

ENGLISH



THE GHAT OF THE ONLY WORLD

~Summary~

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Shahid Talks about his Approaching Death

The narrator had called Agha Shahid Ali on 25th April, 2001 to remind him that they had been invited by a friend at his house for lunch. Shahid was undergoing treatment for cancer at that time but was able to speak and move around. He had occasional lapses of memory. As the narrator was talking to Shahid, Shahid had a blackout and feared that he might die. Shahid was fine after some time and told the narrator that he was suffering from cancer and would die in a few months. The narrator tried to reassure Shahid that he would be fine. However, Shahid ignored his reassurances and urged him to write about him when he died. The narrator wanted to avoid writing about his friend's death but finally agreed to do so.

First Meeting of the Narrator and Shahid

The narrator and Shahid lived a few blocks away in Brooklyn, USA. The narrator had read Shahid's poetry collection "The Country Without a Post Office" in 1997 long before he had met him. Shahid belonged to Kashmir and had studied in Delhi. The narrator also studied in Delhi and they both got in touch through common friends in 1998. They were no more than acquaintances till they moved to Brooklyn, USA in the year 2000. In Brooklyn, they met for meals and discovered that there was a lot in common between them. They both loved rogan josh, Roshnara Begum and Kishore Kumar and had an attachment for old Bollywood films. However, they were indifferent to cricket.

About Shahid

Shahid was a sociable and witty person. He had many friends and liked to have people around him. He had the ability to convey the normal things in the most magical way. He lived on the seventh floor of a newly renovated building where he used to organise a lot of parties and invite his friends, relatives, students and poets.

Even after being diagnosed with cancer, he continued holding these parties at his home. He would plan the parties in a meticulous way and take special interest that the food cooked in the party was up to the mark. Apart from Kashmiri food, he liked Bengali food a lot. He also loved the music of Begum Akhtar.

Shahid as a Teacher

Shahid taught in various colleges and universities in the United States. Once the narrator got a chance to be with him when he gave a lecture at Baruch College in the spring semester of the year 2000. This was to be Shahid's last class. His students loved him and were sad that he would be leaving. They had printed a magazine and dedicated the issue to him. However, Shahid was not at all overcome with sadness. He was lively from the beginning to the end of the lecture.

Shahid's time in America

Shahid moved to America in 1975. His brother was already there when he came to America. Later his two sisters joined them there. However, parents continued to live in Srinagar. He used to come to India in the summer months every year and stayed with his parents in Srinagar.

Effects of the Violence in Kashmir on Shahid

Shahid was a witness to the violence in Kashmir that seized the region from the late 1980s onwards as he used to stay there in the summer every year. The violence and the deterioration of the political situation in Kashmir had a powerful effect on him. This became one of the central subjects of his work. Although he was anguished about Kashmir's destiny, Shahid did not see himself as a victim. He had an all inclusive vision towards religion.

Stopping of Shahid's Medication

The narrator recalls a telephone conversation between Shahid and him on 5th May. Shahid had undergone a scan that was expected to reveal whether the chemotherapy he was getting was having the desired effect on him or not. When he called Shahid to inquire about the test result, he was told that the doctors have stopped all his medications and had given him an year or less to live. Shahid wanted to make his will and leave for Kashmir after that as he wanted to die there. He later changed his mind and decided to be laid to rest in Northampton due to logistical and other reasons.

Narrator's Last Meeting with Shahid

The narrator met Shahid the last time on 27th October, 2001 Shahid was at his brother's house and was able to talk intermittently. He seemed to be calm and contented although he was aware of his impending death. He was surrounded by his family and friends. He died peacefully in his sleep at 2 am on 8th December, 2001. The narrator felt a vast void after his death and remembered his presence in his living room where Shahid had once read "I Dream I Am at the Ghat of the Only World."