Language and Identity of Colonized: A Stylistic Analysis of Poetic Work of Agha Shahid Ali

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A B S T R A C T

Stylistics as an interdisciplinary field of study has evolved over the years as it encompasses theories and approaches of contemporary times from language, literature, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, and anthropology. Since the core to stylistics is language, the present research aims to address the ramifications of Colonization in the poetic works of Agha Shahid Ali. The sample for the study to explore the stylistic features is Language Games. The selected text has been investigated on graphological, phonological, lexical, syntactical, pragmatics and discourse levels of stylistic analysis to expose the hidden and profound meanings. The expressive means of the selected work have been interpreted using lens of Postcolonialism to relate the work with larger socio-cultural contexts. The poem's stylistic analysis reveals the lament of the poet for his lost language and identity. The cost of learning a new language is the loss of one's native language. The lexical choices, parallel structures, and foregrounding function effectively highlight the major and minor themes of the selected text. This study also exposes Agha Shahid's unique poetic style that distinguishes him as a great poet. This study affirms that stylistics links as a bridge two vital disciplines i.e., linguistics and literature. Language carries thoughts which need to be explored. This study has focused on all such features that the poet, knowing the importance of language, selected very carefully to carry his message. This research helps students understand the significant connection and bondage between language features and literature.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Stylistic analysis, Agha Shahid Ali, Language, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the stylistic features of the literary work 'Language Games' by Agha Shahid Ali. Stylistics draws upon approaches, theories and models from other fields and disciplines more often than it develops its own distinctive theories. The most popular amongst them is *Literary Studies*. Aitchison (2010, p. 148) asserts that the analysis from linguistic perspectives of literary language is identified as stylistics. Conspicuously, the linguistic approach to stylistics accommodates this *interdisciplinariness* by investigating both literary and non-literary texts (Aitchison, 2010). According to Jeffries et al. (2010), stylistics have tended to brood over the investigation of literary texts. The stylistic features that are explored in literary texts are not only exclusive to that genre but are toolkits and techniques that can equally be applied to non-literary texts. Thus, the present study intends to probe into a poetic work of Agha Shahid Ali through

stylistic analysis to trace the features of postcolonialism. This research explores the efforts made by the poet to voice the sense of loss that resulted from the critical but insolvent choices he made in his life. Postcolonialism brought forth migration or dispersal of people, by force or will from their homeland because of multiple reasons as trade and business, war, forced labor, natural disaster, finding a job, pursuit of better living or education etc. (Shabir, 2013). The postcolonial era can be thus deemed as the era of movement where natives on a large scale got dispersed. This dispersal results in longing, partition, nostalgia, quest for identity, and inclination towards homeland; and this nostalgic stipulation for the homeland and roots is one of the peculiarities of Agha Shahid Ali's poetry, an iconic Indian Diaspora poet. Ali belongs to the generation of postcolonial poets who wrote a little of their poetry in India and a bulk of it in

foreign lands. His poetry is a truthful account of pangs and suffering that depict the aftermaths of decolonization. Agha Shahid Ali; was born in 1949 and raised in his hometown, Srinagar, Kashmir. His collections include *A Walk Through the Yellow Pages*, *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, *The Country Without a Post Office*, *Rooms Are Never Finished.* Since his childhood, Ali had been globetrotting and thus, was under the direct influence of many societies and cultures (Malik, 2015). Ali, the Indian Diaspora writer, who chose to leave India for good and reside in United States, is a poet of exile with a clear nostalgic sense of loss and rootlessness that he has voiced in most of his poetry. The sense of being away from home in Kashmir is omnipresent in Ali's poetry. A pageant nostalgic air of exile pervades through his works with an evident sense of alienation at different levels. Alienation with its linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions is a hallmark of Ali's poetry. As a Diaspora writer, he has experimented with all themes related to exile: isolation, class discrimination, bigotry, individuality, recognition of identity, pursuit for cultural roots, distancing from home-grown soil, adaptation to the adopted nation, colonization, etc. (Singh, 2015).

Objectives of the Study
The present study intends
- To identify the stylistic features of the poetic works of Aga Shahid Ali.
- To investigate the predicament of identity and alienation from linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions in the selected poetic works
- To explore the utilization of stylistic application with Postcolonialism, a literary paradigm to comprehend literary texts

Research Questions
- What stylistic features have Agha Shahid Ali used in his poetic works?
- How does stylistic analysis reflect predicament of identity and alienation at linguistic, social, and cultural level?
- What is the implication of Stylistics in postcolonialism to comprehend selected texts?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Stylistics is highly interdisciplinary and substantially eclectic field of study (Urbanová, 2005). Stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics aims to interpret and explore textual content more willingly than merely unfolding the text's formal distinctiveness. Additionally, stylistics evaluates the impact or effect of linguistics on literary effects. Its paramount significance resulted in current trends that evolved stylistics into a many sub-disciplines as feminist stylistics (Montoro, 2015), pragmastylistics, cognitive stylistics (Burke, 2015) and critical discourse stylistics (Načisčione, 2020). Simpson (2004) informs that stylistics conform to the three essential principles that are mentioned mnemonically as the three 'Rs'. The three Rs specify that stylistics must be rigorous i.e. stylistic analysis follows an explicit framework of analysis, retrievable i.e. stylistic analysis is thorough and scientific, and replicable i.e. stylistic analysis provides evidence of its interpretations and claims (Simpson, 2004). Stylistics has its paramount position in the teaching and study of literature (Verdonk, 2002). This paper is also a manifestation of exploring and interpreting literature with the stylistic approach. Stylistics analysis sets a foundation for appreciation of literature through linguistic discernment. Owing to its exceedingly interdisciplinary position, stylistics executes various levels of analysis related to multiple language-study domains, i.e. morphology, lexical classes, syntax and grammar, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, etc. (Karanja, 2015). The stylistic analysis of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* brings forth the style and literary characteristics of postmodern writers and strengthens the belief that stylistic widens the scope and impression of a literary text (Zamruddin & Arafah, 2019). Likewise, Kubra, Murtaza and Mahmood (2018) carried out a comparative study of the functions of deixis in translated and non-translated novels to determine the style and variations within literary works (Kubra, Murtza, & Mahmood, 2018). Stylistic Analysis of "Bulla I know not who I am" revealed that poetry of Bulla depicts the culture of Pakistani society and he uses simple diction that is hallmark of bulla's poetic craft (Mazhar, Iqbal, Naseer, & Shahid, 2021). Stylistics settles very contentedly between literature and language contributing to the comprehension of the text as social and cultural praxis, and consequently creates a bridge between literary, cultural and linguistic studies (Zyngier, 2001). Still, it is imperative to emphasis that stylistics is metamorphic and elastic enough to hold diverse cultural waves (Suzuki & Kageura, 2008). Chen (2013) analyzed three version of the poem *If by Life You Were Deceived*

from stylistic perspective and concluded how lexical features are modified within the change of culture and context that bring forth the salient features of the language used along with the distinctive style of the poet (Chen, 2013). Widdowson (2014) is also of the view that Stylistics works as a medium to integrate other subjects and disciplines and this deprives it of autonomy. Equally, it relates language with Literature. The goal of Stylistics is to offer a deeper insight and critical overview to the literary text to explore the linguistic features, style and function of the text examined in a particular context. This stance of Widdow son is reclaimed by (Leech, 2014) when he asserts that a literary text can be completely comprehended when one has sufficient knowledge of the structure of the language used.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative in nature involving descriptive and analytical dimensions of research. This study aims to explore the stylistic features of Agha Shahid Ali's poetic work from stylistic perspective using the lens of postcolonial theory. The sample for this study is 38 lines poem *Language Games* by Agha Shahid Ali. The poem has been explored on the following stylistic levels to elucidate the hidden and profound meanings:

Graphological Level

This level of analysis involves the in-depth study of the writing system of a language, its spelling rules, and use of punctuation etc. According to Leech (2014), graphology outshines the orthography as it focuses the whole system of writing in a systematic way from spacing and punctuation to the paragraphing (Leech, 2014). the foregrounding of quotation marks, semi colon, question marks, capitalization, ellipses, commas, hyphens, colons, full stops, and spacing etc. are also part of graphology (Alabi, 2007).

Phonological Level

This level of analysis in stylistics involves the function and patterns of sound and which kind of impression and impact can be traced out in interpretation. Phonological devices include alliteration, assonance, consonance, repetition, pronunciation rules, rhyming, and metrical positioning (Lodge, 2009).

Lexical Level

This level of analysis in stylistics deals with the choices of lexis or words in the texts. The open class words are mainly focused to investigate the mood, mode, and tenor so that the expressive meanings may be explored empirically.

Syntactic Level

This level of analysis in stylistics determines the nature of clauses, phrases and words grouped to form sentences and which kind of function is being carried out of that specific sentence structures. The syntactical patterns can be simple or complex enhancing the complexity or simplicity of the themes or patterns used in the text (Carnie, 2011).

Semantic Level

This level of analysis in stylistics involves the meaning of words, both denotative and how words and phrases in a sentence structure make sense.

Pragmatic Level

This level of analysis in stylistics involves the use of language in context involving macro structures of language to relate them with socio-political constructions. The entire text is investigated to find the levels of meaning development and the implied and hidden meanings are explored consciously.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonialism emerged as a popular discourse in academia by the mid-1990s. The significant subjects of Postcolonialism embrace universality, depravity, differences, ethnicity, nationalism, identity, violence, representation and resistance, postmodernism, feminism, education, language, history, migration and exploitation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006). It emerged out of people's sufferings, their frustrations, their unswerving, personal, and cultural conflicts with conquering culture, and their dreams, hopes and fears about the future and their individualities and identities. Postcolonial literature has been produced as a voice to the helpless and the poorest people of the global community (Eshun & Tagoe-Darko, 2015). Postcolonial theory encompasses the reading and writing of literary works written in formerly or currently colonized nations; a literature produced in colonizing nations or countries that addresses the issues and experiences of colonization or colonized peoples. Agha Shahid Ali, being a Kashmiri by birth, witnessed and experiences the sufferings and frustrations, the major focus of all postcolonial discourse. Though the human-right abuses, displacement, and identity crisis in the context of criminality, corruption and administrative failures are the features of post-cold war conflicts but are easily applicable to the conflict of Kashmir (Haq, 2017), and here, it is not post-war but new as the levels of violence

is increasing on daily basis.

The Macro structures which integrate content with context have been investigated using the theoretical framework of Postcolonialism. The concept of otherness or us versus them dichotomy has been probed into under postcolonialism. Furthermore, the expressive means of the text are also interpreted through stylistic devices used in the selected text.

DATA ANALYSIS

Title of the Poem

The poem's title "Language Games" sounds unusual to ears as it reflects that Ali wants to capture a mega structure instead of some minor and ordinary phenomenon. Language is specifically synonymous to one's identity and loss of one's identity is equal to death penalty. The use of "Language' with games instead of "word" reflects how the poet is exploited and tormented by language shift in foreign lands as language is an emotionally charged word.   This two-words title significantly highlights the poem's subject matter: all phrases and clauses constituting the poem are connected grammatically to the two-word title 'Language Games'. The poet's yearning for another world with the readiness to sacrifice his identity is beautifully foregrounded. The choice of leaving one's roots for a better materialistic life or some other reason can never be a profitable trade and leads ultimately to an unsolvable sense of loss and rootlessness.

Graphological Level

 The analysis of the poem at graphological level reveals that the abundance of run-on lines reflects the strong and fast flow of emotions. The nostalgic feelings mixed with powerful guilt forming strong remorseful emotions have overpowered the poet and are expressed in run-on and sentence-fragments. For example:

> But you prescribed crosswords,
> anagrams for sleeping pills.
> That didn't work.

The deviations at graphological level help poet express his strong emotions meaningfully. It can be seen in the middle and last lines of the poem where the structure is compromised: the conjunction "AND" is restricted in caps lock and Truth and "Consequences" with initial capitalization within a line and in the last lines; "CAT-ASS-TROPHY" – "'*CATASTROPHE*". This graphological deviation foregrounds the strong emotional experience of the poet with this one word: Catastrophe.

> You cried: CAT-ASS-TROPHY?
> You cried: CATASTROPHE!

Phonological Level

The phonological analysis of the poem shows how beautifully the poet has used refrain and repetition throughout the poem, that makes the poem not only musical with the poetic diction but also shows the undercurrents of strong pessimism and remorse. "I went mad", "you cried" and "catastrophe" are the examples of refrain and repetition. The poet is lamenting over the loss of his identity: in a strange land, the poet must disown his mother language due to core differences and adopt a completely alien language for the same reasons. The helplessness and hopelessness the poet experiences in this situation leads him to cry and cry very loudly "CATASTROPHE!" This single word with all capital letters sums up his life story.

The poem is written in free verse with no regular rhyme scheme. However, the poet frequently uses repetition and refrains that help create rhythm. For example:

> Tableau One: I licked a saucer of milk.
> You cried: CAT!
> Tableau Two: I was stubborn as a mule.
> You cried: ASS!
> Tableau Three: I gave you my smile, like a prize.
> You cried: TROPHY!

> You cried: CAT-ASS-TROPHY?
> You cried: CATASTROPHE!

Lexical Level

 The poem's lexical stylistic analysis reveals the poet's word choices. The poet used simple and direct diction. However, the poet has been very tactful in the choice of words as the diction is a clear manifestation of the poem's major themes, i.e., the identity crisis, alienation, detachment, disillusionment, and remorse. The words used in the poem, like cried, rocked, evade, give up, etc. equate very well with these themes. Moreover, the vivid and concrete vocabulary gives the poem a serious look. Table 1 shows the variety and vividness in the vocabulary used in the poem; the choice of words from categories like nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs, is made judiciously to suit and highlight the poem's themes.

Table 1: Words Choice.

Nouns	Verbs	Pronoun	Adjective	Adverb
Language	Went	I	Mad	Never
Asylum	Challenged	You	Deaf	All
Therapy	Give up	Your	White	Purposely
Crosswords	Prescribed	My	Stubborn	
Sleeping pills	Juggled	We		
Anagrams	Bought			
Pieces	Cried			
Vowels	Smile			
Sorrow	Hear			
Words	Licked			
Mule	Build			
Ass	Framed			
Trophy	Rocked shut			
Syllable	Evade			
Letters				
Truth				
Catastrophe				
Sounds				
Consequences				
Games				

Source: The table is drawn by the authors.

The verbs used are mostly action verbs like spoke, prescribed, challenged, bought, licked, cried, gave, etc. The use of these verbs significantly exposes the consequences of the poet's decision. The constant pain and sense of loss he suffers does not let him stay peaceful. His mind and soul experience a constant turmoil due to the conflict of past and present and his inability to overcome this torment.

In addition, the way the adjectives are used in this poem adds to making the poem unique. Adjectives portray qualities of entities, objects, and concepts. The poem is full of adjectives with negative connotations that help present the sufferings the poet is experiencing.

Ali makes extensive use of personal pronouns. In the poem of one 38 lines, the pronoun "I" has been used eleven times, whereas the pronoun "you" is used seventeen times. Other pronouns like your, we, have also been used, but they are few and far between. The use of personal pronouns reflects thematic universality: the emotional turmoil the poet experiences is in fact relatable to every immigrant.

Moreover, the nouns used in the poem form specific semantic fields. For example, anagram, scribble, charades, and crosswords from the field of game and therapy, sleeping pills and prescribed are associated with medical field. This state of hopeless affair portrays the complete breakdown and the semantic field of

'Language' portrays that breakdown the very title of the poem involves one major word language and in the first line of the poem the poet uses the expression of words: 'I went mad into your house of words' and then he was prescribed therapy of syllables that could not work for him and he started with letters where he remained stuck in the flux of consonants and vowels. His unhappiness at present leads him to question his very existence. It seems as if his life is playing games with him as he is unable to express his feelings and emotions in his own language, that was his identity.

Grammatical Level

The poem has simple sentence structure but mostly run-on lines and extensive use of coordinative conjunctions such as and, and so. However, these techniques keep the flow of the poem running as it is the outburst of powerful flow of emotions. the very first line of the poem, 'I went mad ....' depicts how pathetic is the poet without his language that carries one's identity and roots. The apparent simple sentence structure is quite complex semantically reflecting jumbled thoughts. The poet feels hurt living in a community where no one shares and understands his native language and culture.

When you spoke again,
my sorrow turned deaf:
I couldn't hear you smile

This simple structure has semantic contradiction in it as

'sorrow turned deaf' and 'hear you smile', and it shows the in-depth sorrow of the poet.

Semantic and Pragmatic Level

The poem is semantically and pragmatically rich. The apt choice of diction with their variable meanings to the context leads to multiple interpretations, and thus multiple themes. The two-word title of the poem - 'Language Games'- keeps itself alive with each line of the poem, and its impact is experienced by the readers throughout. The poet's strong feelings are relatable to every immigrant who experiences alienation and rootlessness living in a foreign land.

Tone of the Poem

Language Games" by Agha Shahid Ali is a free verse poem consisting of run-on lines without proper stanza structure but replete with many stylistic features. The poem looks like a dramatic monologue and depicts the inner conflicts of the poet in a dialogic form. It is a first- and second-person narration and monologue exposes the truth and its consequences. The opening of the poem is direct and attracts the readers' attention at once. The opening line of the poem is:

I went **mad** in your house of words,

The line with the use of first and second persons along with the concrete vocabulary and an adjective with the negative connotation vividly reflects the intense sufferings of the poet on the irrevocable loss of his roots. The lexical choices not only express his restlessness but also show his ever-growing desire and quest for his identity that he has lost.

The poem artistically reflects the tormented soul of the poet. The themes of sense of loss, identity crisis, yearning for past and lost home, the tiring efforts of assimilation of new ideas and adjustment at the new place and consequently the conflict between home of origin and home of adoption permeate this poem. The very title of the poem reflects the problem of language and disillusionment. The poet has beautifully presented a personal experience with a subjective treatment: the themes are universal in their nature and relatable to all who leave their roots and migrate to a new foreign land regardless of the reasons behind their decisions.

Hence, the poem has a nostalgic tone with grave sense of loss. It depicts the suffering soul of the poet that is disillusioned and yearning for lost roots and stability. The mood of the poem is pessimistic and shows the complete loss of any hope about an accomplished life. As a result, the poet seems to have been overpowered by a strong sense of remorse and guilt.

Stylistic devices in the Poem

The poet has used many stylistic devices in the poem: symbols, imagery, rhetorical devices, and allusion. Symbols are mainly used by poets to imply certain meanings and help readers perceive the connotative meanings that involve a certain context and situation. The title of the poem 'Language Games' is symbolic and represents commercialization of relationships. In the pursuits of material progress, man must pay a heavy price either in shape of quitting his roots or losing his identity. Verbal communication makes use of 'vowels' and 'consonants. However, at a stage in the materials pursuits, this verbal communication may lose its use mainly when in a foreign land: your words in the foreign language cannot render totality of your feelings and sensations.

The stylistic devices, like refrain and repetition, also contribute to the underlying major themes of the selected work. The repetition of 'I went mad' thrice indicates how the sensibilities of the poet declined gradually when he was unable to express his thoughts in fullest. It was a manipulative strategy of the colonizers as he says 'I went mad in your house of words'. The expression of your house of words exposes the cunningness and shallowness of the colonizers who tempted the oppressed in a new way that was controlling them by the imposition of a foreign language. Likewise, the expression of 'CATESTROPHE' signifies the pathetic impact of linguistic and cultural alienation that kept on haunting the poet throughout his life and it is prevalent in his work.

The figure of speech, simile and metaphor are also used in the poem. For example,

I was stubborn as a mule (Simile)

I went **mad** in your house of words (Metaphor)

The remarkable use imagery in the poem with the words like mad; therapy, sorrow, deaf, truth, consequences etc. clearly present the sad state of poet's present condition. The rhetorical question used in the last couplet reflects the poet's feeling of repentance and sadness.

You cried: CAT-ASS-TROPHY?

You cried: CATASTROPHE!

The poet has also used the Irony of Situation in the poem successfully to reflect the contrast between the poet's expectations in the past and the horrifying reality at present. The irony of choice is also obvious in the poem: it is disillusionment of his choice, and he is forced to pay

the price of that one decision.

DISCUSSION

The stylistic analysis of the selected text brings forth the dominant theme language loss and of otherness or us versus them dichotomy that have been the major issues addressed in postcolonialism. Culturally as well as politically, the 'Other' is represented as the colonized that lacks propriety, identity, purity, and literality. So, the 'other' can be described as an alien: the one who does not fit in a group, does not converse a given language, does not observe the same customs; he is the uncanny, unfamiliar, unauthorized, unfortunate, and the unseemly (Brons, 2015). One of the major characteristics of imperial repression, also, is control over language. It has turned out to be the post-colonial voice. Through language, people not only describe the world, but also

recognize themselves by speaking it. The dominance of a foreign language for Ali was quite like the experience of Ngũgĩwa Thiong, a writer from Kenya. For him, English in Africa is a "cultural bomb" which continues a planned process of erasing reminiscences of pre-colonial history and cultures and installs the supremacy of new, more subtle forms of colonialism (Nicholls, 2016). The discourse of 'I' in context of colonized signifies the sufferings and helplessness of the suppressed where his language, his identity, his expression, and his impression was marred by a new language that was not his own. Table 2 shows the examples from the text about the discourse of 'I' and 'You'. The discourse between 'I', the colonized and 'You', the colonizer reveals how colonized was exploited and disillusioned by the colonizers cunningly:

Table 2: 'I' and 'You' Discourse.

You (Colonizer)	I (Colonized)
Your house of words	I went mad
You would give me asylum	I went mad
You prescribed crosswords	I went mad
You brought a scrabble game	I juggled
You cried: Truth and consequences	My seven letters were all vowels
You challenged me	I couldn't hear you smile
You cried: CAT!	My sorrow turned deaf
You cried: ASS!	I licked a saucer of milk.
You cried: TROPHY!	I saw you do wonders without vowels
You cried: CAT-ASS-TROPHY?	Let's give up, I cried
You cried: CATASTROPHE!	I rocked shut
I was stubborn as a mule.	

Source: The table is drawn by the authors.

The poet laments how he turned mad in a foreign land using a foreign language that was not his native language. He was tempted earlier but realized later the gravity of his wrong choices. The repetition of 'I went mad' thrice reflects the price he paid for the materialistic pursuits. He was coaxed as a cat, but he was an ass as he could not grasp how he was drowning in the mire of catastrophe. The foregrounding of 'CATASTROPHE!' in all caps lock and sign of exclamation mark symbolizes the disaster and decay of his identity, culture, and roots. Language is one's identity and depicts one's culture in the fullest. The discourse of otherness reflects the marginalization of colonized as the poet is unable to use his native language and does not feel empathy for the language of colonizers.

The loss of language is in actual catastrophe as he is culturally and emotionally isolated.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has brought forth the stylistic features of Agha Shahid Ali's poetic work *Language Games*. Stylistic analysis is empirical as it provides linguistic evidence based on which the interpretations and discourse of that text are related with the larger contexts which involve social, political, and global arenas. Agha Shahid Ali's poetry reflects the repercussions of colonialism. Amongst them the loss of one's language and identity is dominant. Postcolonial impact revealed in *Language Games* discloses the new form of colonialism that has

kept the colonized under its effect in current times. Control through a foreign language is such an endeavor that has distorted the individuality and identity of natives. The study defines Ali's poetry as a truthful account of pangs and suffering that are faced by an immigrant in foreign lands. The sense of being away from home in Kashmir is omnipresent in the selected work. The unique style of Ali's poetry is the development of a concern for choice and blending of words from his native language to share his experiences about the life and world. Every word choice connotes the political, social, or religious frame of contexts. The poem though is replete with personal experience and emotions yet shows universality in its themes. This study reinforces the belief that stylistics is not only beneficial but essential for a thorough understanding of literature. This research may help literature students understand the close relation between language features and literature. This study will be helpful for future research related to stylistics as a dynamic interdisciplinary field of study.

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