



Literary Language in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali

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(Received 15 November, 2017, Accepted 06 December, 2017)

(Published by Research Trend, Website: www.researchtrend.net)

ABSTRACT: This paper deals with Ali's appointment with Kashmir in diaspora: how he feels to be away from his home and how he relies on reminiscence to seek home. He was embedded in mélange of multiple uniqueness that has affected his upbringing as union of Kashmiri American. He was passionately involved with his homeland, Kashmir in his last days he wished to die there. While living away from home he banks on the "shards of memory", which in exile seems to be the only solace? However, with the rise of violence in Kashmir, Ali's vision shifts from diasporic longing to the pain of fellow sufferer's in Kashmir. The paper tries to analyze the literary language in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali.

Keywords: Poetry, style, syntax, Kashmiri

I. INTRODUCTION

Agha Shahid Ali is a Kashmiri-American poet who died due to brain cancer on December 8 at the age of 52 at his brother's home in Amherst, Massachusetts [1-4]. Ali was named a finalist for his book of poems "Rooms Are Never Finished," which Norton published in November. Almost thirty of its pages involve his elegy to his mother, who also died of brain cancer. Grief and violence was reflected in his literary work. "From History tears learn a slanted understanding of the human face torn by blood's bulletin from the poem "Of Light," published in the journal Poetry. Ali was aware of the historical vicissitudes that breed violence and abhorrence in people who once lived together quietly [4-6]. The difficulty of maintaining love and friendship is also themed in his literary work. Ali's links to poets ranging from the Urdu-language Faiz Ahmed Faiz to the Spaniard Federico García Lorca is well documented in his literary work. Ali helped to introduce American poets to a respected Persian poetic form, the ghazal that was later well appreciated by the literary world. "In the lake the arms of temples and mosques are locked in each other's reflections is an indication that cultural ties and divisions were also themes of his work. Although, he spoke a combination of Urdu and English as a child, but he wrote all his poetry in English and his eight books of his poems have been published, and Norton plans to bring out another in 2003 [7-9]. The paper tries to analyze the literary language in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali.

A. Syntax in Ali's poetry

Style of Ali's poetry was restricted to literature, he used different vocabulary and probably different syntax in his poetry that was quite different and sometimes misunderstood by the people. Ali's poetry is limited in the range of styles they have their command, and sometimes style expectations have been found deliberately flaunted: Most of the style of love poetry will no doubt cause a certain amount of surprise and thus possibly increase its effect in Ali's poetry that likely caused trouble or appear simply ridiculous for some critics [10].

In marginalization a person loses his old cultural values as well as the large society. Thus there are various processes by which a person goes through the process of acculturation. Its effect on host countries, particularly America and Europe, has been vivid with people from different religious, geographic and ethnic identities settling in one nation. This has given rise to a multicultural society [11-13].

There are utterances where style was used in Ali's poetry with more deliberation than in others especially in political contexts or manifestos, but also most literary texts. In fact, it is partly the calculated and deliberate use of language, or, the special attention the receiver pays to the use of language, that makes a text literary [14].

Sometimes it becomes difficult to separate style or form, from content in Ali's poetry. When examining the style of a text in his poetry one scrutinizes mainly two aspects: diction (the choice and use of words) and syntax (the sentence structure) that have been beautifully crafted by him almost in all his works. In other words, in his poetry one becomes surprised while examining the words that has been used and put together by him with the use of rhetorical devices. He has rhythmical patterns and sound effects in his poetry [15].

II. AGHA SHAHID ALI, HIS LITERARY WORK

Home land, for Agha Shahid Ali, like any other emigre, is a point of focus India diaspora. When people in diaspora encounter a new environment, they react to it depending upon the temperament and on the political and socio-cultural gap between their home country and the host country. The encounter leads either to assimilation or integration or separation or marginalization. Assimilation refers to a reaction to the new environment in which the individual sheds his original identity and adopts a new identity. If an individual seeks to remain away from the dominant culture it is called separation [3-4].

Agha Shahid Ali received less impetus from the traditions set up by Ezekiel and others, rather it was his engagement with western modern poetry, particularly that of T S Eliot that shaped his early writing. Ali tells about his influence in the poem "Introduction": at fifteen he was influenced by the English Romantics particularly Shelley. It was only at the age of eighteen "A Ph.D. from Leeds/ ... brought the wasteland", (Ali, In Memory 13) and this had a great influence on his early poetry. Images of bones, death, graves, and desert are found through and through in Bone Sculpture, Ali is so much obsessed with death that "Death punctuated all ... [his] poems" (Ali, In Memory 13). T S Eliot's poems like "The Waste Land", "Gerontion", "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Hollow Men" reverberate in Bone Sculptor. His distrust with modern city life as a teenager found an apt metaphor in the poetry of T S Eliot and other modernists; however, Shelley kept on intruding time and again. Modern poetry is usually obsessed with death and the image of death, which according to Triggs, has been derived from T S Eliot's and other modernists influence of Dante. Triggs notes that Dante's influence on the modern English poets is even more than that of Shakespeare and Milton, particularly his image of death; so much so that T S Eliot went on to call his style as a "universal school of style" [16-18].

Agha Shahid Ali has written many poetry collections, a translation, a critical work, and has edited a book too. Bone-Sculpture (1972) is his first book written in India where he experimented with style and has been strongly influenced by his reading of Eliot. It deals with loneliness and skepticism. In Memory of Begum Akhtar (1979), Ali seems to have matured as a poet and his Urdu influences are quite noticeable from the title of the book. He deals with the concepts he had left in his early book but presents them in a style which seems to be his own. The Half-Inch Himalayas (1987) is the first book he wrote while living in America; it deals with his strong longing for home, Kashmir, besides his family is also the focus of the book. A Walk Through the Yellow Pages (1987) presents the surreal and gothic vision of Ali, and the poems deal with violence and power [19, 1,4].

A Nostalgist's Map of America (1991) deals with exile, longing and desire. Ali, like a travel poet, sets out to map America and envisions the brutality of history, particularly with reference to the Native Americans. The Country Without a Post Office (1997) is one of his celebrated books which deals with violence and human rights violations in Kashmir. The book is a kind of the "poetry of witness", or resistance literature regarding the Kashmir conflict; it is considered to one of the best literary pieces. Not much critical work has been done on Agha Shahid Ali except some articles, scholarly papers, obituaries, and interviews [1-2,19].

"The Ghat of the Only World: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn" is a combination of Ali's biography, Ghosh's personal interactions with Ali, a critical analysis of some of Ali's poems, and about his death and obituary. This is one of the finest articles on Ali equally useful for critic, student or a lay reader. In terms of critical analysis the article talks about Ali's anthology [9].

The Country Without a Post Office and his relationship with Kashmir, his secular outlook, and Agha Shahid Ali as probably being the future National poet of the Independent Kashmir. Ghosh further talks about the death of Ali's mother and the grief it thrust upon Ali, which he vented in the canzone "Lenox Hill" [10].

He further analyzes how Ali has become witness to the atrocities in Kashmir. He reads the anthology as an elegy on the death of a city. "American by translation: Agha Shahid Ali's "real" American ghazals", Hallie Elizabeth is about his ghazals and gives a general background to the genre of ghazal. He sees him as a "translated" man" since the way he wrote has itself challenged the notion of distinction between original and translated. It also deals with the translation of Faiz, his obsession with Urdu poetry and how he internalized Faiz by listening to him in the voice of Begum Akhtar. He compares his ghazals and translation with Ijaz Ahmad's Ghazals of Ghalib and Naomi Lazard's translations of Faiz. In addition, he discusses Ali's translation of a long eleven can to poem of Mahmoud Darwish "Eleven Stars over Andulasia". He has also discussed Rooms are Never Finished, Real Ghazals in English and its

various forms and themes besides discussing history and growth of the Ghazal in the US. The Diaspora: Agha Shahid Ali's Tri cultural Nostalgia" is an essay by Bruce King in which he discusses Ali's exile, his multilingual and multicultural upbringing and how it had a lasting impact on his life and poetry. He has discussed seven of his anthologies and concludes by calling him "increasingly a major poet" with plenty of forms, themes, styles and a distinct tone. The paper has tried to work out in detail some of the already written critical material which the author found quite brief and therefore needed some more explanation [12-15].

I have tried to show how mushairas (Urdu poetic symposium) and Urdu ghazal singers had a strong effect on the writing of Ali. Moreover, the paper has tried to look into some other aspects of Ali's poetry which have not been worked upon; for example deconstructive study of his parody of Grimms tales and some of his poems from *The Country Without a Post Office*; the position of Ali in Indian English poetic tradition; Sufi influences on him; comparison with Osip Mandelstam; his Canzones etc. This study showed how Ali was less influenced by his senior contemporaries in India and more by English modernists like T. E. Hume and T. S. Eliot [14].

The paper has focused on Ali's earlier poetry which he wrote while living in India. In *Bone Sculptor* the influence of Eliot is quite vivid as he has depicted a kind of wasteland and he sees himself and others as skeptics like Eliot's *Gerontion* and *Hollow Man*. The paper further discusses his engagement with the Indo-Islamic tradition and his lament for the same. Ali has written poems on Faiz, Begam Akhtar and other connoisseurs of Indo-Islamic art and literature.

Agha Shahid Ali has exploited this idea in some poems parodied from Grimms tales. The paper has read these tales in comparison with earlier readings by some critics like Jack Zipes, Talairach-Vielmas. Carol Mavor, etc. Hence, rereading these parodies tells us about the violence and ideology used in language by the authority to augment power. By changing the line, "How dark inside it was inside the wolf!" (Grimm) to "How warm it was inside the wolf!", (Ali 99) Ali, to use Derrida's concept, deconstructs the whole text, so as to reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions within the text. Ali has created the essence in free verse which is poetic and known the best translations of Faiz in the English language along with that of Naomi Lazard and V G Kieman [1,9].

III. CONCLUSION

Most of his poems are not abstract considerations of love and longing but rather concrete accounts of events of personal importance and political importance. *A Walk Through the Yellow Pages* (1987) that he received widespread recognition this was a surreal world of nightmare, fantasy, incongruity, wild humor, and the grotesque. Although the existential anxieties have their source in problems of growing up, leaving home, being a migrant, and the meeting of cultures, the idiom is American and contemporary. *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991), relates a series of travels through landscapes often blurred between his current American home and memories of his boyhood in Kashmir. The imagination links past and present, America and India, Islamic and American deserts, American cities and former American Indian tribes, modern deserts and prehistoric oceans. His literary work is considered highly profiled language of color, paradoxes, oxymora, and other means to lift the poems into the lyrical and fanciful.

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