



SIYAHİ STORIES · 3 POEMS · HOME & AWAY

A Postcard That Never Got Sent

You leave a place carrying a promise about it. You arrive somewhere else and immediately need a new vocabulary just to complain properly.

THREE POEMS · ONE UNFINISHED LETTER · FROM THE SIYAHİ ARCHIVE

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There's a particular kind of writing that only gets produced by distance – the letter you compose in your head at 2 a.m. in a country that isn't yours yet, addressed to a home that has already started to feel like someone else's memory. It's half complaint, half apology, half homesickness dressed as observation. Three poems from Siyahi read, in sequence, like exactly that unsent letter: a promise made before leaving, a diagnosis of what's wrong back home, and a bewildered dispatch from somewhere stranger.

Before you leave, you're handed a debt you didn't ask for

Every departure carries an unspoken condition attached to it: don't forget where you came from, and don't you dare use distance as an excuse to stop caring about it. This poem states that condition outright, twice, in two languages, as if once wasn't going to be convincing enough.

Naam bada karna pdega,
Surat se pehchan btayi nhi jaati...
Durr unhe karna pdega,
Kaamyabi jinse dekhi nhi jaati...

Insaniyat ko kareeb rkhna pdega,
Janazonse dosti seekhi nhi jaati...
Khayal sabka karna pdega,
Khushhali desh mein aisehi nhi aati...

Wafadar watan se rehna pdega,
Jaan jawanoki aisehi nhi jaati...
Thoda kaam khud hi ko krna pdega,
Sarkar har bar apni nhi aati!

— you'll have to make a name for yourself; a face alone tells nobody who you are. Keep those who can't stand your success at arm's length. Stay close to basic humanity — you don't learn kindness by befriending funerals. Stay loyal to your homeland; the lives of soldiers aren't spent casually. And some of the work is simply yours to do — the government you want isn't always the government you get. [Read “Naam Bada Karna” in the book →](#)

This is the poem you'd write, or be told, before ever getting on a plane — equal parts ambition and obligation, framed as if the two were the same instruction. Go be somebody. Also: don't forget you belong to somewhere. Both halves of that sentence are about to get complicated.

II

Because the somewhere you belong to has its own quiet rot

Before the story even leaves the ground, it pauses to name exactly what made leaving thinkable in the first place — a two-line diagnosis of a society trading its actual values for market ones.

Wyaparatil bhav wadhtoy ani samajatil bhav kmi hotoy...
Roj roj ka tandav dekhe, jwala ek khayal hai...
Rang saman aur khoon laal phir bhi...

— prices in the market keep climbing while values in society keep falling. Watching the same daily spectacle of chaos becomes its own kind of fire. Everyone's skin carries the same colours, everyone's blood the same red — and still, the country keeps getting carved along whatever lines divide it best. [Read “Wyaparatil Bhav” in the book →](#)

Four lines, and they do the work an entire op-ed usually needs. This is the quiet second half of the debt from the first poem — you're told to stay loyal to a home, and in the very next breath, the poem admits that home is not behaving in a way that makes loyalty easy. Both things are true at once. The book doesn't resolve that tension. It just lets it sit there, the way it actually sits in a person's chest.

III

So you go. And the new place turns out to be its own kind of absurd

What follows is the longest, funniest, most bewildered poem in the whole collection — written entirely in Marathi, as a running list of everything about a new country that simply refuses to make sense. It reads like someone drafting a real letter home, one observation at a time, growing more incredulous with each stanza.

अमेरिका अशी कशी?

एक एकटे जगावे, कामाला पुरून उरावे,
तरी देखील उसंत नाही, एकही देव पसंत नाही...
सगळी यंत्र मात्र हाताशी,
ही अमेरिका अशी कशी?!

रोज वेस्टर्न हालचाली, उंच इमारती साद घाली,
दिवस-उजेड साठवत, बर्फ पाऊस अकाली...
माणसे कमी पण जमीन पुरेशी,
भाई ही, अमेरिका अशी कशी?!

जितकी माणस तितक्या तर्हा,
मनुष्या पेक्षा म्हणतात कुत्रा बरा...
फॉल इथे साडी नाही, झाडांना लागतो,
दिसेल तो प्राणी, हा अमरीकी मारून चाखतो...
कप माहिती यांना पण ठाऊक नाही बशी,
तेजायला ही, अमेरिका अशी कशी?!

कामावर रुजू व्हायला, सगळे येतात जगभरून
काही कामातून जातात, बाकी कमवतात भरभरून...
फावल्या वेळात फिरायला , नेत्रदीपक सृष्टी आहे,
समाजाला शिस्त इथे, अन् थोरल्यांना दृष्टी आहे...
इथल्या स्वप्नांना काही, सीमा च नाही कशी?
भाई खरच प्रश्न आहे ही, अमेरिका अशी कशी?!

इथे येऊन जग कळते, स्वतःचा मात्र विसर पडतो,
स्वावलंबी वाटचालीत, आगळा माणूस वेगळाच घडतो...
इथे रहिवासी कामचोर आणि पाहुणे मात्र हौशी,
निघतो आता, कळवा पत्राने...
अमेरिका ही अशी कशी?

– live alone, work enough for ten people, and still find no rest – not even God seems entirely pleased here. Every machine imaginable is at hand, yet peace is scarce – what kind of America is this? Towering buildings, unseasonal snow and rain, more land than people – what kind of America is this? As many people as opinions, dogs treated better than most humans, autumn arriving without a single sari's colour in sight, animals eaten that back home would never be, cups and saucers a mystery to some – what kind of America is this? People arrive here from every corner of the world to work, some burn out, others earn generously; the land is stunning on days off, society is disciplined, and dreams here seem to have no ceiling at all – really, what kind of America is this? Coming here teaches you about the whole world while making you forget yourself a little; in learning to stand alone, a different person is quietly built. Locals seem to laze about while visitors hustle hardest – I'll sign off now, write back and let me know – what kind of America is this? Read “Amerika Ashi Kashi?” in the book →

Look at how the poem actually ends: *nikaltoy ata, kalva patrane* – I'm signing off now, write back and let me know. After four stanzas of genuine bewilderment, admiration, and homesickness tangled together, the poem reveals what it was all along – a letter. Not a metaphorical one. An actual, addressed, waiting-for-a-reply letter, the kind every person far from home eventually starts composing in their head and rarely gets around to finishing.

Which is where this story gets its name. The promise made before leaving, the disillusionment that made leaving thinkable, and the bewildered dispatch from the other side – taken together, they're one long letter that was never quite sent, because who do you even address it to? The country you owe a name to? The one you left behind mid-sentence? Or the version of yourself that used to find all of this less strange? Maybe the postcard doesn't need an address. Maybe writing it was the whole point.

The Debt → The Diagnosis → The Dispatch → The Signature Left Hanging

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Siyahi by Saumitra S. Phatak

Original poems in Hindi, Marathi, and English.

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