

# Agha Shahid Ali through a Cosmopolitan and Humanistic Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper argues that as a diasporic poet, Agha Shahid Ali's sense of nationalism is not 'jingoism', for his vision is cosmopolitan and his approach is humanistic. We contend that despite being exposed to Muslim, Hindu and American culture, he does not overlook or close his eyes on inflictions and woes of his compatriots but expresses a sensitive knowledge about the politics of Kashmir, a fact that turns his poetic expression into a protest against the plight of Kashmiri people. Based on this context, we observe Agha Shahid Ali's poetry in the light of Richard Jenkin's concepts of identity and ethnicity and their relation to politics and 'perceived interests' as historical constructs, neither natural nor inevitable. The paper argues that on the cultural plane, his poems are suffused with images that reaffirm the composite culture of India and, as a matter of fact, South Asia. The focus, therefore, is on the images which range from those of Radha/Krishna and Laila/Majnun to Husain and Zainab. Hence, through close selected textual analysis of selected poems, we explore his literary inspiration through diverse influences from Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz to James Meryll and Lorca.

**Keywords:** nostalgia, the country without a post office, Kashmir, homeland, South Asia, cosmopolitan, humanistic, poetry, nationalism, postcolonial, amnesia

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Agha Shahid Ali's collection, *The Country Without a Post Office* was written in the context of the ongoing conflict within Kashmir, thus reflecting the aspiration and the cultural quintessence of Kashmir. *The Country Without a Post Office* is a topical, metaphysical, autobiographical and historical perspective on Kashmir. The title of the volume symbolizes a sense of omnipresent loss. The delicate undertone of Ali's resentment coupled with a protest against his physical distancing from his imagined homeland and atrocities perpetrated on his people. Ali, in his poetry, juxtaposed his feelings of love for his country and its art and culture with the traumatic colonization of his native land. The poems in *The Country Without a Post Office* were written in the context of the state of war while reflecting the spirit of Kashmir. Carol Muske rightly points out that Ali's voice reflects agelessness because Kashmiri culture remains an alter ego for him. Hence, *The Country Without a Post Office* is a look on Kashmir both topical and metaphysical, autobiographical as well as historical.

As a poet, Agha Shahid Ali had a strong allegiance to Kashmir's struggle for freedom. Consequently, he captures the aesthetics of Kashmiri art and culture, a characteristic rarely acknowledged by critics. According to Claire Chambers (2011) critics have "soft-pedalled the political message" of Agha Shahid's poetry (1). While Carol Muske has observed the timelessness of Ali's voice (23). According to Barbara Harlow (1987), "actively engaging in the historical process of struggle against the [forces of] oppression, and assert thereby [its] own polemical historicity" (Harlow 37) is the approach followed by Ali. Post office is a key location in Ali's poetry. As a place from where letters are delivered at particular addresses, a post office serves as an identifier of a specific person who lives at a particular address located in a specific region and country, in this context, Kashmir. Nevertheless, for Ali the absence of this space in Kashmir means the loss of connection with his homeland. Thus, home is a central image in Ali's poetry and for him, self-corresponds to 'home'. Ali also wants to fly to his homeland that he has painted with the help of his poetic imagination or the invisible wings of poesy like Keats. The homeland that he revisits with the help of imagination is the vision of the golden days of his past. In fact, the imaginary homeland, a recurrent phenomenon in Shahid Ali's poetry is the search for the self that is revealed through reconnecting with the other. This self is communicated through the sense of home, past and present, absence and presence. This suggests that the homelessness in his poetry compels other// formation of imaginary space identifying the

dream of an impracticable arrival and the recognition of an unassociated space, somehow along the lines of Bachelard's notion of "Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (Bachelard 47).

### **'The Country without a Post Office': Postcolonial Amnesia and Mnemohistory**

The two poems that nostalgically reflect back on Kashmir but are pessimistic about the situation in this valley are, 'The Country without a Post Office' and 'Farewell'. 'The Country without a Post office', constitutes two stanzas; an octave (eight-lined stanza) and a sestet (six-lined stanza).

Again I've returned to this country  
 where a minaret has been entombed.  
 Someone soaks the wicks of clay lamps  
 in mustard oil, each night climbs its steps  
 to read messages scratched on planets.  
 His fingerprints cancel bank stamps  
 in that archive for letters with doomed  
 addresses, each house buried or empty.  
 (Stanza 1)  
 postman, who belongs

to Kashmir is in a state of turmoil because he cannot find the addresses marked on the letters. This first stanza ends with the poet's sense of futility in relation to the country (Kashmir) because the houses remain condemned or evacuated (stanza 1, line 8).

Empty? Because so many fled, ran away,  
 and became refugees there, in the plains,  
 where they must now will a final dewfall  
 to turn the mountains to glass. They'll see  
 us through them—see us frantically bury  
 houses to save them...  
 (Stanza 2)

In the second stanza, Ali explains that these houses are empty because violence has created a Kashmir which is being abandoned by the natives because of the ongoing violence. They choose to become 'refugees' and abandon their motherland. Consequently, Kashmir, despite its natural

beauty, remains barren. Due to the military operation and violence in Kashmir, people have fled and they watch Kashmir from a distance. The military operations create us/them binaries and people bury their houses to save them and flee to save their own lives. Hence, Ali struggles to resist these binaries and violence by writing this poem.

Following the same style of writing free verse, the second poem, 'Farewell' constitutes thirteen irregular stanzaic divisions with a combination of a quartet, a sestet, a quintet, a couplet, a triplet, a quartet. Ali faces a kind of dilemma and postcolonial amnesia when despite being nostalgically focused on Kashmir, he loses track of its space and history. Paradoxically, Kashmir needs a historian like Agha Shahid Ali. While he acknowledges the fact that Kashmir has lost him due to his diasporic connections - the memory of Kashmir constantly disturbs his memories of homeland. This does not mean he has forgotten or repressed the past, but he keeps trying to remember some incidents of this past and this exercise turns into a 'self-willed amnesia' (Gandhi 5-7).

Army convoys haunt him and Ali inquires if they are done with the violence in Kashmir ('Are you done with the world?' Stanza 3, line 4). As also indicated in the earlier poem, the military in Kashmir is seen as creating a chaos and leaving the local people exposed as he writes, 'they make a desolation and call it peace' (Stanza 2). This line that repeats from Stanza 1. This repetition is a rhetorical device that reflects a sense of urgency and creates a rhythm of desolation, in the poem. In this state of chaos, Ali depicts people who run out of their houses carrying the 'windows in their arms' (Stanza 3, line 1, Stanza 11, line 2). These windows symbolize a piece of their home, memory as well as a personal space. He remains in a state of shock because the guardians of the 'gates of Paradise' (read as Kashmir) are changing every day. Consequently, he abhors the fact that Kashmiris cannot even question these guardians, if they are done with the violence in Kashmir.

I'm everything you lost. You won't forgive me.  
My memory keeps getting in the way of your  
history.  
There is nothing to forgive. You can't forgive me.  
I hid my pain even from myself; I revealed my pain  
only to myself.

These are the most crucial lines in the poem as they reflect his remorse that Kashmir has lost him and the poet begs forgiveness and yet he is in pain. The poem ends with this wish that Kashmir could have been his if he had stayed in Kashmir. The poem reflects Ali's disturbed memory of Kashmir, which is disturbed memories of Kashmir. Most importantly he writes, 'My memory is again in the way of your history'. In Derek Walcott's terms, this is like the victims surrendering to amnesia. In this paper, we identify this disturbance as a postcolonial amnesia (Kabir, 2009) and the poet's mnemohistorical approach to Kashmir (Assman) Ali's memory somehow misses some aspects of the history of Kashmir. He keeps losing track of such negative aspects of Kashmiri history and idealistically mainly wants to remain connected to the peaceful and harmonious beauty of the valley as opposed to its disturbed political context.

Disturbed by the memories of Kashmir, Ali tightly clings to his ethnic traditions, and tries to imbibe a culture marked by global resonance. However, so great was the impact of literary masters like Ghalib, Faiz, Zafar and Begum Akhtar on him that their works helped him to create a nation of imagination. His writing of *Ghazals*, a seventh century Arabic literary genre, in English not only expresses his mastery over language but also makes his root culture alive in America- his 'society of relocation'. Ghazal, when written in English, rests on the principle of stress—the long and the short in the stressed and unstressed order. A minimum of five *shers* (couplets) are expected within the paradoxical unity of the poem. *Ghazal* is composed of autonomous or semiautonomous couplets (called bait in Arabic meaning "house" and *sheir* [sher] in Persian and Urdu tradition, which means "something composed or versified") that are united by a strict scheme of rhyme [*qāfiya*], refrain *radif* and line length *bahr*. The opening couplet [*matla*] sets the scheme by having it in both lines *misra* and then the scheme occurs only in the second line of every succeeding couplet (Ali 58).

### **A Postcard from Kashmir**

The poet's desire to be in the visionary hours of his good old days could only be achieved through poetic imagination. Shahid Ali expresses his desire and dream of beautiful and mesmerizing homeland, Kashmir in his poem 'A Post Card from Kashmir', Kashmir shrinks into his mailbox

My home a neat four by six inches  
I always loved neatness. Now I hold  
The half-inch Himalayas in my hand  
This is home. And this is the closest  
I'll ever be to home

(Ali 29).

The memories of the self-create a cooperative importance where a symbolic identification of the multicultural 'Other' is imagined through fresh experiences. The irreparable loss and sequences of violence that the poet experienced in Kashmir has left him mourning and experiencing an overwhelming clash between the 'self' and the 'other' as indicated below:

At a certain point I lost track of you.  
You needed me. You needed to perfect me:  
In your absence you polished me into the Enemy.  
Your history gets in the way of my memory.  
I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy...  
If only somehow you could have been mine,  
what would not have been possible in the world?

(Ali 176-7).

In the poem titled, 'Survivor', Ali spiritually connects with Kashmir. The poet, as a 'survivor' lives in his own house and room in Kashmir. He even wears Ali's clothes and begins to resemble and sounds like Ali, and shares the same relationship that the poet has with his mother. Making a call to Kashmir which drops before the conversation is over is an interesting nostalgic symbol in his poems 'A Call' (85-9). Calling his parents moves emotions within him and reminds him of the 'cold moon of Kashmir'. He has no answer to his parents' questions about his return and they have no answer to his question 'Are you all happy?' (line 10).

The initial reading of Agha Shahid Ali's poem the reader experiences a sense of nostalgia. The poems are beautiful in their forms and diction as well as bitter and poignant in their tone. These poems are fused with inescapable rhythm of sadness, loss and suppressed anger which is imbedded in crafty but violent nuances of protest. "Translucent elegies 'for the city that is leaving forever (Srinagar)'..." wrote poet John Ashbery for the twenty-seven poems in the collection. Shahid Ali uses his poetry to encapsulate the suffering of the people of Kashmir through

a series of disturbing images of the valley, for instance women lost in bereavement, unkempt hair the veils that used to cover their faces; men, roaming around looking for their loved ones, and the shadows of young boys asking the poet not to tell their fathers that they are dead.

“They make a desolation and call it peace,” he writes in the poem, ‘Farewell’. When Shahid Ali presents a devastating elicitation of conflict and its aftermath, he paints a picture that is not only true for Kashmir but even extends to faraway lands such as Palestine. Edward Said once said that, although Shahid Ali’s poetry derives its searing imagery from his response to Kashmir’s agony, it’s so compelling because his poetry’s appeal is universal, and its voice unerringly eloquent.

In most of his poems Shahid has a sympathetic attitude towards the people of Kashmir and he lives with a dream of free and independent Kashmir. In the poem, “Postcard from Kashmir”, he writes:

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,  
My home a neat four by six inches.  
I always loved neatness. Now I hold  
The half-inch Himalayas in my hand.  
(Ali 29)

Despite the fact that Ali does not advocate violence in Kashmir’s conflict, he supports Kashmiris’ struggle for freedom, and reiterates his love for Kashmir and Kashmiri people in his poems. Most of his poems thus revolve around the bereavement based on witnessing the slow death of Kashmir as his homeland that is translated into the image of a paradise on earth. His poetry is an amplification of the history and culture of the Subcontinent. For Ali, the experience of crossing borders or the existence of an exile is not a reason for the conflict between ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ but a continuation that unites local and diasporic experience that he experiences in search of his Kashmiri origins. Shahid Ali’s poetry is an expression of association and subsequent merger with the plural voices of time and space. His treatment of the communal narrative of Husain, Zainab’s despair and the pains she undergoes as she is shifted to Damascus and the contemporary situation of Kashmir provides the diasporian intent to search the self that is detached in relation to the other.

## **The Land**

A frequent contrast is made between Kashmir remembered as a heaven that is being turned into hell as reflected in his poems. For instance, the opening lines of Ali's poem "The Land" gives the reader a vivid insight into idea of lost paradise and the contrast between beautiful memory of lost Garden of Eden and barren and waste land of present: "Swear by the olive in the God-kissed land -- There is no sugar in the promised land." However, his readers do not find bitterness or resentment against any faith or community for the this lost; rather he is optimistic that 'spring time' will return to his cherished land: "Will the Doomsayers die, bitten with envy, when springtime returns to our dismissed land?"

## **Cosmopolitan Approach**

Despite his cosmopolitanism approach in his poetry, Ali remains a Kashmiri nationalist: however, his nationalism is not jingoism. No doubt, his poetry mirrors political and religious conflicts going on in Kashmir valley but as indicated earlier, the plights and sufferings depicted in his poetry relate to his concerns about race and religion. In fact, he is first a human being, then a Kashmiri, and an Indian Muslim.

Ali's commitment to the global and local is clearly visible in his equal treatment of different religion. He was born in a family, which was the culmination of different cultures; Ali's interview with Christine Benvenuto speaks volumes of his catholic soul:

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).

This indicates that Ali advocates Kashmiri culture of brotherhood among Kashmiris and religious harmony among various Ethnic and religious groups. His vision of culture coincides and compliments Muslim culture as defined by Allama Mohammad Iqbal in his Madras address. In his lecture, Iqbal laid a great emphasis on the fact that Muslim culture is an inclusive and broad-based culture that accommodates and tolerates



diverse features of different faith and creeds. In Iqbal's perception, Islam is not a religion in the ancient sense of the word. It is an attitude of freedom from narrow-mindedness and even of defiance to the universe. It is a protest against all kinds of spiritual slavery of the ancient world. Therefore, according to Iqbal, Islam is neither national, nor racial, nor personal but purely human. As a culture, it has neither any language nor any script nor any specific mode of dress. Iqbal proclaims that A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities is low and ignoble. He entertains the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institution of other communities. A deeper analysis of his writings on this subject indicates that Ali, like that Iqbal recommends the adoption of the policy not of 'indifference' or 'suppression' but of 'respecting and liberating all religions, faiths and creeds' (Iqbal).

The sense of cosmopolitanism in Ali's work is approached in two different ways in this paper. Firstly, through his sense of Kashmiriyat, which somehow connects and acknowledges the multi-religious and multiethnic make up of Kashmir. Secondly, through intertextual references in his selected works. In this paper, the term 'intertextuality' refers either to any references that Ali makes towards other texts (European or non-European literature); or if he pays tribute to poets belonging to other countries/cultures; and when he creates a bridge between the eastern and western values.

While emotionally being attached to Kashmir, Ali also writes about his association with the places and friends in Delhi (I Dream it is afternoon when I return to Delhi 74-5). For example, he writes, 'In the lake the arms of temples and mosques are locked in each other's reflections ('Farewell', line 13). In 'Farewell' Ali uses a symbol of the temples and mosques as being 'locked in each other's reflections' in Kashmir. Ali's voice is the elaboration of a poetic voice that was representative of the subcontinent's own mixed history and cultural heritage. As a poet, Agha Shahid Ali unequivocally sings of the unity in culture in faith of India in general, Kashmir in particular, and his poetry transcends political divides and religious dissensions. This image from his poem "Farewell" gives us a vivid insight into Ali's vision of unity and harmony of different religions.

The image comments on his philosophy of cosmopolitanism and acknowledging the multi-religious and multicultural tradition of

Kashmir, in Zutshi's (2014) words, 'Syncretism religious cultures are part of Kashmiriyat' (18). While the war in Kashmir is aimed at separating religions and traditions, the temples and mosques seem to perpetually cling to each other, defying the political violence that is taking place in the region. Zutshi writes, 'Kashmiris were quite aware of belonging to religious groups with a certain set of rules that set them apart from those outside the bounds of those rules. But they recognized the larger affiliations, such as those with the land they lived in and the people who belonged to the region' (16). Kashmiriyat disregards religious boundaries as Zutshi notes that despite the Dogra regime (1846-1947) to divide Kashmir on religious basis, Kashmiris, regardless of their religious affiliations launched a national movement against Dogras. Pandits and Muslims reunited despite Dogras' efforts of creating social and economic distinctions (46). Exemplifying this typical sense of 'Kashmiriyat', Ali disregards any kind of religious boundaries within Kashmir.

Later in 'Farewell', he writes, Have you soaked saffron  
to pour on them when they are found like this centuries  
later in this country I have stitched to your shadow?

Pouring saffron on somebody or something in the culture of Kashmir and the sub-continent symbolizes the celebration and showing respect and reverence. The poem ends with Ali's plea to the Kashmiri Pundits, who left the Kashmir valley in the wake of violent freedom movement in its final lines, 'If only you could have been mine- what could not have been possible in the world?' In this line, he indicates his readers how much he yearns for Hindu and Muslim unity.

This belief connects with another of his poem 'Even the Rain' where he writes, 'What will suffice for a true-love knot?' (Even the Rain, Stanza 1, Line 1). Despite being a paradise, Kashmir is a hell haunted by 'Exquisite ghost', which is conceivably violence, explained as amalgamating, 'postcolonial violence and postcolonial pleasure' (Kabir, 2009: 13). Surrounded by the ultimate chaos of military operations, death and killings, Ali regrets that Kashmir could not belong to him when he writes, 'If only somehow you could have been mine, what wouldn't have happened in the world?'

Intertextuality is an interesting technique applied in Agha Shahid Ali's poetry. 'An Interview with Red Riding Hood Now no Longer Little' (and

'The Wolf's Postscript to 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Wolf's Postscript to "Little Red Riding Hood" uses intertextual approach to relate the famous Children's story of 'The Little Red Riding Hood', a European fairy tale about a little girl and a big wolf, the latest version being of Brothers Grimm (98-9,100-101). Like Ali himself, the little girl is in search of history as indicated in the opening lines of the poem: 'First, grant me my sense of history:' (line 1).

Carrying the burden of hyphenated identity, Ali oscillates between different worlds, the east and the west with a suggestion of being a world citizen. In his poem titled, 'Land', while being addicted to the 'Capitalist Land' like America, Ali remains split between the two lands he resides simultaneously; physically, in America and emotionally or spiritually in Kashmir, while admitting:

If home is found on both sides of the globe,  
home is of course here—and always a missed  
land.

While, in the same poem, he also remembers the atrocities happening in Kashmir:

Clearly, these men were here only to destroy,  
a mosque now the dust of a prejudiced land  
(Ali 9-10)

And later, the cries of children make him think how this 'tourist land' endures. While the poem strongly ends turning Ali's heart into a rebellious terrorist making him physically broken because the promised land is not the same that he had dreamt about.

At the moment the heart turns terrorist,  
are Shahid's arms broken, O Promised Land?  
(Ali 25-6)

Being torn between these two worlds instead of creating paradoxes, generates a sense of intertextuality in most of his poems. For instance, in 'After Seeing Kozinstev's *King Lear* in Delhi' combines his memories of Delhi with his passion for rich historical heritage of Delhi. After watching, *King Lear*, he reflects on the history of Indian rulers and he reflects on the history of Bahadur Shah Zafar rule. Zafar wished to be

buried in Delhi but was buried in Rangoon after spending several years of exile in Burma. Similar references towards the city of Delhi continue repeating in several poems like 'Chandni Chowk, Delhi' (Ali The Veiled 51).

Ali's poem titled: 'Homage to Faiz Ahmed Faiz' (Ali The Veiled 56) is another example of intertextuality. In this poem, Ali pays tribute to Faiz's contribution to the South Asian literary culture ( Ali The Veiled 56-9). Ali links his own experience of living in exile with South Asian poet who is cherished and mourned both in India and Pakistan. Written in three parts, the first part is based on five quintets (five lined stanzas) remembering Faiz as a poet writing when creativity was threatened by the state and the writers were not allowed to express themselves openly. However, according to Ali, this was also the time when South Asia connected with Faiz as an Urdu poet whether he was in Tunis, Beirut, London or Moscow (Stanza 4, lines 3-4). The second part of this poem is based on eight tercets (three lined stanzas). Ali remembers listening to Faiz when his father recited the poems (Stanza 1), his poems turning into ragas and being sung by renowned singers (Stanza 6). This is when Faiz becomes a 'memory, necessary' (Stanza 7, line 7-8) for Ali. The third part of the poem based on thirteen couplets and ends with a single line. This section reflects on how After Faiz's death, Ali translated his poetry and could somehow relate to his work. He carried Faiz's Urdu poetry beyond the borders of Pakistan and India and continues to be inspired by his work. The poem ends on a sad note as Faiz remains 'a memory of musk, the rebel face of hope' for Ali.

In his poetic collection, *The Half Inch Himalayas*, Ali prefaces with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf that ends: "I die in exile". This indicates the fact that Ali was a man who physically lived in America but psychologically and spiritually he remained deeply rooted in Kashmir as his motherland (35).

I close my eyes. It doesn't leave me,  
The cold moon of Kashmir which breaks  
Into my house. (Andrabi 125)

The prologue of 'The Country Without a Post Office' (1997), Ali follows the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam. At the beginning of his poem, "A Pastoral" We shall meet again, in Petersburg / as though we had buried the sun there! (15). These lines were written by Mandelstam in 1920.

This was the time when Petersburg was politically transforming. The government had just shifted to Moscow and more than half of the population of the city had fled after being devastated due to the Russian Civil War (Volkov 211 12).

In these lines Mandelstam depicts Petersburg, his birthplace, nostalgically “as the place where light and hope, though hidden, may be retrieved’. Here, Ali draws a parallel between his image of Kashmir, which is also place of his birth place and, therefore ‘the garden of bliss’ for him. Hence, mimicking Mandelstam, he replaces Petersburg with Sarinagar: We shall meet again, in Srinagar by the gates of the Villa of Peace’. He goes on to express his intense desire to see his birthplace free and peaceful:

our hands blossoming into fists  
till the soldiers return the keys  
and disappear. Again we’ll enter  
our last world, the first that vanished  
in our absence from the broken city

(Ali The Veiled 2-8)

His vision of liberation is peaceful and beautiful  
Kashmir: he aims at turning the ugly and painful  
elements into beautiful and pleasant panorama:  
We’ll tear our shirts for tourniquets  
and bind the open thorns, warm the ivy  
into roses

(Ali The Veiled 8-10)

In these lines, Ali uses as a spokesperson to expose the massacre, bloodshed, and violence that are being perpetrated in Kashmir as well as voice of happy tidings for the change i.e. the change for better days: “the bird will say—Humankind can bear everything. No need to stop the ear to stories rumored in branches:” {“That bird is silent all winter.

Its voice returns in spring, a plaintive cry.  
That’s when it saw the mountain falcon  
rip open, in mid-air, the blue magpie,  
then carry it, limp from the talons.” (Ali, 2009: 11-30)

Towards the end of the poem, we hear the birds speaking, this time it is in an optimistic tone: We'll go past our ancestors, up the staircase, holding their wills against our hearts. Their wish was we return—forever!—and inherit(Quick, the bird will say) that to which we belong, not like this— to get news of our death after the world's.

(Ali The Veiled 50-4)

Agha Shahid Ali advocates for the liberation of his people from the oppression and tyranny of Indian rulers, yet he never incites his people to violence nor preaches narrow nationalism based on particular faith or creed. His appeal is to the Kashmiri nation as whole regardless of their religion or faith: "We'll go past our ancestors, up the staircase, holding their wills against our hearts" Ali (A Pastoral: 49-51). His use of first-person plural 'We' indicates that he is addressing the Kashmiri nation in general and the image of "up the stair" tells us that Ali wants his people climb up to a higher pedestal. His call is 'excelsior' "holding their wills against our hearts. Their wish was we return—forever!" (Ali The Veiled 51-4).

It is evident that most of his poetry is primarily focused on the loss of Kashmir as his homeland. Ghosh regards Ali for his use of the motif of a lost utopia – a characteristic reflecting in most of the poems in 'The Country Without a Post Office'. Shahid takes up the Miltonic theme of 'Paradise Lost'. Hence, many of these poems deal with his return to Kashmir as a paradise of his childhood, which has been permanently inexorably damaged. Ali quotes Zbigniew Herbert line as the pre-embled of his poem 'A Pastoral' "on the wall the dense ivy of executions" to give insight into hellish conditions of the paradise that was on the lips of Emperor Jahangir when he was on his death bed. However, it does not mean that Ali has lost his hope and disillusioned with the situation in Kashmir for his poem begins and ends with optimistic note:

"We shall meet again, in Srinagar,  
by the gates of the Villa of Peace,.... We'll go past  
our ancestors, up the staircase,  
holding their wills against our hearts. Their wish"  
(The Veiled 1- 54)

This paper has argued that, Agha Shahid Ali's vision is that of a saint or a Sufi who regards unity in diversity. According to him we, sons and daughters of Adam in other words, every man/every woman is a universe and is the product of immense historical forces. Like great Sufi poets of the sub-continent, Shahid Ali also believes that he is a Muslim and Hindu; a westerner and easterner; and is everybody at the same time. He is a lover, freedom fighter, visionary, and a radical thinker. In this time and space of violence and intolerance, Ali's vision of universal harmony, believe in inter-faith and cultural relativism, unequivocal love for humanity at large, and understanding in Gadamerian sense are the need of the hour. His use of different poetic forms ranging from Euro-American form of versification to *Ghazala* popular form of lyrical poem among Arab, Persian, and Urdu poets gives his readers insight into his cosmopolitan vision. He wants to see his Kashmir free, peaceful and harmonious, not the present day Kashmir which is the image of hell, where there is nothing but destruction, sufferings and death. He wants to return to Kashmir that used to be the paradise on earth.

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