

## Karakoram Road

Take me to the Karakoram road, I beg—

Where the mountains meet the rivers,

Entwined with the pathways of cracked cement

thread through cliffs like stitches on torn skin.

Each a symbol to the workers' death

My countries pride lies in these ranges

K2 is our beauty—a beauty yet not destroyed

Our landscape sings the nationalism—filling our hearts with pride

but that anthem grows fainter

as the terrain crumbles under drills,

As the region broadens with its demolition

The terrain massacres into rubble—all because of the war of our neighbors

Progress comes at the cost of silence.

The elite lies in seclusion, watching from afar,

While the death of the poor builds their vision.

Evolution in this land—came from the death of my children

I will go—

I will meet with the Karakoram roads

And see the site—the site where my child perished

The cliffs did not forgive his steps.

They trembled, and he was gone.

His shalwar kameez caught in the wind

a final testament to the countries' flag—before his end

He was a boy with calloused palms

a spine too young to carry a nation's weight

Before the merciless stone buried him

He was building out future,

And the mountain took him for it

His wage will never be paid.

No monument bears his name.

Only the road remains—

Every pahar leads to a darya,

and the rivers rage with what they hold—the marys of my people, my son,

And the bodies of those who could not swim,

Many fear the wraths of the waters

More than they feared hunger at home.

Now the bodies are all lost in numbers,

I pray for my people

My people have never learned to swim.

They learn to endure.

They learn to work.

And they learn to grieve.

Every tourist will ride a jingle truck

Enwrapped in golds and reds

Music playing,

Children laughing from the back—

All on top of the dead

They won't see the boy who once prayed

before each climb,

or the way the wind carried his laughter

before it carried his breath.

We have no crosses to mark our dead.

We look to the land for remembrance—

But how long until even the land forgets?

The Karakoram Road was never made for us.

It was made for the stories told in brochures,

for the ones who arrive by plane,

not the ones who arrive by foot.

The earth here is dammed—

not only by rivers,

but by grief that overflows

and silence that never recedes.

Take me to the Karakoram Road—

so I may kneel upon the stone

and speak my son's name

until the mountain remembers.

This road was never built for us—

but over us.

And still, we are the ones who hold it.

Still, we are the ones who bleed beneath it.

Still, we are the reason it stands.

It stands—

but only because we fell,

and the dead still lie beneath it.