

The Ghat of the Only World

Question 1. When was the phone call that informed the author about Shahid's approaching death?

Answer 1: The phone call was on 25th April 2001 that informed the author about Shahid's approaching death.

Question 2. What was Shahid Ali suffering from?

Answer 2: Shahid Ali was suffering from a malignant brain tumour.

Question 3. When was "The Country without a Post Office" published?

Answer 3: 'The Country without a Post Office' was published in 1997.

Question 4. When did Shahid Ali die?

Answer 4: Shahid Ali died on 8th December 2001.

Question 5. What do you mean by diaspora?

Answer 5: Diaspora means the dispersion of members of an ethnic or religious group from the place of origin to different locations worldwide.

Question 6. Why did Shahid want to learn Spanish?

Answer 6: Shahid wanted to learn Spanish to study the writings of Garcia Lorca.

Question 7. Describe how the author's friendship with Shahid started.

Answer 7: The author knew Shahid before he met him through his poems. In 1998, their conversation started with a mutual friend. In 1998 and 1999, they had several phone calls and a couple of brief meetings. But their friendship started in 2000 when Shahid moved to Brooklyn and started to live in the author's neighbourhood.

Question 8. Why do you think Shahid Ali asked the author to write about him?

Answer 8: Shahid informed the author that he was in the terminal stage of his disease. He knew his death was near and asked the author to write something about him after his death. Though he had many friends, he asked the author to do so because they had great similarities in thoughts and choices and were from the same country. He perhaps thought the author could portray him from a different angle that many people were unaware of.

Question 9. Why did Shahid want to return to Kashmir?

Answer 9: Shahid wanted to return to Kashmir in his last days of cancer. It was because he was from Kashmir and spent his childhood and adolescence there. He wanted to breathe his last in his homeland, amidst nature. He wanted to die in a place where his mother breathed her last.

Question 10. How did Kashmir influence him as a poet?

Answer 10: Kashmir had a great influence on him as he was from this place. The violence that took place in Kashmir had a great effect. The violence comes back in his writing many times. The vanishing of Kashmiri pandits haunted him and took place in his writings. His poems for Kashmir, according to the author, were his best works. But he was not inclined to political writing at all. Rather, he loved humanity above everything else.

Question 11. Describe Shahid's love for food.

Answer 11: Shahid Ali had a great fondness for food. One of his favourite dishes was Rogan Josh, a traditional Kashmiri dish. He could tell at what stage the cooking was by its smell. He loved exploring different foods from different places and had a love for Bengali food. Apart from this, he loved to cook too.

Question 12. How did Ali embrace death?

Answer 12: Ali had great energy in life. Though he knew his death was near, he accepted it with great strength. Instead of being sad, he engaged himself with people, poetry, and food to be happy. He tried to enjoy his last days with laughter and smiles. He knew death was inevitable, so he took reality as a simple truth. He shared his farewell speech with his friends and died peacefully on December 8th, 2001.

Question 13. What do you know about Shahid Ali's career?

Answer 13: Shahid Ali was born in Kashmir. After his education at the University of Delhi, he moved to the United States for higher education. He lived in Pennsylvania and later moved to Arizona to study creative writing. After that, he did several jobs as a teacher. He taught at Hamilton College, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Utah and New York University. Besides teaching, he grew as a poet and especially became a voice for Kashmir.

Question 14. What impressions of Shahid do you gather from the piece?

Answer 14: "The Ghat of the Only World" was written by Amitabh Ghosh in remembrance of his friend Agha Shahid Ali. The writing captured the last days of Shahid when he was fighting against brain cancer. Thus, the author introduces us to his friend from a different perspective. We see that, even in the darkest days, Shahid remained energetic. He tried to enjoy daily life by surrounding himself with what he loved – people, poetry, and food. He could accept death with open arms because of his larger-than-life views. As a poet, he was deeply touched by the violence in his homeland, Kashmir. That violence haunted him and came back in his writing. According to the author, he was a genuine poet, not interested in fame or political views but in having a real voice. He was deeply in love with poetry and writing. Apart from this, he was a great teacher who loved to be among the students. He loved food,

especially Rogan Josh, cricket, songs of Begum Akhtar and nature. Thus, Shahid Ali has been portrayed as a great personality who loved all the beautiful aspects of the world.

Question 15. What is the influence of Shahid's poetry on the author?

Answer 15: Shahid Ali's poetry has always strongly influenced the author. He states that, before knowing Shahid personally, he knew him through his poems. He remembers Shahid's collection of poems in 1997, titled "The Country without a Post Office" and how it deeply moved him. In 1998, he recognised the true voice of a poet, and he quoted a line from a poem in one of his writings. Throughout the writing, the author has brought the poetic sides of Shahid to life. He also described how the violence of Kashmir haunted him and his poetry. He also shared Shahid's non-political views and larger-than-life ideas. Throughout the story, he quotes several lines from Shahid's poems. It clearly shows how much he remembers his friend as a poet, and how the poetic thoughts of Shahid Ali genuinely influence him.

Question 16. How do Shahid and the writer react to the knowledge that Shahid is going to die?

Answer 16: Shahid had great optimism in life. He loved people, food, poetry, and music. In 2000, he suddenly had a blackout, and the consequent diagnosis stated that he had a malignant brain tumour. Though it was almost a death sentence, Shahid prepared himself mentally to face the truth. He decided to enjoy each day and embraced death. So, when he reported to the author about his severe condition, he laughed at the context of death.

On the other hand, the author was not prepared for the news. He was shocked and tried to console Shahid. He further broke down when Shahid asked him to write about him after his death. Though the truth shook his core, he gave himself a moment to accept the reality after the phone call. After this, he decided to pen down his experiences with his friend.

Question 17. Describe Shahid's apartment. What were the small meetings that used to take place in his place?

Answer 17: Shahid's apartment was on the seventh floor of a newly renovated building in Brooklyn. The author described the flat as an airy and spacious one. It had a study room and a terrace on the top floor. From the terrace, one could see the flow of the East River like from a ghat. According to the author, Shahid loved this scenario very much. He loved people, and in his last days, he would frequently organise small meetings in his apartment. There would be half a dozen or more people in those meetings. Many students, poets, teachers, and his relatives used to visit him. At the same time, someone would always be in the kitchen making tea or cooking Rogan Josh. Thus, he used to turn his apartment into an endless mela of food, talks, and poetry.