

Radha

By Amitava Nag

Radha used to love us most – me and *bhai*, my brother. In our joint family of our *kakas* (father's younger brothers) and *jethus* (father's elder brothers) we never really knew who Radha was. Probably she was the orphan daughter of one of my dead uncle. Probably, yes, we were never very sure. It was difficult – in a flock of cousins it took ages before I knew for sure that Rakhi is my own sister and Ranjan-*da* is my cousin. So we grew up thus in a huddle, wetting beds and listening to the moaning of elders. And we had Radha who always kept the best pickle for us, the best twig which she found in her afternoon adventures in the scarce bush at the far end of the garden. We had a big house. We had so many people that we had none to look after us. Radha, was our mentor.

Yet, she was despised by *Ma* and *Kakimas* (my aunties).

'Uff, she is a burden. God knows why her parents left this mad girl on us. See, how they shrugged off their responsibilities!' - *Ma* used to shout.

'Why do you always say Radha is mad? She gives us marbles, *Ma* and also she prepares food for Rukmini'.

'Who is this Rukmini?' - *Ma* fumes.

'Rukmini, you don't know the squirrel in our mango tree'.

'Oh this is what you do all afternoon. No studies? Huh' – *Ma* slams her hand at me. I frisk away and run.

'Remember, this girl won't leave you, she will eat you and your *bhai*'.

'Will you eat us Radha? *Ma* told me'. I was nervous.

'I don't know Sona. They all tell me that I am witch. I ate my parents and now..' She was pensive, and suddenly, 'But I will not leave anyone who dares to touch you, see what they have done, to take you two away' - Radha suddenly took off her blouse and we saw her black back marked with bruises.

'Touch them' - she ordered? I was afraid. I was not sure if I reached puberty, *bhai* even less. And we have been growing up in a gang hearing about masturbation and eyeing girls' bosoms. Suddenly Radha hit me as I fell down and she put her feet on my chest.

'See I am Ma Kali – don't you dare to disobey' – she started laughing , she bends over as she laughed and then she cried and cried. We ran and we shivered. That night I ejaculated and Radha had high fever, *Baba* told.

Radha's incarnation of Goddess Kali was however not kept secret. Banshi of the higher class took me by collar,

'Hey, heard that dusky girl of your house is putting up Kali show?' he winked. I was unsure and he hit me. They were in a group, circling me and jibing.

'Radha, they told bad things in your name' I objected to her.

'Leave them Sona, they are like that only, don't you know?' Then one Sunday afternoon we were playing marbles at this side when suddenly *bhai* told –

'Look, Banshi and his friends there, near the mango tree'. They were teasing Radha –

'Eh..you Kali? Show us that you are Kali. How do you pee? Can you pee while standing? Like us?' They mocked and laughed. And in that blazing trace of the last straws from the Sun, Radha took her dress off and stood there – as the naked Goddess Kali. I was frightened. There was something in the air, some premonition – it was *Baba* and *Chhoto Kaka* (my youngest uncle). Hearing them Banshi fled with his group. *Baba* started rebuking Radha and they dragged her inside. *Ma* and others beat her up,

'You are getting old Radha. What type of decency have you learnt? You sex maniac' – *Ma* shouted. We were shivering in tension, if something happens to Radha who will be our playmate? Radha stayed still in a mess with high fever for few days. We used to go to her room stealthily

'Why do you do things that elders don't approve Radha?', *bhai* asked. She winked,

'There is no fun in obeying, kids. Grow up!'

The last time Radha was beaten up so badly was when she missed her periods. She didn't tell anyone, but who can escape *Ma's* hawkish eyes? She gnarled us

'Speak out. You two must be knowing'.

'No, *Ma*. Seriously No'. Then she took up with Radha. My other aunties joined in venting authority. Radha didn't say anything. She didn't tell them a single word, not the name who made her pregnant, not even *Chhoto Kaka's* !

That night Radha was hospitalized. *Ma* slapped us and told,

'If anyone asks, tell that she fell from the tree'. We were terrified. Is Radha really a witch? We weren't sure. But by then we knew that virgin girls cannot become pregnant. So utter

confusion. I asked *Chhoto Kaka*, can't virginity be cured? *Chhoto Kaka* gave a vacant smile.

Since then Radha's room was locked up. We grew up from feeble boys to fat men believing it was a curse room. Only when my cousin came back from her in-laws' house permanently with her son, *Chhoto Kaka* left his room for them and moved to Radha's. He had retired by then. Every eclipse, *Chhoto Kaka* cries and screams in the courtyard, he doesn't want to stay in; he doesn't want to wear clothes.

ENDNOTE: *There are several Bengali names of relationships which have been used here. They have also been defined in the content itself.*

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