

(Not My) Home: Musings of a Reluctant Immigrant

Despite all her flaws and problems, Dhaka still smells like home

SARA RASHID

Sara Rashid, based in New York, is interested in how religion and politics shape art in South Asia.

EVERY morning, as the first streaks of red and yellow bleed into the sky, as young lovers end late night phone calls, and as the muazzin silently calls the azaan from a decrepit Brooklyn mosque, my anxiety wakes up. And every morning, without exception or consideration, it wakes me up. In a place between sleep and awake, I feel my intestines tear from being snaked into their neighbouring organs, the pain then travels into my stomach, expanding and threatening to break open my ribcage. It shoots through my lungs, finally lodging itself into the base of my throat, without any possibility of escape. The only way the pain will leave is through my eyes, once I open them and orient myself to my surroundings, my reality.

A childhood companion by now, the temperament of my anxiety has evolved with the seasons of my life. It has grown from a light quiver in my stomach to heart palpitations that reverberate through my extremities. More recently, it has metastasised from the physical to the psychological, cropping up imprisoning thoughts of despair and dread along the way. Over the years, I've become grudgingly familiar with the anarchy within me, watching its shades turn as the reasons for my anxiety jump from work, to marriage, health, finances, in-laws, and family. Today, these reasons have become background characters as the underdog of my anxiety finally claims its rightful place at centre stage: home. I want to go home to Dhaka.

For me, home has always been a place, and the emotions that place stirred. Home is my mother's lap, the corridors where my father ran with bowls of lychees and mangoes after me, the rooftop on which my dadima sun-dried her aam shotto and the streets my husband and I went on walks as teenagers.

In a month, I'll have lived in the US for 11 years. Eleven out of the 29 years of my life. And with every year, it gets harder to stay, but even harder to leave. In 2011, I moved to a sleepy small town in Massachusetts to attend an all-women's liberal arts college. Everything about it was new to me: the quiet, the small town, the all-women's community. Unlike most others who moved with me, I didn't come with

dreams of building a life here after graduation. In fact, I was absolutely certain of the journey I'd make back home in only four years' time, giddy at the thought of returning to a city whose streets called out my name, and whose smells still lingered on my clothes in this quaint New England town.

Today, I'm still here - 157 miles away from my old-world college town, but nowhere closer to home, to Dhaka. Over the last 11 years, I made a choice every day; I chose pragmatism over my dreams, independence over interference, the financial stability

yearning for home.

They say your home is in people; I've never fully understood or experienced that. For me, home has always been a place, and the emotions that place stirred. Home is my mother's lap, the corridors where my father ran with bowls of lychees and mangoes after me, the rooftop on which my dadima sun-dried her aam shotto and the streets my husband and I went on walks as teenagers. All this happened in Dhaka. Now when I look back, I realise why these places felt like home to me: it's because they invoked a feeling of hope, safety, fulfilment, and joy at even the

showers, the unforgettable smell of tuberose wafting off of her promises, the kindness of her passers-by who are ready to help strangers in every street corner, the feeling she evokes of belonging, one that generously allows others to claim, with *haq*, that she is yours.

I've desperately searched for but failed to find and feel the same in other parts of the world. Maybe I couldn't feel the same anywhere else because of the helplessness with which I looked for it, or maybe because it simply doesn't exist elsewhere. Either way, I've learnt that the harder you try to hold

and ingratitude, embracing me with abandon just as I come.

The last 11 years have been a long streak of indecision, a circuitous back and forth of whether I want to be in Dhaka or New York City. But what happens when you make countless promises to yourself and to your home that your time in this suitable but unknown, foreign land is up, and you will make your way back - but you never follow through? Despite all these promises, you're stuck in quicksand, going deeper in as time passes, and losing with it your resilience, patience and, most importantly, hope.

Now, when I go back to visit, Dhaka mocks me for all the unkept promises. I've failed to keep up with the alarmingly fast pace at which the city has evolved, and with every return there's less I recognise about the city that raised me. The city's temperament and ambience feel different: it's more magnetic, electrifying, with a sense of urgency and possibility that I hadn't witnessed before. But the city has also held on to her heritage and values, weaved her history and legacy into the present narrative, and raised her youth to be fierce yet sensitive, ambitious yet grounded. And it's this blend that makes me certain of why I belong there and why I will ultimately find my way back.

In Persian poetry, the word *ghurbat* refers to the state of being away from one's own land. It means a type of exile from one's home that leaves you destitute. My *ghurbat* has left me in a state of barrenness, and often brings me back to this translated poem:

*Even in exile
Our hearts dwell at home
Think of us as being there
The home where our hearts live*

All things said, I'm aware of how much I romanticise this city, one that has predominantly lived within me, but I've lived very little in over the last 11 years. And I know, when I finally go back, be it in months or years, there will be so much that's messy, frustrating, disappointing. The city will make me overwhelmed and deflated simultaneously; she will take until I have nothing left to give, and peel my layers to an extent that I don't recognise who I am anymore.

As much as I know all of this, what I believe with even more conviction is that in the grander scheme of things, none of this will matter. It won't matter because I'll finally be in the only place where I've felt complete, a city that is unlike any other, too beautiful for her own good, all emotion, strength, love and heart. I'll be in a place that's mine, one that claimed me decades ago. And how unbelievable that would be, because where else can you find a city, whose eyes are so full of dreams, whose birds sing you to sleep, whose sun shines on everyone and whose melodies bring generations together - *emon deshti kothao khuje pabe nako tumi*. Until then, Dhaka, I'll hang on to my hope for our reunion with dear life, and you, my *jaan*, stay safe and soar high.



VISUAL: KAZI TAHSHIN AGAZ APURBO

of a job that pays in dollars over the intoxicating, potentially unrealistic possibilities of a future in Dhaka. I picked career opportunities over my nani's hugs, reading alone at the park over family lunches after Jummah prayers, a reliable healthcare system over a community so sustaining that not much else is needed in life. Every time, I chose sensible and practical over the only thing that made me whole: the undeniable feeling of safety, of being at home.

As I end yet another day with the unsettling feeling of being in a land away from my own, I look out for the supposed benefits of being here, and remind myself of what a privilege it is to have a choice. It's something that everyone wants but not many have, yet on most days it becomes difficult to reconcile the price I'm paying for the choices I make. From the outside, my years away from home depict a superficially desirable life, made of promotions, a new apartment, holidays with friends, and complete freedom. However, when you look closely, my days are made of long silences, solitary subway rides back home, perfunctory meals with acquaintances, mourning the loss of loved ones in between meetings, and panic attacks that creep in through the cracks of a prolonged

most mundane. And I've only felt this way in a city that makes no sense, a city where you'll find a hundred things wrong for one right, a city that's unfair and brutal - but a city that has kept all of my heart for herself, hiding it under her layers of resilience and generosity, with no desire to return it.

In most of my conversations with people still living in Dhaka, the need to leave the city is so primal, so desperate that I don't share how much I want to be in their shoes. I'm sure they would want to be in mine - after all, the grass is always greener on the other side. We're wired as humans to seek stability, a better standard of living, and a path to progress. These are things that Dhaka withholds from you; it stifles you, doesn't give you second chances, exerts full control over your destiny and punishes you for cracks inherent to her system, unless of course you are born or marry into extreme wealth and privilege. And so the only way up becomes out.

However, if you keep all this aside, the tenderness with which the city holds you at night, the hustle and big-heartedness that's ingrained in her fabric, her world of possibilities and audacity to dream, are unparalleled. There's not much else like the softness of her wet earth after monsoon

on to something, the quicker it slides through your fingers.

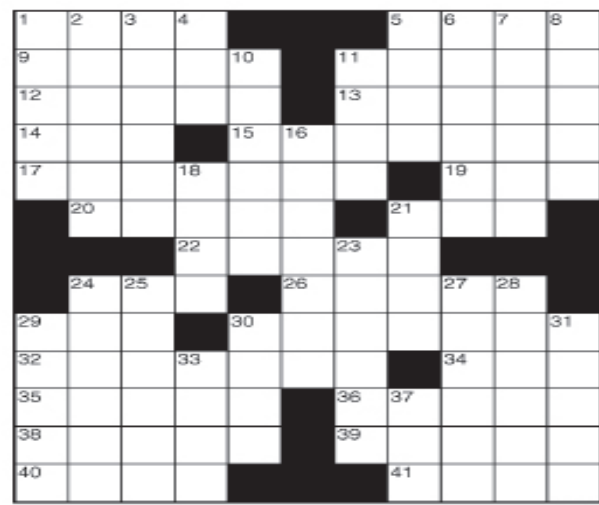
I'm often asked why I wish to move back to Dhaka. It's difficult to comprehend why one would choose to leave a life of comfort and security for one that poses more volatility, less opportunities. These questions are mostly justified, and objectively speaking, there's not much to complain about my life in Brooklyn. On the surface, it looks like the American dream, but that's also where the problem lies. It's monopolised by the constant chase of that dream, a running roster of never-ending things to achieve, adding yet another reason to stay back and make the sensible, albeit mechanical choice. But when you look at its core, everything is lifeless and reeks of sterility and practicality.

This country only wants the best parts of you, it judges me by what I can give it, my time and output. Our relationship is transactional and precarious. It has rendered me a statistic, threatening to replace me at the slightest scent of error. Dhaka, on the other hand, asks for my love, my loss and my pain, always patient and loyal. She doesn't hold grudges for the broken promises; instead, it accepts me with my imperfections

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Spice from nutmeg
 - 5 Biting remark
 - 9 Cake cover
 - 11 Blender speed
 - 12 More polite
 - 13 Fuming
 - 14 Lupino of film
 - 15 Reception feature
 - 17 Courtroom conference
 - 19 Tax org.
 - 20 Stone unit
 - 21 Blue
 - 22 When Ovid wrote "Ars Amatoria"
 - 24 Derek and Diddle
 - 26 Writer L'Amour
 - 29 Plop down
 - 30 Place to get
- steamers**
- 32 Prying tool
 - 34 Abel's mother
 - 35 Find darling
 - 36 "Mack the Knife" singer
 - 38 Track athlete
 - 39 Virtuous one
 - 40 Spotted
 - 41 Crones
- DOWN**
- 1 Some skirts
 - 2 Having a low pH
 - 3 Summer noisemaker
 - 4
 - Hydrocarbon suffix
 - 5 Overcook
 - 6 Mideast peninsula
 - 7 Slow down
- 8 Saloon orders
 - 10 Singer Josh
 - 11 Docking site
 - 16 Kneecap
 - 18 Aphrodite's son
 - 21 Pond growth
 - 23 Floor makeup
 - 24 One under par
 - 25 "The Stunt Man" star
 - 27 European peninsula
 - 28 Bank activity
 - 29 Con games
 - 30 Trucker with a handle
 - 31 Budget amounts
 - 33 Small songbird
 - 37 Contented sound



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

REWARD SWAB
ARETHA TOTO
MADE OF MONEY
ANTON
LOSE REPS
ROBE VARIED
ICE RAY NAY
MASCOT YULE
LEAD OOPS
MEATY
MAID OF HONOR
OGRE REMAND
MEAN ORATES

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, এর কার্যালয়
নরসিংদী সড়ক বিভাগ
নরসিংদী
Email: eenar@rhd.gov.bd

সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতিতে ঠিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/লাইসেন্স নবায়ন বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, সড়ক বিভাগ, নরসিংদী কর্তৃক পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮ এর আলোকে সড়ক ও জনপথ অধিদপ্তরের পরিচালন (সওজ) বাজেটের আওতায় সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের মাধ্যমে অভ্যন্তরীণ কার্য (NCT Works) সম্পাদনের লক্ষ্যে ২০২২-২০২৩ অর্থবছরের জন্য ঠিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়ন করা হবে। সিপিটিইউ কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত আবেদন ফরম নরসিংদী সড়ক বিভাগ এর কার্যালয় হতে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে সরবরাহ করা হবে। আত্মীয় ব্যক্তি/প্রতিষ্ঠানকে ১০০০.০০ (এক হাজার) টাকার অফেরতযোগ্য পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/চালান নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ, নরসিংদী অনুকূলে জমা প্রদান করে অথবা মানি রিসিটের মাধ্যমে ১০০০.০০ (এক হাজার) টাকা পরিশোধ করে নির্ধারিত আবেদনপত্র (ডকুমেন্ট) সংগ্রহ করতে পারবেন। নির্ধারিত আবেদনপত্র (ডকুমেন্ট) সঠিকভাবে পূরণপূর্বক প্রয়োজনীয় কাগজপত্রাদিসহ আগামী ৩০/০৮/২০২২খ্রিঃ তারিখ বিকাল ৫.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে নরসিংদী সড়ক বিভাগে জমা প্রদান করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি প্রয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮ এর বিধি-৬৩ অনুসরণযোগ্য এবং এ তালিকাভুক্তিকরণ দরপত্র আহবান/কাজ প্রদানের নিত্যনত্যা বিধান করে না। উল্লেখ্য যে, ইতোপূর্বে অত্র দপ্তরের তালিকাভুক্ত ঠিকাদারগণ ২০২২-২০২৩ অর্থ বছরের লাইসেন্স নবায়ন ফি বাবদ টাকা ২,০০০.০০ (দুই হাজার) মাত্র + ১৫% ভ্যাটসহ বিনা জরিমানায় আগামী ৩০/০৮/২০২২খ্রিঃ তারিখের মধ্যে অত্র দপ্তরে জমাপূর্বক লাইসেন্স নবায়ন করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

(স্বাক্ষর)
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পরিচিতি নং-৬০২২৪০
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সড়ক
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জিডি-১৪৩৭

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