

Diasporic Poet: Agha Shahid Ali

- Dr. Pratik Dalwadi
- Temporary Assistant Professor
- M.K.Amin Arts and Science College & College of Commerce, Padra
- M.S.University Baroda

Abstract:

Agha Sahid Ali, an Indian writer who emigrated from Kashmir to the United States and experienced a sense of loss because of his forced emigration, is the subject of this paper. This paper's central theme is to illustrate the diasporic relevance of his exiled experience. An Indian diaspora in the United States is imagined in this article, which aims to depict the diasporic experience of exile in a foreign nation, grief, and new possibilities.

Key Words: diaspora, loss of roots, Kashmir, Agha Sahid Ali

In literature, the term "diaspora" has taken on a broader connotation. Many writers of Indian Diasporic literature seek to find themselves in a new cultural context through the lens of nostalgia, which is prevalent in the diasporic community. The crux of their literature is based on issues of identity, loss of origins, and a sense of guilt. It is a joy to read diasporic writing since it focuses on the protagonist's ambition, which establishes their self-identity, and intrinsic talent is the most prominent quality in their writings in the form of creativeness. It is therefore referred to as an academic flourishing industry by William Safran. Further, Dwivedi says:

"Migration always implies change: the change involves the risk of losing one's identity. Whilst the migration recognizes him/herself in his/her new image, the people around him/her do not accept his/her otherness. Therefore, s/he is compelled to face everyday life through a continuous oscillation between reality and dream"¹

Diasporic exile is frequently depicted in terms of a split between a person's home country and a new one they've relocated to because of loyalty. There's no denying that the writer has a strong connection to his or her native country, even though he or she may be physically separated from it. Avtar Brah writes,

"the term Diaspora, embodies a notion of center, a locus, a home from which the dispersion occurs. In fact, at the heart of the notion of Diaspora is the image of journey which essentially is about settling down, about putting roots elsewhere."²

Diaspora in literature serves as a link between many cultures, allowing for more mutual understanding and igniting globalization. It also serves as a motivation for cultural globalization. It discusses the convergence and divergence of two cultures, and how the erasure of memory is a common occurrence.

In 1949, Agha Shahid Ali was born in Kashmir to a wealthy and well-educated family. There was also a time when he went to Pennsylvania State University (Pennsylvania) and Arizona State (Arizona). In the United States, he is best recognized as an American poet who writes in English. He earned a Ph.D. in English in the United States then went on to teach and conduct research in the barrio. He is without a doubt on the land of his dreams, yet before he came here, he had fantasized of returning to his native land. He left his own land in search of a better life and scholastic opportunities in an unfamiliar land, yet he was compelled to write poetry out of his longing for his native land and the memories it evoked. Since they have no connection to their ancestors' homeland when they migrate, the first generation of diaspora suffers from a lack of attachment to their homeland. In many instances, diasporic writing serves to link the migrant community's past and present. In Kashmir, a country of breathtaking natural splendor, it is said that beauty can lead to ruin. Before the 5th of August 2019, the burning state of Kashmir has to decide whether or not it should exist. When it comes to their so-called freedom, this land is in a quandary. Similarly, Agha Shahid Ali was a member of a generation of anti-authoritarians. Despite his relocation to another country, he continues to write poems about his native land, including recollections of lockdown, letters from family back in India, the post office, Delhi politics, and pals from the Kashmir Valley. Pain, sorrow, and suffering are evident in his work since he had lost touch with his native country. On December 8th, 2001, he succumbed to a

brain tumor, but his devotion to his own country and the people who knew him best will live on in the hearts of readers and scholars for all time.

There is no denying Agha Shahid Ali's status as a diasporic poet among Indian-American diasporic writers. Because of his earnest attempts to make culture accessible to the human race via poetry, he is the cultural representative of India in the diaspora. Exile, homelessness, colonization, migration, disease, death, separation, misery, love and many more diaspora-related issues are all reflected in his poetry's fundamental topic. Agha Shahid Ali's poetry books, whether on purpose or not, provide light on the diasporic experience of Kashmir. Before *The Half-Inch Himalayas* was released in America, Agha Shahid Ali had only produced a collection of poetry that dealt with his diasporic feelings toward his homeland of Pakistan. In *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, fictional talks between an exile and an inhabitant provide context for discussions on the United States and other countries. Poems from *The Beloved Witness: Selected Poems* explores the author's agitation over an upsetting and logical dilemma. Originally known as Kashmir without a Post Office, the country without a post office talks about the dislocation of one's homeland. The ghazal *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* had in mind the Kashmiri diaspora's conscience. Indian Kashmiri, American, Islamic, Christian, and Hindu identities have all been infused within his poems.

His major poetry talks about the core of discourse elements. In *Snowmen* he says: "My ancestor, a man / of Himalayan snow, / came to Kashmir from Samarkand, / carrying a bag / or whale bones: / heirlooms from sea funerals."³ In this poem he recalled his ancestors journey of Kashmir from Samarkand. He further writes in *I Have Loved*: "I must go back briefly to a place I have loved / to tell you those you will efface I have loved."⁴ He talks about his love for motherland and his past events. He remembers his native land roots at foreign land and expresses deeper sense of love that he feels nostalgic. In addition while *In Arabic* he talks about love and tradition of his land that he describes, "Majnoon, by stopped caravanas, rps his collars, cries "Laila!" / Pain translated is O! much more – not less-in Arabic"⁵ Agha Shahid Ali segregated himself into the host land and the motherland. No doubt, he has respect and admiration for his host land but the motherland and his remembrance does not allow him to isolate from his identity. That is why he says in *Existed*, "If you leave who will prove that my cry existed? / Tell me what was I like before I existed." He talks about is existence which rooted in motherland though he lived in his host country.

In real sense, if we talk about Agha Shahid Ali he is real felt diasporic Indian poet because in his major part of his work he recollect the memory of his motherland Kashmir because this place Kashmir left such a deep impression on him and he never come out of his past and motherland. Amitav Ghosh mentioned about him that:

"His 1997 Collection, *The Country Without a Post Office*, had made a powerful impression on me. His voice was like on I had ever heard before, at once lyrical and fiercely disciplined, engaged and yet deeply inward. Not for him, the mock casual almost-prose of so much contemporary poetry: his was a voice that was not ashamed to speak in a bardic register. I could think of no one else who would even conceive of publishing a link like: 'Mad heart, be brave'."⁷ As diasporic writer Agha Shahid Ali makes alive Kashmir in our mind and simultaneously he recollect his past in his works.

References:

1. Dwivedi, O.P. *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, PenCraftInternational, 2011. P.2
2. Brah A. *Thinking Through The Concept of Diaspora*. In: Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (eds.) *The Post Colonial Studies Reader* (2nd Edition). London/New York: Routledge, 2006. P. 443
3. Ali, Agha Shahid. *The Veiled Suite*, Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition, (Year).P.34
4. Ibid., p.326.
5. Ibid., p.372
6. Ibid., p.376
7. <https://www.amitavghosh.com/aghashahidali.html>