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PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN SAMINA ALI'S MADRAS ON RAINY DAYS

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Abstract

“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.” - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Madras on Rainy Days is a sad, touching and pathetic story of the life of its heroine, Layla, who is a half-Indian and half-American. She lived partly in America and partly in India. Her parents don't want her to be inhabited by America and wanted her to retain her Indianness. Sameer also calls her:

“.....Twins, like you”..... “Yes, like you. You, the American, you, the Indian. Same face, two people. So where is your home? (Madras: 117)

At the age of nineteen, her mother arranged her marriage to an engineer living in Hyderabad. When she was in America she had slept with her friend- Nate and got pregnant. Though so, she did not oppose the marriage arranged by her mother. She took pills to abort the baby and hence she was bleeding. When her mother comes to know about it, she takes her to Alimmented of the doctor.

Keywords: Portrayal of Muslim Women,Samina Ali's,Madras On Rainy Days

1. Introduction

The novelist throws light on the dresses and the burkhas of women which was according to their economic status or their family background. When Layla entered the house of Alim, she met his wife who “wore a faded sari, its torn edge wrapped around her head as a scarf, the end tight between her teeth.” She also met the other three women who came there to solve their problems who wore “the old –style burkhas with mesh face coverings cast back to reveal their features, and not the more fashionable Iranian chadars that Amme and I did, so I guessed they were poor.” As Layla said they did not look directly to the alim because it was considered improper, according to Islam, for men and women to look into each others’ eyes, if they were not married. The women were always considered inferior to men. It was that the women were made to serve their men and men to trouble the women. As stated earlier in the novel, Amme had a divorce from her husband, and lived there destructing her own life only for the sake of her daughter. Then Layla’s father married Sabana, she also had the same status at home. She used to feed him at her own even in her pregnancy. Women were trapped in burkhas without considering their age.

“This was a Muslim neighborhood, where women did not leave the house unveiled, not even girls as young as six, their bodies yet indistinguishable from boys’.” (Madras: 58)

Henna is the other woman character referred in the novel. Her husband went to Saudi where he couldn’t take her with him, she had to live as a servant to her in-laws. He could come back to her only after completion of two years when he could enjoy a holiday for a month only. Even the private property given to her by her father was taken away to sell, breaking the rule of Islam. So it was hard life for her. She says to Layla;

“Everyone in the Old City knows. Wherever I go, women have questions or advice. They blame me or they pity me. It’s become so hard, I don’t want to leave the house.” (Madras: 61)

It is only thrice the changing condition of women is referred in the novel. Layla’s father told Henna about the change intending to suggest the second marriage.

“..... Customs are changing, Henna. These outsiders come in, they stir things up, they make things possible.” (Madras: 65)

Secondly, after Layla’s marriage, Zeba, her mother-in-law told her that only the wife has the power to rouse her husband. Thirdly when Layla went to the pizza place with her husband, she saw girls who were more free and frank than in America. When she went to her in-laws, she was sent to her husband’s room. While discussion, she came to know that all the letters sent to her by Nate were reached to her husband through the dress drawer. When he slipped his tongue in her, he omitted because of bleeding. So the union did not take place. Then he said to her that he is haunted by those letters and when he was touching her, he saw Nate touching her. He accuses her of making him a fool. He says:

“Yes, a fool. While I was writing to you, telling you how much I wanted to touch you, be with you, you were there----- with him. Letting him into your room, letting him..... fuck you...I tried to do what he... I didn't know I would feel so repelled!” (Madras: 94-95)

As she has no love for her husband, she doesn't care what happens and reacted very differently. She is very firm when she says:

“Do you want me to leave? If you want to.... Send me away, just call Nafiza-”
(Madras: 95)

Then Sameer assures her that he will forget all that has happened in past and tells her not to ask about his past. Days passed, but Sameer couldn't make love to her. She was very eager to consummate the marriage, but he was unable. Both husband and wife go to Madras for honeymoon, but there also he could not make love to her. She then comes to know that he loves Naveed, his friend of the same sex. So she goes back to her home in Hyderabad and tells her uncle that she doesn't want to go back to her in laws as her husband is unable to love her. But she is again sent to her husband's house where she is locked inside the room so that she may not run away. She again and again asks her in-laws that she wants to go back as it is a sin to sleep with such person, but her father-in-law insist her to take Sameer with her to America so that no one will know nothing about him. This is how a woman has no place in her home. She is used for others' sake only without thinking about her life. She had to marry Sameer without having a feeling of love for him only for the satisfaction of others. To whom she had loved, she could not marry because of the tradition. Moreover, she accepted Sameer whole-heartedly as a husband but she, herself, was unfortunate enough to have such a husband who confessed once to her.

“This is ... I cannot tell you how much I needed to make love to you today, for me. Bloody hell, for me! You should not feel ashamed, you should not feel there is anything....lacking in you. There is something severely lacking in me, or so I am beginning to think.” (Madras: 95)

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