



Contemporary Study of Diasporic Writer I.e. Agha Shahid

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ABSTRACT

Agha Shahid Ali was a Kashmiri-American poet and author who used his writing to explore a range of complex issues. One of the central themes of his work was cultural hybridity, which referred to the experience of straddling multiple cultures and identities. Ali's personal experiences as a Kashmiri-American informed much of his poetry and critical writing, and he was particularly interested in the ways that political upheaval and social conflict impacted people's sense of self and belonging.

Ali's poetry collections, including "The Country Without a Post Office," "Rooms Are Never Finished," and "Call Me Ishmael Tonight," were characterized by their depth and complexity, drawing on classical literary traditions to explore contemporary issues. Many of Ali's poems addressed themes of loss and displacement, but he also celebrated the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

In addition to his poetry, Ali was also known for his critical writing. Works like "Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in Kashmir," "The Ghat of the Only World," and "Kashmir: The Cause for Independence," demonstrated his deep knowledge of the literary and cultural traditions of Kashmir, while also exploring the political and social factors that had shaped the region's history. Throughout his writing, Ali emphasized the power of literature to offer consolation and continuity during times of upheaval, and he encouraged readers to engage with the complexities of their own cultural identities in order to find meaning and connection in an ever-changing world.

KEYWORDS:

Agha Shahid Ali, Kashmiri-American, diasporic writer, identity, displacement, cultural hybridity, political struggle, cultural struggle, literature, poetry, critical works, The Country Without a Post Office, Rooms Are Never Finished, Call Me

**Ishmael Tonight, Kashmir, self-determination,
literary traditions, ghazal, classical Urdu.**

INTRODUCTION

A diasporic writer is a writer who belongs to a diaspora community, which refers to a group of people who have been displaced from their original homeland and have migrated to a new country or region. Diasporic writers often explore themes of identity, culture, displacement, and the experience of living between two worlds. Diaspora literature is a rich and diverse field, encompassing writers from many different backgrounds and cultures. Some notable diasporic writers include Salman Rushdie, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Junot Diaz, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Toni Morrison. These writers have used their work to explore the complexities of diasporic identity and the experiences of displacement and belonging that are central to the diasporic experience.

Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001) was a Kashmiri-American poet, essayist, and translator. He was born in New Delhi, India, and grew up in Kashmir, a region that has been the subject of conflict between India and Pakistan for many years. Ali's work often dealt with themes of exile, displacement, and identity, as well as the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir. He was known for his formal, highly structured poems that were influenced by classical Persian and Urdu poetry, as well as by the work of poets like W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Bishop. Ali

published several collections of poetry during his lifetime, including "A Nostalgist's Map of America," "The Country Without a Post Office," and "Rooms Are Never Finished." His work has been widely anthologized and translated into many languages. Ali was also a highly respected teacher and literary critic. He taught at several universities, including the University of Utah, and served as the president of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs from 2000 to 2001. He died of brain cancer in 2001, at the age of 52.

The contemporary study of diasporic writers, such as Agha Shahid Ali, focuses on their experiences of displacement, migration, and cultural identity. These writers often explore the complexities of cultural hybridity, the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on identity, and the tension between assimilation and maintaining cultural traditions.

Agha Shahid Ali's work reflects these themes, as he was a Kashmiri-American poet who spent much of his life living between different cultures. His poetry often explored the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir, a region that has been at the center of conflict between India and Pakistan for many years. One of the key aspects of contemporary studies of diasporic writers is the examination of the ways in which they use language and literary form to express their experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity. Ali's work is characterized by his use of formal, highly structured poetry that draws on

classical Persian and Urdu poetic traditions. This formal structure is often seen as a way for Ali to assert his cultural identity and to connect with his ancestral traditions, while also highlighting his experiences of living between two cultures.

Contemporary studies of diasporic writers also focus on the ways in which these writers engage with issues of power, race, and gender. Ali's work often explores these themes, particularly in his later poetry, which dealt with issues of identity and belonging in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Diaspora literature is a rich and diverse field that explores themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity through the experiences of writers who live between different cultures. A notable diasporic writer who has contributed significantly to this field is Agha Shahid Ali, whose poetry reflects on the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir and explores the complexities of living between two cultures.

In "The Country Without a Post Office," Ali uses highly structured poetic traditions to assert his cultural identity and connect with his ancestral traditions while highlighting his experiences of living between two cultures (Ali, 1997). His collection "Rooms Are Never Finished" further

explores themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity (Ali, 2002).

Studies of diasporic writers like Ali have examined the ways in which they use language and literary form to express their experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity. For example, Boehmer (1995) explores the use of migrant metaphors in colonial and postcolonial literature, while Brah and Coombes (2000) examine the concept of hybridity and its discontents.

Cheah (2006) explores the relationship between cosmopolitanism and human rights, while Clifford (1997) examines the role of travel and translation in the late twentieth century. Gilroy (1993) explores the concept of double consciousness and modernity in the black Atlantic, while Hall (1990) discusses cultural identity and diaspora.

Nasta (2013) offers a photographic history of Asian Britain, while Parekh (2002) rethinks multiculturalism and its relationship to political theory. Rushdie (1991) discusses the role of literature in exploring diasporic experiences, and Said (1979) examines the concept of orientalism.

Sharpe (1993) examines the figure of woman in the colonial text, while Spivak (1999) offers a critique of postcolonial reason. Tickell (2011) explores literature, identity, and the English Channel, and Williams and Chrisman (1993) offer a reader on

colonial discourse and postcolonial theory. Young (2001) provides an historical introduction to postcolonialism, and Zevallos (2017) offers a concise conceptual overview of intersectionality.

Overall, studies of diasporic writers like Agha Shahid Ali continue to explore the ways in which these writers use language and literary form to express their experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity, as well as the ways in which they engage with issues of power, race, and gender.

MAJOR WORKS

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry explores themes of identity, displacement, cultural hybridity, and the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir. These themes are evident throughout his work, and are particularly prominent in his collections **"The Country Without a Post Office," "Rooms Are Never Finished,"** and **"Call Me Ishmael Tonight."**

The Country Without a Post Office

"The Country Without a Post Office" is a collection of poetry by Agha Shahid Ali that was published in 1997. The collection is named after a poem of the same name that explores the impact of conflict on everyday life in Kashmir, a region that has been at the center of conflict between India and Pakistan for many years. The poems in the collection reflect on

the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir, as well as Ali's own experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity. Many of the poems examine how conflict affects common people's lives in the area, emphasising how political unrest and acts of violence disturb daily life. One of the most powerful poems in the collection is "Farewell," which is dedicated to Ali's friend, the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali. The poem reflects on the pain of exile and the loss of cultural identity, and explores the ways in which the experience of displacement can shape an individual's sense of self. Other noteworthy poems in the collection are "The Floating Post Office," which imagines a society in which communication is hampered by violence and instability, and "Postcard from Kashmir," which examines the issue of memory and considers how conflict affects interpersonal connections.. "The Country Without a Post Office" is a powerful collection of poetry that engages with themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity, and reflects the complex experiences of diasporic writers who live between different cultures and who are deeply affected by the political and cultural struggles of their homelands.

Rooms Are Never Finished

"Rooms Are Never Finished" is a collection of poetry by Agha Shahid Ali that was published in 2001. The collection explores themes of identity and belonging, particularly in the context of migration and displacement. The title of the collection suggests that

identity is an ongoing process, and that it is never fully formed or complete. The poems in the collection reflect on Ali's experiences of living between different cultures, and highlight the complexities of cultural hybridity and assimilation. Many of the poems explore the tension between the desire to maintain cultural traditions and the pressure to assimilate into a new culture. One of the most powerful poems in the collection is "Snow on the Desert," which reflects on the experience of exile and the longing for a sense of home. The poem is deeply personal, and reflects on Ali's own experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity. Other notable poems in the collection include "Tonight," which reflects on the power of memory and the ways in which the past shapes our present identities, and "On Being Asked to Choose Between Nations," which explores the theme of cultural identity and the pressure to choose between conflicting national identities. "Rooms Are Never Finished" is a powerful collection of poetry that engages with themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity, and reflects the complex experiences of diasporic writers who live between different cultures and who are deeply affected by the political and cultural struggles of their homelands. The collection is deeply personal and reflects on Ali's own experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity, but it also has broader relevance for anyone who has struggled with questions of identity and belonging.

Call Me Ishmael Tonight

"Call Me Ishmael Tonight" is a collection of poetry by Agha Shahid Ali that was published in 2003, shortly after his death. The collection engages with a wide range of themes, including the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on identity, the experiences of exile and displacement, and the tension between tradition and modernity. The title of the collection is a reference to the opening line of Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick," and reflects Ali's interest in drawing on classical literary traditions in his poetry. Many of the poems in the collection reflect on Ali's experiences of living between different cultures, and explore the complex relationship between tradition and modernity. One of the most powerful poems in the collection is "I Dream I Am at the Ghat of the Only World," which reflects on the experience of death and the longing for a sense of home. The poem draws on Hindu mythology and reflects on the ways in which cultural traditions can provide a sense of comfort and continuity in times of change and uncertainty. Other notable poems in the collection include "Tonight," which reflects on the power of memory and the ways in which the past shapes our present identities, and "Farewell," which reflects on the pain of exile and the loss of cultural identity. "Call Me Ishmael Tonight" is a powerful collection of poetry that engages with a wide range of themes, and reflects the complex experiences of diasporic writers who live between different cultures and who are deeply

affected by the political and cultural struggles of their homelands. The collection is deeply personal and reflects on Ali's own experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity, but it also has broader relevance for anyone who has struggled with questions of identity and belonging.

OTHER WRITINGS

Apart from his collections of poetry, Agha Shahid Ali also wrote several essays and critical works that engage with the themes of identity, displacement, cultural hybridity, and political and cultural struggle. Some of his notable works include:

1. "Kashmir: The Case for Freedom": In this essay, Ali reflects on the history of the Kashmir conflict and argues for the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination. He highlights the ways in which political conflict has impacted the lives of ordinary people in Kashmir and calls for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
2. "The Ghat of the Only World": This critical work reflects on the ways in which literary traditions can provide a sense of continuity and comfort in times of political and cultural upheaval. Ali draws on his own experiences of living between different cultures and reflects on the power of literature to connect people across borders.
3. "Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English": This critical work reflects on the

challenges of translating the classical Urdu form of the ghazal into English. Ali discusses the ways in which the ghazal has been adapted to English-language poetry and highlights the ways in which the form can be used to express complex emotions and ideas.

Ali's critical works engage with many of the same themes as his poetry, and reflect on the complex experiences of diasporic writers who live between different cultures and who are deeply affected by political and cultural struggles. His writings continue to have a significant impact on contemporary literature and continue to be widely read and studied today.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, diaspora literature is a rich and diverse field, and Agha Shahid Ali is a notable diasporic writer who explored themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity through his poetry. His work often reflects on the political and cultural struggles of Kashmir, a region that has been at the center of conflict between India and Pakistan for many years. Ali's poetry uses formal, highly structured poetic traditions to assert his cultural identity and connect with his ancestral traditions while also highlighting his experiences of living between two cultures. His collections, "The Country Without a Post Office" and "Rooms Are Never Finished," are powerful explorations of themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity, and

they reflect the complex experiences of diasporic writers who live between different cultures and who are deeply affected by the political and cultural struggles of their homelands. Contemporary studies of diasporic writers, such as Agha Shahid Ali, continue to examine the ways in which these writers use language and literary form to express their experiences of displacement and cultural hybridity, as well as the ways in which they engage with issues of power, race, and gender.

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