



AGHA SHAHID ALI AND HIS SISTER HENA

## A NOTE ON MY BROTHER'S CHILDHOOD

Hena Ahmad

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is permeated by a sense of loss that belies a life enriched by love of family and countless friends. It is a supreme irony of life that the dark death he wrote about came to haunt him when our mother was diagnosed with brain cancer, and even more so, when she died. A crueler irony of fate awaited him when he himself was diagnosed with it, having to live with the knowledge of his impending death. A less informed reader might read an almost prophetic and uncanny sense of doom into his poetry of loss. However, I will focus on the formative influence on his poetry of the culture he was surrounded by as he was growing up.

Different cultural experiences intersected, overlapped and came together in Shahid's poetry. His verse drew on an eclecticism that derived from various sources, but a major part of it originated from our mother. Instrumental in opening up a world that exposed Shahid to Hindu mythology and Indian classical dance and music, particularly the Bharat Natyam and the sitar, our mother was a repository of these elements, sparking them in Shahid's artistic mind. In addition to helping him recite the Shahada, the