



## VOICELESS VICTIMS OF PATRIARCHY AND OPPRESSION IN SARA ABOOBACKER'S *BREAKING TIES*

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### Abstract

Sara Aboobacker's groundbreaking novel *Chandragiri Theeradalli* is a representation of female oppression in a male dominated society. The plight of the titular character Nadira is every woman in our country who never had a say in their domestic life. Dominated by patriarchy and religious norms, Nadira's fate is sealed when she was born as a woman in a poverty stricken section of the society, pushed to marginalization even further. The novel sheds light on the misogynistic attitude of men deciding the fate of women and controlling their entire life. Many situations in the novel highlights the most ignored issues faced by women such as injustice, domestic violence, marital rape etc. The paper aims to bring forth the cultural and religious misfortunes encountered by women in different communities that are still prevalent in many parts of the world. The female characters depict the lives of women in rural areas and yet it resonates with women with different cultural or religious backgrounds. The research will focus on treatment towards women who are frequently controlled, oppressed and manipulated through religion and patriarchy. The female characters in the novel portray the lives of many Muslim women who are still under the control of patriarchal figures. The research underscores the struggles faced by women in Muslim communities and the right to exercise their own choice. The paper explores the themes of gender inequality, personal autonomy, misogyny and societal expectations. Through feminist perspective, the research aims to uncover various forms of oppression towards women.

### Keywords

*Feminism, Oppression, Religion, Patriarchy, Gender roles, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

The novel is set against the backdrop of a young woman named Nadira and her lamentable experiences throughout the story. Sara Aboobacker's renowned novel *Chandragiri Theeradalli* is translated into English as *Breaking Ties* which primarily focuses on the encounters of marginalised and illiterate women from low social economic backgrounds. Set in the Bhatkal region of coastal Karnataka, the novel foregrounds the silenced voices of women who endure emotional abandonment, domestic exploitation, religiously justified subordination, and the trauma of polygamy and triple talaq. This paper examines the novel through a feminist lens, focusing on how Aboobacker challenges religious misinterpretations and cultural norms that deny women agency and dignity. By analysing family dynamics, and the socio-religious environment, the study



highlights how patriarchal power operates within private and public spheres to produce voiceless victims.

It is important to note that the author Sara Aboobacker herself belongs to the Muslim community and critiques the unruly practices and norms of a community. She became the voice of women and her works often examined the role of women in society, particularly in the region of Kasargod (Khajane, 2023). Nadira's story provides us an account of realistic struggles faced by Muslim women in the coastal region of Karnataka and Kerala, focusing on the narratives of women who are oppressed under patriarchy and controlled and manipulated, often masquerading as religious norms (Alabanoor, 2023). The paper highlights the drawbacks of being born into a community which neglects the rights of women while advocates for men and bestows them with power beyond the control of women in the community. It is worth noting that male characters in the text have a natural agency to dominate, be it Mahammad Khan, Nadira's father or her loving husband Rashid who leaves her at the behest of his father in law, without having the complete information which led to him divorcing his wife. Aboobakar highlights the account of women who suffer and struggle under patriarchy and oppression in her book addressing the many challenges marginalized women have to overcome throughout their lives. Nadira's noted experience in the novel emphasizes the victimization of women under religious norms and structures (Khajane, 2023). The novel also stresses upon the unequal and unjust gender laws that often get exploited at the hands of men and women who are subjected to agony and mistreatment. *Breaking Ties* is a seminal text that exposes the suffocating layers of social, cultural, and religious oppression that shape women's identities. The novel examines how patriarchal authority is disguised as religious tradition and how women's silence becomes both a survival strategy and a symbol of their subjugation. At its centre is Nadira, whose life epitomises the struggles of women denied autonomy in marriage, motherhood, and community interaction. Through her narrative, Aboobacker interrogates the intersection of patriarchy, faith, class, and gender, illustrating how structural inequalities perpetuate voicelessness. In the novel life of an innocent woman is sacrificed as a result of her abusive father and egotistical husband, despite her complete lack of fault. Neither the patriarchal society surrounding her nor the Holy Scriptures in which she placed profound faith are able to protect Nadira. Throughout the novel, Mohammad Khan is depicted as a self-centered man driven primarily by greed. His relentless pursuit of wealth becomes his overriding priority, ultimately leading to the devastation of poor Nadira's life. (Dr. Pauline VN). Sara Aboobacker brings our attention towards the misdeeds carried out by men under the notion of practising customs and rules of the religion. She also emphasizes the role of patriarchy in controlling women in every element of it. In the novel, women such as Nadira the protagonist, her mother Fatima or her sister Jamila are helpless, ineffective and powerless; they were all dominated by one single tyrannical man Mahammad Khan. The paper illustrates how polygamy and talaq are prevalent and widespread in the community and women experience hardships under their regressive rule. The present research solely focuses on the representation of women and the horrors they have to cope with. In the novel, the female characters lack independence and are given no authority. Throughout the novel, the only solution women had was to either follow the command or feel defeated by life.

### **Polygamy:**

The novel captures an aspect of polygamy prevalent in Muslim community, to this day. Even though there are rules pertaining to multiple marriages where women are not subjected to injustice. (Ulfa and Merita, 2023). Nadira's husband was ready to marry another girl on a whim because he thought Nadira can do it and so can he. Sara Abubakar brings attention towards second marriages where a man can marry multiple times whereas a woman is not given the same freedom



of choice somehow it is understood that she has to adjust with her husband's decision. The primary question is why polygamy is practised by only one gender while the other gender is condescended for the same; the following point is why almost all the system works in favor of men. There is emotional and social violence caused by polygamy. Although permitted within Islamic law under specific ethical conditions, Aboobacker portrays how men misuse the practice to justify desire, greed, or ego. These practices reduce women to a dispensable object in the household. Polygamy becomes an instrument of male privilege, normalised through community approval and female silence. Women lose her status, emotional security, and domestic authority, underscoring how women are structurally denied rights within marriage. Aboobacker's critique does not attack religious principles; instead, it exposes cultural distortions that weaponize religion against women.

### **Triple Talaq:**

In the novel, Sara Aboobakar stresses on the Islamic practise of triple talaq wherein men can repeat Talaq three times and divorce their wives instantly, this custom disproportionately benefits only men, and on the other hand women are left without any support. In 2017, the Supreme court of India banned this practice in order to provide women a chance to stand against injustice within their own community and it has been observed that often men have abused and manipulated these laws to serve their own interests (Farooquee, 2022). The unilateral triple talaq, a practice through which men can arbitrarily dissolve marriage without consultation or justification. The threat of triple talaq becomes a constant mechanism of fear, disciplining women into submission. The quick, irreversible nature of the pronouncement leaves women with no legal or financial protection, rendering them socially vulnerable and economically dependent. By illustrating how men exploit religious loopholes to dismiss their wives, Aboobacker reveals the asymmetrical power embedded in marital relations. Nadira's husband utters talaq hastily and on impulse coerced by his own father-in-law Mahammad Khan because of his own grudge against his son-in-law which eventually ruined the life of his daughter. The novel essentially captivates the power struggle of not only men and women but also of men and men; Rashid and Mahammad Khan are a clear illustration of this. Men are afforded extensive autonomy in determining whether to marry or to initiate a divorce. A marriage can be dissolved through the utterance of the word *talaq* three times; a process that appears almost perfunctory and men may seek divorce without requiring approval from any authority. Although the Muslim community adheres unquestioningly to the regulations embedded in its religious framework, members occasionally recognize certain rules as unnecessary or problematic. Nevertheless, they are often unable to challenge the dominant ruling class or the cultural norms that govern their lives. Moreover, because women in Muslim society are traditionally idealized as devoted wives who must remain within the domestic sphere, responsible for caring for husbands, children, and the elderly, as well as performing all household duties without objection, their access to education and various other freedoms has been significantly restricted. (Dr. Praveena Alabanoor, 2023). Mahammad Khan's tyrannical approach led to Nadira's talaq from Rashid, when she was not even aware that such a thing could be done even without the presence of a Maulvi, a religious head of their community. Nadira was never asked whether she wishes to divorce her husband or whether she wants to remarry another person, someone who is almost of her father's age, she did not have any choice or power to exercise, throughout the novel she was forced to follow the orders from her father. Her character portrays her as helpless and vulnerable who is often at the mercy of her father. It's bad to be a woman but it's worse to be an illiterate woman. The book stresses on marginalized women who were not given a chance to be educated because they belonged to a social economic background hence they were not aware about their own community rituals (Alabanoor, 2023).





### Objectives of the study:

The research aims to bring forth serious issues prevailing against women in the society such as oppression, patriarchy, child marriages etc. The paper focuses on gender inequality, marital rape and the lack of autonomy in personal life. The research poses following objectives, such as:

- ✓ To explore the role of religious laws in controlling and shaping women's identity.
- ✓ To analyse how the novel depicts women's oppression and marginalization.
- ✓ To assess the practise of polygamy and divorce (Talaq) in the community.

### Review of Literature:

In her essay titled *Voice of Muslim Women in the Novel Breaking Ties* by Sara Abubakar (2023) author Dr. Praveena Alabanoor says that the novel can be examined from a religious perspective because it depicts Muslim women as vulnerable figures constrained by their community's rituals, rules, and regulations. The narrative explores issues such as divorce, social challenges, marital rape, and the ways in which women are denied the freedom to make crucial life choices. Her paper also offers insight into the struggles faced by Muslim women, highlighting the marginalization of the illiterate, the oppression of the poor, and the exploitation of women under Muslim patriarchal structures.

In words of Muralidharan Khajane (2023) Sara Aboobakar became a voice for Muslim women in the coastal region of Karnataka calling attention towards deceitfulness and double standards of the community mandates that only advocates for men in authority. Her depiction of women in her works made people aware of the abominations women had to bear within their community.

In the article titled *Triple Talaq: India Muslim women in limbo after instant divorce ruling* (2022) by Neyaz Farooque, it is explained that even after the Indian government outlawed the triple talaq, many women are still stranded by their husbands to ensure that they do not have to pay alimony to their wives. They are neither married nor divorced completely, the case rests in limbo.

Studies by critics such as Fathima (2016) note that Aboobacker exposes "internalized patriarchy that governs women's choices." Research by Pramila (2019) highlights the novel's regional specificity, pointing out that Aboobacker represents the socio-religious environment of Karnataka's coastal Muslim community with rare authenticity. Feminist analyses of Avaste discuss the author's critique of male hypocrisy, misuse of Sharia interpretations, and the emotional suffering imposed on women.

### Methodology:

The research employs qualitative analysis and theoretical framework and is studied through feminist approach and subaltern theory. The primary data is Sara Aboobacker's novel *Breaking Ties* with secondary sources from relevant book chapters, scholarly articles from gender studies and feminist literary theories.

### Discussion:

The story of Nadira is an eye-opener for the society as it echoes for help, seeking remedy from the cruel and powerful system. The book can be examined from a feminist lens as it portrays women as submissive, helpless and under the control of men (Alabanoor, 2023). Nadira's character is crushed under the weight of rules and regulations of the community however the same community favors a man. Religion plays a pivotal role in the novel because it highlights the hypocrisy of the laws that benefit men alone and does not support women in the slightest.

Aboobacker's narrative foregrounds the emotional landscapes of women whose lives are governed by external authority—husbands, elders, religious leaders, and societal expectations.



Nadira's silence is portrayed not as consent but as a sign of systemic disempowerment. Women are trained to accept suffering as destiny, while men justify their dominance through selective religious interpretations. The community's expectations force women to prioritise honour over happiness, obedience over individuality. The novel also critiques women's internal complicity—older women who replicate patriarchal norms, believing strict control is necessary for preserving tradition. These layered oppressions reveal how voice, agency, and identity are eroded. Aboobacker does not offer simplistic solutions; instead, she presents moments of resistance. Nadira's gradual questioning of injustice, her emotional awakening, and her desire for freedom represent a symbolic rupture from tradition. The title *Breaking Ties* reflects not only her personal liberation but also the larger call to challenge oppressive customs that silence women.

### Conclusion:

Oppression of women has been normalized since ages in our society wherein a woman has to endure the suffering at the hands of society and men in her life. Nadira's decision to end her life is heartbreaking but at the same time she was relieved of her life altering dilemma. Her narrative makes us understand that rarely a woman is offered or allowed to make decisions for herself. The paper also addressed the phoniness of code of conduct for women and men whereas men get to make decisions for their women and are regarded as the ultimate authority.

*Breaking Ties* stands as an important feminist text that exposes the suffering endured by women trapped in patriarchal systems legitimized by cultural and religious authority. Aboobacker's portrayal of polygamy, triple talaq, and domestic marginalisation highlights the structural nature of women's voicelessness. Through empathetic storytelling, she reconstructs the interior world of oppressed women and argues for dignity, justice, and reform. The novel's relevance persists, resonating with contemporary debates on Muslim women's rights and gender equality. Ultimately, Aboobacker gives voice to the voiceless, insisting that breaking ties with oppression is an essential step toward reclaiming womanhood.

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