

To the Postmaster

by **Arnapurna Rath** (December 2014)

In the sealed envelopes of time,

I sent many a letter, application, song, or rhyme,

to addresses that I had only travelled,

in the space of my dreams

or journeyed through in the depths of my mind.

Each time I added a postage stamp with hope embossed,

and put some glue of patience

on the seams of the envelope,

I dreamt that the world would be mine,

that someday words of the heart would shine.

Each time the postmaster of my small town post office,

assured me that the songs would get published,

that this letter would cast the spell,

that this time there will return a job, money,

and some love in the envelope as well.

In the sealed envelope of time,

I would wait for days, months, and years

for a response from nowhere,

for a leaf of assurance and an acceptance

of my present, my now, and my here.

Each time I sent the letter to addresses in the cloud,
I would run back to the little temple at the bend of the gully,
And chat aloud,
with the local goddess about gifts that I would give,
if I get a response,
and that for her every little rejection, I shall forgive.
Days and months passed away,
but neither an answer nor a word came my way.
The postmaster told me one day,
“Do not lose your heart, the ‘foreigners’ and the big *babus* of the bigger cities
also have kindness at heart,
but forgive them, for they know not the small-town ways.
They do not know how much you spent on the postage stamp.
They do not know how much it takes to wait and work under the street lamp.
Our little town is like a beautiful painting on the white-washed wall.
But paintings neither give you food to eat, nor will feed all.
Go away to the big city,
songs and poetry do not feed empty hearts and hungry stomachs,
Work hard, earn, and do your duty”.

I left the little town for the big city.
The world was big and kind (they told me),
And I wanted to travel and enjoy its beauty.

Years passed,

the poetry and songs that I wrote,

got lost in the same envelopes of time.

Being cynical was the new fashion,

I lived prose and breathed criticism with passion.

Long after,

one day I returned to the small-town.

The post-office had a new, younger postmaster.

He met me with a nonchalant warmth, and handed me a sealed envelope.

The old postmaster had left me a stamped letter and a one rupee note,

before he left the post-office

and vanished into the dark corners of time.

As I tore open with trembling hands,

the letter in the sealed envelope,

I found a hand written note with bloats of leaking ink,

Smelling of old age and drafted with poverty's stink.

Etched on the letter-head of the local post-office.

the postmaster wrote,

"You were looking for an acceptance which we could not give,

But here is a note of "yes" to everything that you ever wrote.

Let this letter help you to heal and to forgive.

I lived your hope

and was disappointed with your disappointments,

But what could I do?

I was only a *sarkari* servant.

I could not publish your writings,

Nor could I give you an appointment.

But, the sealed envelopes of time,

do not seal fates and do not snatch away efforts.

Someday you will remember the good that a few people meant for you,

and forgive what could not work,

and forgive the hurt that was given by a few.

Life is too short to keep waiting for acceptances and admiration,

I bless you to have determination.

But remember,

that whatever is desired is not always for the best,

You just add the glue, put the stamp, and forget the rest."

I walked away with the letter in my hand,

Thinking there is so much to life that we hardly understand.

In the sealed envelopes of time,

That one acceptance brought some poetry back into life.

Arnapurna Rath is assistant professor of English at Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar in Gujarat. Her first book of poems *Devi: A Journey through Photo-Poetry* was released earlier this year.

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