

The Ghat of the Only World – Important Questions

Q. When and how did Shahid tell me writer about his approaching death?

Ans. Shahid told the writer on phone about his approaching death on 25th April 2001. He was turning the pages of his engagement book and then suddenly remarked that he couldn't see anything. After a brief pause he said that he hoped it did not mean that he was dying.

Q. 'You must write about me.' What was the impact of these words on the writer?

Ans. The writer took it as a very important thing which would have to be obeyed. He could not think of anything to say. He had to search the words to convey his promise. Finally he said, "Shahid, I will, I'll do the best I can".

Q. How did the author come in contact with Shahid? When and how did their friendship grow?

Ans. The author and Shahid had friends in common and one of these put him in touch with Shahid. They had several conversations on the phone and even met a couple of times, but they were mere acquaintances till then. Then in February 2000 Shahid moved to Brooklyn in the neighbourhood of the author. Since then their friendship grew.

Q. What do you learn about Shahid's sociability?

Ans. Shahid was very sociable. There was hardly an evening when there was not a party in his livingroom. One would always find there about half a dozen people-poets, relatives, students etc. In the kitchen someone would always be cooking food or making tea. Once Shahid said to the author, "I love it that people come and there's always food. I love this spirit of festivity."

Q. Where did Shahid wish to be laid to rest after his death? Was his wish fulfilled?

Ans. Shahid wished to be laid to rest in Kashmir after his death. But his wish was not fulfilled. Due to some unavoidable reason he changed his mind and, decided to be laid to rest in Northampton in the vicinity of Amherst.

Q. How did the writer come to know about Shahid's approaching death? What was his reaction to it?

Ans. The writer knew that Shahid had been under treatment for cancer for about fourteen months. But he never thought of Shahid's approaching death as he was still on his feet and perfectly clear headed, though he suffered from occasional lapses of memory.

One day the writer rang him up to remind him that they had been invited to a friend's house and tell him that he was coming to pick him up. While going through his engagement book, suddenly Shahid said, "O dear, I can't see a thing. I hope this doesn't mean that I'm dying." This was the first time Shahid had touched on the subject of death and the writer came to know about his approaching death.

The writer was shocked into silence to hear this. After a long pause he tried to reassure Shahid that he would be fine. But Shahid cut him short and asked him to promise to write something about him after his death. The writer tried to change the topic but Shahid persisted on his request. There was an urgency in his voice. The writer realized that Shahid was dead serious. So, he promised that he would honour his wish.

Q. Give a few instances of Shahid's liveliness and sharpness in repartee.

Ans. Once, the writer went to the hospital where Shahid was undergoing treatment to bring him home. He was accompanied by his brother, Iqbal and his sister, Hina. A wardboy came there with a wheel-chair. Shahid sent him away saying that he could walk on his feet. After taking a few steps, his knees gave way. Iqbal ran off to bring back the wheel-chair while they stood supporting him. When the wardboy returned with the wheel chair Shahid asked him where he was from. The man said, "Equador." Shahid held his hand tightly and said, "Spanish, I always wanted to learn Spanish just to read Lorca."

At another occasion, Shahid was stopped by a woman security guard at Barcelona Airport. She asked him, "What do you do?" Shahid replied, "I'm a poet." The woman asked again, "What were you doing in Spain?"

Shahid answered, "Writing poetry." Whatever the question, Shahid worked poetry into his answer. At last, the woman asked him desperately, "Are you carrying anything that could be dangerous to the other passengers?" Clapping a hand to his chest, Shahid replied, "Only my heart."

Q. Trace the development of the bond of affinity between Shahid and the writer.

Ans. The writer Amitav Ghosh, had known Shahid's work long before he met the man. One of their common friends put him in touch with Shahid. In 1998 and 1999 they had several conversations on the phone and even met a couple of times. But they were no more than acquaintances until Shahid moved to Brooklyn in 2000, when he had a sudden blackout in February. Tests revealed that he had a malignant brain tumour.

The building in which Shahid lived in Brooklyn was some eight blocks away from the writer's apartment. Since, they were in the same neighbourhood, they began to meet for occasional meals, they quickly discovered that they had many things in common.

Although Shahid's condition was already serious by that time, it did not hamper their friendship. The writer was always present at the gatherings in Shahid's house. He

accompanied Shahid to the hospital whenever he went there. Even in a brief period they grew so intimate that Shahid asked the author to write something about him after his death.

Q. In spite of malignant brain tumour and awareness of approaching death Shahid was ‘the centre of perpetual carnival’: Elucidate.

Ans. Shahid suffered from cancer. A malignant brain tumour had been detected after he had a sudden blackout in Feb. 2000. The doctors gave him a year or less. In spite of the malignant brain tumour and awareness of his approaching death, Shahid retained his best for life. His gregarious instinct and love for music, poetry and good food helped in retain his cheerfulness. The spirit of festivity didn't leave time for him to feel depressed. His living room was always full of people -poets, students, writers and relatives. Songs, music and recitation of poetry enlivened the meetings at his apartment. He loved entertaining guests with good food. His hospitality and personal attention to the details of food were well known. Although his life was being consumed by the disease, he was always the centre of a perpetual carnival—an endless fair of folk, laughter, food and poetry.