



Home and Exile: Transnational Poetics of Agha Shahid

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Edward Said in "Reflections on Exile" terms exile as a "jealous state" placing an "unhealable rift" between an individual and his native place (178, 173). Said considers it as a thoroughly historical and secular term which is firmly rooted in worldliness. The condition of exile does not make space for fence-sitting as the world of an exilic subject is one which has undergone tumultuous upheavals in history and memory. It is a state that compels one to define self either to oneself or to the world at large. This urge to define oneself and map the territory of past and present provides a creative impetus and goads an artist to narrate, invent or imagine his/her tale. There are innumerable antimonies of exile. It might be crippling for some and liberating for others or both. Exile is not a lamentable state for a "transnational poet" like Agha Shahid Ali who wears his Kashmiri-American identity on his sleeves. In fact, it metamorphoses into some of his finest poetry. His stay far away from his native land was not a forced, but a willed one. With his cosmopolitan vision which made everything he experienced his own, he never felt rootless and did not harbour a negative vision of exile. However, the experience of displacement in the sense of living away from one's home does lend a different hue to his oeuvre. The boundaries of the nation-states are celebrated rather than bemoaned yet the pain of severance from one's homeland that bleeds cannot be ignored. This thread of displacement can be traced in his ancestry; the religions and cultures he experienced; the politics he witnessed, and the life he lived.