

Ashwani Kumar

The Post Office

Everyday my father goes to the Post Office
To buy memorial postage stamps
He has never sent anywhere.
For hours, he chats with the Postmaster
About letters, money orders, and telegrams.
Sometimes, the postmaster sells him tablets of quinine
To relieve his pain from mosquito bites.
They also relish stories of *dak* runners on way
To deliver the Emperor's mail.
Behind their back, sorters of letters
Sip endless cups of red tea or milk tea
And gossip about depleting fish in the village pond and
Outbreak of war in the frontier towns.
Everyday my father and the Postmaster merrily laugh at the colonial
practice
Of letters sent open, read by the addressees and then refused-
So that both sender and recipient got
All they wanted out of the Post Office for nothing.
My father does not like adhesive stamps -
He still loves East India Company vermillion stamps
And protests charging double postage on
Unstamped letters at the time of delivery.
Every day diligently
My father writes old rain-songs on postcards,
Encloses them in envelopes with half-anna memorial stamps,

Builds a monolith of red letterboxes in remembrance of his insurgent son!

Tales of a Prolonged Stay in the Sanatorium

I see a river -

A little guest-house with a terrace

On the water. People dining;

Rich men, poor men, together.

Zebras are playing here and there, and

Speak of love even though

They are not in love with their zoo-keepers.

There are old manuscripts in the kitchen

Waiting to be washed, cleaned before they fall into

The hands of the invisible enemy.

The ophthalmologist told me

I have a rare eye disease but

There is nothing wrong with my eyes.

Sometimes I can't use the flesh of my ears

But I can hear sounds through my carnal eyes,

Imitating hidden amnesia of vowels -

A perfect case for obscene medical investigation.

There is no trouble with the visual parts of

My brain, but I occasionally have

Problems with ghost-foot.

It hurts like hell.
Toes curl up, go into spasm.
This is worse at night
When I am not doing anything.
I keep changing shoes, from left to right foot
As though I am a stage actor
Interchanging roles
Leading a troupe of suicide bombers
Into the forest of red ants.

I am very good at ordinary work -
Cleaning utensils in extreme solitude.
With animal strength and energy
I enjoy touch-typing and Morse code.
Often, I am wakeful, alert, and enjoy the fame of my twin brother.
I haven't forgotten you or your care
Bringing back butterflies from my homeland.
It is a new autumn in my life, and
I am happy with my prolonged stay in the sanatorium -
Illness is a fiction; a construction of sensations or perceptions.