

Vandana Parashar Haiku Reflection:
Biology Embodiment and the Poetry of Being Alive

by

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As a biology major who also writes and reads haiku, I often find myself searching for poetry that reflects how I see the world through both a scientific and emotional lens. Vandana Parashar, a microbiologist and haiku poet, naturally drew my attention. Her work in *A Call's Loon* resonated with me immediately because her poems make use of the natural world in a way that feels not just for image but as if it is essential. She writes as someone who understands that the body and the environment are interconnected systems, each capable of signaling, shifting, and expressing truths that are sometimes easier to observe in nature than in ourselves. Her haiku do not just describe nature, they also translate internal conflicts, longing, joy, trauma, and transformation into biological and atmospheric images. Because of this, reading her work feels like watching emotional states undergo their own kind of ecology.

One of the first poems that captured this theme for me was:

summer rain
all the plants
I never planted

Parashar, CL, 7

This haiku feels like an observation on the surface, but biologically, rain is an agent of germination, movement, and unexpected growth. As someone who spends time studying how organisms spread, adapt, and take root, I was drawn to how Parashar uses the spontaneous sprouting of plants as a metaphor for emotions or memories that surface uninvited. "Plants I never planted" suggests feelings or consequences that have accumulated without intention, much like seeds dispersed by wind, birds, or runoff. She acknowledges that life continually forms beyond our control, and her tone is one of quiet acceptance rather than frustration. For me, this haiku becomes a reminder that both ecosystems and emotional ecosystems produce growth we never consciously sow yet must still tend to.

Parashar frequently merges bodily processes with natural ones, but few haiku do this as directly as:

ovulating
I dust the pollen
off my dress

Parashar, CL, 14

Ovulation is biologically precise. It's tied to cycles, hormones, and fertility. Pollen, too, is a reproductive trigger. By juxtaposing these two parallel biological phenomena, Parashar blurs the boundary between

human and plant, suggesting a universal reproductive rhythm that links all living things. As a student of biology, I appreciate the accuracy and intelligence of this metaphor but as a reader, I am struck by the subtle intimacy of the scene shown. The brushing of the pollen becomes a moment of self-awareness. This represents a recognition of fertility that is neither clinical nor sentimental. This haiku embodies what I admire about Parashar. She writes with the precision of a scientist but the vulnerability of a poet. Her work reminds me that the biological is never separate from the emotional and artistic aspects of life.

Her exploration of early motherhood deepens this merging of body, nature, and emotion. One haiku that struck me with its honesty was:

that first week
either the baby cries
or I do

Parashar, CL, 16

This poem captures the raw biological upheaval of postpartum life. Anyone who studies human physiology knows that the postpartum period involves radical hormonal fluctuations, sleep deprivation, and physical recovery. Parashar does not explicitly mention biology, yet every line hums with it and is some form of representation. Her haiku illustrates how the mother and child are synced in a kind of biological duet. There is no metaphor here, but the pure lived experience carries the weight of a natural cycle. This haiku's emotional intensity lies in its simplicity and conveys how fragile and overwhelming the beginning of motherhood can be without romanticizing it.

The metaphor becomes clearer in another postpartum haiku:

post-partum
the sky finally clear
of last night's storm

Parashar, CL, 15

Where the previous haiku focuses on the emotional turbulence of new motherhood, this one offers a shift toward clarity. Storms in nature serve an ecological purpose of disturbing, cleansing, and renewing landscapes. Parashar suggests that emotional storms, too, are temporary: the clouds pass even if the memory of the storm lingers. As I read this haiku, I imagined hormonal storms settling, tears drying, and the body finding its equilibrium again. The sky's clearing symbolizes a return to self, a phenomenon as natural as any weather pattern. It is through this merging of internal and external climates that Parashar's work becomes deeply resonant.

Parashar does not shy away from portraying the darker or harsher elements of daily life though, especially of women. A powerful example is:

what consent
invading every inch of me
the biting wind

Parashar, CL, 13

Here, she uses a physical, environmental force, the wind, as a metaphor for boundary violation. The word "invading" is biologically charged. Pathogens, cancers, and immune responses all speak the language of invasion. By pairing it with the question "what consent," she draws attention to the unsettling ways in which women's bodily autonomy is often disregarded, both metaphorically and literally. The haiku refuses to

separate environmental discomfort from emotional harm. This echoes the broader theme in her work that nature can illustrate beauty, but it can also embody aggression. This reminds readers that vulnerability exists in multiple forms.

Her use of biological imagery is often inventive and witty, as in:

squid
ah! to have three hearts
broken

Parashar, CL, 24

This haiku delighted me as a biology major. Squids are unusual organisms and actually have three hearts. Parashar takes these scientific facts and turns them into a humorous reflection on heartbreak. The exclamation “ah!” adds a lightness that keeps the poem from becoming melodramatic. Instead, it becomes an imaginative exercise in empathy. What would it mean to feel heartbreak multiplied by three? To me, this poem demonstrates how scientific knowledge can enrich poetic expression. Her background in microbiology allows her to pull from biological truths in a way that is both accurate and emotionally resonant.

Parashar’s exploration of relationships often uses nature to reflect emotional disconnect. One example is the following matched with a Peggy Lyles piece:

waterfall
not falling for you
not falling for me

Parashar, CL, 9

trail’s end
the waterfall
and the rest

Lyles, Red Leaves, 142

Both Parashar’s poem and Peggy Lyles’s waterfall haiku use the image of a waterfall to explore emotional distance, but they approach the theme in different ways. Parashar’s poem is direct and playful, using the repetition of “not falling” to clearly state the mutual lack of romantic interest. The waterfall becomes an ironic contrast, a symbol of constant falling, used to express an absence of emotional movement. Lyles’ poem, by contrast, offers a quieter, more open-ended reflection. Her “trail’s end” suggests a moment of pause or completion, and the waterfall represents what remains beyond that ending, nature continuing on, indifferent to personal transitions. Where Parashar uses the waterfall to highlight a firm emotional boundary between two people, Lyles uses it to evoke the calm acceptance that comes after reaching an ending. Together, the two poems show how the same natural image can express romantic refusal in one poem and peaceful closure in another.

Finally, one of the haiku that stayed with me, most is:

releasing the breath
I don’t remember holding
cherry blossoms

Parashar, CL, 54

This haiku captures a universal physiological experience, the involuntary holding of breath during stress or anticipation, followed by the sudden release when something beautiful or gentle enters awareness. Cherry blossoms are famously ephemeral. They bloom briefly and fall quickly. By pairing them with an unconscious breath hold, Parashar connects human tension with natural impermanence. The blossom becomes the catalyst for letting go, for returning to presence. As someone who studies stress responses in biology, I appreciated how authentically she depicted the mind-body connection. The haiku becomes a moment of physiological truth expressed through emotional recognition.

In reading *A Call's Loon*, I realized why Vandana Parashar resonates with me so strongly. She approaches life with the dual lens of a scientist and an artist. Her haiku embodies biological processes, bodily experiences, environmental phenomena, and emotional truths interwoven so seamlessly that one becomes a metaphor for the other. As someone who studies cells, organisms, and ecosystems, while also loving the distilled essence of haiku, I feel seen by her work. She reminds me that observation is both a scientific skill and an artistic practice. Her poems sharpen perception, deepen awareness, and reflect the truth that biology and poetry are simply two ways of paying attention. Vandana Parashar writes the world as I understand it, alive, interconnected, and full of meanings waiting in the spaces between nature and the self.

Works Cited

Lyles, Peggy Willis. *Red Leaves: Selected Haiku of Peggy Lyles*. Decatur, IL: Brooks Books, 2023.

Parashar, Vandana. *A Call's Loon*. Taylorville, IL: Brooks Books, 2025.