MYM LITERATURE

Scribbles and Stars and Everything-Nothingness

by Mariam Siddiqui

Where Muslims come home to reflect

Scribbles and Stars and Everything-Nothingness

By Mariam Siddiqui
May 13, 2025

My *maamu* gets this look in his eyes when he peers into his telescope—a look of longing. A poet and an astronomer all in one, he was a boy with a notebook full of Urdu *shairi* and philosophical musings who grew into a man that chose a life of stability, of paying the bills. But I often wonder: what if he had chosen to pursue his literary scribbles beneath the stars?

And then I look at his daughters—my cousins—women who have woven science and art into beautifully constructed notebooks. Their chemistry and pharmacy textbooks sit alongside intricate drawings; molds of clay dry next to pages filled with physics equations. There are fibers that connect us, threads of science and art that quietly define us.

As for myself, I chose the scribbles and the stars. I'm thankful I had the choice to do so.

The stars are often the first thing we notice when we look up on a warm summer's night. What fascinates me most, though, beyond the brilliant specks of light, are the blank spaces in between the stars and dust. The haunting silence. The eclipses between the lyrics. It feels as if the universe is preparing her stage—her majesty.

> *"He who created the seven heavens in layers. You do not see any inconsistency in the creation of the Most Merciful. So return*

your vision—do you see any flaw? Then return your vision twice again—your vision will return to you humbled while it is fatigued."

Qur'an 67:3–4

Did you know that when we look up at the night sky, what we see is an image captured in the past? Because of how many light-years away the galaxies are, by the time the light reaches our eyes, the stars may have already shifted. We are gazing at an image still uploading. That idea both terrifies and fascinates me. How much has shifted? How much can we shift? Do changes occur in heartbeats, or in waves cascading with the tides—stars falling, moons and suns eclipsing? Or maybe change happens in small, significant repetitions.

"Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?"

Qur'an 55:13

With every shift, every moving molecule, every beat of our heart, we are truly, completely, and utterly dependent on our Rabb—the One who designed this entire masterpiece, systems within systems. And there are so many other universes He is overseeing that we do not see—intricately designed like gears churning beneath our feet and above our heads. The ants march toward their hills, carved in the most delicate and complex ways. Plants continue to grow in their own subtle, graceful manner—roots anchoring deep, giving life to entire ecosystems. Fish hum and vibrate through watery depths, part of their own world of hidden song. And if He has taken care of all these microuniverses, then how can we not know that He will also take care of our worn and weary, wounded hearts?

Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it is sound, the whole body is sound; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Is it not the heart?

— Prophet Muhammad (S) (Sahih al-Bukhari & Sahih Muslim)

I was in middle school when I first heard the songs of humpback whales in a documentary we watched in biology class. I listened to their eerie, hauntingly beautiful chants echo through the vast waters, calling to their loved ones—mournful prayers, chants of longing. A single song could be heard across oceans, passed from one group of whales to another across the still, silent waters. Ocean to ocean.

It stirred something deep inside me. It was what first drew me to silence, to blank spaces—or rather, to the breath between the pauses. The light between the spaces. The beat between the songs. The dark between the stars.

I heard it again when my uncle pulled me closer to look through his telescope—that lullaby of silence. You must listen carefully before the orchestra erupts. It begins as a trickle, then the song becomes deliberate. Grand. As if the planets, the stars, the galaxies all share roots—shared fibers of some kind. A haunting language between them. Songs of sorrow, ballads of love sent into the void, never to be heard or understood by man, but still appreciated in awe all the same.

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding—those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], 'Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You.'"

Qur'an 3:190–191

"It's fascinating," he whispered, pointing to different stars and telling me their stories in a language I didn't fully understand—but still felt connected to. This man of scribbles and stars stared into the everything-nothingness with that look of longing, and I saw the boy in family albums again, the boy with the large glasses, ironed collared shirt tucked into buttoned-up pants with a defined crease. That look of innocent longing, of hope that can lie among and beyond the stars and within the heavens above. That hope that floats and doesn't shatter like they do on the mud of this dunya. Because beyond that space, beyond that beautiful silence, whispered duaas are being answered—like stars before they break asunder.