

A thematic comparison in the poetry of agha Shahid Ali and Abdul Ahad Azad

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Abstract

The present study is exuberating to bring forth the delineation of ideas and impacts of childhood reminiscences of Abdul Ahad Azad (John Keats of Kashmir) and a Kashmiri originated American poet Agha Shahid Ali. Abdul Ahad Azad and Agha Shahid Ali belonged to culturally, linguistically and geographically to same place, Kashmir. In their works some common themes are found, like they have dealt with the themes of the problems of common people and they have also focused on the miseries and sufferings of a common man because of failure of political setup. Though these themes are very dominant in the works of both these poets, but there is another issue which deserves attention in the works of both these poets that is, they both belong to world famous tourist destination, Kashmir for its beauty and there is an important effect of the environment of the particular locations on world ecology. One in exile and another in home exile depict the Kashmir in their works with their poetic craft.

Keywords: sense of belonging, social, political, depiction of nature, exile, self

Introduction

Poetry is a record of past, present and future well created by poets through their poetic craft. It has an element of continuity which no other art of the world possesses. The greatest treasures of the world presented in poetry by our ancestors were read in past, are read now and our descendants will also go through them. It gives us glimpses into history and is considered to be the art of creation. Just as God has created the world, the poet presents a new world of imagination, where things are more comprehensible and beautiful than they ordinarily are. He creates a new universe. Poets have expressed different views about poetry. The fact is that it embodies sentiments and animates matter. Incidents and events of past and present are preserved through the power of poetry which would otherwise be forgotten.

Abdul Ahad Azad (1903–1948) was one of the well-known Kashmiri poet of his era. He was one of the pioneers of the modernist movement. Azad is often referred to as John Keats of Kashmir. He wrote modernist poems and died in early forties. He was belonging to the famous Dar tribe of Kashmir. His father's name was Sultan Dar. "Kuleat e Azad" and "Haraam-e Saba" are the famous books of Azad. Agha Shahid Ali was born in New Delhi, India on February 4, 1949. He grew up in Kashmir in a highly educated family in Srinagar. He received his education from University of Kashmir, the University of Delhi and later went to America in 1975. He studied further in Pennsylvania State University and the University of Arizona. Being a Kashmiri Muslim, Ali is best known in the U.S. and identified himself as an American poet writing in English. He is the recipient of numerous fellowships and awards and a finalist for the National Book Award, he after completing his studies taught at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Princeton College and in the MFA program at Warren Wilson College. Agha Shahid Ali died on December 8, 2001, in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Both the poets are considered as modern poets and were well developed and well educated. Both the poets have depicted the Kashmir conflict in their verses. Agha Shahid Ali in America and Abdul Ahad Azad in Kashmir both have given voice to the voiceless people of Kashmir. The former in one way and the later in other way. Ali was popular as a poet who was able to blend multiple ethnic influences and ideas in both traditional forms and elegant free-verse. His poetry reflects his tri-cultural identity that is Hindu, Muslim, and Western heritages. Ali's poetry revolves around insecurity and obsessions, memory, death, history, family, ancestors, nostalgia for a past he never knew, dreams, Hindu ceremonies, friendships, and self-consciousness about being a poet. His poems are rich in their use of language: the stunning metaphors, the miraculous juxtapositions and the blend of the real with the surreal, remain poems and don't degenerate into sloganeering. He is known as the Master-Poet of Kashmir, who immortalizes his beloved Kashmir in imaginative gems called poems. 'Azad' has very laudably and all the more, very loudly beckoned to man to derive inspiration from the evergreen nature around him, and consequently tame his animality to reach up to such heavenly heights. He, essentially, is a poet of human values bemoaning the shortcomings and inhibitions under which Man is constrained to count his days; but at the same time, inspiring him to know his own self as well it's his compatriot, which only can usher in an era of mental peace and worldly affluence for him. He has not woven songs of sorrow, but has always wafted an aroma of optimistic rosy future through his pulsating imagination. He has consequently opted for finding an asylum in the future, disdaining the unpalatable present. He may, therefore be called a poet of tomorrow. Azad an ever awake artist could not all the time afford to deride him, cultivating in him a sense of irreparable frustration, and blunting his initiative. As his ardent votary, he tried to instill fresh hope in

him for bettering his present and on its contours build a happy future. He, therefore, strove hard to keep the spirit of Man alive and kicking. The distance between the actual and ideal was to be smoothened by the Man himself. In utter frustration and inner turmoil, he would never raise to the occasion, hence the need to sustain his hopes holding out economically secure, fraternally amiable, socially agreeable and politically undominating future to him.

Both Azad and Shahid wrote about Kashmir. Azad wrote about the humanity of Kashmir and the brotherhood of its people and the future while Shahid wrote about the miseries and day to day problems and also the future of Kashmiriat. Azad in his verses gives us the picture of politics while Shahid show us the inferences of the same politics. Azad told us that in future leaders should choose the different way otherwise they should remain the slaves of the oppressor. 'Azad' is alive to the fact that independence of India and that of Kashmir is in the offing. It is writing on the wall. At that hour of political emancipation, our leaders shall have to undergo an acid test. If they choose the line adopted by our erstwhile rulers, the English, then this freedom will have no meaning. It will mean only change of masters. Indigenous political power cannot be a synonym for corruption, but should in its stead goad man on to sublimity. Political leaders should personify detachment; never feel intoxicated by the power they are supposed to wield- a mandate and a trust from the people. It has often been seen that the man loses his head at this time of his political elevation and paradoxically enough uses the same power given to him by the people, ruthlessly against them. Therefore, he cautions the future rulers of our land in these words:-

"The foreigners have now bolted away after doing a brisk business here. It is the turn of our own kin now, but they also appear to me as the shrewd tradesmen presiding over their business-houses. O! Sylvan pine tree, who does nurse you?"

Their tricks of trade to exploit innocent people are enumerated as under:-

"These enemies of healthy social order screen away the truth the people by invoking religion, authority, God and His Godliness and even destiny."

Even though 'Azad' was not destined to witness the era of independence in its fullness, but how prophetically he has pinpointed the behavior of our rulers to be.

To the sheep and the goat, the butcher and the wolf
Are alike — one slays, the other drains blood.
The law has sanctioned human slaughter;
Mean jackals are feasting on lions' blood.

He could smell future in advance. In this predicament, the people have no choice but to opt for slavery once again. The self-centered leadership has monopolized all the fruits of freedom these have not been allowed to trickle down to the masses at large. Being disillusioned, the man would like to revert once more to foreign domination. The so-called love and concern by which these leaders swear is nothing short of

opium mesmerizing the thinking and vision of the people, so that the unbridled rule of these Political jugglers is perpetuated undisturbed:

"That poor soul can never think of detached behavior of fearless self-denial; He, who is devoid of his mental as well as physical balance, and to crown all, has planted his feet on the pedestal of authority endangering his equilibrium all the more, that so called concern for the weal of man as professed by such leaders actually dopes the dauntless spirit of man, denying him to keep his head high, and forces him to bite the dust."

'Azad's' conviction in Hindu-Muslim amity and consequent Solidarity is marrow-deep. He abhors division of man into parochial nomenclature. Human beings have one and only one religion that is living up to human values. The fruits of hard won freedom should not be frittered away on Hindu-Muslim squabbles. Humanity need not be sacrificed at the altar of communal fenny:-

"Those who call Hindus and Muslims as brothers, hand and glove with each other, are strictly guided by the tenets of the Vedas and the Quran; they have no other Holy Book for preaching this enlightenment. If God had to segregate nations and creeds from each other, then He would have provided them with separate earth and Sky."

In the poetic world of Ali sorrow and loss come together and create his identity. Muhammad Safi Khan says that "emotion excited by deep sense of loss is fundamentally more poetic. Loss versified sorrow versified for having lost something precious to be drowned in sorrow" (Khan 5). In the above discussed sentence we see that both loss and sorrow become synonyms of each other. In such way Ali's poetry is the sorrow of loss. Though he is living in the other location but his heart lies in a particular setting that is Kashmir. The loss that has been coming for so long time is now the metaphorical reality of his poetry. Whatever we read into his poetry are not words only but the synonym of the loss. "It is in the blood. Loss is his beloved, the interior paramour he has willingly embraced and kept faith through the four volumes of the poetry" (Needham 63). He was always in the stream of pain and he kept these streams into his heart. Shahid had ability to hide pain and disclose his pain only to himself, which is only revealed while he pours himself in the forms of words Ali, as sometimes, seems like Keats. Keats was distressed to keep the beauty of the world alive in the Grecian Urn so is Ali always in pain to make his beautiful Kashmir alive in his textual world. His poetic world is like Grecian urn where every spot, whether given by its people or others, echoes to the heart and the mind of the people. Both the poets have mastery to bring the personal to the universal. The Ghazals of Ali are the testimony to the fact that links poets and listeners through time and tradition.

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