

The Ghat of the Only World



By Amitav Ghosh



ABOUT THE WRITER AMITAV GHOSH -

About the Writer Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghose (born 11 July 1956) is an Indian writer, best known for his English language historical fiction. He was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956 and was educated at the all-boys boarding school The Doon School in Dehradun.

He grew up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. His contemporaries at Doon include author Vikram Seth and historian Ram Guha.

Amitav earned a doctorate in social anthropology at the University of Oxford. He worked at the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi.

Amitav's father, Lieutenant Colonel Shailendra Chandra Ghose is a retired Indian army officer.

Amitav Ghosh is married to Deborah Baker who is also a writer. The couple is survived by two children - Lila and Nayan.

Amitav published his first book, "The Circle of Reason" in 1986.

Amitav has been awarded with several prestigious awards for his immense literary output. He has been awarded the Prix Medicis Etrangere, which is a top literary award of France in 1990.

Amitav has been awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2007. He was also elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009.

HIS LITERARY WORKS ARE – NOVELS

1. *The Circle of Reason* (1986)
2. *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
3. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995)
4. *The Glass Palace* (2000)
5. *The Hungry Tide* (2004)
6. *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
7. *River of Smoke* (2011)
8. *Flood of Fire* (2015)
9. *Gun Island* (2019)
10. *Jungle Nama* (2021)

NON-FICTION

1. *In an Antique Land* (1992)
2. *Dancing in Cambodia and at Large in Burma* (1998; Essays)
3. *Countdown* (1999)
4. *The Imam and the Indian* (2002; Essays)
5. *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006; Essays)
6. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016)
7. *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021)
8. *The Living Mountain* (2022)

1.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE CHAPTER IN ENGLISH –

‘The Ghat of the Only World,’ written by Amitava Ghosh, speaks of friendship and fulfillment of a promise made in it.

The story is a tribute to the Kashmiri poet, Agha Shahid Ali, who made Ghosh promise that he would write about him after his death before he succumbed to a brain tumor. Ghosh has fulfilled his commitment to his friend in this story.

1.2 INTRODUCTION OF THE CHAPTER IN HINDI –

अमिताव घोष द्वारा रचित ‘द घाट ऑफ द ओनली वर्ल्ड’ दोस्ती और उसमें किए गए एक वादे की पूर्ति की बात करता है। कहानी कश्मीरी कवि आगा शाहिद अली को श्रद्धांजलि है, जिन्होंने घोष से वादा किया था कि वह ब्रेन ट्यूमर से मरने से पहले उनकी मृत्यु के बाद उनके बारे में लिखेंगे। घोष ने इस कहानी में अपने दोस्त के प्रति अपनी प्रतिबद्धता को पूरा किया है।

1.3 THE GHAT OF THE ONLY WORLD SUMMARY –

The story centers around the life, likes, and dislikes of the Kashmiri poet. This story celebrates his life and is inclusive of the period he got diagnosed with the tumor. This is a sneak peek into his life. His unabashed, unconditional love for Kashmir is evident in each of the sentences in the story. The story makes us aware of the poet's interest and passion for music, art, literature, food, and similar things. Despite Shahid and Ghosh being friends for a short period, the former left an everlasting mark on the mind and heart of the latter. Shahid is an extravagant character throughout the story, and his love for Kashmir is explicit throughout the story. He strongly believed that politics and religion must be distinct from each other.

Ghosh talks about Shahid as a child and expresses a desire to his parents to have a small Hindu temple in his room. Consequently, his mother got him the Hindu idols and small items that led him to transform a part of his house into a Hindu temple. There is a beautiful conglomeration and confluence of both Hinduism and Islam in his house.

Several aspects of Ali have been reflected in the story. He loved food, and during the final stages of the tumor, he used to enjoy his food and talk about it. He was never very serious about the ailment and never gave up before cancer. Till his last day, the man was full of life.

The author and the Kashmiri poet were not childhood friends, but they left a mark in each other's life and created an impact. The author kept the promise he made to a friend he had for a very short while. He successfully managed to draw out the beauty of Shahid's life and bring his bittersweet memories before the readers. The pathos underlining every line of the story oozes charm, which is magical, almost as magical as the Kashmir valleys.

1.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER IN HINDI -

कहानी कश्मीरी कवि के जीवन, पसंद और नापसंद के इर्द-गिर्द केंद्रित है। यह कहानी उनके जीवन का जश्न मनाती है और उस अवधि को शामिल करती है जब उन्हें ट्यूमर का पता चला था। यह उनके जीवन की एक झलक है। कश्मीर के लिए उनका अटूट,

बिना शर्त प्यार कहानी के प्रत्येक वाक्य में स्पष्ट है। कहानी हमें कवि की संगीत, कला, साहित्य, भोजन और इसी तरह की चीजों के प्रति रुचि और जुनून से अवगत कराती है। शाहिद और घोष के थोड़े समय के लिए दोस्त होने के बावजूद, पूर्व ने बाद के दिमाग और दिल पर एक चिरस्थायी छाप छोड़ी। पूरी कहानी में शाहिद एक असाधारण चरित्र हैं, और कश्मीर के लिए उसका प्यार पूरी कहानी में स्पष्ट है। उनका दृढ़ विश्वास था कि राजनीति और धर्म को एक दूसरे से अलग होना चाहिए।

घोष एक बच्चे के रूप में शाहिद के बारे में बात करता है और अपने माता-पिता से अपने कमरे में एक छोटा हिंदू मंदिर बनाने की इच्छा व्यक्त करता है। नतीजतन, उनकी मां ने उन्हें हिंदू मूर्तियां और छोटी-छोटी चीजें दिलवाईं, जिसके कारण उन्होंने अपने घर के एक हिस्से को हिंदू मंदिर में बदल दिया। उनके घर में हिंदू धर्म और इस्लाम दोनों का सुंदर संगम है।

कहानी में अली के कई पहलुओं को दर्शाया गया है। उन्हें खाना बहुत पसंद था और ट्यूमर के अंतिम चरण के दौरान वे अपने भोजन का आनंद लेते थे और इसके बारे में बात करते थे। वह बीमारी को लेकर कभी भी बहुत गंभीर नहीं थे और उन्होंने कैंसर से पहले कभी हार नहीं मानी। अपने अंतिम दिन तक, वह आदमी जीवन से भरा था।

लेखक और कश्मीरी कवि बचपन के दोस्त नहीं थे, लेकिन उन्होंने एक-दूसरे के जीवन में एक छाप छोड़ी और एक प्रभाव पैदा किया। लेखक ने अपने एक मित्र से किए गए वादे को बहुत कम समय के लिए निभाया। वह शाहिद के जीवन की सुंदरता को खींचने और पाठकों के सामने अपनी कड़वी यादें लाने में सफल रहे। कहानी की हर पंक्ति को रेखांकित करने वाला पाथोस आकर्षण को उजागर करता है, जो जादुई है, लगभग कश्मीर की घाटियों की तरह जादुई है।

1.5 CHARACTER SKETCH –

Character— Sketch of Shahid Ali

Shahid was a rather young man, diagnosed with a brain tumor and had little over a year left. He was intellectual and honest in his opinions.

He had a lyrical voice, and despite his deathbed, he profoundly explained his predicament of being unable to see and knowing that his death is near.

The man had a magical persona and could make ordinary things extravagant. Despite depressing times, he managed to stay happy and spread laughter.

He had a deep passion for food, clothes, and culture. He was very interested in Kashmir politics and did not want politics and religion to be connected.

1.6 THE GHAT OF THE ONLY WORLD THEME –

The story is based on fulfilling a promise to a dear friend. Before Shahid Ali passed away, he made the author promise that he would write about him after his death. The story is set around the Kashmiri poet's likes, dislikes, and the way in which he celebrated every

moment of life after being diagnosed with cancer.

कहानी एक प्यारे दोस्त से किए गए वादे को पूरा करने पर आधारित है। शाहिद अली के निधन से पहले, उन्होंने लेखक से वादा किया था कि वह उनकी मृत्यु के बाद उनके बारे में लिखेंगे। कहानी कश्मीरी कवि की पसंद, नापसंद और कैंसर से पीड़ित होने के बाद जीवन के हर पल का जश्न मनाने के तरीके के इर्द-गिर्द घूमती है।

1.7 SUMMARY IN KEYPOINTS 'THE GHAT OF THE ONLY WORLD' –

Summary in Keypoints 'The Ghat of the Only World'

Shahid talked to the narrator about his approaching death on 25th April, 2001.

Shahid has been under treatment for cancer for about 14 months. Shahid wanted the narrator to write something about him. The narrator promised to do so.

Both Shahid and Amitav loved Rogan Josh, Roshanara Begum and Kishore Kumar. They also like old Bombay films and were indifferent to cricket.

Shahid was very social and fond of parties and food. There was always "an endless mela of talk, laughter, food, and, of course, poetry" at his house.

Shahid was famous for his skill in the kitchen. He could tell from its smell if Rogan Josh was ready or not. He was sharp in repartee.

Shahid was a brilliant teacher. He taught at many colleges and universities in the U.S.A.

Shahid hated violence and the counter-violence in Kashmir. Kashmir was the central theme of his poetry. He was secular and believed in the separation of politics and religion.

Shahid expressed his wish "*to go back to Kashmir to die*" but was laid to rest in Northampton. He died peacefully on 8th Dec. 2001 at 2.00 a.m.

OBJECTIVE TYPES QUESTIONS -

Q1. After reading "The Ghat of the Only World", what impression do you have of Shahid?

- (a) He was depressed due to his disease
- (b) He was full of life
- (c) He enjoyed people's company
- (d) Both (b) and (c)

Ans. (d) Both (b) and (c)

Q2. When did Shahid pass away?

- (a) 8 December 2001
- (b) 27 October 2001
- (c) 25 April 2001
- (d) 5 May 2001

Ans. (a) 8 December 2001

Q3. Shahid was in a continuous conflict with his approaching end.

- (a) False
- (b) Maybe
- (c) True
- (d) Not mentioned in the story

Ans. (a) False

Q4. What was Shahid's reaction when he got to know that 'there was not much hope'?

- (a) He panicked
- (b) He was calm and untroubled

- (c) He got depressed
- (d) He isolated himself

Ans. (b) He was calm and untroubled

Q5. Shahid always believed in _____ of members of all religions.

- (a) separation
- (b) inclusiveness
- (c) nationalism
- (d) differentiation

Ans. (b) inclusiveness

Q6. Did Shahid write about being a victim of Kashmir's destiny?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) Somewhat
- (d) Not mentioned in the story

Ans. (b) No

Q7. Shahid's parents continued to live in _____.

- (a) Manhattan (b) Srinagar
- (c) New York (d) Jammu

Ans. (b) Srinagar

Q8. As a teacher, Shahid was _____ by his students.

- (a) disliked (b) adored
- (c) envied (d) worshipped

Ans. (b) adored

Q9. Shahid had a special passion for which food in particular?

- (a) Bengali food
- (b) Kashmiri food in the Pandit Style
- (c) Traditional foods
- (d) Not mentioned in the story

Ans. (b) Kashmiri food in the Pandit Style

Q10. Question 10. Even after he knew about his nearing death, what did Shahid enjoy?

- (a) Being left alone
- (b) Gatherings at his home
- (c) Poetry
- (d) Both (b) and ©

Ans. (d) Both (b) and ©

Q11. The author has described Shahid as a _____ person.

- (a) unsociable
- (b) pessimistic
- (c) sociable
- (d) None of the above

Ans. (c) sociable

Q12. When did Shahid and the author become friends in a real sense?

- (a) When they studied in the Delhi University
- (b) When Shahid moved to Brooklyn
- (c) When the author moved to Manhattan
- (d) When a common friend introduced them to each other

Ans. (b) When Shahid moved to Brooklyn

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS –

Q1. When and how did Shahid tell the writer about his approaching death?

Ans. Shahid told the writer on phone about his approaching death on 25th April 2001. He was turning the pages of his engagement book and then suddenly remarked that he couldn't see anything. After a brief pause he said that he hoped it did not mean that he was dying.

Q2. 'You must write about me.' What was the impact of these words on the writer?

Ans. The writer took it as a very important thing which would have to be obeyed. He could not think of anything to say. He had to search for the words to convey his promise. Finally he said, "Shahid, I will, I'll do the best I can".

Q3. How did the author come in contact with Shahid? When and how did their friendship grow?

Ans. The author and Shahid had friends in common and one of these put him in touch with Shahid. They had several conversations on the phone and even met a couple of times, but they were mere acquaintances till then. Then in February 2000 Shahid moved to Brooklyn in the neighbourhood of the author. Since then their friendship grew.

Q4. What do you learn about Shahid's sociability?

Ans. Shahid was very sociable. There was hardly an evening when there was not a party in his living room. One would always find there about half a dozen people-poets, relatives, students etc. In the kitchen someone would always be cooking food or making tea. Once Shahid said to the author, "I love it that people come and there's always food. I love this spirit of festivity."

Q5. Where did Shahid wish to be laid to rest after his death? Was his wish fulfilled?

Ans. Shahid wished to be laid to rest in Kashmir after his death. But his wish was not fulfilled. Due to some unavoidable reason he changed his mind and decided to be laid to rest in Northampton in the vicinity of Amherst.

Q6. How did the writer come to know about Shahid's approaching death? What was his reaction to it?

Ans. The writer knew that Shahid had been under treatment for cancer for about fourteen months. But he never thought of Shahid's approaching death as he was still on his feet and perfectly clear headed, though he suffered from occasional lapses of memory. One day the writer rang him up to remind him that they had been invited to a friend's house and tell him that he was coming to pick him up. While going through

his engagement book, suddenly Shahid said, "O dear, I can't see a thing. I hope this doesn't mean that I'm dying." This was the first time Shahid had touched on the subject of death and the writer came to know about his approaching death.

The writer was shocked into silence to hear this. After a long pause he tried to reassure Shahid that he would be fine. But Shahid cut him short and asked him to promise to write something about him after his death. The writer tried to change the topic but Shahid persisted on his request. There was an urgency in his voice. The writer realized that Shahid was dead serious. So, he promised that he would honour his wish.

Q7. Give a few instances of Shahid's liveliness and sharpness in repartee.

Ans. Once, the writer went to the hospital where Shahid was undergoing treatment to bring him home. He was accompanied by his brother, Iqbal and his sister, Hina. A wardboy came there with a wheel-chair. Shahid sent him away saying that he could walk on his feet. After taking a few steps, his knees gave way. Iqbal ran off to bring back the wheel-chair while they stood supporting him. When the wardboy returned with the wheel-chair Shahid asked him where he was from. The man said, "Equador." Shahid held his hand tightly and said, "Spanish, I always wanted to learn Spanish just to read Lorca."

On another occasion, Shahid was stopped by a woman security guard at Barcelona Airport. She asked him, "What do you do?" Shahid replied, "I'm a poet." The woman asked again, "What were you doing in Spain?"

Shahid answered, "Writing poetry." Whatever the question, Shahid worked poetry into his answer. At last, the woman asked him desperately, "Are you carrying anything that could be dangerous to the other passengers?" Clapping a hand to his chest, Shahid replied, "Only my heart."

Q8. Trace the development of the bond of affinity between Shahid and the writer.

Ans. The writer Amitav Ghosh, had known Shahid's work long before he met the man. One of their common friends put him in touch with Shahid. In 1998 and 1999 they had several conversations on the phone and even met a couple of times. But they were no more than acquaintances until Shahid moved to Brooklyn in 2000, when he had a sudden blackout in February. Tests revealed that he had a malignant brain tumor.

The building in which Shahid lived in Brooklyn was some eight blocks away from the writer's apartment. Since, they were in the same neighbourhood, they began to meet for occasional meals and they quickly discovered that they had many things in common.

Although Shahid's condition was already serious by that time, it did not hamper their friendship. The writer was always present at the gatherings in Shahid's house. He accompanied Shahid to the hospital whenever he went there. Even in a brief period they grew so intimate that Shahid asked the author to write something about him after his death.

Q9. In spite of a malignant brain tumor and awareness of approaching death Shahid was "the centre of perpetual carnival": Elucidate.

Ans. Shahid suffered from cancer. A malignant brain tumor had been detected after he had a sudden blackout in Feb. 2000. The doctors gave him a year or less. In spite of the malignant brain tumor and awareness of his approaching death, Shahid retained his best for life. His gregarious instinct and love for music, poetry and good food helped in retain his cheerfulness. The spirit of festivity didn't leave time for him to feel depressed. His living room was always full of people -poets, students, writers and relatives. Songs, music and recitation of poetry enlivened the meetings at his apartment. He loved entertaining guests with good food. His hospitality and personal attention to the details of food were well known. Although his life was being consumed by the disease, he was always the centre of a perpetual carnival—an endless fair of folk, laughter, food and poetry.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTION –

Q1. 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.

Q2. What are things that Shahid loved?

Ans. Shahid was a profound lover of good poetry, good music, and good food. He loved the music of Kishore Kumar, Roshanara, and Begum Akhter. He also loved 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.

Q3. 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.

Q4. Who is James Merrill?

Ans. He is a poet who radically altered Shahid's style of writing poetry and often started experimenting with strict metrical patterns and verse forms.

Q5. Pick out the elements of humour from the lesson?

Ans. Shahid was a humorous person. He loved to be happy and wished to see others be happy too. Once at Barcelona Airport, a lady security guard asked him what he was doing in Spain. S had 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".

Also, once in hospital an escort orderly brought a wheelchair for him as he was too weak to stand but with a big smile, he waved him away.