



AGHA SHAHID ALI'S LONGING FOR KASHMIR IN HIS POEMS I SEE KASHMIR FROM NEW DELHI AT MIDNIGHT AND THE LAST SAFFRON

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ABSTRACT

The name of Aagha Shahid Ali is relatively popular in Indian Literature and one of the reasons for this popularity is his poems written on Kashmir and for Kashmir. He is from Kashmir and he often wishes to go there. Most of the themes of Ali are negative but the point of view with which he writes is deeply positive. He tries to include the aspect like loss, love, home, country, memory etc. by which he often laments his past. However, the situation has totally changed because of the political reasons and that is very much unfortunate but we have to understand. Thus, these poems are special in terms of the lament, helplessness and the melancholy from which Shahid, like millions of people, goes through. I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight and The Last Saffron are the poems where the longing of Shahid Ali is evident. Both these poems have been written brilliantly with a sense of emotions and the feelings which are genuine.

Key words: Kashmir, Longing, Loss, Helplessness, Love, Kashmiri Pundits, Place, Situation, Saffron.

INTRODUCTION

Aagha Shahid Ali, a well-known name as far as Indian poetry is concerned, has been quite famous for his melancholic approach. His name has been always been associated to the 'exile' and his collections of poems are often filled with the poems on displacements and the feeling of loss. Most of the themes of Ali are negative but the point of view with which he writes is deeply positive. He tries to include the aspect like loss, love, home, country,

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memory etc. by which he often laments his past. We can certainly observe his longing to go to Kashmir and to change the current situation in these poems. He often remembers his parents and the Kashmiri folks which can be noticed throughout his poems. Shahid is immensely dejected when he came to know about the killing of Kashmiri pundits and the other Hindus in Kashmir. Shahid often remembers them in his poems as he says in his *Farewell*. (2009)

*“At a certain point, I lost track of you.
They make a desolation and call it peace when you left
even the stones were buried
The deafness would have no weapons.” (Ali, Farewell)*

However, it should be noticed that Shahid is very much fond of food and he used to cook as well. Whenever he invites a friend for lunch or dinner, he talks about the flavor of the food of Kashmiri pundits has vanished with the Vanishing of Kashmiri pundits from Kashmir. However, Kashmir is an inevitable part of his personality and that is what reflected in his poems.

Agha Shahid Ali is born in New Delhi but is brought up in Kashmiri in a society which is socially and culturally Sophisticated. He has been raised in a Muslim family which is quite well-to-do and therefore he is well educated and culturally sound. He often says that he is very lucky to get involved into three literary cultures like Kashmiri, English and Urdu. This multi-cultural atmosphere has shaped his poetry and has added unbiased perspective to it. His friends are not limited by any religion as he has so many Hindu friends in addition to western friends. He simply longs to go to Kashmir and wants that his death should be done in Kashmir. In his poem *Postcard from Kashmir* he says,

*“This is home.
And this is the closest.
I’ll ever be to home...” (Ali, Postcard from Kashmir)*

These lines are quite tricky as he uses the word ‘This’ which refers to Kashmir. However, the ‘Postcard that he has received act as ‘Kashmir’ here because he knows that he is not able to return to Kashmir and therefore he says this. However, this poem also describes how he longs to go to Kashmir and how he loves that place.

However, here we want to discuss two of his poems namely *I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight* and *The Last saffron* with regard to his longing for Kashmir. Both these poems have been quite popular and are quite straight in terms of the plight, agony, and disappointment of



Ali as he cannot go to Kashmir even if he wants. His desire to go there simply remains a desire as the political situation of Kashmir does not allow him to fulfill his desire. Thus, we are going to discuss both these poems and understand how he describes his pain.

Agha Shahid Ali's *I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight* is a perfect piece of a surrealist poem. This poem has been a poem that Ali writes by getting the motivation from the famous poem of W.B. Yeats *Easter* (1916), as it evokes the atmosphere of political unrest and violence. The speaker of the poem has been a surreal visit to Srinagar and as often in Srinagar, the night is a curfew night. As a lonely visitor to the city, he comes across one of the ghostly figures, named Rizwan who has been shot in the military firing. He is shocked to see his ghostly figure as he says,

“Rizwan, it's you, Rizwan it's you', I cry out as he steps closer, the sleeves of his Phirentorn: 'Each night put Kashmir in your dreams', he says then touches me, his hands crusted with snow, whispers, 'I have been cold a long, long time.' Don't tell my father I have died, 'He says.'” (Ali, 2008, I See Kashmir...)

However, the displacement of Kashmir and Srinagar can be seen by the lines like:

“We see men removing statues from temples we beg them, Who will protect us if you leave? They just disappear on the roads to the plains, clutching the Gods.” (Ali, 2008, I See Kashmir...)

Thus, these lines are the representation of how violence and displacement take place in Kashmir and surrounding areas like Srinagar and Jammu. However, the poem is a representation of how he has been outside but can certainly feel what is going on in Kashmir. In the poem, the speaker says to Rizwan that he will not deliver the news of his death to his father and also promises to tie a knot with green thread at Shah Hamdan a sacred place. Thus, it is a ritual on the part of a poet with the hope that he will bring back the peace and harmony of Kashmir.

Another poem by which Shahid has shown the condition of Kashmir is *The Last Saffron* where he shares his pain and suffering of his Kashmiri people. In this poem, he envisions his own death which he believes take place in Kashmir during the autumn season. However, the poet wishes to connect the event of his death with the bloodshed of Kashmir and its surrounding areas. However, the poet, after his death goes to visit the place famous for its Saffron cultivation. He goes there with the taxi-driver. It is the place known as 'saffron town of Kashmir' but this place is now on the line of destruction as the taxi driver says, “It won't



grow again, this gold from the burned fields of Pampore.” (Ali, *The Last Saffron*) However, the poet like a compensation for the loss says to the taxi-driver that,

*“The day I will die, I will broadcast crimson,
so long ago of that sky, its spread air, its rushing dyes,
and a piece of earth, bleeding, a part from the shore,
as we went on the day will die...”* (Ali, *The Last Saffron*)

The above lines are the specimen of the deteriorating condition of Kashmir which has once been known for its saffron colour but this colour has been replaced by the red colour of the blood of the human beings of which it is full. The poet ends on a tragic note as the poet envisions the taxi driver as the “keeper of world’s last saffron” after burning him as he repeats the most beloved couplet of the Kashmir Valley which we wish again come true,

*“If there is a paradise on earth,
It is this it is this, it is this...”* (Ali, *The Last Saffron*)

However, the literary meaning of these lines is that death is preferable to life in this present Kashmir. The context has been changes just like the situation of the Kashmir. Like the poet, we also miss the Kashmir that we know but we certainly do not like the Kashmir that is there at the present time.

Thus, both these poems are truly representatives of the Kashmir and this is what Shahid Ali has displayed all through these poems. Shahid’s longing, his desire and his helplessness can be noted here too just like his other poems where he talks about the happy days of the Kashmir that he spent his good days and now the situation has totally changed because of the political reasons which is very much unfortunate but we have to understand. Thus, these poems are special in terms of the lament, vulnerability and the melancholy from which Shahid, like millions of people, goes through.

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