

## The Theme of Marginalisation and Protest in Agha Shahid Ali's Poetry

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**Abstract:**

The research paper throws light upon the use of literature as a tool to reflect the theme of marginalization, discrimination and protest against it. It is evident that from the very beginning of the literature, it consists of the elements that revolt, protest, and raise questions about the wrongdoings in society and the oppression by one group to another. In society, the struggle between the two sections is always been noticed in every period and in various places. This struggle makes somebody suffer from oppression, marginalization, and discrimination.

When the ruling group dominates the oppressed group, the oppressed group finds a way to revolt against it. There are many ways to find justice in society, and for that, everyone chooses to protest in their possible way. Some choose to raise their voice on the road, some go for the elections, and some express it through literature.

The present paper focuses on poetry that projects the true image of marginalized society and protests against oppression. The Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali's poems are considered for the analysis of the present research paper. Agha Shahid Ali's poems are written in the context of regional and political protest of minorities. Therefore, the present research paper focuses on the theme of marginalization and the protest reflected in the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, protest, politics, Hegemony, Society, Poetry, and Indian literature.

**Introduction:**

In every society, there is a hegemonic group that always has different confrontations on various grounds with the marginalized group. The suppression, oppression, and marginalization take place with this group struggle. This oppression can be fabricated based on caste, class, gender, region, religion, language, ethnicity, creed, ideology, etc. This oppression, marginalization, and the struggle between the groups get the vent through various means and mediums. When the minority oppressed realize the marginalization and discrimination, they revolt, resist, protest, and rebel either peacefully or violently, mostly assumed as of a vigorous nature. But there is a protest in a dialogue and in a simple communication. The soft form of the protest is generally found in the form of literature produced in that particular setting.

The oppressive and evil characteristics of society disturb poets of every period and region as a poet or any artist possesses sensitive minds and emotional souls. Protest is an umbrella term used for many forms of expression of resistance and opposition. Protest can be expressed actively or passively. Both take place to make the change in the existing system. The passive protest in the form of literature is a kind of documentation of the period, events, circumstances, and situations that occurred during the crises.

Throughout the history of the literature written in various regions and times, contemporary societal issues and contrasts are brought forth by various contemporary literary figures through their writings. Most of the literature is studied as a mirror of society, the reflection of the problems and the discrimination in society is canvassed in the pieces of art, especially literature.

Agha Shahid Ali's poetries are considered to be a part of Indian Literature. The setting, language, expression, and scenario depict Indianess. It is legitimately Indian literature since it is the expression of an Indian ethos, society, and current problems of the country. Indian Writings in English originated as a necessary outcome of introducing English education in India under colonial rule. In recent years, Indian Writings in English have interestingly operated to attract a wide interest across the globe.

The Sahitya Academy has recently accepted 'Indian English Literature' as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing. The emphasizes two different but equally significant ideas, first that this literature constitutes one of the many streams that join the great ocean called Indian English Literature, which, though written in different languages, has an unmistakable unity; and second that it is an inevitable product of the nativization of the English Language to express the Indian sensibility (Naik, 2015)

### **Agha Shahid Ali:**

One of the most well-known poets from the Valley, Agha Shahid Ali was raised in Kashmir but was born in New Delhi on February 4, 1949. Ali was a Kashmiri American. His poetry depicts his Western, Muslim, and Hindu ancestry. Ali was a well-known ghazal writer. Thematic and cultural poles are a recurring theme in Ali's poetry books.

He stated that Urdu was his mother tongue, yet at the age of twelve, he composed his first poetry in English. His poetry is almost exclusively composed in a ghazalesque form. A significant portion of Ali's poetry is focused on Kashmir and Kashmiris. He has depicted the pitiful situation of minority Kashmir, which has been plagued by conflict for decades, in practically all of his poetry works.

### **His Works:**

Ali's collection, A Walk Through the Yellow Pages (1987), A Nostalgist's Map of America (1991), Rooms Are Never Finished(2001), was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2001; The Veiled Suite(2009), Call Me Ishmael Tonight (2003), The Country Without a Post Office: Poems 1991–1995, The Beloved Witness: Selected Poems, A Nostalgist's Map of America (1991); A Walk Through the Yellow Pages (1987),The Half-Inch Himalayas (1987) In Memory of Begum Akhtar and Other Poems (1979); and Bone Sculpture (1972).

### **The Country without Post Office:**

In 1997, the poem collection 'The Country without Post Office' was published. The poem's title, "The Country without a Post Office," was initially published as "Kashmir without a Post

Office" in the "Graham House Review." When Ali included it in the collection "The Country without a Post Office" in 1997, he altered it and changed its name. It was poetry that expressed a connection to the local environment and populace. It became a representation of a free nation and served as the central focus for a broader collection that expressed the suffering of minority Kashmir and Kashmiris in a heartfelt and intense manner.

#### **Agha Shahid Ali's Protest through Poetry:**

The poem's title refers to a rebellion against Indian rule in Kashmir in 1990, that resulted in hundreds of horrific and brutal killings, burning, and mass rapes. The 1990 Kashmiri uprising against India, led to political bloodshed and forced the closure of all post offices for seven months. Due to the political unrest that engulfed Kashmir around that time, no mail was delivered there. The army turned a few post offices into bunkers. The poet continues by discussing other terrifying encounters he had when the two sides were at war; he talks of longing and "the struggle to understand what is happening in his home and his heart."

The poem is packed with violent images, such as gunshots, bloodshed, firestorms, and tears, which turn the 'paradise' into a fatal place. The poems in The Country without a Post Office were composed while there was a war and they capture the essence of Kashmir. Agha Shahid Ali was a poet who strongly supported Kashmir's independence movement.

“Empty? Because so many fled, ran away,  
and became refugees there, in the plains,  
where they must now will a final dewfall  
to turn the mountains to glass.”

(The Country without Post Office 9-13)

Ali explains that the houses are empty as the violence has evoked in Kashmir. People have run away or have asked for refuge in spite of staying in their homeland. Because of the turmoil, they have to see their beautiful land from a distance. This turmoil has left them with only two options those are to leave their own land to save themselves or stay there in fear and anarchy. Ali struggles to protest these binaries and violence by writing this poem.

“Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,  
my home a neat four by six inches.  
I always loved neatness. Now I hold  
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.”

(Postcard from Kashmir 1-4)

In these lines, he expresses his wish that the Kashmiri people would live free and independent. Even though he is against violence, he stands with the Kashmiri People in their struggle. It is evident that the struggle is based on the region. The people of Kashmir are struggling for their homeland. Their land which was remembered as a heaven, has turned out to be the place of violence and bloody region.

“We are faithful. On their doors we hang wreaths.

More faithful each night fire again is a wall  
and we look for the dark as it caves in”

(The Country Without Post Office, 3-7)

The lines above refer to any of the number of battles in Kashmir. The "we" and "their" the speaker refers to are Hindus and Muslims, the two dominant groups of the region. The soldiers are Indian, they have played a very villainous role in Kashmir as they have burned homes and entire villages during the unrest. Agha Shahid Ali described the unrest in Kashmir and did not hold back while accusing the Indian government of the situation in Kashmir.

Each post office is boarded up. Who will deliver  
parchment cut in paisleys, my news to prisons?  
Only silence can now trace my letters  
to him. Or in a dead office the dark panes  
(The Country without Post Office, 45-48)

The stamps have no name of the nation, this may be because Kashmir isn't an independent country, and both India and Pakistan are fighting on and on to capture this disputed territory.

### **Conclusion:**

These poems are mingled with the evident rhythm of sadness, marginalization, loss, and controlled anger woven in nuances of protest. Agha Shahid Ali expresses his distress through his words. He has used his poetry as a tool to protest against the violence, against the people of his minority homeland. It is political because the decisions from which the whole land is going through terrible situations are taken for political and social reasons. They are strictly political and for political and social hegemony.

Agha Shahid Ali expresses a sensitive concern about the politics of Kashmir. He talks about the fact that turns his poetic expression into a protest against the plight of Kashmiri people. It is a protest against the atrocities perpetrated on his people. In his poetry, Ali contrasted his love for his nation, its art, and its culture with the horrific colonization of his home country. As it is concerned with the minority region his protest is in the regional in nature. The regional protest is an expression of objection, disapproval, and dissent against the hegemonic idea based on minority regions, marginalization, and religion.

The poems written by Agha Shahid Ali are full of references to the protest he wants to present through his words. It is a passive protest against the rule. He expressed his disappointment, dissent, and disapproval of the idea of violence through his poems.

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