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## NEGOTIATING EVERYDAY VIA THE ACT OF READING RESISTANCE POETRY: A STUDY BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF READERSHIP OF POETRY BY AGHA SHAHID ALI ON KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

Kashmir conflict dates back to the time of Indo-Pak Independence in 1947, but it was the uprising of 1989 when people of Kashmir themselves became active participants in resistance movement against the state rule. Due to twin effect of military and militancy, the lives of people revolved around loss, fear, and insecurity that made up their everyday and in turn, the modes of resistance by people acquired different forms ranging from street protests to stone pelting to online blogging. This paper seeks to locate how the act of 'reading poetry' based on Kashmir conflict by Agha Shahid Ali acts as a means of incorporating resistance in the everyday of people when overt resistance is unsafe and subject to surveillance by the authorities. The paper addresses the theme of 'everyday' in two ways, firstly, in terms of violence and insecurity that makes up the 'everyday' of people in Kashmir and secondly, how they negotiate 'everyday' via the act of reading resistance poetry.

**Keywords:** Everyday, Fear, Insecurity, Poetry, Resistance, Violence.

### INTRODUCTION

"Literature is not a discrete entity, sui generis, but has links with the social world. The nature and consequence of the connections between a society and its literature are the province of literary sociology" (Griswold, 1981). Griswold (1993) in her article, Recent Moves in the Sociology of Literature, brings out the relationship between literature and readers response to the same. Here, the reader is conceptualized as a "creative agent" rather than a "passive recipient" and a concept called 'reception aesthetics' (Griswold, 1993) is used to understand the way construction of meanings is done by the readers. As per this concept, the readers never approach a text as blank slate but instead with certain expectations and various positions like gender, occupational status, nationality, class and above all life experiences influence how the readers read. This paper is based on the analysis of readership of poetry on Kashmir by Agha Shahid Ali (A Kashmiri-American poet), so as to explore the reasons as to why Kashmiri

people read him and what impact does reading such poetry generate. The study draws a nexus between violence/conflict and the way people negotiate their everyday lives via the acts of reading conflict poetry. The study examines how reading and identifying with poetry gives place to everyday of people in terms of reflecting their fears, insecurities, loss etc. and at the same time how it becomes a means to incorporate resistance in the everyday lives of peoples so as to oppose the atrocities of the dominant structures usually in covert forms.

Agha Shahid Ali has been selected as the focus point of this research, firstly, because of the growing popularity of the poet in conflict-ridden Kashmir in the recent past only, even when his work had started to get published in the early 70's. Secondly, it is due to my lack of familiarity with the written Kashmiri language that I chose a poet who writes in English. For the study, In-depth interviews have been conducted with readers regarding their interests in poetry, focusing on why they read Ali's poetry and how it affects them. These interviews were to begin with conducted in the premises of Kashmir University and then the collection of samples for study was done using the technique of snow- ball sampling.

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Some of the interviews were also conducted over the internet and in some cases unstructured, open-ended questionnaires were sent across India to the Kashmiri readers focusing on their interest in Ali's poetry and the impact such poetry generates.

### **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CHANGE AND RESISTANCE THROUGH ART**

Caroline Turner (2002) in her book *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and Pacific*, talks about art as a reflection of socio-political changes taking place in the region. She goes on to elucidate the relationship between art and social change in terms of globalization and geopolitical influences that have a remarkable influence on the development of art. "Artists through their work reflect the values and aspirations of the society they live in; some react with cynicism and others produce art of resistance. Over the past two decades, the artists have resisted colonialism; cultural loss; environmental degradation; war violence; racism and so on. Artists can transcend and perhaps even change society as well as reflect its tragedies" (Turner, 2002).

"The Kashmir conflict dates back to the time of Indo-Pak Independence i.e. 1947 whereby being a princely state the then ruler of Kashmir, Raja Hari Singh chose to be neutral instead of Kashmir's accession to either India or Pakistan. However, an attack on the north west of Kashmir by the Pakistani tribesmen in 1948 led him to take military assistance from India, which led to the deployment of Indian army in Kashmir, which after that never left and instead of support began to subjugate. Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, however, made it clear that the people of Kashmir would choose their fate through a plebiscite, which never took place. Kashmiris thus, continue to challenge the legitimacy of the way in which Kashmir was acceded to India and perceive it to be the bond of subjugation and thus resist Indian rule over the state" (Hussain, 2013). Thus, we have two versions of the history, the Pakistani one, which considers Kashmir accession to India forceful and illegal, and the Indian version, which considers the accession legal and proclaims Kashmir to be an integral part of India. The voices of the people of Kashmir have been away from the scene for a very long time and it was only in 1989, because of various 'internal' and 'external' factors (Salahuddin, 2000) that they started coming out in the open and defying Indian rule. The internal factors included the rise in literacy and education rate in Jammu and Kashmir, which led to increased awareness of the

masses about the political situation of the valley, other than this there was electrification of many villages in Kashmir, which led to their encounter with mass media thus bringing about large scale awareness. More than this, however, the elections of the 1987 in Kashmir were unfair and rigged whereby the National Conference-Congress alliance won sixty-six seats and the opposition Muslim United Front won just four seats. The political agents of the Muslim United Front were frustrated by what was believed to be a mockery of their political aspirations and as Tavleen Singh (cited in Salahuddin, 2000) writes, "it were these agents of Muslim United Front who were determined to fight their rights differently and had no option but to pick up guns". Other than this, some external factors also contributed to the armed rebellion include the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the rise of Palestinian Intifada. These movements had a rolling effect on Kashmir fueling the consciousness of Kashmiris around the same time. The year 1989 thus, marked a remarkable change in the scenario of Kashmir conflict when the Kashmiri Muslims population rose up against the state suppression. Many young Kashmiris during that time went across the border to Pakistan to acquire arms training and came back to fight against the Indian state. These men were taken to be 'terrorists' or 'militants' by the state for waging a war against their own nation and 'jihadis' (one's who sacrifice their lives for religion) by Pakistan as they were fighting state's oppression against the Muslims. Since 1989, "Kashmiris have lived in the fear of gun, whether it's of the militant or the Indian security forces" Schofield (2003). "Their sons as militants, militant sympathizers or suspected militants have been arrested, tortured, killed or just disappeared. Nearly every Kashmiri has a sad tale to tell of a family member who has been picked up by security forces on suspicion of being a militant" (Schofield, 2003). "According to Amnesty International, the 'brutality of torture in Kashmir defies belief'. For the majority of people, ill effects of living under siege have been tremendous. Injuries in cross firings between militants and security forces have taken a heavy toll. There are approximately 600,000 Indian military forces--including regular army, para-military troops, border security force and police currently deployed in Kashmir and the nature of legislation in force to counter the insurgency operations includes employment of acts like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act, the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act

and the Jammu & Kashmir Disturbed Areas Act which have been termed as 'draconian' by the International Court Of Justice." (Schofield, 2003c).

The target attacks by militants, reprisal by the government and security forces, search operations, disappearances, and call for strikes, fake encounters have become a part of the daily life of a Kashmiri. In turn, the modes of resistance by common people against the human right violations in turn have acquired different forms ranging from street protests, slogan raising, stone pelting to writing, blogging etc. Many Kashmiris including Mirza Waheed, Basharat Peer, Agha Shahid Ali etc. have via their writings be it in form of fiction or non-fiction given an important place to Kashmir conflict elucidating the experiences of people inhabiting the conflict zone. This paper explores the readership of the poetry by Agha Shahid Ali who via his poems has addressed the issue of Kashmir conflict quite creatively. Apart from focusing on the manifest forms of conflict in terms of bombing, shelling etc. which find place in his poetry he has tried to provide us with latent dimensions of understanding conflict. It's not only about the conflict between security persons and civilians on the streets, or that between India and Pakistan, or India and Kashmir, but it highlights how such events which are termed as violent, shape the everyday of people. It has more to do with human experiences and how individual experiences integrate with the experiences of the community as a whole. In fact, the book *The Country without a Post Office* which first got published in 1997 can be termed as the "Passport to Kashmir" (Sajid, 2012). Agha Shahid Ali was born in Delhi in 1949, he received education from University of Kashmir followed by Delhi University. Then, he was offered a scholarship for a Ph.D. in Pennsylvania State University in 1984 and M.F.A. in Poetry at the University of Arizona in 1985. From 1970-1975 he taught in Delhi University after which he moved to university of Pennsylvania, where he served as an instructor (Ghosh, 2008). It was from the very childhood that Ali had been globetrotting and therefore, was influenced by many societies and cultures at the same time. Apart from Kashmiri Muslim culture, he was exposed to other Indian tradition and western cultural traditions. However, not an exile in the literal sense of the term, "Ali temperamentally loved to call himself one and this is largely because of his ability to inhabit several historical and national backgrounds simultaneously" (Gamella, 2002). Ali continued living

outside Kashmir but he would visit Kashmir during vacations because his parents lived there. These occasional visits along with a smaller network of family and friends in Kashmir kept him updated about the situation in his native land. An interview with one of his closest aides (Personal communication, Jan 2014, Kashmir) revealed the deeper impact Kashmir has had on the heart and mind of the poet. After 1989, when the situation in Kashmir worsened, depiction of violence and conflict became the central theme for much of his poetry. From the same interview, I learnt that the idea to dedicate a complete book to conflict ridden Kashmir was triggered when in 1990's curfews and restrictions had taken over the valley. The condition in Kashmir was so deplorable that one wasn't even sure about people safely reaching their homes, so the sending and receiving of letters was a distant thing. The inspiration to compose an anthology about (for) Kashmir was thus marked off by these events of curfews and restrictions imposed on Kashmiris due to which they were cut off from the rest of the world. The poems thus, take the readers to an incredible journey in the heart of the conflict torn land and bring to the forefront the various events along with the everyday situation of people. Some of his poems, which address the Kashmir conflict include; Farewell, I See Kashmir from New-Delhi at Midnight, The Country without a Post Office, etc. and the excerpts from some of the poems are quoted as under:

"And will the blessed women rub the ashes together? Each fall they gather Chinar leaves, singing what the hills have re-echoed for four hundred years, the songs of Habba Khatoon, the peasant girl who later became the queen. When her husband was exiled from the valley by the Mughal king Akbar, she went among the people with her sorrow. Her grief, alive to this day, in her own roused the people into frenzied opposition to Mughal rule. And since Kashmir has never been free" (Ali, 2013). These lines are taken from the prologue to *The Country without a Post Office* (2013) which was written in the backdrop of the armed conflict in Kashmir which began in 1989. Though the book captures conflict situation post 1989 but it at the same time does not fail to make a mention that oppression and subjugation is not new to Kashmiris and they have been suffering from it for the past many centuries. Rulers after rulers committed atrocities on the people and it is till now that they carry the scars of these atrocities. Rulers starting from Mughals to Afgans to Sikhs to Dogras have benefitted

themselves at the cost of their Kashmiri subjects (Zutshi 2003). Even after India's independence in 1947, Kashmiris continue to be the subjects of a so-called democratic setup that proclaims Kashmir to be its integral part. Ali's sense of history is that of tyranny and repression, which plays out in the present too, although in a different way, but that still trusses a Kashmiri.

"One must wear jeweled ice in dry plains/to will the distant mountains to glass /The city from where no news can come/is now so visible in its curfewed night/that the worst is precise:" (Ali, 2013).

The violence that the state inflicts in terms of killings, arrests, tortures etc. are symbolic of the power and superior position of the state vis-à-vis the helplessness of the 'other' i.e. the Kashmiri masses. The following lines highlight this distinction where *dry plains* signify India and *distant mountains* signify Kashmir (the other) which is cut-off from the rest of the country because of the curfew imposed by the state and thus from where no news can come.

"Don't tell my father I have died," he says/and I follow him through blood on the road/and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners/ left behind, as they ran from the funeral/victims of the firing. From windows we hear/grieving mothers, and snow begins to fall/on us, like ash. Black on edges of flames/it cannot extinguish the neighborhoods/the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers/ Kashmir is burning' (Ali, 2013).

The poem talks about a Kashmiri teen-aged boy, Rizwan who got killed in a firing incident after returning from the funeral of Maulvi Farooq (an eminent political leader) in 1990. Stressing on the gruesomeness of the crime by the security forces, the poet states that the intensity of the pain and brutality is such that even Rizwan's shadow parts away from him and the poet imagines that shadow communicating to him. The poem is thus a narration of events and conversation between the poet and the shadow of the victim. The poem clearly depicts the horror one goes through in the prisons of Kashmir during torture by the security forces. These lines take us away from the moment of killing/firing into a larger set up where there is ironically an ever present sense of insecurity hovering over the masses all the time owing to the heavy presence of security persons in the valley. For the past two decades hundreds of armed forces are keeping a close watch on the masses. The presence of bunkers inhabited by security forces along with the constant surveillance that the masses are

subjected to has become a part of everyday for Kashmiris.

Also the everydayness of violence comes into picture at the time when death of a person leaves behind a family which then has to make do with the loss of a family member especially the young son. According to Veena Das (2007), we need to look beyond these events to understand how violence plays out in the real sense of the term. These events may be important and may provide a starting point to understand violence that is being inflicted upon someone but one needs to go beyond that event in order to capture human experiences and human sufferings and thus arrive at a narrative other than the official ones. So, for the family members of Rizwan, violence is not embedded merely in that event of killing but becomes a part of their everyday in terms of psychological, economic and social hardships which they have to bear all the time.

Shiv Vishwanathan (2003) in his article 'Interrogating the Nation' argues that the dominant discourse on nationalism fails to take into account the pains and grievances of the marginalized people. According to Vishwanathan (2003) the dominant discourses on nationalism overlook the sufferings of the marginalized an leave out the minority i.e exile, diaspora, migrants, refugees and their conditions of suffering, homelessness and loss of identity as they do not fall under the legally defined citizenship of a particular country. He attributes more power to literature over social sciences and argues that it is the literary works from which the social sciences would have to borrow in order to better capture the individual suffering and pain and the muted voices of the minorities. Ali's poetry in the same sense becomes the voice for the muted Kashmiris in terms reflecting their apprehensions and insecurities that makes up their everyday in a conflict ridden region.

#### **EVERYDAYNESS OF RESISTANCE**

According to James Scott, "most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in the overt collective defiance of power holders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites." (Scott, 1985). In his influential works *Weapons of the Weak*, he elucidates the importance of everyday forms of resistance vis-à-vis the historic collective acts of resistance. Scott looks at peasant and slave societies and their ways of responding to domination, with a focus not on observable acts of rebellion but on forms of cultural resistance. Rather than

seeing 'resistance as organization', Scott looks at less visible, every-day forms of resistance such as 'foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, feigned ignorance' to see how they challenge the dominant structures (Scott 1985b). Certeau (2011) talks about the anonymous and the everyday and discusses the 'ways of operating' that constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of socio-cultural production. He argues that the active agents use 'tactics' in response to the 'strategies' of the dominant so as to contest the social order and subvert representation that institutions impose upon them. According to Certeau, (2011) there is an element of creative resistance enacted by the ordinary people in the environment designed by the strategies of the structures of power. Ghosh (2007a) argues against the traditional emphasis placed on violent confrontational struggles in social and political history writings because of its tendency to ignore everyday negotiations of power that go on between the dominated and dominant on a more sustained basis. The writer stresses on the everydayness of struggle by the women in South Asia reflected via doings like rumor, gossip, songs, theatre etc. that provides a critique to the dominant structures while at the same time allow women hide behind anonymity. Such practices may not bring about a revolution but gives a platform to women to overcome their distress. Haynes and Prakash (cited in Ghosh, 2007) in this regard argue that resistance be equated with the behavior by which the suppressed groups pose a challenge to the hegemonic social formations and consciousness need not be essential to its constitution. Such behavior, even if it is unintended on the part of the suppressed group should have profound consequences for the objectives of the dominant or the shape of social order in one way or the other.

The aim of the paper is to understand this cultural resistance via the acts of reading conflict poetry (by Agha Shahid Ali) which makes up the everyday of the readers in Kashmir. This paper tries to understand the relationship between Ali's poetry and its readers. It shows how the acts of reading conflict poetry shapes the everyday life of people in terms of giving space to their fears, loss, insecurities and at the same time acts as a tool of resistance for them. Further, the paper elucidates how readership can play a role in preservation of an art form that speaks volumes about the life, experiences and struggles of a region.

In the past few years, the popularity of Ali's poetry is significantly growing in Kashmir. This is evident by the growing number of Kashmiris subscribing to his pages on facebook, sharing his poems and quotes on social networking sites, various literary groups on internet coming up in his name and majorly by the events and seminars held in his name in Kashmir. In 2011, marking his 10<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary a mega event was held in Srinagar (Kashmir's capital) which was attended by intellectuals, media personals, academicians, students from all over Kashmir. The event was the first of its kind in Kashmir and was organized to pay tributes to the poet who resided outside Kashmir but continued feeling the pain of being a Kashmiri. In the same event a play was enacted '*Bu chus shahid*' (I'm Witness) to depict the pain Ali had witnessed in life due to Kashmir turmoil. In the same event, various scholars and academicians made a plea for the inclusion of his poetry in the Kashmir University curriculum. Similar events were held by Kashmiris residing outside Kashmir in Singapore, England, USA, and New-Delhi (Bashir, 2011).

Another event, which was organized by Kashmir Centre for Social and Developmental Studies, also paid tribute to Ali on his tenth death anniversary. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Hameedah Nayeem (HOD, Dept. Of English, Kashmir University) and the members were of the view that Ali's poetry had touched the depths of Kashmiri hearts by mirroring the plight of Kashmiris for the world community and Ali as a poet had singularly put Kashmir on the international map of English poetry. Nayeem (2011) states:-

'What better expression there could be of the absence of the wholesome selfhood or of the lack of political identity than the title of the collection of poems he has written on Kashmir, *The Country Without a Post Office*, which tells the whole story of what is wrong with Kashmir. It is not only the content but the poetic brilliance and uniqueness of his style that has endeared him to millions of people all over the world'.<sup>ii</sup>

Another seminar was held in March 2014, at University of Kashmir highlighting the precious legacy Kashmir has in term of Ali's poetry. The event '*Literature and the Sacred: Legacies, Issues and the Path Ahead*' was on for three days and was a major success that concluded with the tearful recitation of late Agha Shahid Ali's poem, 'I

see Srinagar from New Delhi at Midnight' (Muzaffar,2014). Ali's role as a witness of the agony, desolation, and disturbance of a whole tradition in Kashmir because of political turmoil was highlighted and it was during this event that inclusion of Ali's poetry was made in the curriculum of English Literature Department in University of Kashmir.

Apart from this many Kashmiri writers both Muslims and Hindus are incorporating Ali's couplets in their works for example Basharat Peer has incorporated Ali's poetry in his book *Curfewed Night: One Kashmiri journalist's frontline account of life, love, and war in his homeland.*'(2010). Even Mirza Waheed in his book *The Collaborator* (2011) uses couplets from his poems. Also in Sanjay Kak's edited book *Kashmir: The New Intifada* (2013) his poetry finds home.

As far as this paper is concerned, the readers of Ali's poetry were questioned on a number of things ranging from 'how has the Kashmir conflict affected them?', 'if they feel the need to protest?', 'what could be the best possible way to protest in their opinion?', 'Why they read Ali's poetry?', 'How it impacts them?' The readers were all Kashmiri Muslims, well-read, belonging to educated families, some of them still studying and some working in different parts of Kashmir and rest of the India.

In this study, excerpts have been quoted from questionnaires and interviews conducted from December-2013 to February-2014 in Kashmir and New-Delhi, focusing mainly on the effect of conflict on them, their take on protests, why they read Ali's poetry and how it impacts them.

#### **TAKE ON PROTEST?**

##### **Respondent 1**

'I don't think the conventional means of protest is going to lead anywhere. Instead by correctly identifying the problem areas and targeting at fixing them, educating youngsters and trying to emphasize on dialogue and action rather than coming out on the streets in unorganized protests' (Junaid Sheikh (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>iii</sup>

##### **Respondent 2**

'Educate. Read. Study history. Educate more' (Wasim Bhat (name changed), 2013, personal communication).<sup>iv</sup>

##### **Respondent 3**

'I feel protests in any form are retrograde and weaken the economy and overall wellbeing of a place. Protests either in physical or text form are melodramatic and often a

knee-jerk reaction to an incident' (Hadi Mir (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>v</sup>

##### **Respondent 4:**

'No. Not the violent protests, atleast. Obviously Kashmiris have suffered a lot over these years and I, as a Kashmiri certainly feel for the plight of my homeland. I want to do something, most definitely. But I don't think violent protests are an option'(Aisha Khan (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>vi</sup>

##### **Respondent 5:**

'To protest is an innate tendency and I believe all forms of protest reinforce and complement each other. It is natural to resist oppression' (Falak Yousuf (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>vii</sup>

#### **WHY ALI'S POEMS?**

##### **Respondent 1**

'the distant way how he talks about Kashmir, i.e. always reminiscing about the past, appeals to me somehow. Maybe it's a reflection of my own hopelessness when it comes to any solution about the conflict in Kashmir' (Junaid Sheikh (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>viii</sup>

##### **Respondent 2**

'I never took to streets to protest against the atrocities committed on us but now at least being well read I somewhere consider it my responsibility to read him because I owe it to all those Kashmiris who pen down the Kashmir conflict and the experiences of people in any way' (Wasim Bhat (name changed), 2013, personal communication).<sup>ix</sup>

##### **Respondent 3**

'It gives me sense of nostalgia and a very strong sense of the adverse impact of the turmoil on Jammu and Kashmir' (Hadi Mir (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>x</sup>

##### **Respondent 4**

'As I grew older, I started developing a keen interest in Kashmir and wanted to read about my homeland. I had heard about Agha Shahid but never really read him. We had a passage about him in our English textbook written by his friend Amitav Ghosh. I developed an interest and started reading. Moreover I am a huge Faiz fan. Agha Shahid Ali has translated some Faiz poems. That heightened my interest a bit more. Being a Kashmiri, I am familiar with the things that he includes in his poetry. I find his poetry to be real and true. And I have never heard of anyone who writes poetry about Kashmir in English (or in a language which I understand).

Moreover he is the only Kashmiri poet who has got international recognition for his work' (Aisha Khan (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>xi</sup>

#### **Respondent 5**

'The Country Without a Post Office mirrors Kashmir and its many stories which never find their way in the grand Indian narratives. The Country Without a Post Office wasn't available in Kashmir for a long time and I remember borrowing the book from a friend and photo copying it' (Falak Yousuf (name changed), 2014, personal communication).<sup>xiii</sup>

The above responses elucidate that the major reason people are interested in his poetry is because they greatly identify with it. Having actually lived through the experiences that Ali highlights in his poems gives them a chance to subtly take a position vis-à-vis their conflict torn homeland. It can be in some ways equated with the silent resistance as articulated by Scott (1985c) because these people don't consider violent protests or street protests fruitful enough for they have been serving no major purpose for the past two decades and instead taking a heavy toll on the lives of Kashmiris. Those who overtly protest suffer retaliation by the security forces. For example, in 2008 and 2010 more than 250 people got killed and hundreds got injured by taking part in the street protests. The killings and injuries were as a result of bullet shots, tear gas shelling, ruthless beating and torture by the security forces. Also, those who escaped being targeted brutally on the streets were later caught because the surveillance and information circuit of the state is too strong and these protestors were dealt with force and some even booked under the gruesome Public Safety Act (Kak, 2013). The futility and brutality associated with overt resistance has made these well-read Kashmiris to take resort in some other ways of showing their resentment. However, equating reading Ali's poetry may not be considered as a form of resistance by some of the readers as one of the reader (Respondent 3, 2014) stated and I quote, "no form of resistance be it street or via writing is workable". However, the same respondent time stated, "reading Ali's poetry gives me a strong sense of nostalgia and a sense of adverse impact of the turmoil on Kashmir". As I researcher, I categorize it as 'externally defined resistance' (Einwohner & Hollander, 2000) where the intent of the subject is absent, the recognition by the dominant group is also lacking but the action is recognized by the observer (or the researcher).

Sanjak Kak in his book *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* talks about the ways in which the modes of resistance by the masses against the state atrocities in Kashmir has changed. The involvement of young people in the street protests was a major transformation in the nature of uprising. 'The strategic shift from the militant's gun to unarmed if -stone-pelting- protest was nothing short of tectonic' (Kak, 2013). Kak further writes that "the surveillance that the Kashmiri society went through along with the blocking of text message services in 2010 by the state through which news and rumor circulated within Kashmir made people to take recourse in Internet based social networking sites like facebook, twitter etc. A number of protest groups like Aalaw, Bekar Jamat etc. were created on the social networking sites with the increased number of people joining them. Earlier if Kashmiris were speaking to each other alone, now with the use of the internet they were speaking to the world" (Kak, 2013). Similarly, by reading Ali's poetry, which is a way of silent resistance or in some cases as externally defined resistance - Ali's international recognition whether it be in terms of his poetry being taught as part of courses in Western Universities or his book *Rooms are Never Finished* being a finalist for the 2001 National Book Award in Poetry - allows Kashmiris speak to the wider world and make their pain known. Also, as the sufferings and agonies of the people of Kashmir don't find a place in the grand Indian narratives, Ali's poetry on behalf of Kashmiris communicates the experience of the pain to the wider world. People in Kashmir are reading him and they know the world out there is reading him too and it is in some ways creating an impact. As one of the readers (Respondent 2, 2014) also said, 'she does not know of any other Kashmiri poet who has won so much international recognition'.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Thus, such poetry somewhere acts a tool for generating 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1995) amongst the literate and well-read Kashmiri people. People might not read him in close physical proximity or his poetry might not appeal equally to all sections of people (due to lack of Kashmiri translation) but people read him because it gives them a sense of solidarity in terms of the shared experiences they have had and binds them in a community of the suffered and deprived. However, Durkheim talked about collective effervescence in terms of religion and ritual practices associated with the same,

but it can easily go beyond the strictly considered religious realm, since all socially derived meaning operates in the same way. For example, a cricket team or an emblem are insignificant unless they derive their worth from the reality of collective forces they represent and embody, and in the same way, this conflict poetry derives its worth. In the context of Kashmiri, 'conflict poetry' becomes important because of the sense of solidarity it generates amongst its readers and thereon shapes their everyday. It does it either by making readers reminiscent of the past, arousing nostalgia, evoking the memory of harm done to their homeland or constant bumping into the present situation of violence, struggle and suffering. It thus acts as a physical and tangible reminder of their marginality thus giving them a sense of collectivity and solidarity.

In relating readership to the preservation of such poetry, I want to bring in the argument by Hannah Ardent as highlighted by d'Entrève (2008). Commenting on Ardent, d'Entrève (2008) claims: "weaving a narrative out of the actions and pronouncements of individuals, is partly constitutive of their meaning, because it enables the retrospective articulation of their significance and import, both for the actors themselves and for the spectators" (d'Entrève, 2008). He further states that the actors are so engrossed in their instant aims and concerns that they hardly have an idea of the full implications of their actions. The significance of an action is manifest only when the action is finished, and its relationship to other actions has unraveled. It is then it can be embodied in a narrative, whether of poets or historians and this narrative being at some distance from the events it describes, is one of the reasons why it can provide further insight into the motives and aims of the actors. These narratives on one hand offer a great deal of truthfulness and a greater degree of significance to the actions of individuals and on the other hand preserve the memory of deeds through time. Action is subject to erosion of time and forgetfulness; deeds and words do not survive their enactment unless they are remembered. The lives and deeds of actors can thus, be saved from oblivion by the retelling of deeds as stories. Poetry is thus valued because it rescues the glorious (as well as the less glorious) deeds of the past for the benefit of future generations (d'Entrève, 2008). In the context of Kashmir, such poetry thus has the function to preserve the memory of whatever the people have been subjected to, it narrates a tale of the deeds of the institutions of

state and the experiences of the Kashmiri masses and in a way preserves the memory for them and for the generations to come. In this regard, the audience or the receivers of such poetry play a significant role in becoming the transmitters of the memory of these actions/deeds that they have been at the receiving end of, and the ones that have shaped their lives in one way or the other. It is important that people's voices, stories—which otherwise get hijacked – are recorded in some form. Brecht (1997), a German poet says 'In the future, they won't say the times were dark! / Rather they will ask, why were their poets silent?' and in the context of Kashmir the poet for sure has not shunned away from his responsibility, it is the readers who are now making an attempt to use his poems as tool to wage a war against forgetfulness and thus preserve 'Kashmir's memory'.

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<sup>i</sup> There are a number of facebook groups active in his name and hundreds of Kashmiris have joined them. Also in the last 4 years five seminars/ events have been held in his name in Kashmir. The details of these events are provided in the main text. Retrieved from [https://www.facebook.com/search/-results.php?q=agha%20shahid%20ali&init=mag\\_glass&tas=0.9916582810692489&search\\_first\\_focus=1398402625831](https://www.facebook.com/search/-results.php?q=agha%20shahid%20ali&init=mag_glass&tas=0.9916582810692489&search_first_focus=1398402625831)

<sup>ii</sup> The quote is taken from an article 'KCSDS pays Tribute to Agha Shahid Ali' in *Kashmir Life* (2011) an online news portal in Kashmir.

<sup>iii</sup> Junaid Sheikh (name changed) is law graduate working in Delhi. Interviewed in Delhi (Jan 2014).

<sup>iv</sup> Wasim Bhat (name changed) studies in a college in Kashmir. Interviewed in Srinagar, Kashmir. (Dec 2013).

<sup>v</sup> Hadi Mir (name changed) is a media professional working in Mumbai. He responded via questionnaire. (Jan 2014).

<sup>vi</sup> Aisha Khan (name changed) has stayed in Delhi since childhood and studies in a Delhi College. She responded through questionnaire. (Jan 2014).

<sup>vii</sup> Falak Yousuf (name changed), has finished Masters in Mass Communication from a Delhi based University responded via a questionnaire in Delhi. (Feb 2014).

<sup>viii</sup> Junaid Sheikh (name changed) is law graduate working in Delhi. Interviewed in Delhi (Jan 2014).

<sup>ix</sup> Wasim Bhat (name changed) studies in a college in Kashmir. Interviewed in Srinagar, Kashmir. (Dec 2013).

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<sup>xi</sup> Aisha Khan (name changed) has stayed in Delhi since childhood and studies in a Delhi College. She responded through questionnaire. (Jan 2014).

<sup>xii</sup> Falak Yousuf (name changed), has finished Masters in Mass Communication from a Delhi based University responded via a questionnaire in Delhi. (Feb 2014).