

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

April 2013 Vol. 4 Issue- II

**Editor-in-Chief**

**Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

**Managing Editor**

**Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)  
[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Women's Portrait Gallery in Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*

**Saykar Satish Govind**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
D.P.Bhosale College, Koregaon

Samina Ali's novel *Madras on Rainy Days* is the reflection of her own life. Samina Ali says: "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." (Ali, Every Act is Political: Samina Ali. An email interview with Shauna Singh Baldwin.) It, according to her, is 'very important to me to give a voice to my own experience and to have that one experience be expansive enough to include a general human experience even as I am dispelling stereotypes.' (Ali, Every Act is Political: Samina Ali. An email interview with Shauna Singh Baldwin.) Layla, a central character in the novel, represents Samina Ali. Layla's servitude, the impact of Hindu-Muslim riots and the dichotomy of women as virgins or whores are the themes of her novel.

*Madras on Rainy Days*, a novel written by Samina Ali, tries to show the condition of Muslim women. The story provides a richly textured insight into traditional Muslim society in India. Women as wives, mothers, and daughters emerge not only as victims but also as people with endurance, wisdom, and great capacity for friendship. (Gundra) She gives us a portrait gallery where we have the pictures of a variety of Muslim women. One more thing is that the writer is a first – generation immigrant in America. Bharati Mukharjee says about the novel and the novelist:

"-----In language that is at once lyrical and unsentimental, she explores both the upside and the downside of being a first- generation Muslim Indo-American woman. A must – read for anyone interested in understanding the multicultural fabric of contemporary America." (Dust Jacket)

ZZ Packer says that it is 'a beautifully written and fully realized first novel.' (Dust Jacket) Po Bronson considers it as 'a wonderful, wrenching family story.' (Dust Jacket) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, author of *The Mistress of Spicess*, writes:

"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." (Divakaruni)

The novel opens with the note of stillness or the dullness of life of a Muslim girl, Layla who says;

SUFFERING QUIETLY in a room not of my own. The door locked. The wooden shutters pulled closed and bolted. No breeze out there, nothing to rustle the leaves of the mango or coconut trees. Only stillness. (Ali, *Madras on Rainy Days*) (3)

The opening statement throws light on the rotten life of a Muslim woman. The phrases 'suffering quietly', 'the locked door', 'shutters closed and bolted', 'no breeze', and 'only stillness' shows the restriction of a woman in the zanana where she is not allowed to communicate with the men unless they marry, even the eye contact is prohibited. The woman is made to surrender herself to her husband because her body also doesn't belong to her as it is in possession of her 'future husband.'(15) In this connection it would be worthwhile to quote Samina Ali:

"----- she knows nothing about herself. She's nineteen and has been controlled by a very strict Muslim culture, Indian culture, parents, and has allegiances to ideas and things outside of herself. Her entire life is controlled, including who she will marry and give her virginity to". (Ali, *Speaking In A Distinct Voice: An Interview with novelist and M.F.A. alum Samina Ali*)

It is the month of May, hot afternoon; Layla is lying on her aunt's bed with soft and velvet covered mattress. Through the example of her aunt, she informs us that for the wedding night celebration, a two-by-two feet white sheet is carefully positioned on the bed sheet to give more validity to the union than the validity provided by woman's wedding necklace or their (husband and wife) vows. Moreover, the red spotted white sheet is hung on the clothesline to flutter in the wind so that the others could see the surrender of woman and the complete victory of man. Her first surrender makes her to forget her own family and integrate with the new one.

Thinking about her aunt, she identifies herself with her aunt and gets frightened and says; "If a man lie on top of me now, I imagine I would break." (4) She is bleeding because she was pregnant and she had taken pills to get rid of it. The family members think that she is haunted by any demon or *shaitan*. But she knows the reality. 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" (23)

She also knows the consequence that she will be banished from her family and everything if she is caught in this matter, so she takes the pills to kill the life inside her. She had an affair with a dark haired Nate, an American. She hides her wedding ring and wanders with him. Not this but one day late at night, she gets him in her house secretly. She enjoys the company of her friend one floor below her mother's room and in the morning he is sent quietly and easily without knowing anyone. But this incident becomes a torture for her as she is going marry.

Actually, since her childhood, her mother taught her to behave properly and whenever she is observed by her mother, she covers her hair, hides her legs, drapes her scarf to conceal the curves of her breasts. She use to do everything which is required to be done by women so that she may not fall prey to man's desire. Islam considers man as the weaker sex, so it is considered improper for men and women to look into each other's eyes. Layla was isolated from the others who are brought up in American culture only to prevent assimilation. If she stays out late at night or gets a call from a boy, her father used to beat her. She is brought back to India every year so that she may not forget who she is. It reminds us of Simon de Beauvoire's famous statement 'Woman is not born as woman'. But naturally wherever she encounters any man, instead of her virginity, Layla thinks that she is a 'desire wrapped in the chador.' (25) There is a recurrent feeling in the mind of Layla that she is a woman, and any man who encounters her wants her only because he is a man. So as a response she says;

As I sometimes met their curious gaze, sometimes let them brush against me as they walked by, and sometimes even followed them with my eyes, admiring their rounded shoulders, their rigid chins, their hairy chaste and forearms, their hands, from what better place to notice a man's body from behind a chador? (25)

Her parents prefer to live in America but want to retire in India. They try their level best to raise their children without the influence of the culture of the West. Layla feels that she belongs to nowhere as she 'wore the shirt of one, the trousers of the other, and both sides were shooting at me.' (26) Always, there is confusion due to the differences between the cultures of India and America. In America, she is known as Indian and whenever after each six months, she comes to India, her mates call her as American and for her 'it was like turning a page and not knowing whether to begin reading the script from right to left or left to right, Urdu or English.' (8-9) Layla's confusion can be compared to the Grandma in *The Shadow Lines* who cannot decide whether she is 'coming home' or 'going home.' Her mother always imagines about her son-in-law as,

*Your husband will be a doctor or an engineer. Your husband will come from a good family. Your husband will be a Muslim. Your husband will be from India.* (116)

Amme fears for her daughter and thinks that Layla is possessed by a devil. She angers her by asking who was her lover and calls her a “Whore!”(6) And threatens her to throw out of the house to live as a prostitute. Amme manages to take her daughter to *alim* to remove the ghost in her. She is very careful that the news should not reach Sameer, the bride groom chosen for Layla, as there was a danger of breaking of the marriage. So both of them hide themselves in the *Chadors* so that no one can identify them. She also supports her daughter by saying not to worry as her dreams and bleeding will stop and she will be better.

Layla’s mother, always, compares Layla with her father as she resembles her father. Before ten years, her husband divorced her as he married Sabana, though it was not known to others. She weeps for a month as it was a shock for her, but has not cried yet since then. She retains her father-in-law’s house as *mahr* and refuses to give up the master bedroom, which her husband needs to share with Sabana, as it becomes her own property as per the contract. Amme loves Layla the most and is ready to kill herself than to see her daughter injured. Her son died after his birth, so she has Layla as the only child. She prays the God to place whatever in Layla’s body in her own so that her daughter may not need to suffer. When she suspects the wrong done by Layla, she says;

“Your mother’s heart is breaking. You are breaking your mother’s heart. Devil’s child, you will never be happy, you’ll se.”(4)

She worries for who can help her as Layla’s father never remains there. When she talks with *alim* about the problem, she rejects the fact that it is a mistake committed by her daughter, instead she emphasizes that devil or ghost is inside her and she has brought her daughter to him to get rid of it. Though *alim* asks her to take Layla to a lady doctor, she insists the *alim* to do everything needed to recover on his own. Layla, once, wants to confess the secret of her bleeding which is the result of the misdeed in Minneapolis. Amme’s blind belief makes a barrier. So though she is ready to spend much money, it is of no use. At last the *alim* suggests her to postpone the marriage until her daughters is better suited to meet her husband.

Though the two families know each other for seven generations and Sameer’s family rented the house of Amme till Partition, now as the mother of the bride, she remains the one without the power. So she has no courage to ask for the postponement of the marriage. She does everything to impress Layla’s in- laws. She prays God for Layla in the night in a private audience with God as the prayer of a night is considered equal to praying a thousand years. She use to pray till dawn.

Amme locks herself when her husband divorces her and mourns for a month and make her husband to sign a contract to not to reveal their divorce to anybody. Amme asks Nafiza to accompany Layla to Sameer’s house and gives her a salary of a month in advance. She assures Layla that the latter will be free after marrying Sameer, though the people in the U.S. think that one loses one’s independence as s/he marries. When Layla asks her to give the house back to her father or tell him to leave it, he overhears and calls his own daughter a ‘Randi!’(86) and threatens Amme that he will throw her out of the house to prostitute herself to live irrespective of whose name it’s in. She stops her husband from beating Layla by saying; “She doesn’t belong to you, not anymore!” ----- “You have no rights left. She is married!”(87)

Her husband, during the pregnancy of Sabana wants her to follow him to America to take care of his sons. Amme goes to the U.S. with her husband. Though she denies her want for him as her husband, he is the only thing she craves for. She goes to watch his sons, to be a surrogate wife and surrogate mother in the absence of Sabana and Layla. .

The *alim* criticizes Zeba, the mother of Sameer, who do not spend money on an oppression of her own son and as a result, he became crippled. Though Layla’s family members come to know about Sameer’s limp leg, they cannot ask the groom’s family as to why the chairs are demanded for the marriage ceremony as they are from the bride’s family.

Zeba looks to Layla through her wedding veil and the latter closes her eyes and is reminded of her husband which makes her to pray the god: “---let him not caste me out”. (68) Zeba feeds ladu to Layla and performs the long rituals of applying oils and perfumes steadily. She adores Layla with the traditional Hyderabad Muslim jewels such as a pearl and emerald necklace, a matching pearl choker, diamond and pearl earrings and gold bracelets. The jewels and oils turns a daughter (Layla) into a wife. But Zeba, herself, doesn't wear any jewels, to which she says,

“I have come here tonight not wearing any jewels, for I no longer have need for them. I have passed everything my mother-in-law gave to me on to you. You are now my only jewel, the jewel of my family.” (69)

She tends her husband on her own, heats up his bath water, lay out his clothes, sets up his dinner and fans him with the day's newspaper. She takes care that all the family members take dinner at seven and she be ready for him as he appears in the gate.

Once she asks Layla about her Amme's life in U.S., she is surprised to know that she cooks and cleans and there are no servants there. She doesn't blame Layla for not knowing how to read Qur'an as she thinks that it is a mother's duty to teach Islam. Instead she takes the responsibility on her shoulder to teach her daughter-in-law to read Qur'an. When she knows that Layla is not clean and her menses begin, she warns Layla to keep away from her son.

“In this house, there is prayer, not sin, Allah, not *shai-tan*. My son should know better than to come to you when you are bleeding, sickness comes from such acts, sickness and disease. I shall talk to him tonight, and if he cannot vow to control himself, then you, Beti, shall sleep by my side.”(123)

When the women come to her house to see the bride, while in discussion, she suggests her friend to let her son marry a Hindu girl if she is ready to convert. She is well aware about the changing time and the changing needs of the new generation. She says to Layla,

“My grandmother spoke and understood Arabic, now I read Arabic but need an Urdu translation. Tomorrow, your children will need an English translation. Every day we go farther from our roots.” (137)

Her son, Sameer, thinks that he is grown up and his mother should not tell him anything about the religion and questions Layla about her behavior: “If the Allah she worships provides me free will and personal responsibility, why can't she!”(138) He criticizes his mother for his condition, his one leg is weak and frail, almost half the size of the other, and his leg could have been corrected, but his mother refused to pay for it. In her dream she finds Layla Pregnant, a tiny boy looking like an American and he was dying. To get rid of her dream, she goes to a shrine.

Sabana is the wife of Layla's father. She pretends to be a great Hindi film actress though she is only a nameless face or a minor character in the few movies. It is she because of whom Layla's father divorces Amme and deserts her life. Sabana is afraid if Amme will mix 'black magi herbs'(42) in the food and affection might turn to Layla and her mother. So she herself prepares everything for her husband. When her husband demands tea, Amme speaks with irreverence to him and asks to demand it from Sabana. Layla justifies the behavior of her mother by saying,

But that was the point, to never let him forget what he'd done. If he had kept her as his wife-even a cowwife – she would have happily taken his request as an order and gone to stand next to Sabana, boiling the tea herself, two women jostling for one man's attention, for his one pleasure. It was the life Amme would have preferred. (43)

Though in pregnancy she attends her husband and says to Layla that a father can spoil his children, but a husband will never spoil his wife. It also shows hoe becoming-wife is difficult.

When Sabana passes by Layla, the latter felt that she is the ill-fated daughter and remembered how Amme erasing her own future continued to stay with her husband though he cast her away; also questioned herself if her mother could give her a husband. At the end we find Sabana in the chador draped loosely about her, exposing her full face. She cuts her hair short to her shoulders. Though it is prohibited in the days of morning, she wears make up.

When Layla asks her father whether he knows about the crippled leg of Sameer, he answers her in a more positive way that the confession of the bridegroom shows his courage. Her father also passes his responsibility for Amme to Layla. As a part of the marriage preparation, the hands and feet are painted with intricate designs of Henna as it is the tradition for the groom to search his initials on the wedding night to provide the natural way for the young couple to touch each other for the first time. There is an unceasing tension to Layla that her husband might throw her out of the wife; if he thinks that she is his wife. She is worried to think,

-----where would I go? No money of my own, no college degree, and, most of all, no experience – no life ever lived – outside my mother’s home, not even that night with Nate. (50)

On the other hand, she thinks that he cheated her with his black thick – soled boots. Nanny is a servant who is working for Layla’s maternal grandfather from her childhood. During partition, when all the servants and villagers tried to claim his *haveli*, she was one of the three servants to remain loyal to the family. She is a year or two older than Amme. After Layla’s birth, she is the one to nurse her. Her skin on her cheeks is dry and hardened. Her dark lips are parted to expose her teeth stained red from betel nut. She is the one who breast-fed, bathed and dressed Layla, and would do so even after her marriage. She cannot question the behavior of Layla because of her servility. She is worried about what Layla will tell her husband as she sees no difference between the latter and her daughter, Roshan; she asks worriedly:

“----But what *you* tell you husband when he find you blood? Who you go to when he throw you out?”(47)

It is because an unsuitable wife has to be a whore or her father has the right to kill her. Layla’s wedding lasts for five days out of which the first three days are the gold that promises fortune and fertility, the *nik’kah* is the blood red of union, and the *walima* dinner that is given on the successful (?) union of the couple.

Layla’s sister -in-law, Ameera Auntie, taught Layla to read and write Urdu. She advises Layla to “Help him out so he knows what to do. You know your body better than him. These Indian boys come to marriage as inexperienced as you.” Asma Kala, Amme’s sister, says to Layla to let her husband to take all the moves; otherwise, he might suspect that she has the prior experience. It conveys the message to her that she has received the letters from Nate. When she comes to know about the unsuccessful marriage of Layla, she goes to visit and remembers her of her former advice and asks her to wait for some time. She also tells her the example of her Abu Uncle who could not go to his wife for two months. She assures her that if Sameer cannot make any move, her relatives have decided to take her to a doctor. She is the one of the only woman Layla had seen ever driving in Hyderabad.

Raga-be is the other woman servant who is very thin, her eyes thickly lined with *kajal* and she seems old due to her slightly hunched back. Layla asks her to do something to stop her bleeding, but she says that her magic is of no use to her.

Roshan is the daughter of Nafiza whose reading glasses are very big for her thin face. Her husband is the owner of a tea shop. Her husband, Sammy, is a Christian by birth who then converts himself to Islam because of his love for her. And he becomes a follower of Allah and becomes a true believer of Islam. It is Roshan who taught him how to pray. She presents

Layla with a sari and says that the latter's husband may wake her up for two to three times a night.

Henna is the daughter of Asma Kala who doesn't come to attend the marriage as the pregnant women keep themselves away from the women who are bleeding. At last she comes two hours before the evening's ceremony. She is beautiful; her eyes black and lips red. Though she is younger than Layla, she had done everything first. Her eyes are dark and deep-set. Her husband is working in Saudi where she cannot accompany him. He comes home for a month after every two years. She thinks that there is no reason to live with his parents in his absence. In fact, it is the break-up of marriage. She still affirms that she, herself, will bring up her child. She and Layla, both have planned their life with their would-be-husbands and their great future, but life is over before its start. She is no better than Amme, Layla thinks. She doesn't want to all these things to Layla when she is planning for her own marriage. This story also adds to the discomfort of Layla and her fear of what will happen to her if her husband finds her bleeding.

Layla's father says that a man from Saudi wants to marry her and he wants her to think positively by saying that the customs are changing. But Henna wants her husband to come back from Saudi. She and Nafiza prepare her for the wedding. Without Nafiza be known, she wraps Nate's letters in the previous night's wedding kurta and then slides the bundle into a dresser drawer neatly and quietly. After dressing her, the veil is lowered over her face and Nafiza reminds her to keep her head bowed in modesty as she is going to face her in-laws. When Layla and Henna are together, Henna unhooks the back of Layla's wedding dress and passes her hand under her bra to know what her husband might have felt when he touched her. Nafiza wants to tell Amme about Nate sincerely and she finally do that. We come to know about her relationship to Layla's mother's brother, Taqi Mamu, her approaching Raga-be, her marriage to a driver.

Layla has a feeling of confusion of which world she belongs;  
"Different worlds, and in each I was a different woman, unrecognizable even to myself. I was like the two faces of the moon, new and full, one always veiled behind the other."(70)  
Still, there is a change in the mentality of Layla who is very eager to cancel the marriage at the very first outset; she now thinks desperately to get it succeeded. She asks Henna to inform about her first wedding night to which the latter replies that her husband took a long time purposely to find his initials, it makes Layla to remember Nate again. Laya always longs to be like Henna, but she is unaware as to why her husband abandoned Henna. Though so she continues:

"But that was the territory I knew better than to explore, having never asked it even of my own mother. The only life left to us now, to dream about, as we used to when we were children, was my own. And, soon that might be over."(72)

Layla compares herself with her father and thinks that both have done the same thing that is, arranged in marriage to one person and choosing another to love. But what her father did was natural for a man by the Old City laws, even the religion allows the man to pronounce thrice the word *talak, talak, talak* to get the divorce from his wife and is free to have four wives.

Woman is never free of the restrictions, irrespective of her being in her maternal house or in-law's house. A girl is said to have shifted from the protection of her father to the protection of her husband. Layla thinks that as she was raised without her father, she became a whore, according to the local customs, by sleeping with Nate. The letters from Nate reach her new house before her. Saleem reads those letters, though so remains silent. Instead of a successful union, Sammer vomits at the first night due to Layla's bleeding. Then he tells Layla that all the letters have been thrown out and now is haunted by them. He says:

“Now I’m haunted by them----- possessed by him, your old lover. When I was touching you, it was him I saw touching you. Over and over, he writes about the night he came to you. Thoo.”(94)

Layla tries to make Sameer feel that she has not made a fool of him, but he doesn’t agree. Here we see a different Layla, she says;

“Do you want me to leave? If you want to----- send me away, just call Nafiza –” (95)

Sameer assures her to her that to him the past doesn’t matter and promises her to forgive her. In return he expects her to do the same and declares that he wants nothing more than to be able to touch her. In the morning, Sameer gives the cloth to his mother as a symbol of their successful union and Zeba thinks that Layla is a virtuous wife. Nafiza, as she breast fed Layla, speaks to her that her husband befooled others with the help of the cloth which was not the result of their union but Layla’s bleeding asks Layla to inform his mother the reality. But there is no way left for Layla as give him away will result in give herself away from his home. She knows very well that there is no home for her and her father will kill her for one or the other reason. Layla convinces Nafiza by saying;

“----- he is keeping me on as his wife. ----- he still accepts me. But he’s my husband, Nafiza, he needs some time to get over this. It’s why he couldn’t touch me last night.”(99)

Sameer’s parents host a party to announce the successful union, *walima*. Afterwards Layla learns from her mother-in-law to wrap a *dupatta* around her head even at home. Sameer took three days to touch her for the first time. Her mother-in-law wants her to join them for prayer though she doesn’t know how to read Qur’an. Her parents never taught her, nor do they know Arabic themselves. Her mother never wakes her up for prayer. Instead of encouraging to fast, her mother dissuades her saying that the hunger and thirst might distract her attention from her studies. She says;

“I had never fasted more than four days of the required thirty. Nor read the Qur’an, as others did while observing the requirements of Ramadan.”(109)

Sameer often tells her to not to do what his mother requires, if she doesn’t want to. Moreover, he asks her to wear jeans. Then Layla feels the freedom, her Amme had promised of, after marriage seems to come true. She has the freedom to address her husband by his name. It is her mother who could not address her husband even after her divorce.

Though Layla lives in America, her parents want her to be an Indian. So she belongs to neither country, but Sameer feels that she is a twin- the American and the Indian. She tells Sameer that she is same to him in colour, race and language. She identifies herself as Indian and shows a chador as the proof for it. She is nervous and cannot eat well in her husband’s house because she say,

“How could I? A week ago, on Saturday night, I had been out with my husband, feeling like I was on first date, exhilarated. Tonight, after dinner I would sleep beside his mother, as I had next to my own for years. What kind of virtue was this?” (132)

As stated earlier, Layla’s father asks her to take the responsibility of her mother, Zeba also shoulders her responsibility for her son to Layla by saying that she has done her duties as his mother and it is up to Layla to look after Sameer as Islam places the role of a woman among the highest. Sameer also says to her to “Teach me how to touch you.”(135)

Layla asks Sameer to vow that he will give her a home. She expects him to be belonged to her as she belongs to him to which Sameer positively answers. Though Roshan asks her to accompany her to a lady doctor to get her body cleaned, Layla strongly oppose the idea. She repents for her sexual intercourse with Nate and says;

Repelled, Sameer had said on the wedding night, he had been repelled by me, by my flesh, a baby floating in blood, draining out. Now, every night I put him into my mouth, it was to uncoil him, yes, but also to prevent him from pushing into me, fingers, tongue, penis, prevent



him from becoming repelled by the very flesh aching to open for him. A month-long punishment for a single night. (154)

Though Laya has spent half of her life in America, she never uses her American clothes in India. It is not for her the matter of blending in, belonging, but a matter of appropriateness. When her husband forces her to wear a jeans, it is for the first time she wore it in India and at the pizza place sees for the first time boys and girls laughing and joking together wearing Western clothes, and the women with their hair cut to their shoulder smoking in open, not only this but a woman in her bikini. Though Layla wants to continue her life in India, her husband very ambitious for his career in America. He says to her,

“I’m going to make it in America, Layla. I’m going to be as successful as your father. Nothing is going to hold me back, not Mum, not religion, and not----” (166)

So Layla promises him that she will help him. When she finds the letters that he had told her he had thrown out in his trunk, she asks him as to why he kept all these letters. When Amme comes to take Layla with her, both Zeba and Sameer feel that she will not come back. Zeba also warns her about the consequences of taking Layla back to her Amme’s home.

“----- remember, there was the *walima* dinner announcing a successful union. No man will marry her now, not unless he takes her for a second or third wife.” (188)

Amme takes Layla to a lady doctor and asks her why she didn’t tell her the real reason of her bleeding to which Layla says that that she had told her about the bleeding and she took her to the *alim*. When Layla asks her if her mother wants to know how she has managed herself in her new home, Amme says,

“You manage as we all manage,”----“What choice do any of us have but to make do?” (190)

She is very happy to know that her daughter is very well though her husband knows what she has done in America. She thinks that Sameer is different than her own husband; otherwise, he might have killed her daughter.

Though Sameer could not love Layla, he wants her to be waiting for him. When his mother informs him about Layla’s departure, he thinks that she would not come back. He is surprised to see her back at his home. He asks her whether she is living in her previous world to which Layla says that she has come to India and married him and now there is no relation between Nate and her; otherwise she might have run away with him and stayed in America. She feels that her intimacy has grown more “than I had ever been with anyone else. It didn’t matter that we hadn’t had sex ----- yet.” (194) She only expect her husband to not to be like her father by abandoning her. He assures her that he will never abandon her. To have a fresh start, she thinks it appropriate to tell her husband that she was taken to the doctor to get clean due to her pregnancy. But when she thinks that the same had the wrong effect, she asks him to beat her because she prefers beating to silence. She thinks that her husband is right to behave badly as she has made a fool of him on the wedding night by saying her mensus started too early. She wants her husband to love her in Hotel Sri Lenka, though the room was not same as she expected. But he rejects to touch her by saying he is not a machine to get up and fuck her. Then she asks him whether she is too ugly to fuck. Sameer says, “--- if there is no love, there is no expression of love” (204) which shows his confused state of mind.

During the night, she sees a boy in her dream who tells her that her husband would never touch her which reminds Layla what her mother said to *alim*: “once a demon takes a liking to a woman, he won’t let any man, not even her own husband, inhabit her.” (206)

Though he try his level best to love Layla, he cannot succeed.

“The body’s functions, not the heart’s, though his lips kept insisting he loved me, that he would do anything to keep me. In the end, he could not do the one thing I wanted.” (209)

And he confesses that there is something lacking in him because of which he is unable to have sex with her. He adds that he cannot go on as her husband. He doesn’t want anything more than to be able to make love to Layla.

Layla thinks that it is because of her confession, Sameer is not able to touch her; but he tells her that it is not her fault. He feels that there is a wall between them to which both of them are unable to see. He has a confusion in his mind which makes him to ask Layla:

“Look at me, Layla, look at me. Do I not look like a man to you? Do I not look like I can satisfy ..... *whomever* I please? So tell me why I can't touch you – what is keeping me from touching you, Layla! Tell me!”(210)

So Layla and Sameer decide to go to the *alim*, the Arabic name for all-knowing and one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. They consider him as the marriage therapist to counsel, insight and heal them. The name of the *alim* is Zakir. But for the last time Sameer in the form of confirmation asks Layla if she is sure about her dreams and about his inability to touch her forever. Sameer informs the *alim* that though he wanted a lot, he cannot get close to his wife and there is an invisible wall between them. But he cannot suggest a remedy over that. Layla insists for help by informing him that that is their honeymoon and agrees to give anything he wants. Layla and Sameer permit the *alim* to touch the body of Layla in Sameer's absence because for them 'faith in its power to mend the body.'(216) Eagerness and anxiety on the part of Layla makes the *alim* to say;

”I didn't encounter these sorts of cases very often. But every now and then ..... Such a pity. Always so much anguish on wife's face. The pain and the confusion are always the same. Women are quick to blame themselves. Its because they don't know better.....”(217)

He also asks her whether she was protected. In response to the question Layla says that she was guarded, her movements restricted and asks a counter-question whether all that mean a protection. As a process of treatment the *alim* asks her to lift up her kurta and undo her *shalwar* . While the treatment was going on he says;

“You are a beautiful woman, Layla. It is much the shame about your husband, it is such a waste.”(219)

When Layla asks him about Sadia's illness, she is told that Sadia has a tumor in brain and he has no power to save her. That is why he is hated by his wife. His last words to Layla are “... Allah tests us in the severest of ways.”(222) It is Layla who gives him money for Sadia's treatment in the hospital.

She tells Sameer to try once more whether he is able to love her, but he informs her that they are going back to Hyderabad the same night. Layla then comes to know that when they came to Madras, they were followed by Naveed who disguised himself as a woman in burkha. He talks to Sameer in front of Layla about the relationship between them (Both Sameer and Naveed are *hijras*) and asks Sameer to not to go in America and face the situation in India as he is there to help him. This incident changes the thinking of Layla and understands as to why he used to copy the letters from magazines. To her 'he did not know how to make love, even on paper, communicate love, to any woman, least of all his own future wife.' (227) She thinks that her mother sold him to the man who would never love her.

She finds her resemblance in Nafiza as both of them were raised in a family to which they were not belonged. She went to Taqi Mamu in search of her and comes to know that she is sick and is admitted in hospital. When she goes to the hospital, she is told that she has hepatitis and there were no chances of her life. So Layla asks whether they have tried other remedies, i.e., herbal, homeopathic, etc., but she is told that Raga-be came and tried her *jadu*.

Due to Nafiza's illness, Ameera Auntie wants to appoint another servant to replace her; but Taqi Mamu cried;

“Nafiza is more than hired help. She is ..... she cannot be replaced.”(239)

She dies within few days on the birthday of Layla. Roshan asks Layla to leave her husband by saying;

“You should leave him, of course. It's a sin to live with such a man. Islam prohibits it.”(236)

But Layla says that she loves her husband to which she is told to do the required to look compassionate.

To Roshan, Amme is a generous woman as a result of which she receives the blessings from others and that is why Sabana's *jadu* does not affect her. Amme has spent her husband's money on the bills of the doctors, of the *alims*. Moreover she tries to force Sabana to leave her husband by giving a blank check as a bribe. Layla feels that more money would be sent on Nafiza's death than on her life.

When Layla goes to Taqi mamu's house, the servant there stops her and asks her where she is going; it unsettles her makes her feel like ' an intruder sneaking into a place I didn't belong.' (238) While talking with Abu uncle, she is told that there are letters from Nate for her and makes her aware that that is not America. He also justifies not only Sameer but to the male community by saying:

"We are not as strong as women– some women – who can control themselves, save themselves till they are married. Men like Sameer, young men, strong men, virile men, they must seek companionship ..... Recreational sex, nothing more." (241)

He advises her to forget the reality and look for the future with your husband. He also reminds her that no one wants a daughter to return home. He wants her not to be like her father by deserting her spouse and warns her to keep her marriage; otherwise people might say that she has left her husband to return to her former lover. Though she tells about his love for Naveed, no one support her. And though he knows is not her real husband, Sameer says that she will do as he says. She also talks about his inability to love her to Zeba, she says her to demand him what she wants as she alone has the power to bring him back to the straight path. There is only one option left to Layla to continue her life with Sameer untouched and uncomplaining as per the ethics of the Old City irrespective of what the Qur'an says.

She also tells Zeba that it is a sin to sleep with such a man though the marriage has come to an end automatically and also there is a sin to forcing her to do that. Zeba informs her that she had once prayed a *shukran namaz*, when she was told about his accident and went to see the dead body of her son. She wants Layla to take him to America to avoid the upcoming disgrace to her family. She also tells the same thing to her father-in-law, but he also rejects her to leave the home. At last she tries to run away from the home, but her brother-in-law catches her and Zeba and he brings her back home and lock her in the bedroom.

Zehra is one of the neighbours of Layla. On the day of his marriage, her son elopes with a Hindu girl he loved. She is very sad of what has happened. She cries a lot and asks a question to the God:

"What have I borne? From my own womb, the shai'tan! Allah, why did you not kill me before showing me this day?" (254)

But when the news arrives of the possible attack of the Hindu fanatics on them, she is very happy to see that her son is not there and thinks that he might live long only because of his absence. To save the women from being raped, the men ask them to lock themselves in the innermost rooms and they are out whole night watching from which side the attackers come. Zeba asks Layla to put on her jeans. She says;

"Now put on your jeans. No, not like that. Under your *shalwar*. Protect yourself as much as you can." (270)

This incidence has an autobiographical touch which says that during the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the family members were informed by the Hindu man that they are going to be targeted as a result of which Samina Ali thought that she will die.

Usually the police are involved in these crimes -- remember, these are political crimes that manifest as religious ones. My mother-in-law, a conservative Muslim woman who only liked me to dress in loose shalwar-kameezes told me to put on jeans under my clothes -- to further deter rape. She and I stayed in my bedroom all night, locked inside the house and then the

room, while the men of the house went to the roofs. It was the worst night of my life. I thought I was going to die -- with strangers! (Ali, Every Act is Political: Samina Ali. An email interview with Shauna Singh Baldwin.)

When she is looking for her death to come, she remembers her school days with Layla's Amme.

"We fell in love with every teacher. It's all she and I talked about, marrying one, leaving the village. We would stroll home through the woods inventing our lives."(270)

She is well aware that their lives have come to an end and there is only thing left for them is to dream for the children. Though she hates her son and had prayed a *shukar namaz* for her son's forthcoming death, she feels love for him and not in reality, but in her dream she goes to search for him. When on the next day, her son comes home, she feeds him by her hand.

Henna is murdered, before that she is raped and her pregnant body is mutilated by the broken glass of a whisky bottle. Sameer tells Layla of how the murderers have ill-treated her, he says;

"----- they were snickering at her body. They said her breasts were engorged, all juicy like mangoes – and just as sweet. Baby, they drank her milk."(280)

Henna, living with her husband, in her father's house and once wished to bring flowers for *durga pooja*. On their way to home, they were attacked by the people and Hanif left her in search of help, nobody helped him and it resulted in her death. Henna's mother-in-law thinks that she and Hanif were living in sin as the sexual union is prohibited in *Muharram*. Abu Uncle also doesn't blame Hanif, he tells Layla that it is Hanif who told him about her bad condition and asked him to bring her back. Only Layla blames Hanif for the death of Henna.

Abu Uncle tells Layla that he and Asma Kala had taught her to be a proper woman, to be humble and obedient, to respect her in-laws. In the absence of her husband, her in-laws sold all the pots pans of copper, the furniture, and the jewels. And she left with cooking and cleaning. Though so, she never complained against all these to anybody. Her mother-in-law thinks that she was doing her duties, not more than she herself did. Further she says that it is the duty of a daughter or a wife to serve her relatives. To put the question of who is responsible for her death, she asks'

"----- why did you allow her husband to take Layla back to her in-laws? Why is she still there with that----- that man?"(291)

Raga-be sends Sameer away and asks him to come the next day to take Layla. When she tells Layla that that time she will make her husband a proper husband, to which Layla says that her *jadu* won't work on her as she is not fully Indian. The feeling of displacement is still in the mind of Layla.

Layla changes herself and visits Henna's grave and the Durga though she had gotten her period. When she goes back to her home she challenges her husband by saying,

"If I am to stay here with you, you are going to remain my husband, then you must provide."(301)

But his inability to have sex with her makes him to say that Layla is free to anywhere she wants. Through this incident Samina Ali tries to say that 'if Muslim women (speaking in the broadest terms) are to have any type of freedom and equality, then Muslim men have to join in that fight. And they are.' (Ali, Speaking In A Distinct Voice: An Interview with novelist and M.F.A. alum Samina Ali)At last, we find Layla walking into the narrow alleyways and she doesn't know "Where would these streets lead me?"(307) She tells afterwards,

"Layla. Darkness. So I was. My body hidden and safe under the chador, belonging only to me."(307)

At least, at the end there is a feeling of belongingness. It's a feeling of freedom on the part of Layla as she is going somewhere unknown to her perhaps to have a fresh start. From the Islamic feminist point of view according to the novelist the book says:

“---read the Qur'an, 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)

**Works Cited:**

- Ali, Samina. Every Act is Political: Samina Ali. An email interview with Shauna Singh Baldwin. Shauna Singh Baldwin. 29 January 2004.
- . Madras on Rainy Days. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.
- Ali, Samina. Speaking In A Distinct Voice: An Interview with novelist and M.F.A. alum Samina Ali Paul Martone. Literary Reference : University of Oregon, Spring 2006. 4.
- Gundra, Jaswinder. " Madras on Rainy Days:Book Review." Multicultural Review Fall 2004.
- Mukharjee, Bharati. . . Madras on Rainy Days. :, . New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004 .