

# Strategies of ATCKs' Transcultural Co-existence in Agha Shahid Ali's Ghazals<sup>(\*)</sup>

Saeed Ahmed Gazar

Lecturer - Faculty of Education- Tanta University

## Abstract:

In light of the high level of international mobility while growing up, issues related to Cross Cultural Kids (CCKs) in general, and Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) have come to the fore due to the falling barriers among countries as well as world cultures. Literature has revolved around the challenges, suffering and the merits of being one of those global nomads. Taking global citizenship in a world characterized by "super-diversity" as its point of departure, this paper examines how the Kashmiri-Indian-American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949 – 2001) presents a model for ATCKs who could achieve a sense of transcultural co-existence throughout his stay in the USA. Ghazal, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian genre which deals with loss and romantic love and consists of syntactically and thematically separate couplets, sets the tone for his vision of what has come to be called the "global citizen," resolving the rootlessness and restlessness issues through a form of harmony between his home Eastern Muslim culture and the American host. This vision stems from the kaleidoscopic nature of identity formation. Introducing American poets to the genre, Ali could highlight the uniqueness of the former (i.e. Eastern background), and familiarize himself with the new attitudes of the latter (i.e. the American culture). The study postulates that this transcultural achievement is possible due to ATCKs' ability to show higher rates of positive affect and greater acculturative balance, denoting an understanding of global co-existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Key words:

Shahid Ali- ATCKs, ghazal , global citizenship , belongingness , positive affect , acculturative balance

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ملخص

في ظل التدفق المعلوماتي وثورة الاتصالات، انصب اهتمام الباحثين في العلوم الإنسانية على فئة جديدة من فئات مجتمع العولمة ألا وهم أطفال الثقافة الثالثة، ويقصد بهم أولئك الأطفال الذين شبوا على الترحال مع عائلاتهم وتعرضوا لما يسمى بقوى الثقافة الثالثة الناتجة عن امتزاج ثقافتهم الأم وثقافة البلد المضيف، وما تلا ذلك من تساؤلات حول قضية الهوية والانتماء. كما امتد الأمر ليشمل هؤلاء الأطفال حال بلوغهم وهم على هذا النحو من التنقل والعيش في ظل الثقافة الثالثة ومؤثراتها على مجريات حياتهم.

تأخذ الدراسة الحالية من مرونة تكوين الهوية لدى الأطفال بصفة عامة، وأطفال الثقافة الثالثة بصفة خاصة، منطلقاً لها، لتطرح تساؤلاً محورياً حول الاستراتيجيات التي يتوسل بها البالغين من أبناء الثقافة الثالثة للتعايش السلمي في مجتمع العولمة. وتصب الدراسة في سبيل ذلك اهتمامها حول استراتيجيتين أساسيتين هما التوازن الثقافي والاتجاهات الإيجابية نحو هذا المجتمع وأفراده وما يمثلونه من فكرة "الآخر"، لتصل إلى واقع ملموس يقوم على قدرة هؤلاء البالغين على التعايش السلمي في هذا المجتمع والنجاح في مناحي شتى من حياتهم.

تتناول الدراسة مختارات من قصائد الغزل - ذلك النوع الشعري الذي ازدهر في الثقافة العربية قبل الإسلام وانتشر في بلاد فارس والهند في القرن الثاني عشر وما تلاه، وكذا أشعار الصوفية في بلاد الأندلس - التي اشتهر بها "أغا شهيد علي" (١٩٤٩-٢٠٠١) الشاعر الأمريكي من أصول هندية وكشميرية. لقد اضطلع "علي" برسالة نشر هذا النوع الشعري باللغة الإنجليزية، متخذاً منه البونقة التي تمتزج فيها الثقافات، وتجسد هذا التعايش الإنساني القائم على التوازن الثقافي والتوجه الإيجابي نحو "الآخر". تصب الدراسة اهتمامها بقصائد الغزل هذه لتعرض كيف استطاع "علي" تجسيد قدرة البالغين من أبناء الثقافة الثالثة على قبول "الآخر" والتعايش معه في مجتمع العولمة الجديد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أغا شهيد علي - أبناء الثقافة الثالثة - المثاقفة - المواطن العالمي

- قصيدة الغزل

## 1- Introduction

In the foreword to the 2017 issue of the *UN Chronicle* which is dedicated to the various perspectives of global citizenship, Maher Nasser asserts that "(W)e live in a world that is more interdependent and interconnected than at any time in humanity's history. It is a world that is marked by high mobility and radical changes in the traditional concepts of belongingness and identity formation." Nowadays, there are various chances of rethinking such basic issues through the lens of transculturalism and third culture. Cross-cultural Kids (CCKs) and its closely related twin terms Thirds Culture Kids (TCKs) and Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) are products of this high mobility where children, and subsequently adults, of migrant parents for professional purposes (military, healthcare, teaching...etc.) are exposed to multiple cultures, and look at the issue of "difference" differently.

A TCK is famously defined as a person who "has spent a significant part of his/her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background" (Pollock and van Reken 13). TCKs' and ATCKs' third culture is one that transcends any social, political, cultural or linguistic borders, ensuring interdependence and interconnectedness. Useem, Useem and Donoghue (170) comprehend this third culture as more than the sum of its parts as it involves composite patterns that transcend the individual nations of which it is comprised. This is supported by the idea that many ATCKs have proved themselves as real global citizens who are capable of not only existing in a "foreign" country, but also of behaving in a productive and innovative way. As such revisiting what "national" identity has come to be in today's highly globalized world has become a necessity.

This study of the Kashmiri-Indian-American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949 – 2001) is qualitative in nature insofar as it investigates how the concepts of identity and belongingness have changed within present-day framework of high mobility and easier communication. More specifically, it ponders over the different strategies through which

ATCKs could provide novel approaches to these two basic concepts. Ali's use of ghazal, the Persian poetic genre embodies a form of homogeneity between what is Eastern Muslim and the Western milieu in which he lived a significant part of his adult life. Ali could prove that ATCKs have a different view of belongingness, making of him an epitome of the modern global citizen. He has found in ghazal a new crucible in which all his cultural backgrounds – Muslim, Indian, Kashmiri and American – could merge and produce a lifestyle that is immediately transcultural.

The study highlights ATCKs' harmonious co-existence in the host country through examining two aspects: positive affect and acculturative balance. Positive affect refers to the individual's "success in multiple and meaningful domains of life including marriage, friendship, income and physical health" (Peterson and Plamondon 757). Acculturative balance is possible through the fluid mobility from one country to another and the kaleidoscopic nature of ATCKs' identity formation. The study hypothesizes that ATCKs are able to form a flexible global cultural identity, and hence can achieve higher rates of positive affect and cultural balance.

## **2- Agha Shahid Ali: A Transcultural Model of ATCKs**

Agha Shahid Ali's life is an epitome of an ATCK who could transgress geographical, political and, above all, cultural borders that used to divide the East and the West. Born in 1949 to a Kashmiri family, he moved with his family to the US in 1976 where he spent the rest of his life. He attended an Irish Catholic school and his parents were religiously tolerant and provided Ali with the space and encouragement to pursue his poetic aspirations from a young age. He was educated at the University of Kashmir, then at the Hindu College, University of Delhi. He got a PhD in English from Pennsylvania State University. Leading a lifestyle stamped with dashing movement between various backgrounds, he got firsthand experience with Muslim, Hindu and Western (American) norms that formulated his global nature as well as his poetic production. This is evident in writing a book about T.S. Eliot (1986) and translating the poetry of the Pakistani Muslim Marxist poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1992).

Ali identified himself as an American poet writing in English. He

could use this type of mobile lifestyle to produce poetry that represents transculturalism. He introduced the traditional Persian genre, ghazal, to the English readership. This availed him in blending multiple ethnic influences and ideas in traditional forms. His poetry reflects his Hindu, Muslim, and Western backgrounds in a way that proves his homogeneous approach to acculturation. Ali wrote *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991), relating a series of travels through landscapes and blurring the barriers between his current American home and his deeply rooted memories of his boyhood in Kashmir.

Unlike the traditions of diaspora writing, which are marked by nostalgia, Ali's poems do not stress the dichotomy and alienation a diasporic writer may suffer. They, on the contrary, present a form of transcultural co-existence that signifies the global identity that most ATCKs enjoy. His insistence on writing in English denotes his understanding - as a global citizen - of the fluid transgression of barriers. He generalizes the feelings of sorrow and loss to all people all over the world. "In Search of Evanescence" portrays this very notion clearly:

When on Route 80 in Ohio  
I came across an exit  
to Calcutta  
the temptation to write a poem  
led me past the exit  
so I could say  
India always exists  
off the turnpikes  
of America  
so I could say  
I did take the exit  
and crossed Howrah

In these lines, Ali, or even any ATCK, can find a haven anywhere in the world since there is always a common ground to share with others. The images flow smoothly from Ohio in the US to Calcutta in India: from the far West to the far East. By the end of the poem, Ali stresses the same inevitable fate of all humanity, highlighting again their interconnectedness. In a surrealist image, the deadly rain in India is the

same in Ohio:

the warm rains have left  
many dead on the pavements

the signs to route 80  
all have disappeared

and now the road is a river  
polished silver by cars

the cars are urns  
carrying ashes to the sea

Evanescence controls everything and the poet postulates that death makes no difference between the *Self* and the *Other*. As such, blurring the barriers among world peoples and cultures is plausible.

Shahid Ali's insistence on this cosmopolitan view of existence is recurrent in many other poems. His adoption of English as a medium for writing, despite his knowledge of Urdu, does not hinder his call for a more comprehensive understanding of Anglophone writing within multiple contexts and the urgent need most ATCKs feel for a move beyond the nationalism of English. Not only does his ghazal "Beyond English" vent this desire, but it also signify the movement beyond America to a much more cosmopolitan view. The opening two couplets pose the central question in the ghazal, and in most of Ali's poetry in general:

No language is old—or young—beyond English.

So what of a common tongue beyond English?

I know some words for war, all of them sharp,

but the sharpest one is *jung*—beyond English!

The poet, like other ATCKs, is always in search of a "common tongue" beyond their local milieu: one that delimits their actions and does not assign a definite identity to their existence. Choosing "Beyond English" as his refrain hammers the same idea in the reader's mind. There is, and should always be, something beyond English; other cultures,

peoples and arts. Reinventing ghazal, as such, has provided Ali with a medium through which he can live between different worlds. Rosine-Alice Vuille maintains that ghazal, for Ali, is:

a place where he could explore all the facets of his identity, and refer to writers and thinkers from the four corners of the world. Choosing English as the language of expression and the ghazal as a form, Ali created a beautiful body of literature which reflects his existence between several worlds, and enables him to reflect on it.

In the subsequent stanzas, the poet explores what "Beyond English" may be:

If you wish to know of a king who loved his slave,  
you must learn legends, often-sung, beyond English.

Baghdad is sacked and its citizens must watch  
prisoners (now in miniatures) hung beyond English.  
Go all the way through jungle from aleph to zenith  
to see English, like monkeys, swung beyond English.

The addressee in these lines is the American reader whom Ali encourages to think beyond the limits of their localities in order to share with ATCKs the new form of cosmopolitan transcultural co-existence.

### **3- ATCKs' Identity Formation and Global Citizenship**

Global citizenship is based on the kaleidoscopic nature of identity. Literature on identity formation stresses this ever-shifting characteristic of identity formation and sense of belongingness, looking at these two conceptions as products of imaginative insight. People imagine what they are, or what they think they are, by means of their shared values, ideas and historical events. A nation is not therefore about objective criteria such as ethnic, linguistic or geographic bonds, so Ernest Renan asserts that "national identities are actually an outcome of imagined shared history" (16). Renan's often quoted definition that "a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle" (19) had paved the way for the subsequent view that

identity formation depends on people's sense of plurality. What is to be emphasized here is the transient basis of identity formation. It is based on a fleeting desire to be part of a whole, a characteristic that resonates with Homi Bhabha's insistence in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* that "(N)ations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1). With this in mind, pluralism becomes a good reason to critique "the myth of homogeneous and monocultural nation-states" (Castles 5).

Identity is not fixed; it changes throughout man's developmental phases. It is a process affected by various social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Bechhofer and McCrone maintain that "the problem with conventional studies of national identities is treating it as a 'thing,' an immutable badge affixed to people by virtue of birth or citizenship or ancestry" (193). Yet, with the theory of pluralism in mind, humans tend to seek a reconciliation between their national identities and cultural pluralism. Openness to other cultures seems inevitable and provides people with the solution to this dichotomy. Isaiah Berlin's comment on this solution is remarkable in this respect:

Members of one culture can, by the force of imaginative insight, understand the value, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time or place. They may find these values unacceptable, but if they open their minds sufficiently, they can grasp how one might be a full human being, with whom one could communicate, at the same time live in the light of values widely different from one's own. (10)

Although Berlin's vision may be described as a utopian possibility of harmony among world nations, his assertion on the openness to the *Alter* in the sense of accepting difference seems to be the basis for modern-day global citizenship. This resonates with Bhiku Parekh's comment on the benefits of being *open* to other cultures. "However rich it may be," Parekh maintains, "no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities. Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfillment" (167).



ATCKs provide an example of this openness to the *Alter* since their identity formation years are marked by fluid transportation among several world countries. One of the advantages of this fluidity is ATCKs' experience of differences among people differently and their formation of what Chaix calls 'supranational' identity (50): a form of cosmopolitanism in which the global citizen is, as the Greek term implies, a citizen of the world. Citizenship has come to denote being part of a greater and larger community, transcending any traditional limiting concepts of what identity may be. As such, global citizens are free to choose which place they would like to live in and the society to identify with.

Shahid Ali is an ATCK whose various cultural backgrounds and mobile lifestyle make of him an example of transcultural co-existence. He embraces diversity and chooses to write in English, indicating his acceptance of the *Alter's* language and culture as well as his awareness of the importance to overcome the dichotomy between what is Eastern, i.e. Muslim, Hindi, Kashmiri and Western, i.e. American. In other words, Ali seems to embrace the global community tolerance of difference among world cultures and viewing this difference differently. He, like other ATCKs, finds in diversity a chance to achieve what Berlin calls "the full human being." In essence, Ali's nostalgic writing bears the seeds of a plea to humans to come together and think of the East as complementary to the West, not an opposite.

Moving to the US, Ali accomplished most of his literary masterpieces. He made friends with friends from various cultural backgrounds. Most notable are the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh and James Merrill. On his deathbed, Ali asked Ghosh to write something about him, so he wrote "The Ghat of the Only World: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn." On *thefreelibrary.com* one reads: Merrill was his real-life mentor, a flesh-and-blood friend, and a powerful influence whose example led Agha both toward the increasing formalism that opened out onto his embrace of the ghazal." Ali's eagerness to build bridges among world cultures is cited back to his boyhood years in Srinagar, Kashmir, when his parents implanted in him this worldview through their religious tolerance. As such, Ali's stay in the US was one of co-existence and fruitfulness: a model for present-day ATCKs.

#### 4- Shahid Ali and Ghazal as a Transcultural Genre

Ali's love of ghazal goes back to his early years in Kashmir. He used to listen to the Indian singer and actress Begum Akhtar (1914-1974), best known as "Queen of Ghazals." He dedicated a large part of his literary production to the genre in order to introduce it to the English reader and to "teach" Western writers the "real thing" or "the authentic" ghazal as he calls it in editing *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000). M. Khalifa finds in Ali's revival of the Persian genre his "most valuable literary contribution to modern American poetry" (381). Ali contends that "(T)hose claiming to write ghazals in English (usually American poets) had got it quite wrong, far from the letter and farther from the spirit" (2000 1). Asserting that what English writers at the time produced was not "real" ghazal, Ali invited them to get to know the basics of such a traditional poetic form that goes back to 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia and 12<sup>th</sup> century Persia.

Ghazal is a form of lyrical poetry composed in a single metre with a single rhyme throughout. It is characterized by its strict form which is based on separate autonomous couplets. The couplets are organized in a series, though each can be dealt with separately. These seemingly disunited couplets are linked together through other poetic elements. Metre (*bahr*/بحر) and rhyme (*qafia*/قافية) provide a formal link that holds the separate couplets together. The prominence of the rhyme is asserted through its repetition twice in the opening couplet (*matla*/مطلع) and in the second line of every succeeding couplet, marking both the rhyme and the refrain (*radif*/رديف). The ending couplet (*maqta*/مقطع) closes with the poet's pen name (*takhallus*/تَخْلُص) as a form of signature.

Thematically, ghazals are known as love poems in the classical sense. The forsaken lover tries to plead for his beloved who rejects his love. This suffering in love is taken to a higher level of reference with Sufis, such as Jalaludddin Rumi (1207-1273) of Konya. In Sufi symbolism, the beloved is God and the ardent lover in distress is the poet who tries to come in unity with his beloved. Yet, with the development of the genre, the ghazal poem came to deal with other various topics: political, social or religious. The ghazal has proved capable of remarkable adjustments to the major cultural shifts characteristic of the

colonial period and of contemporary India and Pakistan and their overseas diaspora. The genre, for example, witnessed a major shift at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it became associated with the middle class and reflected a large part of the values held by the European bourgeoisie. This opened up the way to the genre's endless possibilities which the great Pakistani poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) demonstrated some of them in his ghazals. Thus the modern ghazal can be viewed as traditional in form, Persianized in language and delicately modern in feeling.

From a transcultural standpoint, ghazal is a genre capable of withstanding cultural, social or political shifts. With its strict form in mind, its flexibility allowed its movement from Arabia to Persia then to the English-speaking world. Ali compares its poetic elements, particularly metre and rhyme, to the string that holds precious beads of a necklace together. To know that the early ghazals had been the creation of Sufi poets, the metre and rhyme can bear additional connotations: they are the string that holds the beads in the dervish's hand. While each couplet has its own theme and presents a topic different from the ones before and after it, all couplets must be dealt with, in a way or another, in their complete entity, as complementary units rather than opposing, or even conflicting, ones. Viewing the ghazal poem in this sense resonates with the global citizenship basis of dealing with ATCKs' lifestyles. This means that Ali's choice of ghazal echoes, to a great extent, his situation in the US: a Muslim with Eastern Hindu backgrounds living in harmony in a Western culturally different milieu. He was convinced, Khalifa maintains, that "the inevitable clash of cultures might finally be reconciled" (385). Closing his ghazal "By Exiles," Ali celebrates a possible harmony between the East and the West: the native and stranger.

The stanzas of the ghazal, twelve in number, present a community of exiles that are held together under the umbrella of mutual trust and forgiveness:

If my enemy's alone and his arms are empty,  
give him my heart silk-wrapped like a child by exiles.

Will you, Beloved Stranger, ever witness Shahid—  
two destinies at last reconciled by exiles?

The poet uses his real name, Shahid, as the *takhallus* of the poem's signature, stressing the double nature of his name in Arabic and Persian: martyr and witness. Although he, representing man in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the martyr of cultural disunity, he will be a witness to global homogeneity and transcultural co-existence. The twelve stanzas can be seen as a symbol of the months of the year that repeat endlessly in an accurate form of unity. ATCKs seem also like these separate couplets as they, though different in many respects, form the globalized world in its entirety. Every ATCK might feel this exile, yet they are ready to consider others, i.e. strangers, their beloved fellows who "at last" could "reconcile" in one unity despite, or even by means of, "exiles." In his introduction to *Ravishing DisUnities*, Ali emphasizes the ghazal's major attribute: unity in disunity. "So to repeat the quest: Is there no unity?" he maintains, "The answer" Well, no. However, there is a cultural unity – created by the audience's shared assumptions and expectations. There is a contrapuntal air" (5). Looking at ghazal from this perspective enhances the transcultural attitude of global citizenship. What ATCKs do wherever they move resonates with what happens inside a ghazal. They share their assumptions and expectations with the *Alter* and the result is a form of co-existence capable of transgressing any geopolitical barriers.

The subsequent sections will examine how Ali, representing ATCKs, could achieve this transcultural co-existence in his ghazals from two aspects: acculturative balance and positive affect. It is assumed that ATCKs are able to progress in their globalized milieu because they get, through high mobility and cultural exposure, the experience and social skills that transform them from nationally bound individuals into global citizens. They achieve high on acculturative balance showing a great deal of positive affect.

### **5- ATCKs' Acculturative Balance**

In essence, acculturation is concerned with the processes which individuals, or groups, of different cultures undergo when they live together. Basically, it focuses on immigrants' patterns of accommodation in the host country. As early as 1914, Robert Park, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, presented his three-pillar model of acculturation. This is best known as the melting pot theory which

investigates what happens to people from diverse cultures and languages when they come in contact with one another. Park suggests that due to inevitable contact, people with different backgrounds try to find ways to accommodate to each other in order to co-exist. Intergroup relations are shaped according to dominant culture, American lifestyle for the most part. This accommodation leads to a process of cultural assimilation through social processes such as intermarriage and amalgamation.

Improvements on this model include Redfield *et al* and the Social Science Research Council. Their studies add other dimensions to Park's acculturation model, particularly the freedom of the individual to include or exclude whatever cultural elements one wishes. Amado M. Padilla and William Perez highlight such a development in acculturation studies:

The change from one cultural orientation to another can be "selective," and persons involved in intergroup contact can decide what elements of their culture they wish to surrender and what cultural elements they want to incorporate from the new culture. (37)

With Teske and Nelson (1974) and Berry (1980), this aspect of individual freedom has been stressed, with a focus on the changes in material traits, behavior patterns, norms, institutional changes and values that immigrants undergo. However, Padilla and Perez maintain that the prominent advancement in the last decade of the 20th century is the possibility of a reverse in the acculturation process. They believe:

(A) minority person and/or ethnic group," "could reverse their acculturation process to the dominant group and revert to their former cultural heritage.... Thus, acculturation was not seen as a strictly unidimensional process of cultural change but as a process forced by intergroup contact with multiple outcomes. (37-38)

This freedom of choice paves the way to global cosmopolitanism where individuals with diverse backgrounds feel and behave as part of a global community, and are able to progress in the "host" milieu. It is not host in the usual sense as long as people start to feel at home with the Alter's lifestyle.

ATCKs seem to be aware of such a cultural dimension. Unlike TCKs who lack the knowledge, experience and social skills to select the

social behavior they prefer, ATCKs can decide which way to deal with sociocultural differences among them and other cultural groups. Despite the challenges they face as to issues like identity and accommodation which lead to a kind of prolonged adolescence, they are able to overcome these challenges and build lives. They can also find their own ways of incorporating their cultural backgrounds into the host culture reaching a state of cultural balance. Ruth Useem and Ann Cottrell (1996) assert this mature behavior. For them:

Most adult TCKs conform to what is going on around them in such a way that attention is not drawn to them. As they meet new people and new situations, they are slow to commit themselves until they have determined what behavior is expected. If what is expected is unacceptable or incomprehensible, they will quietly withdraw rather than make fools of themselves or hurt the feelings of others. (27)

ATCKs show a kind of cultural understanding that other adults of the same age may lack because of the stable lifestyle. Mindfulness is another merit of being an ATCK. They have the advantages of both their passport country and the new host one. They nurture an international perspective to the world around them.

Continuing their study of ATCKs, Useem and Cottrell (2007) highlight various advantages of being an ATCK. Most prominent is ATCKs' remarkable commitment and stability in higher education since they are privileged with world-class education in international schools and universities. Moreover, they can evade senses of alienation through focusing on their studies or careers. This educational excellence has led ATCKs to have prestigious jobs, especially in international careers such as international relations and foreign languages.

Shahid Ali could achieve this cultural balance. He earned his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania State in 1984 and an MFA from the University of Arizona in 1985. He received many honors and awards including Guggenheim and Ingram-Merrill fellowships. He had an active academic career starting with teaching at Hamilton College in New York. He moved to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where he worked as the director of the MFA creative writing program. He also taught at the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and was a

visiting professor at Princeton University and in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at New York University. This gives ample proof for his ability as an ATCK to achieve acculturative balance. Until the end of his life in 2000, when he died of brain cancer, he rejoiced the company of his friends of various cultural backgrounds. Amitav Ghosh reports that:

(W)e – Ali and Ghosh - found that we had a huge roster of common friends, in India, America, and elsewhere.... Shahid's gregariousness had no limit: there was never an evening when there wasn't a party in his living room. "I love it that so many people are here," he told me once. "I love it that people come and there's always food. I love this spirit of festivity; it means that I don't have time to be depressed."

Ali's poems reflect this love for all people of all backgrounds. Some such poems allude to events from various world cultures. "Snowmen" presents an image in which the poet considers himself a crucible of all these backgrounds. He tells people in the West about his grandfather who came from Samrakand carrying with him "a bag/ of whale bones." Like his ancestor, Ali came to the US from Kashmir carrying with him Persian as well as Arabic backgrounds and rejoicing cosmopolitanism:

This heirloom,  
his skeleton under my skin, passed  
from son to grandson,  
generations of snowmen on my back.  
They tap every year on my window,  
their voices hushed to ice.

The poet's reference to snowmen furnishes a common ground between him (the East) and Americans (the West) who are also snowmen. Their heritage is deeply rooted and he is always reminded of this connection. The recurrent visits of those "snowmen" imply their ever existence both in the poet's mind and in reality. This is highlighted in his famous poem "Postcard from Kashmir" where all memories of his past years and even the present suffering Kashmiris face revisit the poet in his

home in the US:

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox  
my home a neat for by six inches

I always loved neatness. Now I hold  
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.

This is home. And this is the closest  
I'll ever be to home

Holding the postcard in his palm, memories flood his mind and he imagines holding the Himalayas with all their cultural as well as geographical references in one hand.

Ali's upbringing is marked by cultural openness to other religions and traditions. In his ghazals, he is eager to show a great deal of balanced acculturation and cultural tolerance. Though living in a Western country, he projects a vision of world cultural assimilation. The various allusions to well-known figures from different cultural backgrounds give weight and depth to Ali's poetic vision as an ATCK who believes that all cultures have things in common, especially human suffering and the importance of belongingness. Yet, Ali's vision is one that stems from a deep belief in cosmopolitanism. In his ghazal "Arabic," he shocks the reader with a recognition that:

The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic—

These words were said to me in a language not Arabic.

Ali's poetic experience is coloured with agony and the desire to restore a glorious country. He admits that Arabic can be a medium through which he can express his sense of the loss of a great civilization. His allusions to Majnoon (Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah, the famous Arab poet), Mahmoud Darwish, Lorca and Shamma assert the same attitude towards cosmopolitanism. Addressing his ancestors, Ali wonders why he is attached to them in Arabic. Yet, the images he delineates in the subsequent stanzas are of famous religious as well as literary figures, linking them all to Arabic, albeit their detachment. One meets the Majnoon whose agony in love of Laila is remarkable.

Majnoon, his clothes ripped, still weeps for Laila.



O, this is the madness of the desert, his crazy Arabic.

Darwish tells the world that all people shall have a common experience, and after all human suffering (the sky that has become a ceiling of stone), there is light of hope at the end:

From exile Mahmoud Darwish writes to the world:  
You'll all pass between the fleeting words of Arabic.

The sky is stunned, it's become a ceiling of stone.  
I tell you it must weep. So kneel, pray for rain in Arabic.

What ties all these varieties, though, is the notion of homeland. In Ali's case, the globalized version of homogeneity where everyone feels part of the whole world, albeit the differences among its cultures, is highly stressed.

Memory is no longer confused, it has a homeland--  
Says Shammas: Territorialize each confusion in a graceful Arabic.

However, to know that the speaker in the ghazal heard these words in a language other than Arabic opens the door for several interpretations. One such inference is that the persona lives in a non-Arabic speaking country: Kashmir or the US. The crucible in which languages, and their respective cultural richness, melt gives the poet ample support in a globalized form of living. Arabic in this ghazal provides a milieu for the whole world to get together, even under the umbrella of suffering and sense of exile. The poet shifts his camera to the Mughal miniatures in his homeland Kashmir. There he rejoices at the magnificent calligraphies in Arabic.

The aforementioned figures can be viewed as the poet's cultural ancestors: the Majnoon lived in pre-Islam Arabia; Abraham and Ishmael are the great grandfathers of the Arabs; Mughals adopted Islam and had their affinity to Arabic. Yet, to include the Spanish poet, playwright, and theatre director Lorca (1898-1936) in this list takes the issue of ancestry to another level. The poet claims that all the world history can be dealt with as one entity.

When Lorca died, they left the balcony open and saw:

his *qasidas* braided, on the horizon, into knots of Arabic.

Here, the poet stresses the acculturative balance he enjoys in the US. To say that Lorca wrote *qasidas* (the traditional poem in Arabic part of which is the ghazal) intensifies this global attitude towards cosmopolitanism.

The dichotomy between cultures is now resolved once people adopt the ideals of global citizenship. For ATCKs, this cultural balance is possible since they are exposed to various cultures and get in touch with whatever universities among them. Ali closes this ghazal with a hint at how ATCKs look at difference differently. They find in it a means to redefine their cultural specific identity to a global cosmopolitan belongingness. Ghosh stresses Ali's cultural balance:

The idea of a cultural divide or conflict had no purchase in his mind: America and India were the two poles of his life and he was at home in both in a way that was utterly easeful and unproblematic.

People used to ask him about the meaning of his name Shahid; he refers to two languages – Arabic and Persian - to understand it fully:

They ask me to tell them what Shahid means—

Listen: it means “The Beloved” in Persian, “witness” in Arabic.

Both denotations are the fruits of being an ATCK: he feels beloved by all around him and, in return, he bears no grudge against the *Alter*. He is also a witness to the transcultural co-existence ATCKs' lifestyle represent. To write about these Eastern languages, with whatever historical bearings they have, in English gives homage to the human aspect of this co-existence and the acculturative balance one can achieve in his/her new global *homeland*.

According to B. F. Schaetti's attachment theory (2002), TCKs can achieve cultural balance and quick assimilation with the host culture through their attachment to their parents. Parental support is crucial for TCKs, and ATCKs, to form a culturally tolerant worldview. Ali moved to the US - when he was twelve - with his family for educational purposes. His attachment to all family members, and his mother in

particular, provided his with that support he needed to achieve all the academic success in the US. His mother's death was a shattering experience to him. During her illness of brain tumor, he could not write for months. Ghosh states that "Lenox Hill" which is an elegy Ali wrote to his mother's soul is the poet's greatest work:

In "Lenox Hill," the architectonics of the form creates a soaring superstructure, an immense domed enclosure, like that of the great mosque of Isfahan or the mausoleum of Sayyida Zainab in Cairo: a space that seems all the more vast because of the austerity of its proportions. The rhymes and half rhymes are the honeycombed arches that thrust the dome towards the heavens, and the meter is the mosaic that holds the whole in place. Within the immensity of this bounded space, every line throws open a window that beams a shaft of light across continents, from Amherst to Kashmir, from the hospital of Lenox Hill to the Pir Panjal Pass. Entombed at the center of this soaring edifice lies his mother.

As such, the integration of world cultures and the transgression of all geopolitical borders marks Ali's success in achieving acculturative balance through his globalized worldview.

#### **6- ATCKs and Positive Affect**

The second aspect that marks ATCKs' transcultural co-existence is their ability to feel a great deal of positive affect. Positive affect, Peterson and Plamondon suggest, is related to success in multiple and meaningful domains of life including marriage, friendship, income, and physical health (757). One advantage of being an ATCK is the sense of achievement in their everyday life affairs. Through parental support and acculturative balance, they become familiar with what it means to be an ATCK and adapt quickly to the requirements of success in this environment.

The opportunities exist, therefore, for TCKS to become cross-cultural "experts" with insights into the US and their host cultures. TCKS who negotiate this intercultural balancing act well should be psychologically more satisfied with life (hence score higher on positive affect) compared to TCKs who feel less competent inhabiting multiple worlds....those high on positive affect are also likely to find meaning in

the multiple cultures they inhabit. (757)

In essence, positive affect has to do with the individual's ability propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others and with life challenges in a positive way. It is based on one's openness to alterity and acceptance of change.

ATCKs provide a valid case for those who are high on positive affect. They pass away from childhood when they lack the experience or suffer the cultural shock in their new host country. They have reached the stage in which they take right life decisions such as those related to their careers and social relationships. Shahid Ali's poetry manifests the poet's high positive affect. His insistence on writing in English, rather than Urdu, suffices as a proof for his faith in the pillars of cosmopolitanism: prominent of which is being part of a whole entity that combines all world cultures. In "For You," he establishes a good rapport with his host country: America.

The birthplace of written language is bombed to nothing.

How neat, dear America, is this game for you?

The angel of history wears all expressions at once.

What will you do? Look, his wings are aflame for you.

On a visitor's card words are arranged in a row—

Who was I? Who am I? I've brought my claim. For you.

Ali's repatriation to the US was not problematic at all to this boy of twelve. He does not care where written language is born as he sees in it a mere game. He could use written English to achieve his academic success in both teaching and creative writing. When it comes to formalities, passports that denote one's identity are nothing. He chooses America as a living homeland, while retaining Kashmir as his birthplace. This flexibility is an indication of the poet's positive affect, supported by his acculturative balance.

Again, in "Of It All," Ali asserts his view of world cultures as a

whole entity in which everyone has a share:

White men across the U.S. love their wives' curries—

I say O No! to the turmeric of it all.

This couplet celebrates the marriage of the East and the West. White men of America appreciate their wives' dishes made with Indian curry. Here, as an Indian, he reminds them of turmeric which is not less delicious than curry. It seems that the poet deals with Americans around him as an integral part of his community. Positive affect in this case is a personal trait that leads to the improvement of cognitive processes though increasing cognitive flexibility. The poet's all-inclusive view of world cultures emphasizes his flexibility and tolerance: the two indications of positive affect.

The temporal element in Ali's poems plays a similar role in depicting this unity. He is certain that his imaginary world will one day come true in real time. Speaking to Daniel Hall (calling him a friend), Ali envisages how the friend's prayers are fulfilled:

“Behind a door marked DANGER” are being unwound  
the prayers my friend had ensrolled in real time.

This friendship combines reality and imagination since behind danger cannot be expected unless in one's vision. The poet reassures his friend that his prayers will be fulfilled and harmonious co-existence will be a reality one day:

Now Friend, the Belovèd has stolen your words—  
Read slowly: The plot will unfold in real time.

If the thief that has stolen the friend's words is called "Beloved," the reader must question the reason for this friendly attitude: forgiveness. It seems that the unity of disunities referred to above formulates Ali's poetic vision and proves ATCKs' ability to achieve transcultural coexistence through positive affect.

## **7- Conclusion**

This study has examined Agha Shahid Ali's ghazals as a genre that fosters transcultural co-existence. The form whose traditions date back to

7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia and 12<sup>th</sup> century Persia could blur the cultural barriers through its development across centuries and localities. Shahid Ali's repatriation to the US while still twelve years old makes of him an epitome of ATCKs who spend a significant part of their childhood and adulthood in countries other than their motherland. His poetic vision stems from his cosmopolitan view of world culture. His ghazals provide a milieu for cultural integration rather than conflict. Its strict form and flexible content assist the poet in this globalized view of culture. He took as his mission the teaching of English speaking poet how to write "authentic ghazals." The study has then examined the strategies upon which this transcultural co-existence depend: acculturative balance and positive affect. They are relevant to ATCKs' globalized form of citizenship and the flexible nature of identity formation. ATCKs show a competence of acculturative balance and achieve high on positive affect. This can be tested in their success in social affairs and careers. Shahid Ali's ghazals give much evidence of his cultural tolerance. His academic career witnesses a number of honors and awards in creative writing, indicating his high positive affect.

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