



By Amitav Ghosh

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Reading with Insight

1. What impressions of Shahid do you gather from the piece?

Answer: Shahid Ali was a multi faceted personality and appears to be sensitive soul. He was born in Srinagar and had studied in Delhi. Later, he migrated to America and served in various colleges and universities. Shahid was a fine scholar and a 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.

2. How do Shahid and the writer react to the knowledge that Shahid is going to die?

Answer: "Oh dear! I can't see a thing...I hope this doesn't mean that I am dying," The fear of death was very vividly visible in Shahid's tone of voice and usage of words. He got scared when he felt for the first time that he was dying. When his occasional memory lapses became more serious with passage of time, the realisation of death drawing nearer becomes stronger. When he was in a conversation with Amitav Ghosh, he said in a clear ringing voice- "When it happens, I hope you will write something for me." The writer could think of nothing to say on such a topic. At last, he had to promise, "I'll do the best I can." From that day, the writer started keeping a record of all the conversations and meetings he had with Shahid. This record helped him to fulfil his promise.

3. Look up the dictionary for the meaning of the word 'diaspora'.

What do you understand of the Indian diaspora from this piece?

Answer: The word 'diaspora' means a dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity, such as a language or culture. With reference to the context, Indian diaspora becomes more prominent in Ghosh's writings.

From this text, we come to know that a number of Indians have settled in different countries of the West, especially England and America. Agha Shahid, his brother and two sisters, Suketu Mehta and the writer form part of the Indian diaspora in America. Shahid belonged to Kashmir and migrated to America in 1975. His elder brother was already settled there. His two sisters also joined them later. These people, though living in another land, never forgot about their roots. These Indians feel a sense of unity and keep meeting each other on various occasions.

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