

VILLAGE PARTITION AND EVERYDAY COMMUNALISM IN RAHI MASOOM RAZA'S *ADHA GAON*

Dr. Umeshkumar Solanki

Assistant Professor & Head

Gujarat Arts & Science College, Ahmedabad

Email: umesh_solanki24@yahoo.in

Abstract—Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* relocates the history of Partition from borders, ministries, and spectacular riots to the ordinary life of Gangauli, a village in eastern Uttar Pradesh. This article argues that the novel presents communalism not as an ancient and permanent hatred between Hindus and Muslims but as an everyday political process that translates distant slogans into local suspicions, interests, and losses. Gangauli's Shia Muslim households are connected to Hindu neighbours, lower-caste labourers, tenants, ritual specialists, and the land through practices that cannot be divided by the two-nation theory. Yet the village before Partition is not an ideal community: caste, gender, lineage, and zamindari already organize intimacy unequally. Political organizers exploit these divisions, while the abolition of zamindari after independence exposes the economic anxieties hidden within religious language. Raza's crowded narrative, genealogies, Bhojpuri-inflected Hindustani, humour, abuse, mourning, and Muharram rituals preserve a social world that national histories reduce to communal categories. The 'half' in the title names territorial division, broken families, damaged cultural memory, and the incompleteness of any account that treats religion as the village's only truth. The article concludes by relating Raza's representation to contemporary rumour networks, electoral polarization, land insecurity, and debates over linguistic and religious belonging. *Adha Gaon* remains urgent because it shows that communalism becomes powerful when repeated in daily speech, but also that shared life supplies resources for resisting it.

Keywords: *Rahi Masoom Raza, Adha Gaon, Partition, village, communalism, Gangauli, zamindari, Muharram, Hindustani.*

Introduction: Partition away from the Border

Literary accounts of the 1947 Partition often centre Punjab, Bengal, refugee movement, trains, camps, and large-scale violence. *Adha Gaon* changes the scale. Its village, Gangauli, lies in eastern Uttar Pradesh, far from the new international border. No line is drawn through its fields, yet Partition reorganizes its language of belonging, unsettles Muslim futures, and converts familiar neighbours into members of national categories. Raza's achievement lies in showing how a decision made through elite negotiations enters places that neither demanded nor fully understood it.

The novel spans the late colonial years, the Second World War, the Pakistan movement, independence, and the abolition of zamindari. These events reach Gangauli through returning students, political workers, soldiers, newspapers, rumour, and changes in property. Public history is not placed above village life. It is tested against marriages, debts, harvests, kinship quarrels, religious observances, sexual relationships, and disputes over status. Partition becomes intelligible through the ordinary structures it disturbs and the inequalities it reuses.

This article argues that *Adha Gaon* represents communalism as a process of everyday translation. National slogans become effective only when attached to existing anxieties about land, honour, employment, caste, and social decline. The novel rejects the claim that Hindus and Muslims formed two naturally separate civilizations, but it does not replace that claim with a sentimental picture of perfect harmony. Gangauli's shared culture is real and unequal. Its intimacy contains domination, dependence, affection, contempt, and practical cooperation. Raza's realism emerges from holding these conditions together.

Gangauli as a Social World

Gangauli is more than a setting. It functions as a dense social world whose people know one another through ancestry, neighbourhood, occupation, ritual, scandal, and memory. The narrative's many names and relationships can initially seem difficult, but this difficulty is meaningful. A village cannot be reduced to the few representative characters preferred by national allegory. Its history belongs to overlapping households and to people who do not occupy the same position within them.

The Syed zamindar families of the north and south pattis organize much of the novel's social field. Their rivalries, marriages, pride, and claims of descent give the village a hierarchical shape. Shia religious identity connects them, yet lineage and property divide them. The internal complexity of Muslim life immediately challenges political rhetoric that speaks of a single Muslim community. A landlord, tenant, artisan, servant, woman, and Aligarh-educated campaigner do not experience Pakistan as the same promise.

Hindu and Muslim lives are similarly connected without becoming identical. People participate in one another's practical worlds; ritual occasions draw on shared labour and local recognition; language and humour cross religious boundaries. These ties do not erase prejudice. They show that community is produced through repeated coexistence rather than abstract agreement. Gangauli belongs to its residents because their memories and dependencies have made it, not because all share one theology.

Raza's semi-autobiographical attachment to Gangauli gives the narrative intimacy without making it nostalgic testimony. Gillian Wright notes that the novel grew from a world transformed by war, Partition, and the end of zamindari (Wright). The remembered village is not frozen before change. It is already historical, internally divided, and vulnerable to forces its residents interpret through partial knowledge.

Against the Myth of Timeless Hatred

Partition is frequently explained through the language of old communal antagonism. Adha Gaon contests this explanation by showing how political identities must be taught, circulated, and made useful. Villagers who understand land, kinship, and local honor may find the distant idea of a Muslim nation abstract. Campaigners must therefore connect Pakistan to fear: fear of Hindu majority rule, loss of religious security, or social humiliation. Communalism appears as organized persuasion rather than inherited instinct.

Gyanendra Pandey argues that communalism is not a simple survival of ancient difference but a modern discourse through which communities and histories are produced (Pandey, *Construction*). Raza dramatizes this production in conversation. A phrase heard at Aligarh or in a political meeting changes as it moves into the village. It is repeated, mocked, misunderstood, or tied to a local rivalry. Everyday speech is the workshop in which the two-nation theory acquires emotional force.

The novel also reveals the unequal prestige of political knowledge. Educated men can present themselves as interpreters of history to villagers whose questions are dismissed as ignorance. Yet rural scepticism often identifies contradictions that formal rhetoric hides. If Gangauli is home, why must a Muslim's future lie in a place he has never seen? If religion determines nationality, what happens to shared language, graves, fields, friendships, and obligations? These questions expose the distance between ideological maps and lived belonging.

Raza refuses to make rural people politically innocent. Rumour can harden suspicion; honour can sanction cruelty; familiar insults can prepare the ground for exclusion. Everyday communalism does not require continuous riot. It operates when a neighbor is redescribed as a representative of a threatening population, when a political claim becomes a joke with a hostile edge, or when silence allows a falsehood to circulate. The ordinary is precisely where communal categories become durable.

Muharram and Shared Cultural Memory

Muharram occupies a central place in Gangauli's calendar and in the novel's emotional structure. For the Shia families, the mourning of Karbala carries theological and ancestral significance. In village practice, however, the observance also depends on local artisans, performers, routes, spaces, and audiences that exceed a single religious community. Ritual binds sacred memory to material cooperation. The tazia is both an object of devotion and the product of social relations.

The Karbala narrative gives the village a language for loss, betrayal, endurance, and unjust power. These meanings resonate with later political disruption without becoming a simple allegory of Partition. Raza allows ritual memory to remain locally specific. Its songs, gestures, hierarchies, and emotions belong to Gangauli's calendar, and their repetition

connects generations. When families migrate or status collapses, Muharram registers the damage because the community capable of sustaining the form has changed.

Shared participation should not be romanticized as proof that hierarchy has vanished. Dominant families may control prestige within the observance, while labour is distributed by caste and class. Women's ritual and emotional work may be essential but less publicly authorized. The festival holds the village together through roles that are not equal. Adha Gaon values composite culture while compelling readers to ask who receives honour, who performs service, and who remains unnamed.

This tension makes Muharram politically important. Communal nationalism imagines religious communities as internally uniform and mutually sealed. Village ritual demonstrates something messier: religious difference is real, but its public life is interdependent. The attempt to purify community after Partition damages practices that developed through proximity. Cultural loss occurs not only when people cross borders, but when familiar cooperation becomes suspicious.

Caste, Lineage, and Unequal Intimacy

A critique of communal division cannot ignore the divisions that precede it. Gangauli's Muslim society is ordered through claims of noble descent, biradari, occupation, and landownership. Syed identity carries authority, while lower-status Muslims and service groups encounter different possibilities. The political category 'Muslim' suppresses these distinctions in order to claim a unified constituency. The novel restores them, showing that religious solidarity can protect privilege as easily as vulnerability.

Caste also structures Hindu-Muslim interaction. Dependence across communities does not necessarily produce equality. Landlords may rely on labourers and retainers whom they treat as socially inferior. Sexual access, domestic service, and customary obligation reveal how intimacy can coexist with domination. Raza's village is composite, but its composite culture is not an uncomplicated moral ideal. It must be distinguished from justice.

This distinction prevents the novel from becoming a celebration of feudal harmony. Zamindari supplies continuity and patronage, yet it rests on control of land and labor. Landlord nostalgia after independence may describe the old order as stable because elite families experienced its benefits. Tenants and workers may remember the same order through extraction and dependence. Partition and land reform intersect because the crisis of Muslim zamindars can be narrated as communal loss even when it also represents a challenge to class power.

Aijaz Ahmad warns against readings that make every Third World text a transparent national allegory and overlook its particular social contradictions (Ahmad). Adha Gaon requires this caution. Gangauli is not India in miniature in any simple sense. Its eastern Uttar Pradesh location, Shia institutions, Bhojpuri speech, and agrarian hierarchy are historically specific. The novel reaches national questions through that specificity rather than by abandoning it.

Women, Domestic Power, and the Gendered Village

Women sustain Gangauli through marriage negotiations, childbirth, household management, ritual mourning, gossip, care, and the transmission of family memory. Much of the village's continuity depends on labour that political speeches do not recognize. Partition debates are conducted mainly by men, but their consequences enter women's lives through migration, reduced household resources, altered marriage prospects, and the departure or death of relatives.

The domestic sphere is not outside politics. Genealogy and property are reproduced through marriage, while ideas of family honour regulate women's sexuality. Relationships across status lines expose a double standard: elite men's conduct can be absorbed into village knowledge, whereas women bear lasting shame or insecurity. The same community that presents itself as endangered may preserve masculine privilege inside the home.

Women are not merely victims or silent symbols. Their speech carries local judgment, ridicule, memory, and emotional intelligence. Gossip can police conformity, but it can also puncture male pretension and preserve truths excluded from formal history. Raza's crowded dialogue gives domestic speakers a presence unavailable in speeches about Pakistan. Nevertheless, the narrative's perspective remains shaped by a male author and by the prominence of male genealogies. A feminist reading must attend to both the women's agency and the limits placed on its representation.

The gendered organization of migration is especially important. Men may imagine departure as political choice, education, employment, or national destiny. Women often experience it as the breaking of a household network and the loss of familiar support. Home is material and relational: rooms, courtyards, graves, neighbours, and ritual routes. To leave is not simply to select a nation. It is to surrender forms of belonging that cannot be carried intact.

Land, Zamindari, and the Economic Life of Communalism

The abolition of zamindari after independence changes Gangauli as profoundly as Partition. The timing matters because religious and economic anxieties become entangled. Landed Muslim families who lose authority may interpret their decline through the language of minority insecurity, even though agrarian reform addresses a property system rather than a religion. Raza does not deny genuine fear among Indian Muslims. He shows how class interest can borrow communal vocabulary.

The end of zamindari alters everyday relations of deference, employment, marriage, and ritual sponsorship. A legal change in property produces emotional disorientation because status had been embedded in habits and speech. Former landlords confront the difference between cultural prestige and economic power. The ‘half village’ is therefore divided across time as well as religion: the world before land reform cannot be restored after it.

This economic dimension clarifies why ideological appeals succeed differently among villagers. Pakistan may represent imagined security to some educated or property-owning Muslims, opportunity to an ambitious young man, and irrelevance to a laborer tied to local survival. Political identity is filtered through material position. Yasmin Khan’s history of Partition emphasizes contingency, uncertainty, and the uneven understanding of what division would mean (Khan). Adha Gaon supplies the village-scale texture of that uncertainty.

The novel also resists a narrow opposition between secular class analysis and religious feeling. Land matters, but so do graves, Muharram, kinship, and fear. People do not experience these as separable academic categories. Everyday communalism works by joining material insecurity to sacred identity. Effective resistance must therefore address both: it cannot defeat communal fear while ignoring unequal land and livelihood.

Language, Abuse, and the Politics of Hindi and Urdu

Adha Gaon’s language is one of its strongest arguments against cultural partition. Raza writes in Hindi while drawing on Urdu, Bhojpuri, Persian-Arabic religious vocabulary, village idiom, proverb, song, and abuse. The prose refuses the purified language imagined by competing nationalisms. Its Hindustani world precedes and exceeds the institutional division of Hindi and Urdu into religious possessions.

Alok Rai shows how Hindi nationalism participated in making a standardized language carry majoritarian cultural claims (Rai). Raza’s writing troubles that history from within Hindi literature. A Muslim author can claim Hindi without surrendering Urdu inheritance; Gangauli’s speakers can inhabit mixed language without needing to identify each word by communal origin. Linguistic belonging appears through use, not purity.

Abuse and coarse speech are crucial to this realism. Respectable literary language would falsify the force of village intimacy, where affection, hierarchy, anger, and humor often share a vocabulary. Controversy over such language reveals who is permitted to represent rural life and which forms of speech are excluded from the national canon. Raza does not translate the village into polite citizenship before allowing it to appear.

Translation into English creates another layer of mediation. Gillian Wright’s *A Village Divided* makes the novel available to a wider readership but must negotiate dialect, kinship terms, religious language, and jokes whose social force cannot be reproduced by dictionary equivalence. Translation is valuable precisely when its limits remain visible. The English title emphasizes division, while Adha Gaon also carries the ache of incompleteness: a village made half by loss, memory, and narration.

Narrative Form and the People’s Archive

The novel rejects a single heroic protagonist. Its large cast, genealogical movement, digressions, and shifts of tone create a collective narrative in which no individual fully contains Gangauli. This form resembles village memory: a person is introduced through relatives, an old quarrel explains a present joke, and public events are remembered through who left, married, died, or lost land. History becomes social relation rather than a line of dates.

Humour protects this archive from solemn nationalist simplification. Political claims are brought down to the scale of appetite, vanity, misunderstanding, and local wit. Laughter does not deny the approaching tragedy. It tests grand language against ordinary intelligence and reveals the absurdity of demanding that villagers exchange a known home for an abstract homeland. Satire is one of the novel’s secular methods because it refuses to grant any political slogan sacred immunity.

The narrative also preserves contradiction. A character may express communal prejudice and later act through neighbourly obligation; an opponent of Pakistan may still fear life as a minority; a landlord may love the village and

exploit its workers. Such inconsistency is not weak characterization. It records how people inhabit several moral and social worlds at once. Communal ideology becomes dangerous when it compresses these mixed lives into one identity.

As a people's archive, Adha Gaon does not claim perfect inclusiveness. The story remains closer to some families than others, and elite memory can crowd out subaltern experience. Yet its polyphonic form makes hierarchy visible and leaves room for resistant speech. The village survives in language after its older structure has broken, not as a recovered whole but as a contested memory.

The Meaning of the Half Village

The title's 'half' first suggests the territorial and emotional division produced by Partition. Some villagers leave, households are broken, and those who remain are forced to explain their loyalty within a nation that may treat Muslim identity as suspect. Gangauli is not cut by the border, but its social imagination is divided by it. Pakistan becomes present through absence: missing people, interrupted relationships, and futures imagined elsewhere.

The half also describes the incompleteness of political explanations. The two-nation theory sees religion but not land, caste, language, gender, or local memory. A secular nostalgia for harmony may see shared culture but not exploitation. Land reform sees property but may not capture the emotional world attached to status and home. Raza's novel refuses to let any one of these partial truths declare itself complete.

Finally, the title names the condition of narrative memory. The village that can be written after transformation is necessarily fragmentary. Some voices are lost, some stories are reshaped, and intimacy becomes retrospect. Yet half does not mean worthless. A fragment can challenge the false completeness of national history. By naming its incompleteness, the novel creates a more honest form of remembrance.

Migration and the Politics of Remaining

Partition literature often makes migration its defining movement, but Adha Gaon gives equal attention to remaining. For Gangauli's Muslims, staying in India is not passive failure to choose Pakistan. It can express attachment to soil, family graves, dialect, neighbors, and a local moral geography older than the new states. The decision to remain nevertheless becomes politically marked. A Hindu resident may be assumed to belong, while a Muslim resident can be asked to prove that his home is truly his country. Raza exposes the injustice within this unequal burden of loyalty.

Those who migrate do not simply move from danger to secure identity. Pakistan is imagined differently before it is encountered: as religious shelter, political opportunity, employment, or escape from declining status. The ideal homeland cannot carry Gangauli's social world intact. Kinship may cross the border, but ritual routes, village jokes, land, and everyday recognition remain localized. Migration therefore produces a double estrangement. The migrant loses a known home, while those who stay experience the absent person as a continuing gap in community memory.

The contrast between departure and remaining also complicates moral judgment. Raza is deeply critical of political mobilization for Pakistan, yet the novel allows fear and uncertainty to remain intelligible. Indian Muslims faced a future shaped by majoritarian suspicion as well as constitutional promise. To acknowledge that fear is not to accept the two-nation theory. It is to recognize why abstract guarantees could seem fragile to people hearing reports of violence and political change. The novel's secularism is credible because it does not demand that minorities feel secure on command.

Home in Adha Gaon is thus neither a possession nor a sentimental slogan. It is a set of relationships maintained through presence and practice. People belong by burying their dead, speaking a local language, working the land, observing rituals, quarreling, caring, and remembering. National borders can assign citizenship, but they cannot manufacture this form of attachment. The village becomes half when political identity interrupts the ordinary acts through which home had been renewed.

Contemporary Relevance: Everyday Communalism after Partition

Adha Gaon remains contemporary because communal polarization still grows through ordinary channels. A rumour forwarded through a messaging platform, a joke that assigns collective guilt, a selective video, or a repeated claim about demographic threat can translate national ideology into neighbourhood suspicion. Digital speed changes the medium, but Raza's insight remains: communalism becomes powerful when it attaches itself to daily language and familiar anxieties.

The novel also helps distinguish conflict from communalism. Neighbours may quarrel over property, ritual routes, romance, or political patronage without those disputes being inherently religious. Communal actors redescribe a local

conflict as evidence of permanent hostility between whole populations. Once that frame is accepted, compromise appears betrayal and ordinary disagreement becomes civilizational danger. Reading context carefully is therefore a civic practice.

Rural change continues to connect identity with economic insecurity. Unequal access to land, employment, education, and state welfare can be communalized when leaders offer a religious enemy in place of structural explanation. Adha Gaon shows why cultural appeals cannot be answered by economic data alone, but it also shows why celebrations of composite culture are insufficient without justice. Shared festivals and language matter; so do material equality and political rights.

The novel's treatment of belonging is particularly relevant to debates in which citizenship is proved through ancestry, documentation, or public demonstrations of loyalty. Gangauli's residents belong through lived attachment: graves, labour, memory, speech, care, and participation in a common place. Their belonging does not require cultural sameness. Raza offers no easy cure for polarization, but he identifies resources that communal ideology must destroy in order to succeed local knowledge, mixed language, humour, mutual dependence, and the refusal to treat a neighbour as an abstraction.

Conclusion

Adha Gaon transforms Partition from a border event into a village process. Gangauli is divided not by a cartographic line but by the circulation of political categories that reorganize memory, fear, and aspiration. The novel demonstrates that communal identity is made in everyday speech and attached to existing hierarchies. Its account is persuasive because it neither accepts timeless hatred nor invents an innocent village harmony.

Raza's social world is shared and unequal. Muharram, mixed language, neighborhood obligation, and attachment to land challenge the two-nation theory, while caste, zamindari, lineage, and patriarchy prevent composite culture from becoming a substitute for justice. Partition and land reform together expose the unstable relation among religion, class, and national belonging. Those who speak for 'the Muslim community' or 'the village' are never socially interchangeable with everyone they claim to represent.

The novel's crowded form preserves this difference. Genealogy, gossip, ritual, satire, and domestic memory create an archive that official history cannot supply. Its incompleteness is acknowledged in the title itself. Gangauli survives as half a village: materially altered, emotionally scattered, and narratively unfinished. For contemporary readers, that unfinished quality is an ethical demand. Resisting communalism requires more than affirming tolerance. It requires protecting the complex relations through which people share a place, confronting the inequalities within those relations, and refusing political stories that make neighbours unreal.

Works Cited

- [1] Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Verso, 1992.
- [2] Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Duke UP, 2000.
- [3] Dhulipala, Venkat. *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India*. Cambridge UP, 2015.
- [4] Hasan, Mushirul, editor. *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. 2 vols., Roli Books, 1995.
- [5] Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. Yale UP, 2007.
- [6] Menon, Ritu, and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. Rutgers UP, 1998.
- [7] Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Oxford UP, 1990.
- [8] *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge UP, 2001.
- [9] Rai, Alok. *Hindi Nationalism*. Orient Longman, 2001.
- [10] Raza, Rahi Masoom. *Adha Gaon*. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009.
- [11] *A Village Divided*. Translated by Gillian Wright, Penguin Books India, 2008.
- [12] Saint, Tarun K. *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction*. Routledge, 2010.
- [13] Wright, Gillian. "The Making of Adha Gaon." *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1993, pp. 111–26.