



## Stipulation of Muslim Women in Samina Ali's 'Madras on Rainy Days'

PANKAJ D RATHOD  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English  
Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar.

### Abstract:

*"I, have heard it said,  
My parents wanted a boy  
I've done my best to qualify." (Iyer, 205)*

*This research article includes the survey of Muslim women in Samina Ali's 'Madras on Rainy Days' which is one of the modern classics as far as representation of the lives of women is concerned in the modern yet traditional community. The clash between culture, tradition and the seeking for modernity is quite evident in the novel. Layla, the protagonist dreams to be free from the vicious grip of her community and culture. Of course, it brings so many things on the surface and her struggle starts with it. Indian English literature has included this clash in most of the works but this work is quite different. Thus, this novel is also one of those novels where Samina Ali talks about this age-old difference.*

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'Madras On Rainy Days' is one of the best novels of history which is written by Samina Ali and it was published in 2004. It is novel which is exploring life of Layla. However, 'Madras on Rainy Days' is a kind of indication of Samina Ali's personal life as she herself has said once, India is my birthplace and home, my heart, my core. My first book, 'Madras on Rainy days', is entirely set in Hyderabad because I wanted to start at the roots and then branch out as it is very important to me to give a voice to my own experience (Ali, Every Act is Political: Samina Ali, January, 2004)

'Madras on Rainy Days', is a book that talks about the condition of the women in general and the Muslim women in particular. The novel tries to supply an opulently textured look into the conventional Muslim society in India. The women who may be mothers, daughters, wives are generally seen as preys but in the other hand they also are people with high level of patience, perception, and immense competence that is needed to have a friendship with others. Here, the novelist has given us a complete picture of Muslim women, as she is also a Muslim. Gundra Jaswinder, in this respect says that:

Samina Ali has created a compelling story filled with psychological insight and a deep understanding of the conflicts that plague all of us who inhabit two worlds. (Gundra, 31)

The story revolves around a central character named Layla who is a second generation Indo-American Muslim and who is torn between clashing identities, and agrees to her parent's and only for her family's wish for the sake of her parents wish she has to leave America and submit to an arranged marriage, when she steps into the closed world of tradition as well as ritual as the wedding preparations get underway in Hyderabad.

'Madras on Rainy Days' is a story which stands for freedom and speaks about human rights. It is set in the Old City of Hyderabad, India. With the purpose of showing a Muslim world narrator has used here the image of Old City walls it is so because by using it she can so a Muslim world that is contained as well as unchanging, it is not related to progress outside. Here we can consider Layla as Protagonist and leading character of the novel. There seems an environment in which Layla has been raised a rigid world of people in United State. She has to play both roles when she is only nine years old and too young to play role of a Muslim daughter and independent young American. She finds herself trapped between these two identities, which seem clashing with each other. She tries her best to get her true home to which she must belong. Believing it is in India, she reluctantly gets ready to her parents' wish that she submits to an arranged marriage to a Muslim man whose name is Sameer. When the wedding day comes and progress is going on, she enters slowly into the closed world of tradition and ritual. She gets shock while going to her in law's home as she gets surprised herself. It differs from her home she has been yearning for.

'Madras on Rainy Days' begins with a blind Alim, he is a mystical healer. Once Layla visits him because her mother believes her to be possessed but Layla confesses that these are visits she has to make each time she comes back to Hyderabad from the United State. So what is truly possessing Layla that her mother is trying to rid? And why is it so important to her mother to rid Layla of these influences?

Once she is thinking about her aunt because she classifies herself with her as she [Aunt]says being haunted: "If a man lies on top of me now, I imagine I would break." (Ali, 4) The members of the family believe that her aunt is possessed and is haunted by an evil spirit or shaitan. However, the reality is known only by her as she says,

I was no longer the girl others imagined me to be. I was not going to my husband as a virgin. And the bleeding, it was not demonic. It was a dying baby. Nate's. I had gotten pregnant. An accident, conceived in haste or in good times. (Ali, 23)

This said novel is set in 1989 and it is heavily centered on Layla's personal life as journey, in what ways does the story feel contemporary? What is existed as themes today, in our world, that make the story compelling? It says that Islam is considered as main character of this novel. In what ways is this true?

Here we can see the women taken as characters in said novel are heavily confined to their limited fate: during the scene of departure from Father's home to the arrival of husband's home. In which there is nothing can be found in which they come as own personality or status except someone's wife, daughter, or mother. How people are using the religion of Islam in order to keep women oppressed? And also, how both females and males betray females and women's rights with a view to getting freedom? Think of Layla's father and his co-wives, of Ibrahim after Layla tells him about his

son and asks to leave the home, and also think of Layla's own mother and aunts. In what ways Layla identify with her own nanny whose name is Nafiza?

However, here it is suggested by novel that women should occupy particular roles in this culture, it is also lamented by Sameer how he has had to become someone other than he truly is. On page 195, During conversation with Layla he tells her that he is not able to be himself in India. What is he trying to say by saying this line? By which forces is he being kept, even as a man, from expressing himself in Hyderabad? And when Layla eventually exposes him to their families, what is the reaction of Abu Uncle, of Ibrahim of Zeba of the Muslim Community?

Nate is also one of the important characters of this novel, though we see him only through the letters sent by him to Layla. In one of them, she is told by him. Why would Layla, who has seen her childhood in America and grown there return to India in order to get into an arranged marriage? By which forces is she compelled to do so? What then keeps her in her marriage with Sameer even after she learns that Nate is in love with her? Does giving her virginity to Nate necessarily mean she loves him? And is she really choosing Sameer over Nate or is she choosing something else, something's more? Does she even have a choice?

Layla has a friend who is one her best friends. Her name is Hemma. She is confidante and cousin. It is said by Layla that they are such victim girls that they grew up to be women who knew they would be sold to men in marriage and were looking forward to it. For what Hemma stands and what is the importance of her to the overall theme of women's fate? It appears quite shocking when a scene is seen in which her sudden death happened, but how does this event help to change Layla and Sameer's relationship and why? Could this change have come about without this death? How does it influence Layla to make the decisions she finally does?

Here seems violence between Hindu -Muslim in the book and it is said by Layla that it cannot be a religion rather than a politics that causes such strife, in what ways is politics currently creating violence in the world, by using the name of religion? Go closer to the word's world leaders use in trying to legitimize their fight.

This novel is begun by Layla in place of possession: there are several factors by which Layla is controlled like cultural, familial, religious forces etc. As she journeys through the novel, she starts to distinguish between Islam, as a religion, and Islam as it is practiced in culture. Her learning about her religion helps her, by the end, in order to become self-possessed. No matter what religion or culture, families and society used to control people. Think of the ways in which you have sacrificed your personal freedom in face of these outside pressures.

In the book in middle on the page number 228 it is said by Layla that, "Love, why did we all confuse that emotion for what this really was, a desperate loneliness, greed of mankind touch (Ali, 228). She added that,

In what ways is love denied in this novel? What type of circumstances in which love is ignored for women? In what ways is it expressed? How do characters put themselves at risk for such an expression, and what must they stand up against to love others? How does breaking of love boundaries break the other silent boundaries imposed by religion as well as culture and family? (Ali, 228)

In the conclusion in the said novel, fortunately Layla gets success in finding her real freedom and says, "My body hidden and safe under the chador, belonging only to me." (Ali, 234) In what different ways did Layla have to fight control of her body? The western world has come to view the Muslim veil as an oppressive device. Still, here, the chador provides Layla the freedom she has long awaited. With or without the veil, in what ways do women everywhere struggle for this very control of their bodies? The novelist has said at the sense of belongingness is seen at the end if other things are there. It can be taken as a feeling of liberty for Layla because she is going someplace which may be indefinite to her but at least she can have a fresh start there. As far as Islamic feminist perspective is concerned, the novelist says about the book that:

Read the Quran, and know for yourself your own history, know what your faith says, and then you'll have what you need to fight for your Islamic rights to equality and justice. (Ali, 268)

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