

# Aboobacker's Nadira - a resolute radical symbol assessing humanity and dignity in the face of the cultural oppression.

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**Abstract:** South India based author writing in Kannada, Sara Aboobacker expresses her suppressed perennial anguish which is very rampant in the Indian social set up regardless of any caste or creed. Not only do the mainstream authors represent the anguish and unrest thread but also the authors of the margins including the minority communities in India. To all the oppressions, the culture or religion has been the base. As racism in Africa, casteism and patriarchy in the Indian sub-continent that discriminates the women at different levels of humanity. Though Islam is fairly liberal religion with regard to its women's status and honour, here is an instance of the culture or religion oppressing the human dignity portrayed in the novel *Breaking Ties* by Sara Aboobacker. The article is an attempt to study the Muslim protagonist in a rebellious illustration breaking the manmade boundaries of religion.

**Keywords:** Culture, patriarchy, suppression, women discrimination, dignity.

**Introduction:** Aboobacker Sara was born to Pudiyapuri Ahmad and Zainabi Ahmad in Kasargod, Kerala on 30 June 1936. She is the finest model of radical author in the Indian Writing in English. She bravely writes about the cultural mysteries in the religion like Islam too that is approved of by neither the religion nor the community. She slyly conveys the message through the fiction about the eccentricity of religion causing implicitly in rebellion against the strange and vicious religious customs controlling the human life. Through this novel *Breaking Ties*, Sara Aboobacker has voiced as an ambassador for feminine sensibility and oppression and subordination in the patriarchal hegemony. The second part of the book reflects her autobiographical part as it duly supplements the motive of the protagonist relating to her life as well. The fiction translated from the Kannada original Chandragiri Theeradalli lays the intricate web of relations - economic, gender and religious - that operate within domesticity in a larger patriarchal order in which the women remain voiceless victims of male ideology and male interpretations of the religious scriptures.

The author Sara Aboobacker is the first Muslim girl in her community to have attended school and matriculated in the region. She has published seven novels, four collections of short stories, a book of essays and three Malayalam works translated into Kannada. She runs her own publishing house, Chandragiri Prakashana, named after the river in this novel. Aboobacker's books largely focus on the lives

of Muslim women living in the Kasaragod region, bordering the Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka. She focuses on issues of equality and injustice within her community, critiquing patriarchal systems within religious and familial groups. The *Breaking Ties* is evidently a feminist novel with an assumption of the female body as the center of struggle. The novel focusses on the Muslim woman's world and gives expression to the subaltern experience of oppression of the poor, uneducated Muslim women victimized by the Muslim patriarchy. Being silenced by the patriarchy that governs women's lives in the name of religion, the protagonist an unlettered Muslim girl fails to voice her story of misery and indignity. The author educates her protagonist in the second half of the novel and gives a voice during the predicament of Muslim women within the unilateral practices and customs of marriage in Islam. Both the first and the last part of the novel constitute an internal critique of the Muslim patriarchy.

The translator creates an atmosphere of Indian domesticity and at the same time maintains the individuality of the text by preserving the flavour of the specificities of local customs, culture and language. The translation dismantles the male discourse by supplementing the language difference through culture-specific terms like '*mangalasutra*,' '*atte*,' '*happala*,' '*sandige*,' '*madi*,' etc. There are some culture specific terms like birthing room. The translation attempts to effectively convey moments of shared communion characteristic of female experience as when *Phaniyamma* consoles *Dakshayini*; another child widow, supports and encourages *Premabai*; a young Christian midwife and helps an untouchable daughter in a difficult delivery. Niranjana's translation of *Phaniyamma* clearly projects a feminist discourse right at the outset and remarkably contributes to the creation of a female tradition. In recalling the words of *Phaniyamma*'s brother "that no other woman like his sister Phani had ever been born or would be in the future" (p.1), the novel doesn't really play up to the dominant male ideology in the absence of any overt rebellion, nor does it reinforce. On the contrary, the translation successfully represents the gestures of defiance and subversion implicit in it.

**Discussion:** In 1981, Aboobacker published her first article; an editorial on communal harmony in a local monthly Kannada-language magazine *Lankesh Patrike*, following this she began writing stories and novels focusing on her own community, the Beary people, a Muslim community living across the some regions of Karnataka and Kerala.

Aboobacker is most renowned for her first novel *Chandragiriya Theeradalli* (1981), which was later translated into English by Vanamala Vishwanatha as *Breaking Ties* and Marathi by Shivarama Padikkal in 1991. The novel was initially published in serialised form in a local monthly magazine *Lankesh Patrike* and later republished as a novel. The fictional narrative represents the tragic plight of the central character Nadira; a helpless and young Muslim girl who is a well mature and most beautiful girl. She is illiterate but possesses a good sense of life and her worth towards herself and her family; parents and later husband and in-laws. She inherits nothing from her father of an egotistical and dictatorial person. In course of time, as she grows fourteen she is married to Rasid; a suitable match who proves as perfect and true match for her. Their happiness witnesses a new horizon with an entry of a child in their life. Their life reaches happiness

to a high index for couple of years after the birth of child. Then a villain in Mohammad Khan; her own father rises to the occasion to spoil their happy life. His arrogance and avarice of his daughter's beauty, he assumes, is viable even when she is married and with a son. Besides he thinks his desire to be rich and affluent life is feasible only through Nadira. He brings back his daughter with her son to his home on the pretext of visiting their home located in the neighbouring village. To realize his conspiracy, she desists Nadira from going to her husband and creates such conditions that would oblige her to seek divorce from her husband and they are separated as well against their will making his motive easy to become rich. In meantime before their divorce, Rashid arranges to have their child kidnapped in order to force Nadira to return to him that breaks Nadira's heart but their love for them lessens not even in the least. Muhammad Khan makes his attempts to realise his dream by remarrying a rich man of the village who in return assures him sufficient amount of money; though wealthy but as old as her father with many children. Nadira defies her father from his intentions of her marriage with the old man to which Muhammad Khan has to acquiesce and to give up his intention. In later course, he suffers of age and feels ashamed at his daughter's grief for her husband and son. So he is ready for her reunion with husband and son. But this time, they have to confront the religion. As per the religious code, Nadira can reunite with Rashid only if she goes through the ritual of marriage with another man, sleeps with him and gets a divorce from him. This thought itself terrifies her in refusing to this flashing marriage. She is then convinced by her mother-in-law and her own mother to undergo the ordeal for her husband and child. She reluctantly consents the proposition. The marriage takes place but the sight of the man with whom she is to spend one night as an ordeal terrorizes her culminating herself in immersing in the river Chandragiri flowing by the village, it stands as a witness through her childhood to the last breath. The very thought of spending the night brings aversion to her. At the heart of the novel is the question Nadira asks herself silently, "But what kind of law was this that the man who called himself husband should pronounce talaq three times from wherever he was and the marriage null and void!" (p.75). It is an encumbered question that attempts to deconstruct the concept of marriage. Nadira can neither be saved by the patriarchal order nor by the religious scriptures as the pious system of humanity. Both of them witness a human life being ruined at no fault of hers that devastates the entire human life haphazardly.

Muhammad Khan's brutal treatment of his child on the first night is heart-rending. Nadira's predicament reflects the psychological trauma arising from the conflict in which the female body stands at the centre. Muhammad Khan who ruins Nadira's marriage and wants her to marry a wealthy old husband the second time, stands for the masculine principle that negates the worth of women.

The translator Vananala Viswanatha provides a fairly informative introduction locating the novel. She employs the modern techniques of translation to 'represent the Muslim woman's world that observes how the translation becomes the agent of voicing subaltern consciousness. The translator enlightens in the introduction the change of the title to *Breaking Ties*, "The title could have been translated into English as *On the Banks of Chandragiri* to reflect its Kannada source. But since it sounded too literary to reflect the political edge of the book and somewhat familiar." (2001: xix). She further says, "After a prolonged

discussion on the implications of the title, we selected the more neutral and nuanced title *Breaking Ties* (xxi). In a way, it lays the cards on the table right at the outset as it were, representing the feminist project symbolically.

The narrative leads towards a reinterpretation of the religious codes which the patriarchal hegemony has used against women for its own convenience. The novel critiques the patriarchal order and argues for reform and justice for women. Resistance to patriarchal ideology is implicit in the question which points out absolute disregard for the woman as an equal partner in marriage or for her feelings.

It is important to note that the writers, translators and the translation editors of such novels are women who seem to have joined hands for the common cause of equality. In the novels patriarchy is a common hegemonic structure within which women live and struggle; the particular kinds of oppression women face differ depending on their setting in caste, class, region and religion. (*Breaking Ties*, p.xvii). Translations act as powerful agents in the task of deconstructing the predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience enabling the marginalized voices to find utterance. If *Phaniyamma* chronicles and questions the traditional Hindu codification and exposes the inhumanity of the social and religious rituals practiced against women, *Breaking Ties* similarly translates the religious codes against women and the harsh patriarchal attitudes of the Muslim community that all but stifle the female voices. By taking these texts to a wider public, the translators not only underline the articulation of the implicit resistance but become participants in the creation of meaning.

**Conclusion:** Sara Aboobacker, in the preface to the 1995 edition of the novel, earnestly urges for an impartial study and reinterpretation of the religious prescriptions. *Chandragirya Tiradalli* foregrounds the Muslim woman's burden of inequality in social and religious spheres. There are number of works offering similar custom based situations with certain restrictions on the authors, as of Aboobacker is concerned, she has successfully represented a voice seeking positive and firm reinterpretation of the scriptures without hurting their intentions of socializing the society. For the scriptures, perhaps, allow reconsideration and reinterpretation of the texts but not the stringent followers. Their reaction may cause to destabilise the entire society as Lalitambika Antarjanam who dares stand for the cause of the Tatri woman though terrorized by the thought of writing about the Tatri.

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