

Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza's A Village Divided: A Faithful Document of History

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Abstract

Dr. Raza is a remarkable Hindi poet and novelist, script writer and what not. He has written scripts for more than 300 films and for popular television series, Mahabharata. Many of his works have captured the moments of social tension among communities like Hindu and Muslims. His *A Village Divided* is a touching delineation of the divided psyche of the Shia Muslims of Gangauli village in Uttar Pradesh. These controversial novel touches manifold aspects of contemporary society. Raza's greatness lies in his masterly handling of and faithful delineation of history.

Keywords: translation, village, religion, antagonism, identity

The post-independence period boosts up attenuation of translation within Indian languages as well as translation from Indian languages into English. Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza (1927-1992) is one of the well known eminent novelists of the post independence period. His novel *Adha Gaon* was originally published in Urdu and this classic piece of Urdu literature has been translated into English by Gillian Wright as *A Village Divided* assuring the novel much wider readership. The translation work by Gilian Wright is a flawless one and gives much justice to the original.

The Ganguli village portrayed here with vibrancy and intensity. The village at once become representative of the villages during decades of 1930-50s. The novel unfolds the later years of British regime and the first decade of Independence. The novel cannot be said as a novel of partition in strict sense as it is more about the rivalry and religious antagonism of Gangulis rather than politics around creation of Pakistan. For the Muslims here in Ganguly the creation of Pakistan was not a concern as they were aware that the very place was their home. The novel presents the rivalry of zamindar family their festivities and litigation etc. At the same time, it highlights many lines of gender, caste, class, religion, education, and sect and so on that the village is divided.

The book traces the history and story of a small village in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Raza delves deep into his personal and social history in order to depict the realistic picture of

the nation before partition, though it was divided on various fronts other than geographical. The book conveys that within a religion there is no single category. Among Muslims, for instance, there are Shias who were zamindars and the other sect Sunni comprise of traders and weavers. Shias were considered as upper caste while the Sunnis were considered as lower caste. In the same line the Hindus were divided in castes and categories. In Ganguli village as elsewhere the Thakurs were powerful and considered as upper caste while the other lower caste people were the Ahirs, Bhars and the Chamars. Further, the Shia Saiyads in the village are divided between Upper Patti and Dakkhin Patti. It is the fierce antagonism between Upper Patti and Dakkhin Patti folk form the backbone of the plot of the novel. There is division of Saiyads and non-Saiyads, and even further in Saiyads there are Saiyads of Phatakwal, of Payjamawala, and Lungiwala. Among women there are 'bahoos', 'begums', 'dulhins', 'aziz dulhins' and 'nafis dulhins'. The Shias of Ganguli would not tolerate the idea of marrying the low-caste Hindu women. Arranged marriages are preferred here, lovers had to elope if they have to marry after their choice of a partner. Corruption is rampant as even today. The differences of religion did not stop villagers to love and respect others. Raza has shown that in spite of differences there is Hindu-Muslim integrity. They have reverence for each other's cultures as Phunan Miyan, an illiterate Zamindar shows respect and tolerance for Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The delicate fibre of communal harmony also binds men like Gaya Ahir and Maulvi Bedar. The simple and straight forward villagers do not have any desire for Partition. But After Muslim League and Quaid-e- Azam set the creation of a new nation; Ganguly village gets disturbed more than before.

Raza's role in the novel is one of observe and a part narrator. The narrative in the novel functions as other, an alternative point of view presenting the partition in objectively subjective manner. The novel opens in the autobiographical first person and then switches interestingly to a third person narrative which darts unabashedly from one character to the next. He has successfully captured the absurd tragedy like partition and the absurdity is presented through the character of

Phunnan Miyan, a proud Saiyed. The discrimination against woman is now and then a part of Indian life. The Saiyid cherish to have control over women. The identity of woman is defined by marriage. The few women who would choose their partner are forced to elope and are ostracised by the entire community. The marriages here are linked to the power that zamindars are entitled. Zamindars may 'keep' a woman of lower caste or may indulge in a relation outside marriage. As they enjoy the freedom they do not have any problem with British rule rather it spurs their interests, provide power to exploit. Consequently, the Saiyids do not support freedom struggle nor do they have any sense of nationalism or national identity as such.

At village level, thus, no appropriate consciousness of a 'nation'. For most of the people in the village, their imagination restricted only to their immediate surrounding and region. The identity for them is restricted to region only as they practice the custom, tradition and even their language is regional. Moreover, even the 15Aug 1947 or Independence Day is barely mentioned in the novel as for the Gangulis nothing has changed on the day. However, it is the partition that moved the Saiyids thorough Hindu -Muslim animosity with which the Hindu neighbours ask them to leave the nation and 'go to Pakistan'. But the Saiyds explains the educated youngsters from Aligarh Muslim University that it is the very place where there are graves of forefathers, the tazia platforms, fields and so on. In short, they do not have the conception of a 'nation' or 'nationality', a separate nation on the basis of their religious identity.

After the independence the provision of abolition of zamindari in the 1950s threatens to tumble the lives of the Saiyids in Gangauli. It shook their foundation more than the partition did. Raza conveys that the abolition of zamindari too did not bring drastic changes in their set up but on the other hand their power persisted in the form of politics as they grew politically well-connected and have privileged access to economy and education. Raza highlights the importance of education in creating

political consciousness. He seems to convey that the ideas like Hindu- Muslim enmity are inserted among youths through education and vested interests in politics. The outburst of communal disharmony is not observed in the Ganguly as the simple and straightforward folk could not cherish the idea of setting the fire to the houses of those with whom they are living for centuries.

Rahi ends the novel with a fresh morning on the distant horizon of the sky, which vividly mirrors his faith in life itself. The ending of the novel re-affirms his belief in the regenerating power of culture, village, language and home. Somewhere in the middle part of the novel he writes a second introduction therein he states his belonging to Ganguli, Gazipur (grandmother's home), Azamgarh (paternal ancestral home) etc and emphasise that his roots lie in Ganguli. No one has right to tell him or the other fellows like him that they do not belong here. In this way Raza assumes the voice of countless Indian Muslims who had nothing to do with the making of Pakistan and who refuse to leave the place they call home. Raza's novel, most importantly, shows that one's identity has varied aspects, the religion, therefore, is just one of them. The villages and the nations cannot be divided after the lines of religion and other petty consideration or differences.

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