



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XI
THE GHAT OF THE ONLY WORLD
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SUMMARY

The Ghat of the only world is a friend's tribute to a friend almost in the manner of the Romantic Essayists in which the writer Amitav Ghosh recollects all the memories of his beloved friend namely Aga Shahid Ali.

Shahid was suffering from a malignant brain tumor at the beginning of the story. When he could see nothing, his words appeared to be a moving epitaph, "I hope this doesn't mean that I'm dying..." And a few words later, his wish moved his friend too, "When it happens I hope you'll write something about me." Agha Shahid Ali, an expatriate from Kashmir asks Amitav Ghosh to write something about him and his poetry when he dies. The unusual request shocks and pains Amitav. He could think of nothing to say for a while. He searches the words in which one promises a friend that one will write about him after his death. Finally, he agrees and expresses his mind that he will definitely write about him. Shahid leaves this world December 8, 2001. An indomitable emptiness fills the author's mind. "So brief a friendship" results in "so vast a void". Both Shahid and Shahid - "witness and martyr" - mingled and melted into eternity. Now, in order to fulfill his pledge, Amitav Ghosh responds with this beautifully warm piece of writing in which he talks not only about the world of Agha Shahid Ali's verse but also about his personal experience of shared moments with him. Thus, it is a homage to Aga Shahid; a poignant obituary that presents to us a very poignant vision of this is a deeply emotional response to respect a friend's desire to write something about him after his death. "The Ghat of the Only World" is actually the title of the famous poem written by Agha Shahid Ali. He remembers his mother, the famous Gazal singer, Begum Akhter, his friend, Iqbal Ahmad and James Merrill, a famous poet. Basically, the poem is written in response to the poet's knowledge of his approaching death. He feels that his beloved ones are calling him from the other world. Ghat is an Urdu word also used in Hindi which means a place at a river bank from where the boats depart with passengers to the other side. Ghat is used as a metaphor for death and the only world symbolizes the man's life on this earth and Ghat is the bank (point of death) which takes the man to the other world.

Shahid as a Poet and Music Lover

Agha Shahid Ali was a profound lover of good poetry and music. He himself was a great poet and always enjoyed the company of poets and writers. He was highly influenced by James Merrill who radically altered the direction of his poetry. Shahid also loved music very much. He liked to do chores against the background of songs and voices. Even the ringing of the doorbell had a musical sound. His mother was also a famous Gazal singer whom he remembered very much. Through his poems, through his melodious words and stunning sentences, he gave liberty to live and happily shook hands

with death. Knowing the fact very well that he was going to die any time, Shahid Ali opened his treasure-trove of enormous life force and tied up Ghosh with the ropes of nostalgia. He was also sharp in repartee. This sheer dynamism was his way of life till “the Shahid world’s last saffron” was gone.

Shahid’s Love for Kashmir

Shahid’s love for Kashmir is revealed in most of his works like “The Country without a Post Office”, “Eleven Stars in Andalusia” etc. He sees Kashmir as a possible “flashpoint of a nuclear war,” and in “Ghalib’s Ghazal” warns that “terraced cities” and “marble palaces” may be reduced to a “wilderness” if peace is not achieved in Kashmir. In “Eleven Stars in Andalusia” Ali discusses exiles, the dispossessed not only in Kashmir but in Spain and Palestine. Even at the last stage of his life, Shahid loved his homeland. He wanted to return Kashmir and die here. To quote his own words, he said, “I would like to go back to Kashmir to die.” His words revealed the heat of the political lava during his stay in Kashmir. During this short period of their friendship, Shahid had left some fabulous brush strokes of an unambiguously different Kashmir. Even being a firm believer in the separation of politics and religious practice, he set apart the separatism, atrocities, and violence that had already led the paradise to a paradise lost. At the point when his childhood loitered about in the room of Srinagar, he intensely set a craving of wants to his parents. It was but to build up a little Hindu sanctuary inside his room. He was mainstream and comprehensive even at the season of his remaining on the consuming map book of Kashmir. His mother conveyed icons and different trappings to her home and the deepest piece of their home turned into the holiest place a temple. Along these lines, his home turned into a delightful religious blend of Hinduism and Islam.

Shahid’s Adoration for Food And Festivity

Shahid was maniac of food and festivity. He was incredible for his capacity in the kitchen. He would invest days over the arranging and planning of a supper party. He cherished Kashmiri food a lot particularly the rogan josh. Notwithstanding amid his last phase of disease with everything affirming his demise, Shahid could appreciate nourishment and discussed about foods. At whatever point there was a gathering around, he had gone without disappointment. Was it to satisfy his yearning or was it to satisfy his buddies, we don’t have the foggiest idea. All things considered, he appeared the crazy person of food and festivity.

Shahid And The Dreadful Disease

Shahid Ali was a brave and strong personality. Even the dreadful disease like cancer could not break his spirit. He was a fighter and never lost courage in the face of misfortune. He refused to take help of a wheelchair while in the hospital and preferred to walk on his feet. For him, the cancer was like a joke. He admitted it but never admitted his defeat to cancer. “Almost to the very end, even as his life was being consumed by his disease, he was the center of a perpetual carnival, an endless mela of talk, laughter, food and of course, poetry. He celebrated the life that anybody could think he was defeating death day by day. But death builds no paradox. Shahid was suffering from cancer, some fourteen months at the beginning of the account. When he could see nothing, his words appeared to be a

moving epitaph he said, “I hope this doesn’t mean that I’m dying...”He was really a multi-faceted personality.

Shahid Ali and Amitav Ghosh

When approached near to his death, he asked Amitav Ghosh that he wished he should write something about him. Ghosh tried to console him that he would be fine soon but Shahid Ali seemed to have accepted his fate. Amitav kept his promise and opened into painful and tender memories with concealed skill, which hid his pain even from himself. Agha Shahid Ali was everything Amitav Ghosh lost and hence *The Ghat of the Only World* has been written to reincarnate him – to breathe life into their unbroken friendship.

Hospital Scene:

Shahid’s remarks to the hospital man about learning Spanish to read Lorca is as moving as it can possibly get. The uncertainty of the final sleep tragically lingers. Critically speaking, it is a very interesting analysis of Shahid’s poetry, his experience as a diasporic poet who kept constructing an imaginary homeland through his verse, his double-bind in his relation to Kashmir and its problematic topology and above all his desire to die in his homeland.

Q.No.1 What were the common things between Ghosh and Shahid ?

Ans The common things between Ghosh and Shahid were that they both loved the music especially the music of Kishore Kumar, Roshanara, and Begum Akhter. Both shared the love of Rogan Josh. They both had a natural indifference to cricket and equal attachment to old Bombay films. Above all, they had a common roster of friends in India and abroad.

Q.No.2 What are things that Shahid loved?

Ans Shahid was the profound lover of good poetry, good music, and good food. He loved the music of Kishore Kumar, Roshanara, and Begum Akhter. He also loved the old Bollywood films. He had a passion for Kashmiri food. He always loved rogan gosh. He had a friendly nature and, therefore, loved the company of others. There was never an evening when there wasn’t a party in his living room.

Q.No.3 How does Shahid face death ? Describe the hospital scene?

Ans Shahid faced his death with extraordinary courage. The dreadful disease of cancer could not break the spirit and never lost courage in the face of misfortune. He thought he was to meet with his mother after-life.

Once before his death, he was in hospital and an escort came to him with a wheelchair. He refused to take help of a wheelchair and preferred to walk on his own. However, when he walked a few steps he could not proceed forward. The attendant was called again. A kind of joy came upon him, when the hospital orderly returned with the wheelchair. He gave him a smile and asked where he was from. The man said that he was from Ecuador. He clapped his hands and said at the top of his voice that he always wanted to learn Spanish in order to read Lorca.

Q.No.4 Who is James Merrill ?

Ans. He is a poet who radically altered Shahid's style of writing poetry. It was after his encounter that he began to experiment with strict, metrical patterns and verse forms. No one had a greater influence on his poetry than James Merrill.

Q.No.5 Shahid was himself no mean practitioner of repartee. Discuss

Ans. Shahid was a humorous person. He loved to be happy wished to see others be happy too. Once at Barcelona Airport, a lady security guard asked him what he was doing in Spain. Shahid replied that he was writing poetry. When the lady asked him if he had anything that could be dangerous for the passengers, he sharply clasped his hand to his chest and cried, "only my heart".

Q.NO.6 What facilitated Ghosh to fulfill his pledge? How did it help him?

Ans. Ghosh had promised Shahid that he would write about him after his death. To fulfill his pledge Ghosh started recollecting a record of every moment, noting the date, that he spent with Shahid. He also gathered all the information that he could about Shahid's life. All this helped him to fulfill his pledge.

Q.No.7 How was Shahid's reputation as a teacher among his students?

Shahid was a successful teacher. He performed a series of jobs in colleges and universities. Due to his brilliant intelligence and art of teaching, he gained a great reputation among the students. They held him in deep love and respect. For some time, he taught at Manhattan's Baruch College. When he was to leave this college, the students published a magazine and dedicated the issue to him.

Q.NO.8 What does "the ghat of the only world" mean?

Ans 'Ghat' is an Urdu word also used in Hindi which means the place at a river bank from where boats sail off with passengers to the other side. Here 'the only world' is a symbol of the man's life on this earth and the 'Ghat' is the bank (point of death) from where a man departs for another world. Thus it is the only death which takes a man to the other side. Ghat is simply used as a metaphor for death.

Shahid dreamt he was at the ghat of the only world – the world of the gone. He was to bid adieu to the world of the living. Having gone past pangs of life he was cradling "in supreme consolation", that is, "I love to think that I'll meet my mother in the afterlife if there is an afterlife."

Q.No.9 What impression do you form of Agha Shahid Ali as a man?

Agha Shahid Ali was a man of culture and high secular values. He was sociable by nature and was fond of all good things in life, particularly good food and parties. He loved music. As a teacher, he was extremely popular among his students. He loved his homeland, Kashmir. He was secular to the core. He wanted separation of religion from politics.

Q.No.10 Write a note on the early friendship between Shahid and the writer.

Shahid and the writer were students at Delhi University. They had friends in common. One of them put the writer in touch with Shahid. They had telephonic conversations and also met a couple of

times. But they remained mere acquaintances until Shahid moved to Brooklyn the following year. There they came closer and became good friends. They had many common interests.

Q.No.11 Write a brief note on Shahid's culinary skills.

Shahid was greatly fond of good food. He would never lose track of the food being cooked for the evening. He would give directions off and on for the delicacy being cooked. He could tell the stage of cooking of 'rogan josh' from its smell. He would spend a lot of time over the planning of a dinner party. He believed in traditional cooking.

Q.No.12 Write down the personality profile of Aga Shahid Ali.

Shahid Ali was a multi-faceted and glamorous personality. He was dynamic and had a noble soul. He was born in Srinagar and had studied in Delhi. Later, he migrated to America and served in various colleges and universities. He has authored many books which include - The Country Without Post Office, A Walk Through The Yellow Pages, Rooms Are Never Finished and many other books. Being himself a good poet he always enjoyed the company of poets and writers. His wit, sharpness of tongue and sense of humour were also unique. Shahid was a fine scholar and brilliant teacher. His students loved and respected him. Shahid was a profound lover of good poetry, music, clothes, and food. He always thought of Kashmir and was hurt by the mounting violence in the valley. Though he was not a political poet, his finest work relates to writing about Kashmir. Shahid's outlook was ecumenical. He did not believe in mixing of politics and religion. He never lost the courage in the face of misfortune. Even dreadful disease of cancer could not break his spirit. He refused to take the help of the wheelchair in the hospital. He was a fighter throughout his life. Shahid was a good dreamer. He knew that he was going to die at any time. So, he seriously requested Ghosh to write something about him when he dies. Shahid also used to say that he will meet his mother in the after-life.

Q.NO.13 How do Shahid and the writer react to the knowledge that Shahid is going to die?

Ans.: When Shahid approached Ghosh out of the blue that he would die and asked for him to compose something about him, Ghosh was shocked and astounded. He couldn't discover words, the most effective method to react. He attempted to reassure him. "Oh dear! I can't see a thing... I hope this doesn't mean that I am dying." The dread of death was plainly obvious in Shahid's manner of speaking and use of words. He got terrified when he felt out of the blue that he was passing on. At the point when his infrequent memory slips turned out to be more genuine with the progression of time, the acknowledgment of death moving closer ends up more grounded. When he was in a discussion with Amitav Ghosh, he said in a reasonable ringing voice- "When it happens, I hope you will write something for me." The author could consider nothing to state on such a subject. He reassured him that he would get well soon. But, finally, he had to guarantee, "I'll do the best I can". From that very day, the essayist began tracking all of the conversations and meetings he had with Shahid. This record helped him to satisfy his promise.

Q.No.14 What do you know about Shahid as a poet?

Ans.: Agha Shahid Ali was a fine poet who brought English the lyrical nuances of Urdu poetry. He experimented with metrical patterns and verse forms. He did not write in the mock-casual prose of much contemporary poetry. Though Kashmir was a subject of his poetry, he did not write on Kashmir as a political poet.

Shahid's most commended work is *The Country Without a Post Office*, published in 1997. *The Country Without a Post Office* had established a great connection on his readers. His voice was unique – at once lyrical and fiercely disciplined, connected and yet profoundly inward. His was a voice that was not afraid to talk in a bardic enroll.

Q.No.15 What fed and strengthened their friendship?

Ans.: Once remaining in Brooklin, in Shahid's neighborhood, Amitav soon found that both of them shared a great deal in common. At this point, obviously, Shahid's condition was already serious, yet his disease did not hinder the advancement of their companionship. They had a colossal roster of common companions, in India, America, and somewhere else. They found a common love of rogan josh, Roshanara Begum, and Kishore Kumar; a shared lack of concern to cricket and an equivalent connection to old Bombay films.

Q.No.16 Do you think that Shahid's cancer played an important role in the making of two friends?

Ans.: Yes, due to Shahid's condition even the most unimportant trades had an exceptional charge and criticalness. The unpreventable agony of discussing about food and half-forgotten figures from the past with a man who knew himself to be dead was multiplied, in this instance, by the information that this man was also a writer who had achieved significance. Shahid had an alchemist's capacity to transmute or change the common into the mysterious.

Q.No.17 What incident does the author quote to explain his ability of transforming the mundane into the magical?

Ans.: Once Amitav Ghosh happened to go with Iqbal, Shahid's brother, and Hena, his sister, to the hospital to bring Shahid home on 21st May. When the time had come to leave the ward a blue-formally dressed healing facility escort touched base with a wheelchair. Shahid waved him away, proclaiming that he was solid enough to leave the healing center without anyone's support. However, the wheel chair attendant had to be called as he was very weak and his knees buckled after no more than a few steps. Shahid smiled and asked where he was from. "Ecuador", the man replied. Shahid clapped in an unusual glee, "Spanish! I always wanted to learn Spanish. Just to read Lorca."