Exile for most early writers and critics was synonymous with loss and mourning. From Satan’s exile from Heaven and that of Adam and Eve from Eden, to the exile of Jews from their homeland, or the exodus of Armenians, the migration of Blacks and the transportation of indentured laborers from India to the West Indies, the story of exile is always written with the tropes of bereavement, tragedy and mourning. The British colonization, in the modern history is also responsible for the large scale “dispersal” of people from their original lands to new areas as colonizers and as slaves and laborers. The modernization of economies with the end of British colony produced a new class of migrants—educational, professional, who left their heaths and hearths willingly in search of greener pastures. This new position however, emerged after a long journey of political trouble and maneuvers with various cross-sections and deviations. Each exile has their unique journey whether forced into it or taken willingly. Students, artists, labors, technicians, academicians, and businessmen are also categorized as diaspora and exile for they also undergo a traumatic experience while leaving their home and language even when they do it out of their own choice. For such migrants, exile is a much more complex phenomenon. The identity of the man leaving his land becomes an important issue as he is out of touch with his people, language, food, culture and even the news about them sometimes. He has a new world to think of, to respond to: a new race of people, a new language, new food and new surroundings. In case of the modern exiles of privilege, this
novelty is usually a longed for/wishful romance. To the immigrants of Third World, the First World is not only a ground offering immense opportunities but also immense luxury. However, once they become used to the new life, the finesse and the cultural subtleties of the old life, the life back at home start hankering them. The old identity that had taken a backseat comes to the forefront. The diaspora starts accommodating the new world into his old one, rewriting the old rules for new ones, removing those that had become junk in the new land and reworking on the certain that refuse to leave. This of course, is an ever-going process. The diaspora is always in flux. It may be painful at times or it may happen naturally. The identity of the diaspora thus sways between the two worlds leaning more on one at any certain point. This process is witnessed in the use of the language and the assertion of a religious-cultural identity. This is done with an intention of recreating the old home into a new one. While the political exiles and forced migrants undergo much difficulty in the re-creation of the old home, the ‘exile of privilege’, the willful migrant always have the opportunity to take a flight back to the home. They are much more updated with the contemporary scenario at their homelands and their re-created new homes in the foreign land are therefore more realistic, and contemporary as opposed to the semblance of an idealistic home found in the literature produced by political or forced exiles.

Diasporas belong to both the homeland and the hostland but both belongings are incomplete or fissured. Thus, they belong nowhere. They are hybrids. They are neither completely this nor that. They are not whole or pure. They are broken and always ‘in-the-making’. The term ‘hybridity’ is borrowed from biology and refers to cross-breeding of two species to yield a third, ‘hybrid’ product. In the intermingling of human races due to
migration and exiled population, hybridization results in many new linguistic, cultural, political, racial products/production. Major issues that the diaspora, the hybrids and the in-between face are those concerning languages, cultures, identity. These three are very intricately interlinked and affect each other through the recollection of memories and a constant reference and re-creation of history. Language is seen as a tool carrier for the postcolonial subjects, leading to the creation of cultures or cultural identities. For the Indian post-modern writers and poets, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Arundhati Roy or Salman Rushdie, language can be molded through techniques of loaning words into English language, changing the syntax of the sentences to replicate the syntax of the mother-tongue, using original words from the mother tongue. This is an ongoing project that asserts that culture could be molded, re-created and asserted even in a foreign land and tongue.

The poet Agha Shahid Ali cultivates a new discourse in the field of diaspora studies as a figure having a clear trajectory that moves through nostalgia and longing to diaspora and exile towards an existential concern. Shahid's career as a diaspora moves in a sort of backward gear as compared to most other diaspora writers, where his involvement with his homeland and language and culture increases with the passage of time while he was living in the United States. Starting his career at plush universities, Shahid had all the privilege that the modern migrant could wish for. He, however, becomes what is referred to as, victim diaspora when his home is destroyed in Kashmir and when his mother passes away. His homosexual orientation contributed to his alienation from the social gendered norms escalating his sense of exile. The loss of the mother is seen as the loss of the safety-net and the one reliable source of love and comfort. Later when Shahid contracts the same
disease of brain tumor as his mother did, he undergoes a severe personal crisis between doubt and faith in the divinity. The emotional flavoring of the language and the metaphor, the use of epic tropes drawn from the native Urdu-Muslim culture and the interlacing it with history of the land of Kashmir, point to the existential crisis that is handled deftly in the last volumes. It was only towards the end of his life that Shahid realizes that he has to live the true meaning of his name as a “Beloved Witness”. The irony of the Witness is unintentional—but Shahid's later poems reveal that he learned to play the role of saint-seer and at times, like Tiresias of Eliot’s *Waste Land*, connects the temporal and the spatial junctions from not only his personal life but from disparate sources and cultures into a pattern that appears in the last volume. This pattern is a trace of his journey as a diaspora which brought about an amalgamation of cultures from East and West.

The present study has borrowed certain autobiographical elements from the poet’s life to be able to read the dramatic fictive narrative that is present in the work of the poet. A phenomenological method of reading has been applied where the poet’s cogito binds the various volumes of his poetry in an implicit hidden story patterned on the fall and redemption trope of the Persian-Urdu poetry. The tussle as played out in the last volume of the poet is between doubt and faith. The Judeo-Islamic figures of Ishmael and Abraham are symbols of faith and submission with the poet-persona seems to be rejecting. The poet-persona, like the arch-lover Satan, is in rebellion against his Beloved God, aware of *His* vulnerabilities and *His* loneliness in Heaven. The poet-person seems to known it all and is thus seeking a communion with his Beloved. The pattern that is visible in Shahid's work is modeled on the Islamic and the Judeo-Christian archetypal pattern of love, separation, fall, rebellion, submission, and communion. The poet of *The Veiled Suite*
makes a journey similar to Dante undergoing painful hell and purgatorio to finally come into a union with God/the Divine Being. Many Sufi poets have also believed in this tradition of rebellion sympathizing with Satan and calling him the Arch-Lover as well the Arch-Rebel for he was truer to the word of God than God himself. Satan rebelled because God asked him to bow down to the new lover; Adam. They question the methods of God and accuse him of being whimsically exacting. The Sufi poets find it difficult to humbly submit to the fancy of God and thus model their love for God on the love of Satan. Unlike Job who was relieved of his tragedy, Satan remains devoid of God’s munificence for it is communion that he seeks and not a single-sided devotion. He, therefore, vouched to lead astray God’s subjects till the Day of Judgment; himself suffering the pangs of separation and loneliness. Thus, every lover who suffers is the successor of the arch-lover, Satan who descended from heavenly abode which is the place of the Beloved/God to Hell which is defined by the absence of Beloved/God. Shahid borrows this theme from Urdu poetry which was originally influenced by Arabic and Persian literature.

Shahid's merit as a poet lies in carrying forward a tradition in the Indian English poetry that has Rabindranath Tagore, A.K. Ramanujan and Arun Kolatkar in the liege, where they have successfully managed to fuse the native with the foreign. The use of Bengali folk music by Tagore, the Tamil and Kannada poetic diction by Ramanujan, and the remodeling of the Marathi Bhakti poetry by Arun Kolatkar in English poetry gathers them as a unit that has successfully managed to bring out a distinct identity of the Indian poetic tradition. Shahid Ali with his Ghazal and the Marsiya, and with his experimentation of fusing the mellifluousness of Urdu poetic tropes into English also stands among these poets. Shahid's international popularity rests in several of his poetic feats. His
involvement with the American landscape in the *Nostalgist’s Map of America* earns him a position as an American poet, while his later works contribute to the multiculturalism of the American land and literature. His use of old European poetic forms—the canzone, especially, earns him a prominent place in the poetic fraternity. Shahid remains among the few American poets who had successfully used the intricate form.

What sets Shahid apart from these writers is the note of decadent romance that is found in Urdu poetry of Mir and Ghalib. The note of Shahid's poetry is that of loss and celebration, most of the time combining the two together with an indulgence or seeking out a celebration even in loss. Shahid had an eye that could spot beauty in the most mundane and commonplace objects/emotions. He could rope in the modern and the classical together to create a delicacy even among utter loss. Shahid's poetry emerges from very personal loss and longing leaving a sense of intimacy. The tone of Shahid's poetry is a blend of the metaphor of Mir, the wit of Ghalib and the revolutionary zeal of Faiz conveyed through a language that has been shaped and influenced by impassioned irony of T. S. Eliot in the classics and the elegance, dispassionate use of autobiographical of James Merrill in the contemporary poets. From Merrill, Shahid learnt the ability to use the personal life without being confessional. Shahid's work may be categorized along with those of Robert Bly or James Wright under the ‘open field’ poetry with obscure symbolism; meditative notes on self and life are fused with natural scenery and in personal experiences. Shahid's poems are personal, though not confessional. They build up a myth of family, home, homeland but are not idiosyncratic utterances of a modern man. They are well rooted poems each reflecting a part of his consciousness—even the trivial and the ridiculous are celebrated with utmost veneration. Many of his personal
experiences find a place in his poems; his poetics evolves from the personal to the general and the universal.

The first chapter Émigré, describes the poet’s migration which is traced from Kashmir to America. This chapter talks about the first five poetic collections by Agha Shahid Ali— Bone Sculptor (1972), In Memory of Begum Akhtar & Other Poems (1979), The Half-Inch Himalayas (1987), A Walk Through the Yellow Pages (1987) and A Nostalgist’s Map of America (1991). The first two volumes—Bone Sculptor and Begum Akhtar, are slim ones and exile and loss are used only as a trope to build up an idea, an identity and a book of poems that is bound together as much with the tradition of post-colonial migration as with the decadence of Urdu-Persian language and is equally a part of the loss that the Kashmiri native feels due to the undefined nature of his political affiliations. From the chinars of Kashmir to the Vietnam wars, the poet is responsive to a variety of issues that crowd his life; the mind was now the Jamesian web of consciousness where everything gets caught up, reflected upon and reproduced in photographic images. It is only after Shahid publishes The Half-Inch Himalayas in 1987 that the theme of exile takes a real form. This collection of poems is bound by a narrative of recollections, triggered by the postcard from Kashmir that sets him thinking about how he travelled from a secure, rooted home (Kashmir) through a city of coalescence (Delhi) to a metropolitan world (U.S.). The four sections of the volume roughly correspond to the subsequent stages of Ali’s life-roots/family/ancestors in Kashmir, life of a student and later as teacher in Delhi, arrival and settlement in U.S. and from there a retrospection and reminiscence of the life left behind in India. Shahid Ali’s poetry is an attempt of recreating that race and religion, language and the community of interest but his physical
movement from India to U.S. deprives him of the geography, and thus in his poems he creates ‘imaginary homelands’ with all the assortment of memories he had. The poems from *The Half-Inch Himalayas* are highly imagistic and yet they have a distinct voice of the poet. They succeed in conveying what they want to. The images create scenes from an episode and then liquefy and re-emerge into another picture. The poems sometime resemble the Bergsonian snowball of consciousness where one episode on the mind gets wound around another episode. Shahid's voice as a poet is clear and strong from this volume onwards; his reputation as a poet was firmly established as he got good reviews from all quarters. Shahid's style of writing in this early phase is characteristically controlled. These volumes reveal Shahid as an Indian-American poet with a distinct voice and original metaphors contributing to the multiethnic voice in American poetry. The major themes in these volumes are loss, longing, home, homeland and histories. This is generally considered the honeymoon phase of the migrant when the issues of settling in the new land and fitting in with the new culture and language are the core concerns. The home assumes a metaphorical value of a phase which was happy and comfortable but there was no possibility or desire of return. The poetic concern at this stage is therefore to find an idiom to describe his unique identity as a Kashmiri-American and even as an Urdu-speaking Indian. He also grapples with finding the correct expression with the American experience.

The chapbook *A Walk Through the Yellow Pages* published in 1987 and the next volume *A Nostalgist’s Map of America* that appeared in 1991 established Shahid as a poet of language. Shahid is found using a style of writing which is increasingly post-modernist; spare, controlled, working with sudden puns and twist and relying on imagery for
expression of an emotion. The single and even smaller words are infused with potent meanings and are placed in poems strategically. Written against the backdrop of advertisements in the Yellow Pages and those that flood the modern American streets, newspapers, and lives; the volume conveys the idea that human emotions can be easily manipulated and the sole motive of every activity is profit-making. The poems treat nostalgia ironically— an emotion characteristic of the diaspora who moves through a phase of plain homesickness to an acceptance of the new land and is undergoing a state of realization that though a home is lost, all is not lost.

*A Nostalgist’s Map of America* is a document of the poet’s experience with the landscape and history of south-western America and is therefore reliant on creation of moments in the narrative to replicate the drive through the sparsely populated regions. The poems sway between emotion and emotionality, between dark and somber and also between structure and fluidity. The poems in the volume are eclectic both in their themes and their inspirations, intertextually woven with the voices of many American poets. Shahid's involvement with Emily Dickinson can be seen in his continual referencing to her poems and a styling of the poems in the Dickinson-ian manner. Shifts in focal points, time and space ellipsis, wordplay, disjointed themes, unfinished sentences, narrative digressions and sudden diversions are the techniques employed to bring in disparate images under a canopy, tying them in a poem for they all seem to point eastward to home.

The second chapter *Exile* takes up Shahid's deep involvement with the root cultures of Arabic-Persian-Urdu and with the personal crisis the poet undergoes when his homeland Kashmir undergoes political turmoil. Shahid’s use of the Islamic traditions of the Karbala elegy, the sacrifice of prophet Ishmael, as well as the Hindu mythologies of
Shiva-Parvati, Radha-Krishna point towards the poet’s return to his roots and to his native identity. The loss of the homeland binds the poet back to its politics and the language gets emotionally dense and profuse. *The Country Without a Post-Office* (1997) draws readers’ attention towards the ethos of a Kashmiri culture and at the same time decries the violence that broke out in the 1989-90 which destroyed the local culture. The images of loss, suffering, and pain are juxtaposed against or weaved along the images of beauty, tenderness and benevolence of the history and genesis of the Kashmiri land. The volume stands out in Shahid's oeuvre as an anguished cry of loss and mourning with poems pouring out emotions like the molten lava, sometimes too forceful to be harnessed into a form and at other times, too raw to be left without a formalistic boundary. The poems are a requiem that connects the atrocious historical lineage of the land, a lament of loss suffered by the people of the land, and a mourning for the destruction the land has undergone. It is also a song of celebration of the mythological roots of Kashmir, of the bucolic beauty of the land, and of the cultural amalgamation that has been referred to as *Kashmiriyat*. The poems move both temporally and spatially to bind universal sentiments of loss and love. The division of the homeland on religious grounds is of utmost disgust to the poet and he is seen continuously asserting the long tradition of the syncreticism of the Hindu-Muslim cultures that was a unique feature to Kashmir. Shahid's poetics overrides the modern notions of secularism and tolerance to show that people are capable of more; of adapting and of relenting to the beauties of nature and geography. Unlike the modern Western notions of cultural tolerance, most Indian cultures can boast of not only being tolerant but also being influenced by different religions and ethnicities.
Exile, in Shahid's poetry, emanates from the postmodern identity that is full of ironies and contradictions, and from the ‘Outsider’ position that his homosexuality places him in. The Shia-Muslim poet traces his sense of exile from the original exile of Satan, the arch Beloved/Lover of God and the exile of the first man, Adam and Eve from Heaven. To Shahid, man is essentially bound to suffer exile due to his position as man, and as a lover. The ‘no-return’ is a territory that is home, womb, and heaven. Thus, exile in Shahid's poetry is not just an exile from homeland but also from home, from the womb of the mother, and from the showground of the Beloved. From the vantage point of being a US resident Shahid’s backward glance towards his home in Kashmir, is fondly romantic. The poems are constantly recreating the lived experiences. Shahid’s poems are never judgmental towards India, Kashmir, Kashmiri culture or people; rather they emphasize the tenderness and beauty of the pluralistic society that Kashmir was known for. Popular Kashmiri icons and figures are used by the poet to construct an ethnicity specific to the land. The icons and components of the Kashmiri culture, Nund Rishi, Lal Ded, Shah Hamdan were local saint that stood for social unity, cultural richness and steadfastness in troubled times. They are used effectively to furnish a link between the popular religious traditions and the socio-cultural practices of the people of the land. By playing them out in his poetics and weaving the personal, the political and the historical together, the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali concretizes a ‘thirdspace’ (Bhabha) that the diaspora longs for as ‘home’. The act of poetic creation, while spelling out that from which he is exiled, is also an act of recreating that land. Memory, lived experiences, imagination, history and the geographical spaces all blend to create an ‘imaginary homeland’ that is not close to the ‘real’ home but much better. Many strict poetic forms in this volume like the canzone, the
villanelle, and the ghazal are used with an intention to convey the layers of emotional density.

The loss of the mother which forms the theme of *Rooms Are Never Finished*, further consolidates his sense of exile. She, along with God, home and homeland fill in for the ‘Beloved’ in his poetry. The death of the mother brings him face to face with certain rituals that he or the family would not practice generally. The offering of prayers for the death body—‘*namaz-e-janaza*’ and then the days of ritualistic mourning, the third day ‘*teeja*’ or the tenth day ‘*dusvi*,’ the singing of traditional elegies and *Marsiya* ‘*nauha* and *marsiya*’ in the Shia household become sources of poetic inspiration while also being an expression of grief. There is a sense of awakening, a different knowledge that instills in the poet the sense of exile that becomes apparent in this volume. The history of Karbala is a core to the Shia identity, Shahid’s inclusion of that history in his poetry while providing a new idiom to English poetry also points towards his recourse to the Islamic culture and theology. The play between history and personal memory is a part of the poetics of Agha Shahid Ali who patterns his personal tragedy with the larger historical and religious frameworks. The subjective and the objective, the recorded and the experiential, memory and history, the distant and the loved ones all feature and interact freely and constantly in the poetry of Shahid to show how common lives can alter the sense of history and how loss and lamentations are a universal rejoinder. The new form and possibility Shahid added to the English poetry by reworking the ancient poetic tradition of *Marsiya*—a form still used in most Muslim communities, by juxtaposing the bloodshed and killings in Kashmir with the historical episode of Karbala and the loss, lament and pain of his dying mother with that of Hussain’s sister Zainab, make his personal tragedy with that of
Karbala and of the entire Shia community. The religious and historical loss syntaxed with a personal one provides the diaspora poet a consolatory perspective in the process of constructing a new transnational poetics. The mother is also equated with the motherland and the poet laments the loss of both. Clubbing disparate allusions from history, mythology and folklore, Shahid invokes the historic Vaishnav (followers of Lord Vishnu/Krishna) and the Shaivic (Lord Shiva) and the Buddhist traditions of the land.

One of Shahid's techniques was a telescoping of two different time zones in order to show how life is a continuum lived in small moments. History, for Shahid Ali, is as much a part of the present as he understands the present will be to future. The history of Kashmir, and of Karbala provide him the suitable metaphor to translate his loss, nostalgia and his exile and find his position in the larger tradition of aesthetic. In constant narration and quoting of Islamic history—even verses from the Quran, Shahid tries to fit his grief in the larger framework. He also establishes how pain and suffering is a part of the divine plan and how like all true lovers of God (Christ, Abraham, Ishmael and Hussein) he too is suffering for His whims. The defiance becomes more vocal and structured in the last volume, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* (2003) but in the present volume, the poet is going through the purgatory and the suffering demands tropes as intense as Karbala. Shahid’s poems apprehend that the faith, especially for an Oriental mind, remains at the core of human existence. This, however, is an impossible condition for the exile. There remains ambiguity on the relevance of God and his power to hold the centre in the event of loss. The diaspora, the postcolonial, the post modern has the curse/blessing of ambivalence, of alienation and of an existential quest. God, faith, religion, family, history, nation and cultural unity only provide a semblance of comfort and form to the poet. And yet the
ambiguity prevails when there is a constant movement towards these well-established notions. The only respite available to him is in memory and poetry.

The third chapter *Existence*, deals with the existential crisis the poet faces in event of the foreknowledge of his death. Exile from land and from home and from the social gendered norms makes the poet move beyond the social and cultural, beyond the good and the evil and also beyond the temporal and the spatial. Shahid's approaching death pushes him into larger issues that encompasses these and moves beyond. The central theme of the volume is an existential quest of the meaning of life and his own position. The quest is explicated in an encompassing narrative that touches upon all those parts of his life that has been important to him, events that have defined him and people who influenced him. It is from these ideas that Shahid builds up his ideal world. Exile takes a much larger dimension to include life itself and becomes a temperamental condition to the poet. Fated with Abraham and Ishmael, and also with Adam and Satan, Shahid draws his sense of exile from the expulsion of Satan and of Adam from Heaven, the original abode of the Beloved. The chapter reveals how Shahid had worked through his entire poetic career towards bringing a new metaphor to the English poetry by lending it the Urdu poetic form of ghazal. This also brings in a whole range of imagery, diction, syntax and expression from the Urdu poetry. Shahid in popularizing/perfecting of the English ghazal finds an expression of his own in-betweenness, his sense of exile, and his existential concerns. The chapter discusses how Shahid throughout his career worked with the English language to infuse in it his own native cultural consciousness. The ghazal in English came into form after a long process of lending and loaning. Shahid first ventured at the translation of Urdu poems into English, he then introduced the ghazal form to the American poets where
it was received with much vigor. Shahid finally produced *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*, which was a book of ghazals in English. This volume not only provides a closing to Shahid but was thematically constitutive of all that remained important to him. The volume *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* forms a finale to the poet’s oeuvre in many ways. The content of the final poems adapt perfectly to the concerns of a poet who was a man of multiple cultures and traditions. The ghazal with its thematic history of love, longing, loss and a tradition of skepticism towards social conventions, organized religion as well as the Divine Will provided Shahid the ground on which he could situate his own tussle of faith and doubt. The ghazal comes to Shahid as a form of consummation of his life-long struggle to make a niche for the Oriental poetic sensibility and metaphor, and was perhaps the most appropriate form that could do justice to his personality. The ghazal offered immense possibilities to the poet who had Oriental roots but Occidental routes to explore his multiple loyalties, to express his polymorphic, variegated self in its structural arbitrariness of the different *sher*, where the *qafiya* that drives home the philosophy, the wisdom or the emotion of the couplet/poet persona. The ghazal also has a long tradition of love, loss, mourning, and extravagant emotionality, and an ambiguously gendered address to the lover/beloved. All this provided a fertile ground to Shahid to situate his own personal dilemmas and identity politics. Shahid in turn gave the Oriental form a new home, a new field in American/English poetry. By bringing the form to America and popularizing it amongst the American poets, Shahid was returning the favors that he felt the two sides of the globe had privileged him with. with no insistence on narrative unity, no development of thought, the ghazal allows for a variety of emotions simultaneously—the poet can thus be intense, playful, comical, flirtatious, sorrowful or existential in turn. The ghazal with
its formal strictness and arbitrary content incubated in Ali’s mind for a long time and suited Ali best. Agha Shahid Ali reached to the culmination point of English ghazals after years of chiselling, pruning and experimenting with the English language/poetry so as to make it accommodative of the Urdu emotions as well as the Urdu metrical form. There were three stages through which the ghazal passed under the hands of Shahid Ali, to reach the culmination point of *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*. It provided Ali the necessary and the firm ground on which he could lay the foundations of his diasporic identity.

As a form, it provided Shahid an existing tradition of defiance and effrontery against the societal as well as divine order. Shahid's dilemma at his own mortality, his despair at his mother’s death and his emotional turmoil at the political trouble at his homeland were issues that were handled deftly in the ghazal. One of the striking qualities of the Urdu poetry was its recurrent emotional indulgence inevitably layered with philosophical abstractions. The movement, in most Urdu ghazals, is from a state of rejection and pain to a state of acceptance of the pain as an essential condition of living. This tendency of fatalistic existence is reflected and also concretized by the greatest of the Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib, who remains, apart from Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the most resonant voices in Shahid's poetry and had a major influence on Shahid's poetic sensibility. The exile of the poet, as discussed earlier, is not a political banishment, but a temperamental condition. Shahid in his last stage of life, while confronting his mortality in the face of a fatal disease, comes to realize that pain and suffering are elemental to living and cannot be escaped from at all. These existential concerns find a voice in his poetry. The issues that trouble the poet range from sexuality, to reconciliation of languages and cultures, the play of memory and history, land and loyalties, to god and religion. It is however, a basic
struggle to understand the meaning and relevance of all these concerns that become a central issue to the poet. The poet sees his identity as a Kashmiri-American, as a Shia-Muslim and as an heir of multiple legacies of Urdu-Indian-Western culture and languages. The struggle is as much as an existential quest as a re-formulation of his personal as well as cultural identity.

The Islamic tradition, as against the Judeo-Christian beliefs, put Ishmael at the centre of the sacrificial ritual as ordained to Abraham by the Divine Will. While the test of faith was directed towards Abraham, it was equally demanding on Ishmael as he had the foreknowledge of his death. Abraham has told his son Ishmael of the God’s command to which Ishmael not only acquiesce but shows complete faith. Ishmael, in Islamic tradition, is therefore, a model of willful submission accepting God’s command to give up his life for faith. He faces his upcoming death with not only patience and fortitude but a keenness and willingness that defy logic. It is with such a figure that Shahid equates his own submission and yet the post-colonial understanding is anything but plain. This post-modern poetic voice is not focal but multiple and fluid. Like T. S. Eliot’s Waste Land which is a weave of various strands of consciousness, the volume Call Me Ishmael Tonight is a similar product of a postcolonial diasporic mind and the various voices weaved in one poetic output is constitutive of the multicultural and the cosmopolitan culture. There is a Muslim, a Kashmiri, and a diaspora to the American land in the poet Shahid Ali—inclinations are equally towards the Islamic histories, Hindu gods and goddess as well as the western theologies and culture. Above it all, Ali is the Witness and a Beloved! While these multiple tangents have an equal claim on the poet; for a diaspora, the core unity of home and Self gets shattered as soon as he enters into a new land, a new
language or a new culture. No matter how hard the diaspora tries to clutch onto the native roots, to deny the life of Other’s culture; the centre gets disrupted and so, forever. S/He can no longer look back at one’s roots with the same innocence and purity. This diffused mind, full of multiple focal points when faced with life’s vulnerabilities in the form of his own mortality tries to find and make a pattern by looking into the voices that he has known all his life, the cultures he had lived into and the knowledge he has gained. There is evidence of struggle between doubt and faith, between truth and appearance and this journey from doubt to rejection to knowledge to submission that Shahid goes through is his personal purgatory.

The God referred to in Shahid's poems is not the powerful god of Hopkins. It is not the grandeur of god that is implored or celebrated but the vulnerability and whimsicality that has been dwelt upon by the poet. The use of words like ‘spiv’, ‘lonely’ ‘terrorizing’ are instances of the wavering faith or the unconvinced belief. The volume thus, presents a ground where the conflicting emotions and ideas of the poet are fore-played in the form of allusions to the figures of Abraham, Ishmael as well as Satan. The poet figure has a shifting stance from submission and faith in the form of Ishmael, Karbala and the Sufi mystic Mansoor Al-Hajj to a defiance represented in the constant questioning, negation or uprooting of these ideals of piety and holiness. The defiance is projected through a romanticizing the Satan figure. The rebelliousness of Satan in the classical Urdu literature has been a common motif and has provided a ground to many poets to express their doubts in the Divine Will. Agha Shahid Ali is also following the same paved way of these Urdu-Persian poets like Ghalib, Faiz, Iqbal (his famous piece Shikwa or Complaint against the Divine Will) in voicing his rebellion and his existential concerns in his poetry.
The ghazal tradition offers a common motif of the lover and the beloved, modeled on God and Satan, deeply in love yet highly antagonist against each other. In the ghazal, the poets play upon this metaphor and the virtuosity of the poet lies in maintaining the ambiguity between the earthly lover and the divine love. It is only Satan who had preserved his identity by rebelling against god because he was the truest lover—he alone can understand god’s “vintage loneliness that has turned to vinegar”. And only Shahid because he is the ‘Witness’ can know “God’s sorrow in heaven” and see Him sobbing, longing for His lover. This knowledge of God’s vulnerability towards Satan stands analogous to Bhabha’s concept of the ‘Other’. The Beloved-Satan is the ‘Other’ and no matter how cruel, crude or undeserving of attention, it is a necessary figure to keep the ‘Self’ alive. But the ‘in-between’ figure of the poet, a post-modern mind of multiple centers and a postcolonial diaspora who has knowledge of both the worlds—here metaphorically can thus have no fixed truths. He stands at a vantage point where he witnesses the play of both the Self and the Other. To such a Witness, submission is not just difficult but impossible.

Apart from making use of Islamic history and metaphors, Shahid's poetry is significantly laced with the myths of Hindu Gods and Goddess. Shiva and Parvati, Radha-Krishna signify the regenerative and creative forces—a sort of communion that Shahid longs for—the coming together of the antagonistic Hindu and Muslim identities to fuse into one creative force. There is a continual reinforcement of the idea of multiplicity reinforced through the use of icons from multiple religious and cultural ideals. The language of the roots is reclaimed by resorting to the poetic structure, the content matter, the style and the mannerisms of the popular poetic form, ghazal, in the way it was used
and a revisit to the folklore, popular myths, mythology, or popular legends. This leads to a transfer of the real essence of the language for a language is, but a vehicle of its tradition and culture. Reproducing the folklores of Laila Majnoon, the anecdotes of Mansur Al-Hallaj, drawing metaphors and parallels from Islamic history bring in a consciousness of the Arabic language—the essence is also captured by a constant allusion to the great Urdu poets and singers—Ghalib, Meer, Faiz, Faraz, Begum Akhtar, Mallika Pukhraj. The Indianness/Hindustani culture is also reproduced by the mention of Malhar lyrics, Bollywood songs, bhajans, Shiv-Parvati tussle, the Radha Krishna affair, the priest in saffron, the smashed statues of the temple. The syntax or the structure of a language has several common phrases, expressions common to its speakers—this has been used at several places by the poet to bring home to the readers of his poetry the real feel of that language. Shahid was inspired by the Spanish poet Lorca as well as the Urdu poet Faiz to handle his verse in a manner that ushers in a language that was close to common people.

Frequent allusions to images, icons, songs, movements from the Indian cinema explains the composition of the diaspora as a product of 70s and 80s when the Bollywood pervading upon the psyche of the Indian youth so much that it becomes an essential component of their lives. Shahid's use of it only reflects that a modern man exposed to multiple sources and mediums of learning is not the regular Wordsworthian, Arnold, Eliot drawing inspiration from only classical literary texts or their social surroundings but the contemporary poet—a post-modern, post colonial poet who lives in the era of advanced scientific inventions of television, video cameras, telephones, trains, flights, computers and floppies have many more moments of inspirations and many more medium to
influence him. The existence of the poet is therefore not restricted within a literary tradition but is much more open and diffused drawing from multifarious sources.

The Book of Ghazals may be considered an act of pro-creation at one level; the poet’s desire to live on, even in the act of submitting to his fatal illness, the assertion of his identity and claims indelibility by his knowledge.

The *Conclusion* offers a summation of the above points revealing how Shahid's poetry has a two-way movement. There is a journey forward in time where he is battling his death and a retrospective journey backward in time rejoining the dots of existence. The experiment with the language and the form that was central to the poet’s work finally led to the infusion of an Urdu-infused emotion and diction to English poetry.