**Postcard from Kashmir *by Agha Shahid Ali***

*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.*

**About the Text:**

‘Postcard from Kashmir’ is the opening poem from the Volume The Half-Inch Himalaya (1987). In this poem, the poet stresses the distance and longing from home in the very first line. Kashmir- the beloved homeland has metaphorically shrunk and is now ironically reduced to a postcard. The poet emphasizes that he always loved neatness and home is now “a neat four by six inches”. The poem derives its impetus from this irreducible gap between reality and aspiration. The poignancy increases when the poet confesses the impossibility of ever getting closer to home than this. Therefore, the postcard must serve as a poor substitute for the absent proximity of the native land. ‘This is home…’ could also mean that the poet would have to be content with his current place of residence as a sort of home. Towards the end, the poet enhances the feeling of distress that seems to be pervading the entire poem when he imagines that on his return, he might not witness the beauty of Kashmir either as captured in the postcard or as imprinted on his memory.

The poem is written in free verse consisting of 14 lines, which are identical to that in Shakespearean sonnets, a traditional format for love poems. It is clear that the ultimate aim of the poem is to channel the poet’s unbounded patriotic love to Kashmir, the place he is proud to call home.

**Analysis of the poem:**

* The word ‘Shrinks’ in “Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox” suggests that the real, grandeur Kashmir diminishes to the tiny delicate picture printed on the postcard.
* Home, normal speaking, refers to a place where people are currently living in. Postcards are usually sent from a place people spend their holiday on. Yet, for this time, the poet receives a postcard from his home, Kashmir. Apparently, the speaker has lost touch with his homeland. The ‘four-by-six-inch’ postcard simply evokes his memories towards his birthplace.
* The poet highlights that he always loved neatness. The adjective ‘neat’ refers not only to the regular shape of the postcard but also the neat and harmonious Kashmir in the poet’s memory.
* In line 3, the use of the past tense for the first and only time in the poem reveals that war-torn Kashmir is no longer as calm and peaceful as it used to be.
* The speaker then switches his focus to the mere ‘half-inch’ Himalayas, which is, in reality, the most gigantic and iconic mountain range in the world. The poet deliberately uses the same kind of contrast to express the wide distance between Kashmir and where the speaker is.
* The tone of the poem gets increasingly serious and emotional from line 5. “This is home. And this is the closest I’ll ever be to home.” (line5-6) the powerful rhetorical repetition emphasizes poet’s deep affection towards the land he loves!
* In line 5, the poet ironically yearns to be home but the chance to do so is thin.
* The poet continues to build up a bitter mood by imagining what Kashmir will be like when he returns. Torn by wars, Kashmir would not be so colourful. Bloodshed Jhelum’s water would not be so clean and ultramarine anymore.
* The repeated use of “so” in line 7-10 intensifies the poet’s pity and lament for the destruction of Kashmir.
* His emotion reaches the climax at “my love so overexposed” (line 9-10). The poet intentionally separates “so overexposed” from “my love” in order to achieve a rhetorical emphasis on his patriotic sentiment.
* “overexposed”: show how overwhelming the poet’s nostalgic love to Kashmir is in a somehow distorted and explicit manner, just like a piece of photography that are overexposed (too much light).
* “giant and negative”: the two adjectives help contrast the shrunken, idealized Kashmir in the postcard with the giant, grim one in reality.
* “Black and white”: a metonymy for things happened in the past. It contrasts the stark colour on the postcard.
* The last sentence of the poem is filled with quite a number of commas. This structure reflects that memories are just pieces of flashbacks and feelings that tangle together. However enchanting his memories are, they are indeed messy and will gradually fade.

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* *Internal rhyme: “inches”, “neatness” and “Himalayas”*
* *Alliteration: ‘hold’, ‘half-inch’, ‘Himalayas’ and ‘hand’*
* *Irony: the word “closest”*
* *“giant and negative”: the two contrasting adjectives*
* *“Black and white”: a metonymy*