intensified shape. It is made progressively concrete for him but the physical actuality of discontinuity, of his present being in an alternate place from his past, of his being 'somewhere else'. (12)

Memory frequently assumes an important role in poetic mapping of the poet's personality, and this is especially clear in his poem "Postcard from Kashmir" where he says:

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox  
[...]. Now I hold  
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.  
This is home. And this is the closest  
I'll ever be to home.

Anyway the sentimentality/Nostalgia does not only present the essential-zed image of Kashmir, yet in addition encourages him to appropriate and have a consensus with the social system of the land where he moved to; because of which Kashmir some of the time progresses toward becoming an 'obscure and undetermined place'. Ali's poetry is regularly set apart by misery and the feeling of loss. In any case, this distress and unfulfilled want to come back to his home is compensated to some degree through the medium of poetry which makes a connection between his country and 'transand- extra national world'. So serious was his inclination that he saw Sarajevo, Srinagar and Alexandria on a similar plan:

Say farewell, say farewell to the city  
O Sarajevo! O Srinagar!  
The Alexandria, that is for ever leaving.  
(Ali 230)

Ali's pledge to the global and local is unmistakably noticeable in his level with treatment of various religions. He was born in a family which was the culmination of various cultures; Ali with an interview with Christine Benvenuto grasps it:

There were three languages- Urdu, Kashmiri and English spoken at home all the time. When I was a kid, I remember telling my parents that I want to build a Hindu temple in my room, they said sure. And then once I said I want to build a Catholic Chapel with pictures of Jesus, and they said sure. It was a wonderful atmosphere full of possibilities of self expression. (262)

Ali being a diasporic author constantly treasured an 'ethno-global vision'. In one hand he held tight his ethnic conventions, and on the other attempted to acclimatize with a culture set apart by global reverberation. So incredible was the effect of literary experts like Galib, Fiaz, Neruda, Zafar and Begum Akhtar upon him. Thus much of the time he had changed his areas that these helped him to create a world of imagination. His writing of Ghazals in English communicates his mastery over languages as well as makes his home culture alive in America. In Ali's poetry, feeling of loss, forlornness, yearnings are burdened together as a result of his nearby association with different cultures which make him the man of different existence. Daniel Hall appropriately opines:

Agha Shahid Ali was, by his own count, the recipient of three societies Muslim, Hindu, and for absence of increasingly exact rubric, Western. (Hall 15)

In any case, the images of home which are clearly inaccessible frequent his cognizance so much that he, as though in a trance, expresses in "A Call": I close my eyes,/ It doesn't leave me,/ The cold moon of Kashmir which breaks Into my house. Ali was widely possessed with the way of life of Kashmir and because of which, as Hena Ahmed opines, 'different cultural experience intersected, overlapped and came together in Shahid's poetry' (35). He spent his adolescence in Kashmir. The phrase beloved-Kashmir-mother demonstrates how profoundly he was in love with his country. Looking at the excellence of the place with that of paradise he wrote king Jahangir's Quote in his "The Last Saffron":

If there is paradise on Earth  
It is this, it is this, it is this.

Kashmir left such an extraordinary effect on Ali that in a discussion with Amitav Ghosh he revealed

his last wish-'I would like to back to Kashmir to die'(124). But the poet was straightforward and in this manner demonstrated his dedication to unravel truth that Kashmir has changed into a 'dark velvet void' and admitted with crushing sadness decisively that Kashmir is burning and 'the homes are set on fire' by 'night soldiers. Understanding the way that Ali firmly saw how his indigenous culture was abused, we should recognize that his poetry is in reality the aggregate portrayal of the sadness of the entire Kashmir. Yerra Sugarman appropriately says: Shahid's poetry casts its craft and concerns upon histories of loss, injustices, and brutality, particularly those endured by his ravaged Kashmir. (129)

In his poem "Tonight" Ali depicted clearly his native land Kashmir as a place which is swarmed totally by obscurity. To outline his own recollections of a distant borderland in the Indian subcontinent while living in America he briefly stated: And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee- God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight. In "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror" the poet compared the state of Kashmir with that of couple of different nations as he could 'see Argentina and Paraguay under a curfew of glass' and, could feel that 'the night in Uruguay is black salt'. This 'rhizomic transaction of travelling subjects inside and between the countries' as Ashcroft opined, can be additionally seen at the point when Ali communicated his identity as 'both and not one or the other' or 'plural and partial.

[...] he's brought the sky from Vail,  
 Colorado, and the Ganges from Varanasi  
 In a clay urn.[...]  
 He's brought the desert too...  
 What hasn't he planned? For music  
 Debussy,  
 Then a song from New Orleans in the  
 Crescents'  
 Time nearing Penn Station. (Ali 23)

Ali's poetry throws its art and worry upon authentic misfortune, injustice, and severity especially those persisted by Kashmir weaving at the same time the strings of individual encounters and that of individuals close to him. Ali tested himself to frame a quintessential unique craftsmanship and cognizance so as to battle against the elements which definitely work to make a feeling of misfortune in personal, social, passionate and scholarly associations, particularly in the province of Kashmir that for him in all conditions remain a change of self image and a rich wellspring of motivation for innovative purposes. In that capacity, Ali has an everlasting effect of being one of the extraordinary children of soil of Kashmir who endured at each phase of life and energetically lived with the feeling of distress as his constant buddy. However, he kept his intrinsic dynamism alive to the last minute and

when assess as on today Ali without a doubt remains a phenomenon of his novel personality and craftsmanship in the domain of Indian writing in English.

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