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## A Comparative Study of Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker

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### Abstract

Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker are the two most popular and accomplished poets of the twentieth century. The exploration of their poetry reveals a diasporic world in which the dark forces of life threaten to destroy any vestiges of redemption. They convey their complex inner states of mind. That is why there is a great deal of diaspora in their poems. They spend most of their life in self-exile alienation in West. Imtiaz Dharker currently divides her time between the United Kingdom and Mumbai. She often describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist, born in Lahore and adopted by India. Ali divides his time between U.S.A. and Delhi and Kashmir. Their life and work were similarly affected by their state of being “exile”. The focus of this paper will be the comparative study of Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Exile, Ancestral, Religion, Discrimination

Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker are two diaspora poets of Indian subcontinent. This research paper is the outcome of their “comparative study of their diasporic consciousness”. The term ‘comparative literature’ was used by Mathew Arnold in 1848. He made a prophetic statement by saying that no single literature could be adequately understood except by its relation to other events and other literatures. Comparative gives clinches to transcend the culture barriers and establishes meaningful contrasts and affinities. Both Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali were born in Indian subcontinent in Muslim families i.e. Dharker in Lahore Pakistan and Ali in Delhi India. Dharker was brought up in Scotland, where her family had relocated when she was less than one year old. Shahid was brought up in Kashmir, and after completing his graduation he joined his masters in English literature at Hindu College, Delhi University and became a lecturer at the same college. Dharker went to a Protestant school, but also had a religious upbringing in a Koranic school where she went at weekends. Ali was sent to Irish Catholic School, an elite institution in Kashmir, where he was taught by Irish priests. When his parents moved to the US for their doctoral studies, he spent three years at a

school in Muncie Indiana. Dharker was awarded an MA in English Literature & Philosophy from Glasgow University. Ali was awarded a PhD degree in English from Pennsylvania State University. Dharker divides her time between London, Wales and Mumbai. She eloped to marry an Indian, a Maharashtrian Hindu Anil Dharker who lived in Bombay. Because of that, her family completely cut her off and she did not see or hear from them for the next fifteen years. Her second husband, Simon Powell, whom she married in 2007, was a Welsh poetry entrepreneur, the creator of Poetry Live, a series of events directed at GCSE and A-level students, where contemporary poets read their work to the children at various venues around the country. He died in 2009 after an eleven-year-long battle with cancer; Ali's mother Sufia Ali Nomani also died with cancer in 1997. They spend most of their life in self-exile in West. Imtiaz Dharker currently divides her time between the United Kingdom and Mumbai. She often describes herself as a Scottish Muslim Calvinist, born in Lahore and adopted by India. Ali divides his time between U.S.A. and Delhi and Kashmir. Their life and work were similarly affected by their state of being "exile".

There are so many social, political and religious inequalities that have existed since the dawn of civilization. As a consequence, all the humans did not enjoy a comfortable position in society. There are some great personalities, among them writers are at top, who fight against these discriminations. They were not demanding only equal rights and equal status, but they also resisted the dangerous power of the literature that forced them to suppress their feelings. They claim that major portion of literature has been written from the dominant point of view either by ignoring or suppressing common masses point of view. Literature reflects the private as well as the social life of a writer. Writers started to write on these topics of discrimination under a new form of literature called 'Resistance literature'. So the 'Resistance literature' writers in the recent past have launched a liberation movement demanding equal rights and equal status for all men without any difference on the basis of religion, region, sex, etc. So, equality, freedom and justice are central topics to these writers for bringing about a radical change in society. Two of the Asian writers of Indian sub continent namely Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali, form a witty pair of victims of different types of discriminations on the basis of society, politics and religion etc; and they express the same with the help of 'Resistance literature' in their poetry. They express their feelings and emotions through poetry with the help of different techniques of literature such as: confessional mode, diaspora, feminism, religiosity etc. All these techniques are interconnected with their diasporic consciousness, as both of them spend their life in exile and they express nostalgic feelings in their works. Both Ali and Dharker have always been in exile, ever since they started writing poetry and which has been recorded through their diasporic consciousness. Most of their poems are marked by the sense of sorrow and of loss. Exile is always an undesired state for every human being. Thus, we see that 'Exile' causes 'Grief'. They were two of the members of few Islamic families who used to write poetry in

English language. Nobody likes to live away from their homeland and from their loved ones; but sometimes circumstances compel one for exile life for ones betterment. The same is the case of Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali, as former had left her motherland Pakistan for her freedom, and later for his academic education. It is this diasporic experience that frames their poetry. They both are poets as well as editors but Dharker also draw drawings while as Ali made translations from other language into English. They have command upon so many languages mostly upon Urdu but both of them write in English. They describe beautifully exile, home, childhood, and journey, political and religious strife even in exile life by their poems through diasporic consciousness. Their poems deal with a complex and revolutionary journey. They transcend the society, politics, religion and gender. They represent the issues of private life, homesickness, urban violence, religious upheavals, political activities and women empowerment in a very simple and artistic way.

The word 'Diaspora' derives from the Greek, meaning 'to disperse'. It is the dislocation of a person from his or her 'original' motherland. In the sphere of literature diasporic writers are those who constantly resist, harmonize and vivify the pain resulted from the enforced or willing diasporic condition. The exile in case of Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali is self-exile and intentional, and frequently have clear impression of the difference amid fondness and requirement. Both of them travel to the different places, not only to Asia but also that of West, devoid of detaching the pain of holding left 'home' to which revisit is possible only in imaginings, remembrance, and writing. For them dislocation and transfer attain the honest and metaphorical proportions of change. Both of them elegize or remember the places and languages of Asia left in the wake of the places and language of West to which resettlement have happened. Their candid attempt is to find out the relation and distinguish between their motherland and the country which they are detached. The sense of loss, the memory of 'home' and the pain of being separated to a new land and culture disturbs them. Thus due to the fear of losing the socio-cultural individuality in their newly displaced Western society they make conscious efforts to affirm their Indian national individuality and at the same time to absorb with the new culture of West. They are studied on the basis of the wide range of experiences which they gained not only from their exile life, but also from their motherland by different means which help to grow their diasporic consciousness. Both of them face different cultures in their life: as Hindu cultures from Ali's birth land and Dharker's adapted land i.e. India; Islamic culture from their common ancestral religion Islam and Christian culture from their diasporic land of West. According to a British Anthropologist Sir E.B. Tylor "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". This definition is applicable for both of them as they have "knowledge" of "belief, art, morals, customs," etc of three religion cultures: Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, which help them to develop their own consciousness which they expressed through diaspora type of

poetry. So, they did the exchange of cultures, and values; the transmigration from one culture to another also from one nation to another. So, as Muslims from Indian subcontinent in West, they owned three major world cultures. There is no doubt in it that they spend most of their life in far off West but mentally they were haunted by their mother land. Both AghaShahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker can positively be judged against other “Regional” writers from around the world who attained fame especially after the disregard and rejection of Western civilization and acceptance as foreign language on the cost of mother language. All these writers face the same problem of rootedness in place and inhabitant background. In one of the original critical explorations of the concept of diaspora, William Safran defined the diasporas as “expatriate minority communities” who “regard their ancestral homeland as their true and ideal home and the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return” (Safran 83) and highlighted the bonds of “ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity” (Ibid) as the basis of such survival. This definition of William Safran about diasporas is applicable for both Dharker and Ali, as both of them belong to minority in their exile life. As Ali’s ancestors had migrated to Kashmir from Central Asia, and live in Kashmir in minority as Shia sect among majority Suni Muslims, then in Delhi in minority as Muslim among majority of Hindus and finally in minority in USA in minority as Muslim among Christians. Same is the case with Dharker, as her parents had settled in Scotland in minority as Muslims among the majority of Christians, also Dharker’s migration to India as minority Muslim among majority of Hindus, again her migration as Muslim to London as Muslim in minority among the majority of Christians.

The main themes of Dharker and Ali’s poetry are: alienation and banishment, the disaster of individual identity and of cultural identity, childhood memories, familial relations, homesickness for the past, cultural traditions, political upheavals, female empowerment and broad vision in religion. In most pomes, the common sense of separation from the family or the community becomes so enormous that they turn totally inward. The result of such inwardness is a highly personal poetry, confessional in quality and engrossed with isolation and angst from which the flight is sought either in the erotic fantasies or the self- inquiring of a torment soul. Their poetry thus exposes their diasporic consciousness of raw Indian identity. The poetic sensibilities are inclination along three different possibilities: the modes of authentication in terms of fable and history search for the self in and through love, modes of rejection in terms of desire for delay and death. In other words, their poetry has centered itself around self in relation to society, history with family as the core unit and in relation to self, its own pushed emotions and feelings of diaspora life. Although they spent their exile life happily but they never stopped thinking about their motherland so always lived in the memories of Indian culture with their haunted diasporic consciousness. Their potry show that they were pulled by their motherland again and again. Their poems prove that they were not only emotionally but also physically alienated from their mother land i.e. he from New Delhi

and Kashmir, and she from Pakistan and adapted land Mumbai. This is the reason that they write most of their poems both about Pakistan or India than for their exile land of West. Their poetry proves that their hearts were deeply rooted in Indian culture and society. It also proves that they faced a lot of identical problems in West and that's why they felt alienated. Keeping all these things in view, it is very essential to see how they were alienated from great Indian culture, how they felt rootlessness in a foreign country and how they proved themselves as faithful children of their motherland Indian subcontinent. Their diasporic consciousness about Indian society and culture brought them recognition all over the world. Therefore, it seems necessary to assess their personality based on their poetry in this context. They were Indian English diasporic poets and that's why Prithvi Nandi says in Indian Poetry in English Today that "the Indian Poet in English represents his generation and speaks for it. Yet he knows his own generation is freak, part of an affluent subculture, rootless, often alienated from the mainstream of the Indian experience". This definition fits both Dharker and Ali, as both of them "represent[s]" their "generation and speak[s] for it", they know that their "generation is freak, part of an affluent subculture, rootless, often alienated from the mainstream of the Indian experience".

It is a fact that diaspora is a state of living in which a man's soul is dead from his own self, his nature, his companions in which his mother, father, wife and children are included, besides, it is a man's sensitive sense of remoteness, rootlessness and suffering, so both Ali and Dharker use their poetry for the expression of their alienation and diasporic consciousness. The physical, psychological, spiritual and mental alienations have been the powerful themes in many of their poems. As far as alienation in their poetry is concerned, it can be interpreted in many ways according to its various layers of meaning. Different kinds of alienation can be seen in their poetry. They were not only alienated from their motherland but also alienated from their society, culture, tradition, religion, and also from themselves. That is why they have written so many poems which prove that they were really alienated from some basic intuitions of human life. For them the institutions have lost their importance in world by the misuse of so called leaders and they are in search of these basic needs for the citizens of their motherland even in their alienation. Most of their poems are arked by the sense of sorrow and that of loss. However, in the land of dreams they had dreamed about their homeland. They are the Indian English poets, in spite of their migration to West surpasses all manmade environmental and cultural boundaries with the help of their complete poetic intensity. They tell the story of their under developed mother land in a way that only a poet can do through a breath taking use of language. Thus being a member of the diasporic group of people the suffering and pain of 'unhomeliness' obsessed them and prompted them to generate 'imaginary homeland' in their imaginations and express that through their thoughts in the form of their poetry. Their poetry is full of diasporic consciousness, with

references to exile and their identity as Indian. So their poetry is mixed with the scenery of their motherland India and exiled UK.

Imtiaz Dharker is a Pakistani and Agha Shahid Ali a Kashmiri by birth, so there is no doubt in it that they belong to the same subcontinent India. So, they have close affinity in their confessional style of writing. Also, both of them express their lives caused by the diasporic crisis of living. They express their diasporic consciousness through confessional technique of poetry. The term 'Confessional' was not designated by the poets themselves nor did the poets constitute one conscious group. It is marked by its intimate autobiographical subject matter that is sometimes referred to as grotesque which is depicted by their poetry. All its chief proponents suffered from severe personal psychological difficulties as faced by Ali and Dharker in exile life. The confessional poetry of the mid-twentieth century dealt with subject matter that previously had not been openly discussed in poetry such as: Private experiences of life, feelings and emotions about past, suffering, depression, suicidal tendencies, conflict, turmoil, exploitation and relationships etc. These were addressed in this type of poetry, often in an autobiographical manner. All these autobiographical features were discussed by Ali and Dharker in their exile countries through diasporic consciousness. Also both of them allow no veil of 'Objective Correlative' or 'Negative Capability' like other Confessional poets; and they employ experience in all its rawness and directness allowing it to acquire meaning and form in the imagination. This mode dispenses with a symbol or formula for an emotion and gives the naked emotion direct, personally rather than impersonally. Like other Confessional Poets they make an expression of personality rather than an escape from it; and also neither follow any tradition nor respected any conventions. Their poetry like other confessional poetry is the poetry which springs from the personal or private compulsions of a poet. Their poems are intensely personal, highly subjective like other confessional poets. They deal almost exclusively and intensely with their own self. The 'I' in their poems is poet and nobody else; it is the poet's real self, exposed in the most relentless and consistent manner. They reveal directly or indirectly their own experiences about their diaspora life. The innermost depression of their soul are laid bare, the secrets of their hearts expressed, and the disturbance of their psyche stated with a confusing, sometimes frightening, frankness. The expression of personal nostalgic pain has been regarded as a hallmark of poetry which they feel through diasporic consciousness.

Both Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali confess diaspora feelings in their poetry. A 'confessional' poet places no barriers between his self and direct expression of that self. Both Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali express their private experience in their poetry. He takes the help of an open language for an uninhibited expression of his emotions, and by 'open language' is meant free verse or blank verse, as opposed to rhymed verse (which is so much restricted). It does not suggest, however, that the 'confessional' poets are uncivilized in their emotional outbursts. Furthermore, a 'confessional' poet courts death and destruction in

order to arrive at a higher level of perception. The protagonist in a poetic piece feels quite alienated from the surroundings. Personal failure as well as mental illness is his favourite theme. These themes are dominated in the poetry of both these poets. The Confessional poets employ the self as sole poetic symbol in their poetry. They are artists whose total mythology is the lost self. They prefer to live as lost men. Even a casual look at the major Confessional poems will substantiate the statement. A Confessional poem is surely not a mere recitation of losses, but it springs from the need to confess. Each poem is in some way a declaration of dependence or of guilt, or of anguish and anxiety. Thus the writing of each such poem is an ego- centered, though not an egocentric, act. Its goal is self-therapy and certain purgation. These all elements are found in Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid. Both Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid represent their pent-up, inner nostalgic feeling of their hurt mental state in the confessional style. It is found to be a convenient form of expression for the two poets who are keenly sensitive to the delicate. The main aim of the study of comparative literature in relation to the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid is an attempt to produce more genuine and more truthful appreciation of their works. They both express their personal lives directly with their own language without hesitation. So their main source of poetry is their own inner self. Their poetry is closely related with their life. Their poetry is their life. They express in their poetry pain, confusion, inner turmoil and severe disappointment which was root cause for their pain and anxiety in their diasporic life. So they are confessional poets since there are all the essential features of a true confessional poet in their works. There are most of the poems of Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker in which they make the use of first person "I" which have autobiographical elements and through which they make use of confession in their poetry.

There is no doubt in it that both Ali and Dharker were born in Muslim family and follow Islam in their life, but they have broad vision and so respect other religions also. They came across different cultures and different religions directly or indirectly such as Hindu, Islam and Christianity etc. Their poetry reflects Muslim, Hindu and Western heritage. They narrate their practical life's so many episodes to make their poetry religious even in their diaspora life. In their exile life they remember Indian religion not only Islam but also Hinduism, and they give vent to their thoughts in the form of religion poetry. They were not only haunted by their personal memories of Indian subcontinent but were haunted with religious ceremonies, festivals, shrines, great religious personalities, legends and even the misuse of religion etc. All these memories are represented by them through their religion poetry. Ali was born in a broad-minded family who had social approach toward life and secular type of approach towards the religion which is represented in his poetry even in exile life through the diasporic technique. While as Dharker was born in a narrow-minded family that had strict approach towards life and extremist approach towards the religion which haunted her in diasporic life. Probably the harsh atmosphere of her family is responsible for

her marriage firstly with a Hindu and then with an English. Dharker was in search of freedom in life and secular approach towards life, like that of Ali's. Even though she married with non- Muslims, she was strict towards her ancestral religion Islam but she was against the false preachers and false followers of Islam. Ali had a secular approach towards the religion and he was the true follower of his religion Islam but likes other religions also. Majority of the poetry of Dharker elevates her voice against the traditional and false ways in which Islam is understood and followed by so called preachers, while as Ali's poetry voices against the harsh and terrific attitude of non -Muslims towards Islam.

Both of them support women cause and women empowerment in real life as well as through their works. Dharker, being woman is called feminist and Ali being man is called pro feminist i.e. supporter of feminist, both fight for the weaker and suppressed sections of society. In their actual life Ali had been brought up in a family where every member of the family share love with each other and take care of one another with any difference on the basis of sex; in his family the female had full freedom and also she is allowed to get higher education; all his female members such as grandmother, mother, and sisters are able to get the opportunity of higher education not only from their own country but outside seas. While as Dharker had been brought up in a family where females and males were not treated equally; there where some type of restrictions upon the freedom of females and they are not even allowed education and to take participation in some religious functions and ceremonies. They are recognized as India's foremost poets in whose poetical writings they highlight the anguish and anxiety of Indian continent women caught in the morass of affected conventions—social and familial. But Dharker portrays her own joys and sorrows, anguish and anxiety that she herself experienced in different situations of her diaspora life; while as Ali portrays that he experienced in the society as a sensitive soul. Most of their poems explain their feministic approach in which they had projected a new device to liberate the women from the anguish and anxiety of slavery. They have highlighted the various images and roles of an Indian woman, as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a mistress and even as a pious religious woman. They focused their stance on the problems faced by a woman and their exploitation in the name of different institutions of religion and politics etc.

This dissertation examines diasporic consciousness in the Indian English poetry from a nostalgic perception. It put emphasis on the ways in which poets discover possibilities of writing across personal, social, political, religious, and gender borders in the light of diasporic consciousness. In this research the works of two poets "Agha Shahid Ali and Imtiaz Dharker" are dealt with. It is analysed in this research how their writings depict the diasporic consciousness with the help of their confessional poetry, the theme of femininity and religion. Ultimately, by this research we argue that reading these poets can broaden the scope of not only Indian English poetry but also Asian Western. Both of them actively travel between and interweave geographies, histories, and cultural traditions into the fabric of their texts with the



help of diasporic consciousness. Their poetry are marked by acts of moving and resistancy against fixed categorization, as they narrate physical journeys, make cross-cultural references, translate, and adopt forms from other diasporic traditions. In their very processes of thematic and formal border-crossing, the two poets intervene in dominant social discourses on national history, international relations, gender, racial and ethnic identities and thus enable a reconsideration of Indian subcontinent present India and Pakistan. They struggle to achieve more than making a place for Asian minorities in Western countries. Not only do they explore ethnic identity within the domestic contexts of the Indian subcontinent through their personal or familial histories of diaspora. But their works also reference cultural and literary traditions of Asia, West, and beyond and critically engage with the unequal and fraught relations between Asian and Western countries. Their geographical and metaphorical travel in real life in multiple directions makes their writings a particular kind of Asian Western poetry. In this poetry, Asia, where their parents, grandparents, or they themselves are from, represents not only a past and a memory but also an important coordinate that defines their present position in a web of intersecting cultural and political forces. It appears in a variety of forms as imaginary homeland, destiny for an exile's journey home, nexus of memory and the present, as well as literary form or literary tradition. West, too, appears as an unstable, fluid concept expanding to its more inclusive form and so they feel diasporic consciousness about their motherland.

Both Ali and Dharker were popular as poets who were capable to merge numerous cultural influences and ideas in both customary forms and well-designed free-verse. Their poetry reflects their tri-cultural identity that is Hindu, Muslim, and Western heritages. Their poetry rotates around anxiety and fascination, remembrance, loss, history, relations, ancestors, and self-consciousness about being poets. Their poems are rich in their use of language: the dazzling metaphors, the amazing juxtapositions and the mix of the real with the strange, remain poems and don't deteriorate into sloganeering.

Both the poets Imtiaz Dharker and Agha Shahid Ali have mastery to convey the private to the general. The Ghazals of Ali are the indication to the fact that relations poets and readers through instance and custom. Ali has his personal griefes, that is grief of being in diasporic and living at a place that never received him and he also he was haunted by the diasporic consciousness about his motherland. He has regretes of losing his mother that about whom he writes in his verse and his writing has a purgatory consequence on all who ever reads his poetry experiencing same kind of griefes, they sense one with the poet, hence his poetry gives universal massage. Imtiaz Dharker has a powerful intelligence for expressing her personal problems as a female ihn a traditional bound society and she expresses her powerful feelings and emotions through her writings. Her voice through her art is not only her inner feelings but of the all women who suffer in the so called civilized society. So their poetry have universal appel; it is the story of other people of the world also who are not able

to speak their inner feelings due to different reasons; so they have given the tongue to dumb and mute people.

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