

Afsana¹ of the Jehajin

The sahib² takes a fancy and gives me light work

Sugars me with candy and cheap sweet talk

While I crouch in the scorching heat, sweating and burnt,

breaking the tattered earth with my hurried hoe

He gapes and feeds his erotic fantasy

Ogling, his hormones savagely go berserk

He moves me to a far way field

And wounds my soul beyond heal

Sometimes a sahib's cook, sometimes a laborer

Sometimes a wife, sometimes a daughter

Sometimes a 10 year old bride

No matter where I be, or what I do

My fate was sealed before I knew

They long forgot that I too am a woman

Burnt by the sun after a hard day's work

I, the concubine of Girit, toil in several beds

For money, I am even rented to my man's friends

Who thrust and shove me at their will

My soul cries and my decorum reels

Has anyone wondered how I feel?

¹ Story

² White overseer in the sugar cane plantation during indenture system

Some call me Randi³, some as amoral as a doe

Some marry me for sex, while some just bonk their way through

Shame, honor, dignity, adieu, adieu, adieu

They have their share of fun

But I carry their seeds in my womb

Sometimes a *Madras*⁴, sometimes a *Kurwi*⁵

Sometimes a Whiteman

My children of different fathers

Do not make a neat clan

I can't give you a father's name, my child

You were born from an act of shame

The prostitution of my gender

Was Girmut's⁶ other name

To the laborer, sahibs and overseers

My sexual service I had to render

During Girmut, your mother was always up for tender

The highest bidder took me home

I couldn't complain nor escape

³ Derogatory Hindi word for a harlot

⁴ Term used by North Indians to refer to South Indians

⁵ Term used by south Indians to refer to North Indians

⁶ Indian version of the term agreement used to refer to the indenture system

So I complied in body but never in soul

Up in the morning at four, I carried you on my back

The hoe and sispaan⁷ lumbered in my hands

I dragged my feet with dead weight

And walked miles to my gruesome fate

I placed you on a sack near the field

And weeded the patch in the scorching heat

Your cries would break my heart and

Pull me towards you

Yet I would push myself to continue

As motherhood in the field was against the sahib's dictum

I did not have time to see you grow

To awe at your first smile

Or jump with joy with your first step

Not that I did not want to

But from the girmmit regime

This mother couldn't break through

My tales of misery would shake the Himalayas⁸

⁷ Metallic Lunch box used by indamines mostly in farms

⁸ Range of mountains in the India – Mount Everest is part of this mountain range

And all the water in the Ganges⁹ cannot clean my soul

I turn and twist in my grave, when you too believe

What they told

I only wish if you really knew

Who I was and how I lived?

How I survived this miserable girmmit

I wish you were there to write my tales

My agony, my toil, my misery in details

So that the *afsana* of the *Jehajin*¹⁰ too unveils

Now when writers pen my life

They forget my sorrows, my struggle, my strife

The call me a woman of low caste and morals

And walk away with audience, applause and laurels

I can't help it

All those who wrote about me were men

How they perceived me I don't understand

I cannot justify, I could not make a stand

Women's sorority was not in Gordon's plan

But think for a minute, if I was amoral and so bad,

⁹ The sacred river Ganges in India. Indians believe that washing themselves with the holy water of Ganges cleans them.

¹⁰ Feminine construct of Jehaji shipmates- a bond developed while on the ship to Fiji

Child of the Jehajin, who put the veil of honor on your head?

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