



This Land is My Land

RAZIA SULTANA KHAN

DEDICATED TO SOHAIL AHMED, A MUKTIJODDHA

Aahana took short agitated steps around the back courtyard of her house. She paused for a few seconds, to clear her head which was spinning, either because of the circles she was taking around the yard or because of the information her husband had given her the that morning.

Her two *jhas* were in the middle "hall room," which served as a living room, and their voices floated across to her from the back entrance of the house.

"Do you think Montu's wife will be happy to see us?"

"Didn't we put up with their whole family when they came to Dhaka? How long ago was that?"

"Three? Four years ago?" Her eldest *jha* pauses, then continued "But there were only five of them."

"So we're six. What's the big deal?"

"You're forgetting the children."

"Ok. But they're only babies. Aasha is two and Ayaan is... what? Four?"

"He'll be four in a couple of months."

Aahana moved away and continued walking. Thank God she didn't have children to worry about. It had not been an easy five years of marriage. Questions had started being targeted at her even before a

year had passed: *Did she not want children? Was she on the pill? Was their marriage not moving smoothly? Was there another woman?* She didn't have a mother-in-law (another blessing given her situation!) but there was no dearth of female relatives and elderly ones did not hesitate, no, felt it was their duty to offer advice and suggestions. The powder of such and such a root, the visit to a holy man they knew of - no one who went to him came away disheartened. Some went so far as to suggest which positions were good for fertility and which days of the month more auspicious.

She bore it all with lowered head as befitting a young Hindu woman but closeted in her bed room, she would give way to her grief. The only thing that sustained her was that Dhiman had never once expressed any concern or unhappiness at the fact that even after five years of marriage they still had no children.

A gentle breeze brought the fragrances of nature to her. She could almost separate the different smells. The subtle whiff of the *bokul* flower from the main road some 100 meters away, the astringent aroma of the *panch phoran bagar* that their new neighbors were

The powder of such and such a root, the visit to a holy man they knew of - no one who went to him came away disheartened. Some went so far as to suggest which positions were good for fertility and which days of the month more auspicious.