

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,
my home a neat four by six inches.

I always loved neatness. Now I hold
the half-inch Himalayas in my hand.

This is home. And this the closest
I'll ever be to home. When I return,
the colors won't be so brilliant,
the Jhelum's waters so clean,
so ultramarine. My love
so overexposed.

And my memory will be a little
out of focus, in it
a giant negative, black
and white, still undeveloped.

Summary and Analysis

The poem *The Postcard Expresses* profound sentiments and emotions, the reason being far away from one's home and the inescapable fading of memories of home after the passage of time. The postcard that comes is from 'home' and the word home transfers the imagination of the poet to that distant land that he has left far off but tries his best to hold on to its enchantment and aroma through his power of imagination. It is the sense of nostalgia that an exile has to deal with and the sensation is so difficult to apprehend that he feels totally out of control of his own self. The longing for the home that he has left behind is strong that everything around him looks lifeless and charmless as he is deeply engrossed with that part of his existence which is beyond his reach. Physically he is at some other place but mentally and emotionally he is at his 'home' which is too close to his heart. 'Home' is not just the place where one stays, it is the most intimate connection psychologically, ethnically and socially. People often travel to various places for different errands but finally seek the solace and peace that home offers to them. Leaving home is a great sacrifice and it is only one who has undergone that submission knows the depth of it.

The poem is a part of his book *The Half-Inch Himalayas* and the poet here believes that the postcard that he has received from his home 'is home, and this is the closest/ I'll ever be to home.' The imagery he employs in the poem expresses his loss; his home rendered insubstantial by time and memory. This idea is especially clear in the poem as Ali expresses his frustration that the home he describes can never again be made corporeal, that he will actually be able to see it again. Ali uses a significant imagery in his poem in order to portray his frustration at the impossibility of bridging the gap between the past and the present. Ali's poems are like revealing 'impossible nostalgia in his sentences'.

The speaker of the poem is denationalized and finds himself without an identity. He attempts desperately to link his old home that no longer is his home in his present state, and his present home which never seems quite like home to him. The narrator, an exile from Kashmir, experiences three tribulations: the repentance of having left his home, the denial of feeling like an outsider and the struggle of coming to terms with the changes that would have unavoidably taken place in his absence. The internal encounter of the narrator is exposed as he looks at the postcard photograph of Kashmir, a place where he belonged to but now exists only in memory. He knows that his imagination of Kashmir is much beyond what it is in reality and this shows his deep love for the place he belonged to once. He knows that his long displacement has made his memory a little out of

Postcard from Kashmir by Agha Shahid Ali

focus and he still tries to hold on to that reminiscence - a recollection so pure and ultramarine that the recent blotches of contamination and coagulation might not affect Kashmir's great heritage.