Introduction
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Exile and diaspora

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 from after a long journey of political trouble and maneuvers with various cross-sections and deviations. Not all exiles are sad. Not all exiles make it big in life. Each exile has his unique journey whether forced into it or taken willingly. The present study takes a glance at the history of diaspora and the various distinctions under which they are categorized by theorists which in turn enables them to study its distinct features.

The word Diaspora, derived from the Greek word “diaspeirein” meaning scatter across, was used specifically for the Jewish people who were forced out from their own land. (Edwards, 2008, 150) The terms ‘diaspora’ and ‘exile’ are thus synonyms. Edward Said in his essay ‘Reflections of Exile’ (2001) makes a case for remembering the differences among exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. To him, “exile originated in
the old-age practice of banishment…the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with
the stigma of being an outsider. Refuges, on the other hand, are creations of the twentieth-
century state…suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent
international assistance” while expatriates “voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for
personal or social reasons…may share the solitude and estrangement of exile, but do not
suffer under its rigid proscriptions. Émigré is anyone who immigrates to a new country”.
They are free people who choose to move. (181) For Said, exile is the subject of concern.
He lists several tribulations of the condition of exile.

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is
the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place,
between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be
surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic,
romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no
more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of
estrangement. (173)

…Exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at
not being with the others in the communal habitation….Exiles feel…an
urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see
themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people. (177)

However, most modern theorists have readily accepted the interchangeable use of
the words exile, diaspora and migration to denote émigrés, expatriates as well as exile.
Robert Cohen (1996) has advocated moving beyond the ‘victim tradition’ in the diaspora
studies because they are too ‘complex and diverse’ an experience, ‘enriching and creative as well as enervating and fearful’. (5) The new diaspora, Cohen suggests, have ‘interesting and suggestive contexts’ that should not be missed out from the study. He supports William Safran in his metaphorical use of the term ‘diaspora’ to be employed to ‘expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court’. (6) Safran (1991) lists Cubans and Mexicans in the USA, Pakistanis in Britain, Maghrebis in France, Turks in Germany, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Greeks, Poles, Palestinians, blacks in the North America and the Caribbean, Indians and Armenians ‘in various countries’, Corsicans in Marseilles and ‘even French-speaking Belgians living in communal enclaves in Wallonia’ as diasporas. All these people displaced due to political or social turmoil at home or in search of better prospects have certain commonalities (despite their place or cause of migration) when found in other lands.

Features of diaspora

William Safran is one of the pioneers to draw attention to the diaspora other than the Jew in his 1991 essay, Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. Safran agrees that none of them conform to the "ideal type" of the Jewish Diaspora but may be assigned a “metaphoric designation” to include the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, Chinese, Polish and Indians in foreign land.

The salient features that Safran delineates to formulate the diaspora are:
1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions;

2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements;

3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;

4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate;

5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and

6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83/4)

A geographical region or location is an important feature for Safran to constitute the diaspora. Exiles emerge from expulsions. Safran cites the example of Gypsies, who faced genocide under the Nazi rule, are branded as the truly homeless and therefore powerless as they do not have the mythic “home” to return to—“they have had no precise notion of their place of origin, no clear geographical focus, and no history of national sovereignty” (87) Intellectual elite, who remain absent in case of the Gypsies, are also
responsible for infusing the consciousness of loss, of memory, of return and of the alienation in the foreign land.

The trope of loss is something that is evident in all diaspora literature and has commented upon by all scholars of diaspora and migration studies. Robert Cohen (1996) has advocated inclusion of the modern migrants who take the journey willfully among diaspora studies. Students, artists, labours, 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 ‘exile 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
religio-cultural identity. Many diaspora clutch hard to their religious and ethnic identities forming ethnic groups abroad. They celebrate festivals together and send their children to be educated into these ethno-cultural groups so that the child remains aware of her roots. 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.

The modern and the second generation diaspora literature thus exhibit a feature of cultural appropriation and negotiation and a relatively happier position. They realize that they have made it big in their lives already by transcending their boundaries and the struggle now is to find a new way to express the meeting of home-culture with a new land.

Types of Diaspora

Edward Said notes that the modern western civilization is constituted “in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, and refugees. In United States, academic intellectual and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents” (173) implying that the diaspora are of various types, from various regions and have various histories.
While Diasporas are generally clubbed under a nomenclature that corresponds to their geographical or national identity, they are however, broadly categorized as first generation and the second generation diaspora. Many nations now also have third or fourth generation diaspora but they have mostly assimilated into the mainstream culture. The classification is useful in identifying the nature of their affiliation to their homelands and language and power play between memories, desire to return or re-create a homeland and also the attitude of state policy regarding these groups.

Vijay Mishra, the Indian-Fiji-American academician as well as Makarand Paranjape, the Indian academician who have devoted themselves to the study of Indian diaspora classify them as ‘old’ and ‘new’, taking their history and nature into account. The old diaspora constitute the indenture labors in Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam having a “complex relationship of power and privilege.” The new diaspora “are people who have entered metropolitan centers of Empire or other white settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US as part of a post-1960s pattern of global migration.” (The Diasporic Imaginary, 2005, 13)

Mishra classifies the Indian diaspora as “old diaspora of exclusivism (of plantation or classic capital or modernity) and “new diaspora of the border (of late modernity or post-modernity)” . The old diaspora whose contact with India existed as “a pure imaginary space with epic plenitude” (Mishra, 2005, 26) because “a physical return was virtually impossible” (Paranjape, 9) “This break was…enforced by the distances between the motherland and the diasporic settlement, the older, much slower modes of travel, and, above all, the lack of economic means to make frequent journeys.” (9)
To this older diaspora “the motherland remained frozen in the diasporic imagination as a sort of sacred site or symbol, almost like an idol of memory and imagination.” And interestingly the flaws of the homeland are overwritten by the deep desire to recreate or to return to home. Even the dire economic shortage gets brushed aside “with the feeling that it was home, a place where the present alienation of the diasporic person did not exist.”

(Mishra, 2004, p. 22) Mishra cites older characters in V S Naipual’s *A House for Mr Biswas* as an exemplary instance. The new diaspora is the “complex and internally fissured community” of Indians in the White Western nations like US, Canada, Britain and Australia. Technology, travel and multimedia have helped them in keeping contact with the homeland. According to Mishra this new diaspora “occupies a desired space, the dream-world of wealth and western luxury. But it is also the space where a new form of racism (a metaracism) is on the ascendant and where race and ethnicity get dragged into debates about multiculturalism.”

Writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vassanji, Hanif Kureishi, as well as other artists and filmmakers Gurinder Chadha, Meera Syal and Srinivas Krishna among others, as the new diaspora who “raise theoretical questions about ethnicity.” (Mishra, 2004, p. 22)

Moving beyond the victim trope
In his 2007 essay, *The Diasporic Imaginary*, Vijay Mishra makes two observations about the diaspora people: “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way.” (1) And that diasporas are people who “are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted by spectres, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist movements.” (189)

This shows the sense of loss and dispossession that the diaspora experiences when uprooted from his homeland. However, Paranjape questions “this perception of powerlessness,” for, he says “there is nothing alienating or dispossessing about a south Asian’s sudden burst of stupendous success in Silicon Valley, where she has relocated to better her prospects. Such a person’s success is celebrated world over and not invoked to illustrate the misfortunes of forced, cross-continental traffic in human beings.” Paranjape does realize that for any group or individual to be branded as diaspora there has to be “a significant crossing of borders. These may be borders of a region or a language, but more often are multiple borders such as the loss of homeland would suggest.” (5-6)

Aijaz Ahmed too mentions the non-suffering nature of those academic migrants who secure plush jobs in reputed ‘white’ universities and re-formulates the native canon to suit their readership/taste. Ahmad holds these academicians guilty of ‘elitism’ and of ‘overvalorizing’ the Third World Literature.’ This category does not evict much respect from Said but he points to another similar group of people

“who are prevented, against their own commitment and desire, from living in the country of their birth by the authority of state—any state—or by fear
of personal annihilation. In other words I mean not privilege but impossibility, not profession but pain. (85)

To this

upper-class Indian who chooses to live in the metropolitan country is then called ‘the diasporic Indian’, and exile itself becomes a condition of soul, unrelated to facts of material life. Exile, immigration and professional preference become synonymous and, indeed, mutually indistinguishable. (86)

Arjun Appadurai is the modern theoretician to recognize this change in the composition of migrants. He rejects the centre-margin dialectics in the diaspora discourse focusing instead on how people carry capital, information, images, people, ideas, and technologies. The “complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” of the modern diaspora deserves a new taxonomy: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes. (2003, 220-1)

Hybridity

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.
The term ‘hybridity’ has been used by the literary critic Homi K. Bhabha, in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture* to analyze the ambivalence and the anxiety of the white colonizers through the agency of these *in-between* characters. He discusses the concept of a ‘Third Space’ where hybridity and cultural difference exists and operates. For Bhabha, absolute purity of culture is non-existent, but they are always in flux and constant assimilative or destructive motion. It is the hybrid, “the *in-between* space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important.” (Ashcroft, 2000, 108) These hybrids, for Ashcroft, question “essentialist models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, ‘natural’ cultural norm, one that underpins the centre/margin model of colonialist discourse.” (62) They also keep a check on the native cultural aspirations in a post-independence era.

**Nation/Nationalism**

The diaspora is most instrumental in the formation of the ideas of nation and nationalism. The notion of exile is closely tied to the notion of the nation. The nation is both the Self and the Other for the diaspora. Exile is a condition of separation from the nation (the self—as it helped identify a man) but is also the other as it can be separated. It is that which helps in defining the diaspora—that ‘imaginary’ (Vijay Mishra) which gives pleasure by its absence. The notion is therefore very much necessary to be defined—for by articulating the *Other* which is essential in defining the Self. National identity, according to Renan comprised of race, language, religion, community of interest, geography, culture of interest.
Edward Said too, resonate similar ideas about the constituents of the nation. He remarks:

“Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement…Triumphant, achieved nationalism then justifies, retrospectively as well as prospectively, a history selectively strung together in a narrative form: thus all nationalisms have their founding fathers, their basic, quasi-religious texts, their rhetoric of belonging, their historical and geographical landmarks, their official enemies and heroes.” (176)

For Said thus, the diaspora is highly instrumental in concretizing the idea of the nation. He recognizes the exile’s need for “reconstitutive projects as assembling a nation out of exile” which includes “constructing a national history” “reviving an ancient language” “founding national institutions like libraries and universities.” Said however, objects to the ethno-centricism that may result from exilic conditions. (184) “Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity” (185)
For Renan, present nation-states are essential for the assertion of cultural plurality. “A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.” (4) The existence of nations is a good thing, a necessity even. Their existence is the guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master.” (5)

Cultural Identity and Language

Major issues that the diaspora, the hybrids and the in-betweens 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 recreation of history.

Language is seen as a tool carrier for the postcolonial subjects, leading to the creation of cultures or cultural identities. For Achebe, the Nigerian novelist, English can be made to “bear the weight of my African experience”. Similarly, for the Indian postmodern 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. “At base it is a refutation of the idea that culture is a property of language, a statement that language is a tool that can be used for many purposes.” (Achebe quoted in Young, 57)
Stuart Hall’s major concern in the diaspora study is the formulation of black Caribbean identity in the First World. His formulation can nevertheless, be used as general rules of identity formulation for the diaspora community. He formulates two ways in which identity can be perceived, the first one is when, identity is defined by “one shared culture, a sort of collective one true self” (110) For Hall, such cultural identities are based on the “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes”, “with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history”. This formula provides a sense to the diaspora of possessing one transnational cultural identity and played a critical role in all the post colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world. Hall displays how this sense of identity lay at the center of the vision of Negritude in writers like Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor and of the Pan African political project.” Such post-colonial writers and artists, create texts which remain “an act of imaginary reunification” imposing “an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas.” (The Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 111)

He however, using the Derridean terms of ‘play’ ‘differance’ ‘trace’, advocates another more fluid and evolving notion of identity formulation. “Identity is not transparent or unproblematic as we think…we should think of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” (110)

This second notion of cultural identity is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past” They carry a historical base but are constantly altering into something new. There are not “fixed in some essentialised past”,
but are subjected to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.” This sense of identity accepts the break in the continuity of past and of history. It therefore has no point of return. “Constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth, cultural identities become points of identification, but are nonetheless, unstable points of identification, the suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning.” (112-3) Hall concludes by referring to the continuous evolution of the cultural identity:

“The diaspora identity, as I intend it here is defined, not by the essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.” (120)

Salman Rushdie also finds a close link between cultural identity and the exiled writer. For him, memory shards may be used as a tool, in a collage to reconstruct an imaginary homeland. His concerns are about the exile identity getting static or fixed through that memory: “How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? Rushdie’s concern here is to what extent should we allow other cultures to influence us without the fear of becoming like them/ Westernised. The answer he says lies in “Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism” (6) which offers a “to build a new, ‘modern’ world out of the old legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of the newer one.” (Imaginary Homelands, 6)
Pitfalls

While the diaspora is essential in maintaining a check on the power balance of the Master/Slave, First World/Third World dialectics, there remains certain pitfalls in that position as well, especially in the post-modern world where information is confused with knowledge and all views and opinions get broadcasted very easily, within minutes and to the remotest of areas through television, world wide web and social media. The diaspora is always on the brink of being too nationalist, or too nostalgic or too fundamentalist. With their strong positions abroad backed up with rich resources, technical know-how and constant financial supply, they may form oppositional alliances or simply be a nuisance to the home governments.

“Diasporas are also bastions of reactionary thinking and fascist rememorations: some of the strongest support for racialized nation-states has come from diasporas; some of the most exclusionist rhetoric has come from them, too.” (Mishra, 2007, 8)

“…diasporic communities are known, at times, to support the most rabidly violent and fanatical of causes, not just ideologically but financially. In South Asia, for instance, it is well-known how Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Tamil, and other militants have been supported by overseas communities.” (Paranjape, 5)

Both Mishra and Paranjape are essentially talking of the same danger of the diaspora collaborating and formulating political movements abroad instigating in effect, the people in the homeland and threatening the power politics at home.
William Safran also comments on the politics of the diaspora with the homeland and the hostland, citing several examples from modern history where the diasporas where cultivated to gain political ends. The necessity of the diaspora study is therefore established by pointing to the effect these people have in conditions of return, their economic resources or their flourishing abroad. Safran’s concern is that the diaspora communities abroad may be used by the host countries to wield political powers on the nation to affect their own gains. An example he cites is that of the United States luring the Armenians promising them an independent land in Anatolia only to desert them after the war. (1991, 92)

Persian-Urdu tropes

While the above stated theoretical framework of the diaspora studies would formulate a sufficient background score to study the poems of Agha Shahid Ali, there is an elemental pattern of fall and redemption in Shahid's poetry. 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. Eric Orsmby (“The Three Faces of Satan in Islam” in Deliver Us From Evil, 2011) and Navid Kermani (“History of Counter-Theology” in The Terror of God, 2011) the Persian Sufi mystic poet Mansur Al-Hallaj (9th century) and the Sufi mystical writer and preacher from 11th century Ahmad Ghazali, to be the source of these counter narratives that led to their percolation in Urdu narratives and folklore.

This pattern is evident in Agha Shahid Ali’s poems when read in a chronological continuum. Home, homeland, mother, culture and even poetry at different points assume a metaphorical stance and become the beloved while the poet persona remains an estranged lover. The present study shows how and under what circumstances these various concerns take a prominence in the poet’s life to emerge as the beloved for which he pines. The attempt is to connect the dots to bring out that Aristotelian narrativity from the book of poems. Dutta-Roy has tapped insightfully into the secret encrypted narratives underlying the poetic narratives of Yeats, Eliot, Whitman and Tagore. A similar method has been employed here to study the oeuvre of Agha Shahid Ali. In Reconstructing the Poetic Self (2001), Dutta-Roy has set on the precedent of reading the fictive biographies of poets by formulating a narrative out of their poetic collections. Through an extensive study of
Yeats, Eliot, Whitman and Tagore, he shows the method of tapping on to the growth of the poet’s mind by connecting various poems from the poet’s collection.

“A book of poems, planned and edited by the poet, could contain both these modes of thinking and writing simultaneously. It is poetry, by its very nature, but is shaped into autobiography as the poet discovers hidden narratives connecting poem to poem. The process begins with a backward glance over the body of one’s poetry, a glance that reveals stories of the growth of the poet from poem to poem in secret narratives encoded in the poems, and only discovered later by the poet. Spots of time in memory, eternal moments in isolated intensity, are preserved in the focused, meditative, intuitive, associative, concentrated language of the poem. A later retrospect could pick these moments and spots up and gather them up into an order and pattern through the combining, connecting, organizing aspects of language typical of all historical and discursive modes (of which autobiography is a part).” (Pg 25)

The collection of poems by Agha Shahid Ali produces an implicit narrative that has a beginning laying down the concerns of the poet. There is a middle part where the climax of his poetic life takes place (complexity, struggle, reversal of fortune) and then there is an end, a denouement where the poet persona finds a pattern of redemption-submission-communion with the beloved.

Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) drawing upon Husserl’s concept of ‘intention’ posits a phenomenological mode of an “active reading” that is able to draw out the intentional
(directed towards an object) acts of consciousness in any text and while doing so also “fills out” the “potential and indeterminate aspects of the text”. (224) It is the author’s lebenswelt (lived experiences) which is present in his literary work as his/her unique mode of consciousness. The present study is also done in this similar mode, where the intention is to recognize the “cogito” or the consciousness of the poet which

“pervades a work of literature, manifesting itself as the subjective correlate of the “contents” of the work; that is, of the objects, characters, imagery and style into which the author’s personal mode of awareness and feeling imaginatively projects itself.” (Abrams, 225)

Shahid's poems are therefore personal, 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.

Shahid's position among the Indian English poets/writers is different for two reasons. He is probably the first poet from an Urdu-Muslim background writing originally in English. Not only does he brings into the Indian English literature a fresh metaphor that is heavily tinged with the Indian-Muslim culture as well as Kashmiriyat, he also gifts new poetic forms to the English poetry—the ghazal and the Marsiya. The latter form has not been yet emphasized by the critics and still remains to be explored fully as an alternative to the English elegy.
Most contemporary diaspora poets and writers from the Indian sub-continent or who bear an affiliation to it—Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, M.G. Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, and Kiran Desai, A. K. Ramanujan, Sharat Chandra, Shiv Kumar, Vikram Seth, Meena Alexander—have their own unique contributions to the Indian literature. 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.

Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, A. K. Mehrotra and Dilip Chtre are known as experimentalists in Modern Indian English poetry. A.K. Ramanujan, Sharat Chandra, Shiv Kumar, H.O. Nazareth, Vikram Seth and Meena Alexander are poets that migrated to and settled abroad. Imtaiz Dharker, Tabish Khair and Saleem Peeradina are from Muslim backgrounds; Shahid's position may be aligned to these poets to see how much he stands in the tradition of Modern Indian poetry as well as different from these. As a Muslim poet, Shahid does not use his poetry to play out the dilemma of his Muslim background in a Hindu majoritarian state. Rather he takes it as a given, and through his poetry creates a romantic view of the Urdu-Muslim culture in the post-independence India. Khair comes close to Shahid in his range of emotions that cover depression to irony to the non-serious. (King, 348-9) However, Shahid's later poems are much more evolutionary in form and
content. While Khair uses the English language to express his post-modern angst and anxiety, Shahid brings a fresh idiom to the English poetry, but he manages to find suitable metaphors from the Islamic history to match the passion of his tragedy. Shahid also, does not indulge in his migration sentiments for too long (it begins and ends with the first American volume, *The Half-Inch Himalayas*) instead, Shahid accepts his condition of an *in-between* and takes upon himself to introduce to the English world, the beauty and tragedy of his language and homeland. Amongst the English poets, Shahid may be said to belong to the cluster of poets that were bringing about the *Indianness* into English poetry. Rabindranath Tagore’s translation of his own works into English infuses a cultural amalgamation of the native Bengali tradition with the English one. Similarly, in the post-independence context, A. K. Ramanujan in his experimentation with the Tamil language, tradition and forms and Arun Kolatkar with his re-modeling of the Marathi Bhakti poetry in the post-modern context are recognized as fostering a tradition of authenticity of Indian roots into English poetry. Shahid's poetry carries that tradition further with his experimentation with language and poetic forms. 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 “stylish elegance, moral sensibilities, and transformation of autobiographical moments into deep and complex meditations” (Poetry Foundation https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/james-merrill) 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 where “an opening observation of the
natural world is rapidly overtaken by obscure, highly charged personal associations, sometimes expressed in unexplainable imagery, concluding on an unexpected assertion of guilt, failure or, occasionally, hope.” The open field poetry has “rapid fluctuations of feeling, associational organization and a tendency towards the use of fantasy and the exploration of the normally unarticulated areas of self-awareness. Even more than confessional poetry it appears addressed to the self. The poet ruminates about life and brings up, in striking and unusual images, feelings that others repress or are reluctant to display.” (King, 2001, 8)

In the United States of America, Shahid has also been lauded for his efforts at the revival of traditional poetic form. David Kaplan in his Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Forms (2005) has included Shahid amongst the long list of American poets who were experimenting with and reviving the old poetic forms of the sestina, the ballad, the heroic couplets, the sonnet and the ghazal. Kaplan calls Adrienne Rich the real champion of the ghazal in America for providing a platform for the sexual and political conscious giving Shahid a short-shrift in his chapter on the ghazals. This however, is challenged by the circumstantial evidence of the popularity of Shahid as the real champion of the ghazal when eighty-three different poets attending a conference in Palm Springs which Shahid had to miss because of his ill health, contributed one she’r each (the ghazal couplet) to form the longest ever ghazal in English, Missing you in Palm Springs published later in New York, 2002 in a journal called Rattapallax.

Apart from the ghazal, Shahid experimented with the traditional English poetic forms like sestina, canzone and the villanelle earlier in his career and had artfully mastered those difficult forms. His last canzone, written at the time when his was losing
his sight and memory due to illness (he died of brain tumor in 2001) has been included by Harold Bloom in his anthology of poems *Till I End My Song: A Gathering of Last Poems* (2010, Harper Collins). The discussion on the Ghazal and the other Western traditional poetic forms has relegated the other Oriental elegiac form with grandiose tropes, used primarily in Muslim communities, *Marsiya*, that Shahid had tried to reincarnate in English. Shahid's position in the United States has a firm popular hold due to his involvement with languages, cultures, and histories—American, Indian and beyond. His obsession with the role of memory in his identity and his skillful use of temporal frames to pin his loss or to move it further into a larger space has earned him his unique position in the post-modern English poetry.


Ali received fellowships from The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Ingram-Merrill Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation and was awarded a Pushcart Prize. He held teaching positions at the University of Delhi, Penn State, SUNY Binghamton, Princeton
University, Hamilton College, Baruch College, University of Utah, and Warren Wilson College.

The poet was born on February 4th in the year 1949 in a Shia-Muslim family in Delhi. He spent his early years in Srinagar, Kashmir earning a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Kashmir in 1968, studying History, Philosophy and General English. He did a Master’s in English from the Hindu College in 1970. In the same year the college employed Shahid as a Lecturer and he continued teaching there till 1975. Shahid Ali then moved to the USA to earn a Ph.D. in English from Pennsylvania State University in 1984, and an M.F.A. from the University of Arizona in 1985.

Delhi spurred Shahid's creativity. In the year 1972, the Writer’s Workshop in Calcutta brought out Shahid's first collection of poems Bone Sculptor. Another volume came out in 1978, In Memory of Begum Akhtar and Other Poems again published by Writer’s Workshop. These early poems earned Shahid little credit as a poet fetching some reviews that lauded his distinct voice but were critical of his craft. Shahid was confessedly under the influence of Shelley and TS Eliot.

In 1975, Shahid moved to the US to earn a second Masters in English from Pennsylvania State University. He completed his PhD from the same place in 1984. His PhD dissertation ‘T. S. Eliot as an Editor’ was published in 1986. Shahid spent the year 1984-85 at the University of Arizona earning a Master’s degree in Fine Arts in Creative Writing. This dissertation, after certain changes, was published in 1987 as The Half-Inch Himalayas by the Wesleyan University Press. The excitement of getting published by such a reputed publisher after a long wait and several rejections is seen in a letter dated
February 14th ’86 that Shahid writes to his parents the Wesleyan Press is like “the Rolls Royce of University Presses”! This publication immediately shot him to fame. He earned good reviews from many American poets (James Merrill, Hayden Carruth, Mark Strand, W S Merwin, Forrest Gander) and was included in the *Oxford Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* composed by A. K. Mehrotra in 2011. Needham Lawrence, an ardent reader and critic of Shahid's poetry finds HIH having “historical and political awareness (Satanic Verses, 12).

The year 1985 Shahid marries a fifty two year old lady, ‘Jamie’ Stanley Taylor in Arizona, who was a friend and a housemate, as it allowed Shahid to remain in US as a legal migrant. In 1987, Shahid moves to Hamilton College in Clinton, New York State as a teaching faculty. The journey from Arizona to upstate New York forms the skeletal framework of *A Nostalgist’s Map of America*. This volume’s structure is much like the road trip, the poet comes across several interesting and fascinating tales while on his road trip and the poetry emerges out of it. Thematically based on the northwest American desert, the poems include few pieces of revisionist reading of popular mythic figures. This volume *A Nostalgist’s Map of America* was dedicated to “Jamie Stanley ‘who brings polish to her every insight’”.

In 1991 Shahid’s translation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s Urdu poems were published by University of Massachusetts Press as *The Rebel’s Silhouette*. This volume has a long introduction that clarifies Shahid's position and intention as an Indian-American poet. He wanted to bring to the Western world the knowledge of one of the finest poets of the Subcontinent and while doing so make his two worlds meet, “repay the loan” of the two cultures. This was also the period of severe hostility in Kashmir. The inland trouble in
Kashmir, the political uprising of the common people to claim independence, the brutal suppression of it by the Indian army and the travails of the Pandits who had to leave their home in the Valley to become refugees in Jammu and Delhi, deeply affected Shahid providing a political flavour to his poetics.

The Kashmir episode brought in a sense of real exile in Shahid's poems as it blocked the way of the ‘return’. For migrants with no-return option, the homeland is frozen in time and memory at the point when he sees it the last time or had their happiest, saddest, interesting memory. In Shahid's case, these memories were reinforced by his annual trips to Kashmir. The home was therefore, not actually lost; the memories were updated, in constant flux and in-formation. The idea of separation from home hits him only when the political situation became so intense that the passage to the Valley is shut off to the rest of the world. There was a period when even post offices were shut down, leading to the genesis of *The Country Without a Post Office*, published in 1997. From this point on, the poetry gains an intensity that was unprecedented. When this situation in Kashmir subsided, Shahid's mother, Sufia Ashraf, developed a brain tumor and after undergoing a long treatment in US for almost a year, passed away in April 1997. The volume *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2000) is dedicated to her memory and relates to the event of her passing away and the rituals after. According to Shahid's own version, he could not write for an entire year. The elegy that he composes after that spell of mourning comes in the form of a *Marsiya*, an oriental elegiac form; another Oriental form that Shahid had brought into English poetry.

The year 2000 also saw the publication of *Ravishing Disunities* (published by Wesleyan Press) which was a part of the project of ‘repaying the loan’ of one culture and
language to the other began with the translation of Faiz’s Urdu poems in *The Rebel’s Silhouette* (1991). As an Urdu speaking Indian, Shahid felt that he could not let go of certain emotions, ideas, images and traditions; he felt compelled to introduce it to his English speaking audience. He therefore introduced the ghazal form to the American scene. The contributors to the *Ravishing Disunities* were poets and students of Shahid from the various American universities and colleges. Shahid took great efforts to teach the peculiarities and requirements of the form to them. However, most of the ghazals in this volume do not have the oriental subject matter, metaphor or mood. The metaphorical East does meet the West but the exchange remains strained as the emotional ground of the ghazal is completely bypassed by the American poets. The “loan of the two languages and cultures” that Shahid, referred to in his introduction to *The Rebel’s Silhouette* is ultimately and fully paid off only in the last volume, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*, published posthumously in 2003, when the English language is molded and suffused with the syntax and idiom of the Urdu to produce the ghazal in English. The volume earns Shahid a prominent place in the American poetic scene for the ghazals are lauded with being tempered with both oriental and occidental emotions while being true to the post modernist existential needs.

Begum Akhtar and Faiz Ahmed Faiz and James Merrill are the three poetic figures that feature in and influence Shahid’s poetry. While Begum Akhter’s classical ragas teach Shahid how to express and control his emotions, Faiz teaches him how to bring about a revolution through poetry. The volume *The Country Without a Post Office* dedicated to James Merrill. According to Amitav Ghosh, James Merrill was “the poet who was to radically alter the direction of his poetry: it was after this encounter that he began to
experiment with strict metrical patterns and verse forms such as the canzone and the sestina. No one had a greater influence on Shahid’s poetry than James Merrill.” (Ghosh, 5)

Shahid died just as he lived; full of wit and humor, living instantaneously and yet living largely. There were almost two hundred people at his funeral “all claiming to be Shahid's close friends” recounts Daniel Hall. It was on his way to a class when he had his first blackout. “I’m dying,” was his realization at the moment but he tells himself, “No. First I’ll teach my class, then I’ll die.” (Katyal, 2011) He was employed at the University at Utah as a Professor, which was kind to Shahid in not only letting him retain the position, but also taking care of the health insurance. (Noori, 2018) Agha Shahid Ali died on December 8, 2001.

The present study takes into account the biographical details as influencing the poetry and poetics of Shahid Ali and his diaspora position as firmly defining the progressive movement of the oeuvre. The chapters are therefore divided as Émigré, Exile and Existence corresponding to the involvement with his homeland and histories.

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). 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. *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 second chapter *Exile* takes up Shahid’s deep involvement with the root cultures of Arabic-Persian-Urdu. The chapter deals 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 poet is exiled from his land not because he is pushed out of it but because the land is physically destroyed and overtaken by forces that marred the exquisite cultural beauty of the land. The loss of the mother which forms the theme of *Rooms Are Never Finished*, further consolidates his sense of exile. The two losses get a universal frame when narrated along with the historical loss at the Battle of Karbala. Shahid Ali’s homosexuality also plays an important role in his poetry and the feeling of exile. Exile in Shahid Ali’s poetry comes across as a
temperamental condition which only gets accentuated by both gender politics and well as the political crisis of his homeland Kashmir.

The third chapter *Existence*, deals with the existential crisis the poet faces in event of the foreknowledge of his death. Exile from land (Kashmir is destroyed) and from home (Mother dies) 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 *Conclusion* offers a summation of these chapters. Shahid's importance for the English Ghazal and the ghazal’s importance for Shahid have been reiterated. The experiment with the language and the form is the central project to the poet’s ambition of bringing in the Urdu-infused emotion and diction to English poetry.
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