



# REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN RAHI MASOOM RAZA'S ADHA GAON

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Every piece of art represents the spirit of given milieu and its culture as well as changes occurred in its history. *Adha Gaon*, where Rahi Masoom Raza portrays the distorting images the Partition is a fine example for it. Women's considerations, albeit, are a subtext to a narrative that intends to tell its story about half a village in the wake of the Partition. Raza says, "This novel is, in fact, my journey....If I can capture the truth of Gangauli, I will have the courage to write the epic of Gazipur. This novel is really the prologue to that epic....This story is neither religious nor political, because time is neither religious nor political...and this story is actually about time. It is the story of time passing through Gangauli." (3)

The women those are presented here in this novel shed light on life of women in a patriarchal society during and after the Partition. The names of women are associated with the space within home and room of a building as 'Gori Dadi ka Aangan', and 'Naima Dadi ki Khalbat' as against 'Abbu Mian ka Fatak' and 'Badka Fatak' which indicate the boundaries for women within four walls or the entrance. The hierarchy amongst women is also shown where low-caste women, though they marry to Saiyids, are not allowed to sit at equal place or together as Naima Dadi, being a Julhain was not allowed to sit with other Saiyid ladies. Women were considered just as a tool to satisfy sexual hunger and breeding machine which was natural to them. They spent their lives in raising children and serving husbands and elders. For instance, Zangatiya Bo is an affectionate mother who feels herself happy by thinking that her children are allowed to sit with Saiyids unlike herself. She cannot think her existence without her husband Suleman Cha. The major concern for daughter of any family was looking after household affairs with her culinary expertise as a crowning merit. There was a clear demarcation amongst women according as their status in the family. Gori Dadi, Hasan Dadi and Hasina Dadi are shown ruling and abusing their daughters-in-law whilst daughters-in-law such as Zangatiya Bo and Damadi Bo are shown confined in the kitchen. Daughters follow them where they read 'nauha' or help their mother in daily chores.

In the patriarchal society having an extra-marital relationship or sharing one's husband with two or three women was not alien to them. As Raza contends, "It was not considered wrong to marry a second time or put some common woman in house and perhaps there was not a single Saiyid family which did not have its bastard boys and girls." (9)

Women suffered from namelessness and their individual identity was never cared for. Daughters-in-law were categorized according as the dowry they had fetched. Although nobody would like her nature, she would yet be called 'Aziz Dulhan' (dear bride). On the other hand, a woman with foul temper and unsightly looks would be called 'Nafis Dulhan' (delicate bride) if she brought largesse of fortune. Beauty, charm or virtue was never a criterion for a woman of fortune. Raza says, "For wives to be beautiful is not at all essential. It is just for prostitutes that beauty is required." (15) For a rueful contextual necessity only that Raza delineates woman's physical beauty and charm while depicting Tamibai, Gulabijan and Chandabai who are prostitutes. They enjoy creaturely comforts and live a sumptuous life as a token of reward for their services from the landlords. Tamibai, for instance, is able to hire Raza's father as an advocate for a case lodged against her son. Prostitutes, thus ironically, possess some pelf, power and liberty in a male bastion for man's own selfish motives.

Those women who have nothing to offer sensually other than familial duties and righteousness are at the best reduced to nonentities. Women exist in their house as merely lingering shadows. Passive listeners as they are, such women are never involved in any important discussion not to mention discussion about the imminent Partition. They are totally ignorant about the outer world and unaware even of the advent of audio-visual forms of media.

While depicting the plight of widowhood, Raza puts the frustration of a widow in a delicate way with the help of Ummul Habiba. Man was allowed to marry as many times as he wished whereas for a widow remarriage was roundly ruled out. Raza indites:

Hussain Ali Mian's sister, Ummul Habiba, had been wearing white for around twenty years. She had been widowed on the third day after her marriage. There were just three days between Asiya's wedding and her own. Now, by the grace of God, Asiya was the mother of six children. And Ummul Habiba was treated as an outcast at weddings and marriages. Her shadow was not allowed to fall on the floor covering of the feasts of Fatima. She could not wear bridal garments. Her hair even turned prematurely white from constantly listening to the songs sung at other girls' weddings. Hussain Ali Mian took very good care of her. But still a brother is just a brother. He could not give her a married life. (101)

Women were as religious as males and actively participated in Moharrum. They listened to 'nauha' and beat their chest in remembrance of Imam Hussain and weep. Even the prostitutes believed in and remained faithful to religion. For instance, Kulsum Di wanted to protect her husband Funnai Mian from a policeman Thakur Harnaraya Prasad. On the other hand, Gulabi Jan wished for Funnai Mian's arrest and prayed to the saints Fullan Shah and Chandan Shahid. On the arrest of Funnai Mian, Kulsum Di finally consoles herself by thinking that wishes after all do clash with each other and this time Gulabi Jan, who was a prostitute, had an edge over herself.

In the whole novel the only girl who is shown educated is Saida. She could luckily get university education. Raza has been very clever to chart her out from 'Chhotisi Saida' (little Saida) turning to a beautiful lady and trying to be an independent person. However, she is not received positively as she has taken up a job and no positive response was shown to her progress.

The picture of women life portrayed in *Adha Gaon* is a canvas full of characters where each and every woman has a distinct quality. They are faithful and duty bound to their husbands, for instance, Zangatiya Bo and Kulsum. They sigh, weep, abuse, gossip the scandals and did not much care about changes in the outside world. Raza has not been formal and ceremonious in depicting moral values of people of Gangauli as he has very freely shown their sexual hunger and frustrations for being deprived of it. Raza has portrayed them in a very sensuous way in way which might sound offensive to feminists. Raza, in fact, does not cater to any moral or political righteousness but remains in his depiction of people of Gangauli a faithful and keen observer of crude but lively ethos of the land.

## REFERENCES:

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