



SIYAHİ STORIES • 10 POEMS

The Ink Remembers

A journey through ten poems, from a mother's lap to a story still mostly written by other people.

TEN POEMS • ONE ARC • FROM THE SIYAHİ ARCHIVE

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There is a kind of person who writes because living asks for a witness. Not a diary – a diary is private. A poem is a diary that has decided, at some point, that it wants to be found. *Siyahi* – “ink” – is built from 108 of these small confessions, in Hindi, Marathi, and English, and if you read them out of the archive’s neat thematic drawers and instead let them fall into a single life, a story appears. Not *the* poet’s story necessarily – but *a* story, the one any of us could be living. Let’s walk it.

Before you were anyone, someone was already loving you

Every life starts with debt. Before ambition, before heartbreak, before the first friend or the first poem, there is a hand that raised you and asked for nothing back except that you eat well and come home. In Marathi, the poet calls her *Aai*.

जन्मापासून जीव लावला जिने,
लहानाचं मोठं केलं ...
प्रयत्नांची पराकाष्ठा करत,
यशाच्या पायथ्याशी नेलं...

स्वतःहून जास्त माया जिच्यावर,
अशी ती एक...आई आहे...
निश्चिंक जिच्यात देव पाहतो,
अशी विठ्ठल रखुमाई आहे...

आजवरच्या कष्टांचं मोल,
मी तरी तिला काय देणार...
5-स्टार च्या जेवणाला तरी,
तिच्या हातची चव काय येणार...

मोठं ही तिनेच केलं,
तरी लहानही तीच समजते...
अंतरमनात चालू असलेली लगबग,
फक्त तिलाच उमजते...

मजा मस्तीत पण शिस्त हवी,
हाच तिचा उपदेश...
बाबांना बिनशर्त साथ दिली,
इतके वर्ष हे मात्र विशेष...

थोडेही कुठे दुखावले तिला,
तरी दिवसभर मनास लागते...
कौतुकाची थाप जर मिळाली,
तर आभाळ सुद्धा ठेंगणे वाटते...

एवढेही शब्द पुरे आहेत,
डोळ्यात तिच्या पाणी यायला...
मोठा कितीही झालो तरी,
लहान होईन कुशीत शिरायला...

पन्नास पूर्ण झाली तशी,
किमान शंभरी होऊन जाऊदे...
स्वप्न असो वा झुंज सत्याशी,
डोक्यावर फक्त तुझा हात राहूदे...!

— she raised him with a strength that never advertised itself; no five-star kitchen has ever matched her hands; and however tall he grows, some part of him will always want to be small enough to fit back into her lap. [Read “Aai” in the book →](#)

This is the ground floor. Everything that happens later — every ambition, every heartbreak, every 3 a.m. doubt — happens on top of this one unshakeable fact: someone already decided you were worth the trouble before you'd done anything to earn it.

II

Then the ground floor gets shaky, on its own

Growing up means discovering that the mind can generate suffering out of nothing but *tomorrow*. No enemy required. Just a clock and an imagination. In Marathi again — the same tongue that once sang lullabies now interrogates God directly:

Udyachich chinta, kay re bhagwanta...

Ajche hi diwas kalchya athwanit ch jawe?

Kay hi dasa, Ann kuthli ti disha,

Sang tuch ya bhiti poti kse me nijawe?

Hach sarwancha wicha, rog ituka kay upchar,

Kuthlya ashewar ata ekhade swapn tri bghawe?

— “Worry about tomorrow, what is this, oh God? Will today too just become another memory drowned in yesterday? Tell me — how am I supposed to sleep with this fear in my belly? This sickness belongs to everyone; what's the cure? On what hope am I even allowed to dream anymore?” [Read “Udyachich Chinta” in the book →](#)

Nobody warns you that this is the actual entry fee of growing up — not a rite of passage with a ceremony, just an ordinary Tuesday night where your own mind won't let you sleep. And it's here, exactly at this low point, that the story needs its first ally.

III

Someone shows up who isn't required to

Family is assigned. Friendship is chosen – by both people, simultaneously, which is what makes it a small miracle every time it works. The poet doesn't romanticize it; he clocks its actual, unglamorous shape: showing up at the wedding *and* the funeral, without being asked twice.

Kuch baat hai jo kbhi byan hui nhi...

Aj padhkar sunaunga...

Dosti ka matlab thoda khulkar btaunga..!

Dost hote bde ajeeb hai....

Awsar khushi ka ho ya gum ka...

Ye to milkar hi maante hai...

Janam din ho ya koi aur tyohar,

Jashn saath hi mnana jante hai!

Angaron ki asli aag to bs faqeer hi jaante hai...

Apno se badhkar koi lage to unhe hum dost maante hai!

Apas mein rota to koi nhi par hasana sab jaante hai...

Mushkil se milte hai bhai dost aise... hum bhi jaante hai!

Wapas mulaqat kbhi na ho payi unse to dua yehi karte hai...

Janaze se pehle gale milne ki thodi fursat mangte hai!

Kuch aise hai humare dost, kbhi jrur milaunga...

Dosti ka matlab aur khulkar btaunga!

– friends are strange creatures: they insist on celebrating and grieving in the same room. Nobody cries in front of the other, but everyone knows how to make the other laugh. And the closing prayer is almost unbearably plain: if we never get to meet again, let there at least be time for one embrace before the funeral rites begin. Read “Dost Hote Bde Ajeeb” in the book →

That last stanza is doing something most friendship poems don't dare — it's already grieving the friendship while it's still alive, the way you sometimes hold someone's hand a little tighter *because* you know it won't always be there to hold.

IV

With that one steady hand to hold, the bigger question finally gets asked

Fed, loved, and accompanied — the story now has the surplus energy required to ask the dangerous question: *what am I actually here for?* This is where the book turns inward and the poems get shorter, almost clipped, like someone thinking out loud at 2 a.m.:

Bekhudi se wakif ho,
To kiske liye jiyein jaa rahein ho...
Jawab asan to hai nahin,
Maqsaad janne puri kaynaat khadi hai...

— “If you truly knew your own selflessness, tell me — for whom are you actually living? There's no easy answer. But the entire universe is standing by, waiting for you to find your purpose.” [Read “Bekhudi” in the book →](#)

Four lines. No decoration. Just a door left open in the dark. And doors left open in the dark are exactly where love tends to walk in uninvited.

V

And then, without any warning, the sky changes

This is the part of every life story that arrives without an appointment. One day the world is neutral scenery, and the next, a single person has rearranged the lighting of the entire universe.

Darawna sa andhera thha,
kahinse jab ek sitara khil gya...

Cheez mamuli nhi bhai,
sarein khushiyonka pitara thha mil gya...

Guldasta khubsoorat par usne najane, mehekna kyu chhod diya...
Khushbu ki talash mein koi usey, khareedna hi bhul gya.....

Adhura thha, anjan thha, par wakif tabse ishq se bann gya...
Yaad karke sare pal eksath, gehre nashe sa chadh gya...

Yaad hai unse pehli hi mulakat se bs, sama sa thha bann gya...
Khoj khwaishonki thhi, aur khuda hi mil gya...

— it was a frightening kind of dark until a single star bloomed out of nowhere. Not a small thing — a whole treasury of joy, delivered without warning. He was incomplete, a stranger even to himself, but from that first meeting on, he understood love. He'd gone looking for a wish and found, instead, something closer to God. Read “Sitara” in the book
→

This is *Sitara* — poem two in the book's own numbering, but psychologically, this is always where love announces itself: not asked for, barely believed, mistaken at first for luck.

VI

Luck, given time, becomes devotion

The infatuation of *Sitara* is lightning. What comes after — if it survives the lightning — is something slower and more deliberate: the decision, made daily, to protect what you've found.

Khoobsurati aisi... ki sheesha bnne ka dil karein,
Pehchan aisi... ki parchhayi bnne ka dil karein,

Likhawat aisi... ki kagaz bnne ka dil karein,
Aur awaj aisi... ki guzaarish banne ka dil karein,

Ek chahat aisi... ki adat banane ka dil karein,
Ek muskan aisi ki bs amanat bnne ka dil karein,
Aur amanat aisi rahein jiski hifazat karne ka dil karein!

– beauty so complete you want to become the mirror it looks into; a presence so vivid you want to be its shadow just to stay near it; a smile so precious it starts to feel like something entrusted to you, something you now feel obligated, gladly, to guard. [Read “Khoobsurati Aisi” in the book →](#)

Notice what’s happened to the verbs across these two poems: in *Sitara*, everything happens *to* him – the star blooms, love arrives, he’s found. Here, for the first time, he wants to *do* something – become the mirror, become the shadow, become the guardian. That shift, from receiving love to wanting to protect it, is the entire difference between infatuation and the real thing.

VII

Which is exactly why it costs so much when it ends

No journey through this book would be honest without its most brutal stretch. *Puchhna Mat* – “Don’t Ask” – reads less like a poem and more like someone physically holding a hand up in front of their own face.

Puchhna mat hum kaise hai.. bta nhi paenge...
Thoda wakht lgega shayad, jbtak hum samhal jaenge...
Ilzam kitne lage pta nhi, par sajah to ek hi mil gyi...
Wakht se jab lagayi shart, tab asli aukat dikh gyi...
Manzil nhi jinhe op aise raston pe chal pade thhe...
Ab aa gyi to shayad dusra rasta chunn nhi paenge...
Puchhna mat hum kaise hai... bta nhi paenge...

Harkatein jo lagti thhi wo niyat bann gyi..
Dostike safar mein kyu chahat bann gyi...
Kaha thha ishq ho gya hai ab adat na bann jana... Badal nhi paenge...
Aapne khair mana nhi... ab smjha nhi paenge...
Ab puchhna mat hum kaise hai.. bta nhi paenge...

Khuddar thhe hum shayad jab iska alam kiya...
Dildar thhe aap jab sath har dum diya...
Kahani aisi bann gyi ki adhuri keh nhi paenge...
Zid mat karna kyunki puri suna nhi paenge..
Puchhna mat hum kaise hai.. bta nhi paenge...

Pdhke ye sab aap ab bura na mann lena...
Man hi mann kuch yaad krke dil behla lena...
Kbhi nhi... aapko gum mein dekh nhi paenge...
Kbhi dikhe to kahise aakar hasa de jaenge...
Kbhi hue pehle ki tarah to ek hi bar gale mil jaenge...
Bs puchhna mat hum kaise hai... bta nhi paenge...

— don't ask how I am, because I won't be able to answer honestly. It will take time to gather myself. Whatever blame was assigned, only one punishment was ever handed down. He warns her, gently, not to feel bad reading this — and promises that if their paths cross again, he'll show up smiling anyway, and there will be, at least once more, an embrace. [Read “Puchhna Mat” in the book →](#)

What makes this poem devastating isn't the anger — there isn't any. It's the tenderness the speaker keeps extending even while asking to be left alone. That's a very particular, very real kind of heartbreak: the one where you still love the person too much to let them see you not okay.

VIII

And after the leaving, the smallest poem in the whole book says the most

Grief, once the noise dies down, doesn't stay loud. It gets very, very quiet. Four lines. No stanza break needed.

Raat mein parchhai nhi hoti...
Sirf gehrai hoti hai...
Bina aapke iss aasman mein,
Bs chandni hoti hai....

— at night, there are no shadows — only depth. And without you, this whole sky holds nothing but moonlight. Nothing more. [Read “Raat Mein Parchhai” in the book →](#)

It's worth sitting with how small this poem is compared to everything that came before it. *Puchhna Mat* needed four stanzas to process a breakup. This one needs four lines to describe what's left after the processing is done: not devastation, just an enormous, quiet emptiness where a person used to be.

IX

Which is, eventually, where the sky starts talking back

Here is the pivot every long story needs — not resolution exactly, but perspective. Grief doesn't get solved. It gets *situated*, inside something larger than the person carrying it. The poet steps back from his own heartbreak far enough to notice how the entire universe runs on the same principle he's just been punished by: timing.

Kab aur kaha, ye khel bas isi ka hai...
Sahi wakht aur sahi jagah,
ye duniya bas uss hi ki hai.
Barsaat agar dhoop se mil jaye,
Toh saat rang jarur khilenge.
Chand agar dharti se judd jaye,
Toh khud mahasagar bhi hilenge.

Mitti suraj ka milap jo,
Toh jungle pura khil uthta hai.
Nadi parvaat jutt jaye,
Toh srushti ka sangam dikhta hai.

Wakht aur apni pehchan rakho bas,
Toh kahinse jarur madat milegi...
Dhoop mitti chand taron jaisi phir,
Apki bhi dastaan banegi!

— it's all a game of when and where. The right time in the right place: that's what actually rules this world. Rain meeting sun makes a rainbow; the moon meeting the earth moves whole oceans. Soil meeting sunlight blooms an entire jungle. Just hold on to your sense of timing and your sense of self — help will find you from somewhere, and your story, too, like sunlight and soil and moon and stars, will eventually write itself. [Read “Kab Aur Kaha” in the book →](#)

This isn't consolation-prize optimism. It's something sturdier: the idea that heartbreak wasn't a personal failure, just bad timing in a universe that runs entirely on timing — and that the same law that broke your heart is, statistically, obligated to eventually get it right.

x

And the story ends up exactly where it started

After love, after loss, after the cosmic pep talk — what's left? The book's own closing instinct, when it finally lands, is startlingly humble. Not a grand statement about what he's learned. Just an honest accounting of whose story this actually was.

Meri apni kahani mein abtak,
Bakiyonke hi kisse jyada hai...
Ehsaano ki jaaydaad mein abhi bhi,
Ma baap ke hi hisse jyada hai!

– in my own story, so far, other people’s chapters still outnumber mine. And in the estate of gratitude, my parents still hold the largest share. [Read “Meri Apni Kahani” in the book](#)
[→](#)

Four lines, and the whole circle closes shut. We began in Aai’s lap, watched the self go wandering through worry, friendship, purpose, love, heartbreak, and grief, watched it get talked down off the ledge by the sun and the moon and the rain – and it arrives, finally, not at some hard-won independence, but back at the same debt it started with. The parents are still owed the biggest share. That’s not a failure to grow up. That might be the entire definition of it.

That’s the shape I found in it – ten poems, one loop, closed exactly where it opened.

Roots → Doubt → Friendship → Purpose → Falling → Deepening → Breaking → Silence
→ Perspective → Return

[← All stories](#)

Siyahi by Saumitra S. Phatak

Original poems in Hindi, Marathi, and English.

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