

The Bond of Sisterhood in Syed Waliullah's *Tree Without Roots* and Abu Issaquah's *Surya-Dighal Bari* :A Comparative Study

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Abstract: In feminist thinking, the term “sisterhood” is generally used to refer to a kind of socio-psychological attachment among women that is based on the appreciation of their regular understandings and aspirations. The bond of sisterhood is taken seriously by many scholars and writers—both female and male—throughout the world as a means of support for women of different ages, classes and backgrounds. Examples of sisterly bonding and supporting activities are, as expected, available in the literary works of different writers of different places and periods who are usually seen to portray the bond of sisterhood as a tool of women's struggles for survival in the patriarchal world. *Tree Without Roots* (1967) and *Surya-Dighal Bari* (1955) are two well-appreciated novels by two male writers of Bengal—Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) and Abu Ishaque (1926-2003) respectively—in which we can find reflections of effective sisterly bonding among the marginalized women of the rural Bengal of the mid 20th century. Hence, this article tries to present a comparative reading of the two above-mentioned novels, both of which were written in Bengali first and translated into English later on, with a view to analyzing the depth and dynamics of sisterhood of the grass-root level village women of the pre-partition as well as the post-partition Bengal.

Key Words: Patriarchy, marginalization, sisterhood, struggle, survival, self-reliance

Introduction: *Tree Without Roots* (1967) and *Surya-Dighal Bari* (1955) are two classic novels written by two eminent Bengali novelists, Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) and Abu Ishaque (1926-2003) respectively. *Tree Without Roots* (1967) is the English translation or transcreation of the famous Bangla novel, *Lal Shalu* (1948). This male-centred novel focuses on the religious exploitations of the simple-minded rural people of the Bengal of the mid 20th century by the fake *pirs* and such other so-called saintly persons. *Surya-Dighal Bari*, on the other hand, is a female-focused fiction dealing with the life-struggles of women in gender and religion prejudiced rural Bengal of the 1940s and 1950s. Interestingly, both the novels present a good view of the sheer marginalization of the then village women under the patriarchal socio-economic system. At the same time, they also provide pictures of women's fighting back by creating a strong social and psychological bonding among

them. Therefore, *Tree Without Roots* and *Surya-Dighal Bari*, though written by two male writers, have been chosen here to study from a feminist point of view. By presenting a list of oppressive patriarchal customs noticeable in the selected novels as well as by listing the mentionable activities of some of the female characters of the said narratives that reflect their close sisterly bonding, this paper tries to make the readers follow and appreciate the hidden philosophy of sisterhood used in the novels under discussion.

Patriarchy versus Sisterhood: Before presenting an analysis of the patriarchal tyrannies as well as of the sisterly ties in the selected novels, a short theoretical explanation of the terms—“patriarchy” and “sisterhood”—is provided here for a better understanding of the discussion.

According to the feminist thinkers, “patriarchy” is “a system of domination in which men as a group has power over women as a group.” (Storey 113) Women’s marginalization is basically the result of the patriarchal social-economic system. To justify and maintain “the male monopoly of positions of economic, political, and social power”, patriarchy “promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men.” (Tyson 84) Also “a range of practices” are customized to subdue women, and to uphold the patriarchal ruling system (Andermahr et al. 151). To ensure a better way of life for women, feminist writers and activists have, therefore, shown a number of ways out among which sisterhood is one. By creating strong “women-women relationships”, i.e. “sisterhood”, marginalized women of a certain class or group may get the necessary support from one another to survive against the various forms of patriarchal socio-psychological violence, oppressions and exploitations (Andermahr et al. 291). Hence, the idea of sisterhood is hailed by many feminist scholars and writers.

Syed Waliullah, Abu Ishaque, and Their Concerns for the Marginalized Women of the Mid 20th Century Bengal: Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) was “not a prolific writer” in the true sense since he wrote only three novels along with two volumes of short stories and three plays in Bangla, and one novel in English. Still he was regarded as a major Bengali writer during his lifetime; and even now most of his works “are considered exceptional additions” to the field of Bangla literature. Moreover, *Tree Without Roots*, the English transcreation of his first novel—*Lalsalu*—by himself, is taken as a notable English fiction by a Bengali novelist (see Zaman n.pag., and Alam n.pag.). Syed Waliullah had a deep psychological connection with his place of birth though he lived in different foreign lands at different times of his life. As a result, his writings often expose different issues close to the lives of the people of this very land of his lifetime.

Abu Ishaque (1926-2003), another significant writer of the mid 20th century Bengal, also did not write much; in “his literary career of approximately half a century”, he “wrote three novels, forty-eight short stories and a voluminous dictionary of contemporary Bangla language.” (Selim viii) Among his writings, *Surya-Dighal Bari*, the first novel by the novelist, is the most well-known. Passing his childhood and early youth in rural Bengal, Abu Ishaque had the opportunity of observing the ordinary village people's struggles for survival amid different natural and man-made hindrances. Naturally, the sensitive mind of the novelist was deeply moved by those views. Hence, in his novels and short stories, Ishaque portrayed the lives of the “farmers, fishermen, boatmen, religious bigots, *bauls* ... , painstaking *char* youths, and destitute women that he had the opportunity to watch closely.” (Selim vii)

The philosophy of feminism—“the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes”—began to flourish in the western world since the late 18th century with the aim to providing equality and justice to the long-neglected female-sex of the world (Burkett and Brunell n.pag.). However, it was not an issue of much interest in the mid 20th century Bengal since that was a time of “political turmoil” in the Indian subcontinent, causing “the emergence of Pakistan” and India in 1947, and “the birth of Bangladesh out of the ruins of East Pakistan” in 1971 (Siddiqui 13). Hence, the people of East Bengal were concerned mostly with the long expected freedom from the 190 year-long British colonial rule. Moreover, as the inhabitants of an economically underdeveloped country, majority of the people of this land had to remain busy most of time with the thoughts of earning their livings. Therefore, even the conscious people, like poets and novelists, also did not have the opportunity of thinking much about women's rights. As a result, most of the well-appreciated novels of the mid 20th century Bengal focused on the lives and aspirations of the “village” people, representing the struggles and the hopes of “the Collective Man” rather than those of an “individual” or of a particular group (Siddiqui 26). Naturally, Syed Waliullah and Abu Ishaque also focused, in their own unique ways, on the different social and psychological issues. Thus, though they were deeply touched by the sufferings of the helpless village women, they could not focus merely on the problems of the women; rather they tried to bring forth the pictures of the various ills devouring the whole rural society of Bengal of that time.

Oppressive Social and Familial Treatment of Women in *Tree Without Roots* and *Surya-Dighal Bari*: *Tree Without Roots* is a male-centred novel, focusing on the rise of its middle-aged protagonist—Majeed—from a vagabond to a so-called saintly person by exploiting the religious faiths of the naïve village people of Mahabbatnagar. *Surya-Dighal Bari*, on the other hand, is a female-centred fiction revolving round the character of a single

mother of about thirty years, namely Jaigun. Both the texts provide a quite similar picture of oppression and marginalization of women. In both the narratives, women are seen to be treated as objects having no freedom of their own. They are also noticed to be the victims of polygamy, domestic violence, and so on. The inhuman and unjust social and familial treatment of women as portrayed in the two novels under review is categorized and listed below:

I. Having a Number of Wives Simultaneously: In both the novels, women are found to be the victims of the polygamy of men. Men are seen to marry to fulfill their carnal desires, and to get children. Women are expected to keep their husbands happy, and to abide by all their decisions.

Majeed marries Rahima first after becoming successful in making arrangements for his living by exploiting the religious faiths of the simpleminded people of the village of Mahabbatnagar. Rahima, a young and childless widow who comes to Majeed's house as his first wife, is described by the omniscient narrator of the novel as follows:

Rahima was tall and broad, with large breasts and wide hips. Majeed soon realized that she was not only big, but strong too. She could carry heavy loads with remarkable ease ... Her clear, sonorous voice could be heard from quite a distance. But her body, that tall, full body which had first attracted Majeed, veiled a gentle, yielding, understanding personality; she never showed anger. (21)

Though he leads a happy conjugal life with Rahima, Majeed remarries Jamila as soon as his social and economical foundation becomes firmer. Using the excuse of having no children yet, he informs Rahima of his decision of marrying again, "I have therefore decided to marry again. ... I will marry so that God may bless us with children who will bring joy and happiness to our home." (91) Interestingly, Rahima does not say anything in response since she also thinks that the remarriage of her husband may bring the lost happiness back. So, Majeed takes Jamila, a very young girl of the same village, "as his second wife" (92).

Like Majeed, Khaleque, the most well off person of the village, is also found to have two wives at the same time. Since Amena—his first wife of 13 years—has failed to give birth to any children, Khaleque marries another young woman, named Tanu, and places her in the same house with Amena.

Surya-Dighal Bari also provides examples of man's polygamy. Even after his already having three wives at home, Gedu Pradhan—the most solvent person of the village—is seen to be interested in Jaigun. So, he influences

Shafi's *Ma*, Jaigun's relative-cum-neighbour, to provoke husband-forsaken Jaigun to marry him. Thinking the proposal of Gedu Pradhan a good one, Shafi's *Ma* says to Jaigun:

Gedu Pradhan ... has five bulls, two cows. He stores ten morai (granary) of rice grains every year. Also owns a huge property. You have to work hard there, I know. But ... you won't have to work alone. Pradhan has three more wives—four daughters-in-law. He has a garden full of gold. They'll work for you, and you'll be there to guide them (65).

Later on, Karim Bakhs—the second husband of Jaigun who divorces her for no reason during the time of famine—is found to be interested in taking her back as his wife though he is now the husband of another woman, named Anjuman. When Jaigun refuses his proposal, Karim Bakhs says to Shafi's *Ma*, "I say this for her good. I'd be happy having her back, and my children would be happy, too." (155)

II. Beating Wives and Daughters: Along with the practice of polygamy, the tradition of beating wives and even adult daughters is also noticed in the selected novels. Moreover, married women are seen to be taught by their relatives to bear all the tortures of their husbands without any kind of protest.

In *Tree Without Roots*, Jamila, the second wife of Majeed, is tortured by her husband in the name of teaching religious lessons. In fact, Majeed wants to make Jamila subdued to him; but as he fails, he uses the names of the *Pir* of the *mazar* and of God to frighten her and to make her listen to him. When these also do not work, he keeps Jamila locked in the dark *mazar* room on a stormy night, which makes the young girl critically ill.

Kulsum, a young widow, is seen to be "terribly beaten by her father" for the crime of her seeking Majeed's help in solving a familial problem (33). Her mother is also said to be beaten quite frequently by her father for almost nothing.

In *Surya-Dighal Bari*, Karim Bakhs, Jaigun's second husband, is found to be a wife-beater too. He is such a person who gets "immense sadistic pleasure" in "beating his wives, even killing one" (Selim x). The heartrending incident of his killing his first wife, Meheran, by beating her much in her advanced pregnancy is described as follows:

It was midnight when he once came back home listening to *jatra* ... Meheran was late opening the door for him. He beat her mercilessly with this very stick for the negligence. Pregnant Meheran couldn't endure the humiliation and chose to hang herself in a fig-tree to find her escape. He had to spend around one thousand taka to settle the

legal hassle that ensued. (29)

After the death of Meheran, Karim Bakhs marries Jaigun, the widow of Jabbar Munshi. However, his old habit of wife beating remains the same. Hence, after her divorce with Karim Bakhs, Jaigun is found to think of her past days as such—“For long six years he experimented his muscle power on her ... Not a single part of her body was spared.” (29) Interestingly, Jaigun’s mother-in-law is seen to comfort her by saying, “It isn’t a big deal *bau*.... The place your husband hits will be holy to go to *behest*” (30).

III. Blaming and Forsaking Wives for Any Familial Misfortune or Even for No Reason:

The novels also present a view of another patriarchal tyranny that is blaming wives for any kind of familial misfortune or sometimes even for no evident reason. Some unfortunate women even are seen to be made bound to leave their husbands’ residences for different superstitious beliefs.

Kulsum, in *Tree Without Roots*, is found to feel herself guilty for the death of her husband since all her in-laws think this way. So, she does not think of asking her in-laws for any kind of support for herself and her son in the absence of her husband—the breadwinner of the family. Unfortunately, like her in-laws, her parents and siblings also ill-treat her thinking herself guilty for her misfortune. Her mother says to her brother, “She’s eaten one husband, she’ll eat the next one too.” (31) In response to her mother’s saying, her brother asks her, “How did you eat him?” (31) However, patient Kulsum is seen to take the comment and question lightly, and to answer in a placid voice, “I swallowed him” (31).

Rahima, the very devoted first wife of Majeed, is also implicitly blamed by her husband for his so-called joyless and monotonous life. Majeed marries for the second time by giving the excuse of Rahima’s being infertile. Interestingly, Rahima also accepts the blame quite easily since living in the patriarchal society for many years she has learnt to accept different types of charges without any kind of protest. However, Majeed’s second wife, Jamila, “is also shown to be childless in the course of the novel” which, in fact, indicates to Majeed’s infertility rather than of his wives’ (Kamal 12).

Amena is the most pitiable of all the victims of fake blaming. Her husband has married for the second time for her being infertile, and the new wife has already given birth to a number of children. In such a situation, Amena wishes to get “some water blessed” by “the *pir*” of a nearby village from the hope of conceiving a baby (53). However, when Majeed somehow comes to know about her wish, he declares her a sinner. Believing in the fake statement of Majeed, all start to treat Amena in such a way that soon she

loses her sanity. Ill-fated Amena, then, is found to be sent back to her parental dwelling for good.

In *Surya-Dighal Bari*, Jaigun is seen to be divorced by her second husband during the time of famine for no reason. Jaigun recalls with reproach, "After Jabbar Munshi expired Jaigun depended on him for her protection. But he failed utterly. For no good reason he divorced her during the famine" (21).

Jaigun's ten year old daughter—Maimun—is also falsely blamed by her in-laws, and sent back to her mother's dwelling soon after her marriage with Osman, a young widower of the same village.

IV. Discriminating between a Son and a Daughter: Not only are the wives the victims of the male-dominated social customs, both the adult and the growing up daughters also.

In *Tree Without Roots*, Kulsum is found to live a life of utter miseries with her son in her parental abode after the death of her husband. The narrator of the novel mentions, "Since the death of her husband, she had been staying with her parents, trying to eke out a living by husking paddy or doing odd jobs" (31). Though she is not at all financially supported by her parents and her brother, she is both physically and verbally abused by them quite frequently.

Surya-Dighal Bari draws a picture of familial discrimination between a son and a daughter. When Jaigun is divorced by her second husband, her husband keeps the son—Kashu—with him. On the other hand, the two little daughters, Maimun and Khuki, are thrown away from the house with her. Jaigun sorrowfully recalls the incident:

The age-old societal code made three-year old Kashu remain with his father Karim Bakhs while Jaigun was left with Maimun and her newborn daughter. ... Famine had just set in then. Forsaken by her husband Jaigun feared to get out of her house for social disrepute. Her breast milk dried up because of continuous starvation. Naturally Khuki, a child at the breast, thinned as a rake as Jaigun failed to breastfeed her. The baby struggled hard for life but had to give up at long last. Failing to afford *kafan* ... for her Jaigun used a portion of her *Bombai sari* to give her a funeral. (39)

Though Jaigun loses one of her daughters and feels very sorry for the unfortunate child, she herself also practices the same custom of prioritizing a son over a daughter. As her 13 year-old son—Hashu—works as a porter to earn money for the family, she takes more care of him than her 10 year-old daughter—Maimun—who also does most of the household chores for Jaigun. The narrator describes:

Hashu and Maimun—brother and sister—sit side by side on two *piris* ... Jaigun serves them *paanta* ... in two bowls. She takes a bowl for herself too. Maimun obliquely looks at Hashu's bowl. ... Jaigun gives the largest portion of *paanta* to Hashu everyday. But Maimun doesn't have any courage to protest against this discriminating treatment. Jaigun realizes her discontent and lifts a fistful of rice from her own bowl and gives it to Maimun saying, 'Say Bismillah and start eating. That'll fill your stomach full' (9).

However, Jaigun realizes her fault one night when looks at the very thin body and the falling away rough hair of her daughter. She is seen to admit her fault to herself—"She recollects this daughter of hers has never got any love from her. She always behaved harshly with her whenever she came up with any request." (46-47) Also she "promises to herself" that "from now on she won't mistreat Maimun ever." (46) She understands that she has "deprived her of mother's love only because she is a girl." (46) Suddenly she realizes "that there's no difference between Hashu and Maimun" since both of them are her children (46).

Though Jaigun tries to come out of the faulty tradition of discriminating between a boy and girl, Karim Bakhs's cynical attitude to his daughters does not change much. His baby daughter, Khuki, dies out of starvation and malnutrition during the time of famine. The two surviving daughters—Maimun and Phuli—are also not seen to get the necessary love and care from him. Phuli, his daughter from his third marriage, is neglected by him whereas he is extremely loving and caring of Kashu, the son from his second marriage. Anjuman—Phuli's mother—is hence seen to think, "Karim Bakhs doesn't like Phuli at all. He never takes her on his lap, even if she cries for hours. ... Kashu is everything to Karim Bakhs." (95) However, Maimun, his daughter from his second marriage, is even more neglected than Phuli; Karim Bakhs does not only abandon her with her mother, he even does not attend this unfortunate girl's wedding to bless her as her father. When Shafi's *Ma* comes to request him to be present in his daughter's wedding, he says, "Give her to marriage or cut her throat off, I have nothing to do about it." (101) Near the end of the novel, Karim Bakhs is seen to be interested in taking the responsibility of Jaigun and Maimun by remarrying Jaigun. However, his discriminating attitude between his son and his daughters remains almost the same.

V. Keeping Women Indoors: To keep them marginalized and subdued, women are seen not to be allowed generally to go outside of their residences. In this regard, the leaders of the villages are found to use favourable references from various religious books and stories.

Rahima of *Tree Without Roots*, is found to be taught by her husband to always be inside the boundary of their residence so that no other man can see

her. Majeed says, "No, Bibi, you must not let yourself be seen like that out in the open" (22). Later, when Jamila goes out of the boundary of the house on the *zikr* night, he becomes very furious on her. Coming back home at the end of the *zikr*, Majeed rebukes Rahima for letting Jamila go outside—"Didn't you see her go out? ... They all had a good look at her while she stood before them absolutely without shame. She didn't even have had her face covered!" (110-111)

The two wives of Khaleque are also seen to keep themselves away of the sight of the other men. Though Kulsum, the poor young widow, becomes bound to work in the houses of others to earn her living, she tries to keep herself veiled.

In *Surya-Dighal Bari*, Jaigun and her children are found to face different "odd comments of the villagers" for her going outside to earn her living (21). The *Imam* of the village *masjid* refuses to accept her offerings to the *masjid* as he thinks her "an immodest woman" for her working outside (16). Later, on the wedding day of her daughter, Gedu Pradhan says that he "won't allow this wedding to take place" until Jaigun confesses "her sins" and promises "not to commit those ever." (107) Interestingly, the same person is seen to try hard throughout the novel to marry Jaigun. In fact, it becomes clear to us that the main intention of Gedu Pradhan is actually to keep Jaigun helpless so that she becomes bound to accept his proposal.

Feminine Bonding and Sisterhood in *Tree Without Roots* and *Surya-Dighal Bari*: Along with providing a realistic and thought provoking depiction of the patriarchal repressions and exploitations of the rural women, the two novels of our discussion present some positive instances of feminine bonding and sisterhood among some of the female characters of the narratives. A list of the noticeable activities reflecting close sisterly bonding among different female characters of both the novels is presented below:

I. Fellow Feeling and Acts of Kindness: In the novels, most of the women are found to be more or less kind to the other women, especially when the other ones are in distress. They are not only sympathetic to the women and children in misery but also serious about providing whatever help they can manage to offer to them within their limited scopes.

In *Tree Without Roots*, Rahima is found to be kind and supportive to the village women. When they come to meet her to share their miseries and to seek the blessings of the so-called unknown saint of the *mazar*, she always listens to them very attentively. Often she is so moved by "their tales of sorrow" that "tears" fill "in her eyes" (28). With the intention to helping the village women, she prays at night going near the tomb of the *mazar*. She tries to help Kulsum to earn her living by providing her part-time work in her

house. Moreover, she thinks about adopting Hasuni, the son of Kulsum, to quench her thirst for a child as well as to minimize the financial burden of Kulsum. Rahima's feelings for another village woman, namely Amena, is also revealed in the novel. On the day of Amena's so-called gynecological testing by Majeed, Rahmia is found to be quite helpful to the unfortunate woman:

Rahima had been watching the ceremony through the chinks in the bamboo wall, together with Kulsum. She had planned that as soon as the ceremony was over, she would take Amena into the house and give her the sweets which she had occasionally prepared for her, to break her long fast. On seeing her fall to the ground, she became confused and filled with concern. Despite the presence of Khaleque, she and Kulsum rushed in, and together they carried Amena into the house (67).

Later, in the novel, Rahima is found to be very kind to and caring for Jamila—the second wife of her husband—from the very first day of Jamila's coming to their house. The narrator of the novel describes:

The girl who entered his home as his second wife was hardly more than a young kitten.... Her name was Jamila. Rahima observed her closely for some time, and her heart grew tender with affection. The more she was with her the more she liked her. She took particular care to see that she ate well, and she talked softly and kindly to her to help her take heart. (92)

The other women of the village are also seen to have some sort of fellow-feeling for one another. The scene of Amena's going back to her parental house for good, after her turning insane, makes us understand the village women's sorrow for the ill-fated woman:

A small crowd stood by his gate, watching the departing group. Some women bit their lips to hold back their tears. Tanu stared blankly at the swaying palanquin as it drew away in the distance and the noise made by the bearers became fainter and fainter. ... Tanu broke into tears, as a dark fear of unknown gripped her. ... The other women soon began to cry too (82).

Like Rahima of *Tree Without Roots*, Jaigun of *Surya-Dighal Bari* is also found to be kind and sympathetic to the other helpless women and children. Though she and her children cannot get enough to eat most of the time, she tries to make her children feel for their next door relatives-cum-neighbours. When her son, Hashu, wants to have a full meal of the sweet dish that she manages to prepare meagerly on the *Eid* day, Jaigun scolds him by saying, "You're too selfish! Can't think of others, can you? What about Shafi?

They've nothing to eat" (53).

Shafi's *Ma*, Jaigun's sister-in-law, in return also shows similar type of kindness to and fellow-feeling for Jaigun and her children. Since, Jaigun is not welcome to her ex-husband Karim Bakhs's residence, Shafi's *Ma* and Shafi go there on the *Eid* day to handover the *tupi* that Jaigun has bought for her son. She also tries to shower motherly love to the love-starved little boy by putting him on her lap. Coming back home, Shafi's *Ma* describes the scene to Jaigun to quench her motherly thirst for loving and hugging her child—"Once he was on my lap he wouldn't get down! ... After a lot of hassle when I put him down he started crying."(54-55) Later on, when Jaigun temporarily stays in Karim Bakhs' residence to take care of her critically ill son—Kashu, Shafi's *Ma* tries to support her by staying with her over there at night. The narrator describes, "Every night Shafi's *Ma* comes to stay with Jaigun. ... She is awake almost all the night for any help Jaigun needs. Shafi's *Ma* is a great support for her. ... Jaigun grinds enough *paan* for Shafi's *Ma* during the day so that Kashu isn't disturbed in the night with the grinding noise" (147).

Lalu's *Ma*, a co-worker with whom Jaigun "used to go north to buy rice", visits "her twice" during Jaigun's long break from work after her daughter's marriage (162-63). Also she informs Jaigun about the opportunity of her joining a new work to minimize her economical crisis. And all these are done by her from her fellow-feeling and concern for Jaigun.

II. Coexistence for Survival: Apart from their having mutual fellow-feelings and doing occasional acts of kindness for one another, some of the female characters of the selected novels are seen to strongly support each other for survival.

In *Tree Without Roots*, Rahima and Jamila, the two wives of Majeed, work as a strong support system for each other which helps them to survive against the various patriarchal oppressions of Majeed. Rahima is seen to take "particular care" of Jamila from the very first day of Jamila's arrival in Majeed's abode (92). Hence, there grows a strong bond between the two. So, whenever she finds Rahima hurt or sad, Jamila also feels the same. One day at the time of doing household chores together, she makes fun of Majeed and Rahima for their being quite aged to be her husband and half-wife. As Rahima becomes "stony" being hurt by the comment of Jamila, Jamila becomes full of tears. However, noticing the tears in Jamila's eyes, Rahima draws "her close" and kisses "her on the forehead" with tearful eyes (95).

The sisterly tie between the two gradually grows deeper; so, Jamila tries to remain close to Rahima not only during daytime but also at night. The following description reveals the fact:

When he woke up, ... he found the bed empty. Jamila was gone. For a few moments he remained motionless, not knowing what to think. Then he quickly got up, lit the little oil-lamp on the floor near the bed, and went with gentle tread to the next room... There her face pressed against Rahima's ample bosom, Jamila was sleeping soundly.... Like a small child at her mother's breast. (99-100)

Rahima is also seen to be so attached to Jamila that she tries to save her from the whims of anger of Majeed as much as possible. Referring to her immature age, frequently she tries to convince Majeed not to be angry with her. When Jamila becomes critically ill after being punished by Majeed one night, Rahima becomes highly worried. She thinks about her treatment and proper diet—"She thought of the herbs she would grind the next morning to prepare medicine for her. The girl had eaten nothing during the day, which Rahima thought was a good thing when one is sick. But next morning she would have someone buy her some nourishing sago from the village grocer." (138) Noticing the serious condition of Jamila's health, meek and mild Rahima becomes so worried that she even dares to accuse Majeed and to ask him, "What have you done to her?" (137) Later on, feeling hopeless about Jamila's health, Rahima is seen "to sob desperately" going to "a corner of the room" (139).

In *Surya-Dighal Bari*, Jaigun and Shafi's *Ma* come forward to support each other in their fights against the cruel patriarchal world. Coming back from the town, they manage to live in the long-abandoned ill-omened house, namely Surya-Dighal Bari, only with each other's support. The omniscient narrator describes:

Jaigun came back to the village with only one hope. She had an abandoned ancestral homestead. She owned one eighth of it. The rest belonged to her nephew Shafi—a minor. Shafi's *Ma* was back with Shafi. They also had no place to go. Finally, it was decided that they would clean that abandoned land and build two rooms to start their life anew. (2)

Interestingly, at the end of the novel, when Jaigun and Shafi's *Ma* become bound to leave the village being the victims of the plot of Gedu Pradhan, then also they are seen to leave their habitats together. The novel ends with the following description, "Accompanied with their children Jaigun and Shafi's *Ma* set out once again for an unknown abode. They have only one hope—in the huge world of *Khoda*, they'll definitely find a place to live." (168)

III. Cooperation for Self-reliance: Along with minimizing the troubles of women's lives to make them survive in the patriarchal world, sisterly kindness and bonding are seen to encourage women to be self-reliant when necessary.

Coming back to her father's dwelling after her husband's death, Kulsum, in *Tree Without Roots*, is found to earn her living by working in Majeed's house. Rahima's feelings for the distressed Kulsum bring them close to each other, and make them support each other. Hence, Rahima tries to engage Kulsum in different part-time tasks in her household so that Kulsum may earn at least a meager living for herself and her son.

In *Surya-Dighal Bari*, Jaigun becomes able to be self-reliant by being in a sisterly network with two other working women—Gedi's *Ma* and Lalu's *Ma*. The three struggling women are seen to travel by train to different far away markets to buy rice in cheap price, and then, to sell that in a bit higher price to make some profit which serves as a means of their earning. The narrator describes the hazardous beginning of this sisterly group's journey by train for business one day:

Jaigun comes to Fatullah rail station. The train is very late today. She looks around and finds two of her mates.

The 9 o'clock train comes at 10. It doesn't stop for more than one minute. With the help of her two mates she somehow manages to board the train. She then rolls out her bag on the floor and sits on it with Gedi's *Ma* and Lalu's *Ma*. (22)

Interestingly in the train, Lalu's *Ma* arranges her son's marriage with five-year old Gedi since Gedi's *Ma* has to carry the little girl everywhere with her as there is none else to take care of her. Later, when the train reaches their destination, they get down from it fast, and go to the nearby market on foot. On their way to the market, "Lalu's *Ma* cradles her future daughter-in-law on her lap and helps her *Beian* walk unburdened." (26) After buying "three different varieties of rice all in the same price" and splitting the "rice in six small bags" to fake their "small rice bags" as "beggar's alms", they get up on the 4 o'clock train to go back home. When they reach near the destined station, "they tie the bags tightly with ropes" and drop "the bags through the windows" so that Hashu, Jaigun's son, can collect those from there (28). Thus, the three very poor and helpless women manage to become self-reliant by dint of their sisterly love and cooperation.

Conclusion: In the end, it can be said that *Tree Without Roots* and *Surya-Dighal Bari* can make a good pair when read from a feminist perspective. Though both the novels are written by the male writers, they portray realistic pictures of male-domination and marginalization of women in the patriarchal Bengal of the mid 20th century. The male-centred *Tree Without Roots* and the female-focused *Surya-Dighal Bari* present a good view of the sheer marginalization of the then village women under the patriarchal socio-economic system. The novels provide a number of positive scenes of fighting back of some highly peripheral women by creating a strong social

and psychological bond among them. The sisterly tie between Rahima and Jamila works as a means of their survival whereas the sisterly attachment between Rahima and Kulsum works as a means of the latter's self-reliance in *Tree Without Roots*. Similarly, in *Surya-Dighal Bari*, the sisterly bonding between Jaigun and Shafi's *Ma* helps both to survive with their young children while the sisterly connection among Jaigun, Gedi's *Ma* and Lalu's *Ma* provides them the scope of becoming self-reliant in the male-dominated and dogmatic rural Bengal of the mid 20th century. Both the novels, thus, implicitly speak for the needs of female networking for the protection and nurturing of women and children in a world mostly ruled by men.

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