



UGC Approved Journal

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065

Impact Factor : 5.27



Editor-in-Chief

Volume V, Issue VI June 2017

www.ijellh.com

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**PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF *MY LITTLE BOAT* BY MARIAM
KARIM**

Abstract:

This paper studies a contemporary novel, *My Little Boat* written by Mariam Karim from psychoanalytic perspective. The novel set in post-Babri Masjid and post-Pokhran event was published in the year 2003. The novel dwells deep into the political and communal tension in the Indian society. Besides this the novel focuses on the traumatic life of the protagonist Nasreen; her struggle to find her own self, and her identity in a Muslim family which is largely run by the male dominance and traditional opinions.

Key words: Psychoanalysis, trauma, identity, political and communal tension, marriage.

My Little Boat, a novel published in 2003, written by contemporary Indian novelist and playwright Mariam Karim is set in the backdrop of Pokhran Nuclear Test and Babri Masjid demolition at Rahimganj, Uttar Pradesh with few scenes in London and Paris. *My Little Boat* is exclusively a feminist work, dealing with the issues of women in traditional Muslim families, and sub-plot involves the political and communal tension, that arose in India during post-Pokhran and post-Babri Masjid demolition. It has stream of consciousness narrative, Karim follows the narrative technique of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce to explore the inner conflict of the characters especially Nasreen. Karim's narrative technique is highly attractive, the plot of the novel is highly compact, despite shifts in the time from past to present to future. The sub-plot has been managed beautifully, though it differs significantly from the main plot, which is concerned with the journey of Nasreen from childhood to old age. Furthermore, the narrative becomes more complex, because of various narrators; the narrative is presented through the perspective of three different women, Nasreen who leads the stream of consciousness narrative

and is central to the theme of novel. Mehajabeen, daughter of Javed and Nasreen provides her perspective on the life and situations through letters which she addresses to her father. The third narrator, who is unnamed and probably Karim herself presents to the readers general description of the plot and its development.

Plot is set in Isfahan, an obsolete house in a deserted area of Rahimganj. Isfahan is a populated home, most of the significant characters of the novel reside in Isfahan, Javed, Nasreen, Mehajabeen, Zohra Appa, Qamrun Bua, Abbu, Ammi, Moosa, besides these, Khushnood Mia, Khalida Bibi and Abida Bibi make consistent appearances at Isfahan. The subplot of the novel which deals with the political aspects of Indian society and the communal tension is set in Press Club Café, where the journalists like Javed, Srivastava, Tarkunde, Kratis and Rahul Ganguly usually meet and discuss political events taking place in India.

The main concern of the novel is the unsuccessful quest of Nasreen to find the exotic truths, and an attempt to overcome the losses which she had during her childhood and youth; her struggle to adjust in a society which she never chose for herself. The story begins at Isfahan with the death of Anwar Ali husband of Zohra Appa. It is said that he was a very cruel husband who used to beat Zohra Appa. His death brings both grief and relief to the family living at Isfahan. His death meant freedom for Zohra Appa, who was already forty five years of age. Soon the narrative is taken over by Nasreen, and is dominated by her life throughout. Nasreen's narrative is gripping with stream of consciousness narrative. Nasreen, daughter of Saira Alvi, a widow, a poetess, a free woman, who brought up Nasreen in London and Paris eventually marrying her at Rahimganj, a decision which left Nasreen almost paralysed for rest of her life. Life at Rahimganj was completely opposite to what Nasreen had lived so far. She exclaims:

Here, bits and pieces of my life, the bric-a-brac in my string purse, sometimes seeming unconnected, fragmented, and in many tongues, as has been my life. Here, perhaps also the story of many others: when our own lives seem so unlike our own...our selves so unlike ourselves...we look to others' tales and others' songs to find what may resemble us most closely. (*My Little Boat*: 4)

At Isfahan Nasreen had lost everything that she grew up with: atmosphere, language, culture, friends, mother, Zammurad. This loss left a great impression upon her personality, and she failed to recover as a normal human being afterwards. Sigmund Freud, discusses this aspect of human

personality in his book *Interpretation of Dreams*, he attempts to unveil the effect of suppression of thoughts on one's personality. According to Freud, the trauma and diseases related to human psyche arise because of suppression of things or thought which one wants to forget, or fails to forget, the memories keep on haunting the person turning him psychologically ill. Nasreen, becomes a perfect example of this. Gap between two cultures, left a huge void in Nasreen's life; she even lost her language, in which she could have expressed herself. She often repeats that she is the child of forgotten tongues.

I am a child of forgotten tongues. No word is spoken ever as it is written. No word is spoken twice in the same way. Children of forgotten tongues have no choice but to only hear, the *parole* and never known the spirit, the *langue*. I can form no abstract relationships with the words of my tongue. (*My Little Boat*: 71)

After her marriage to Javed, Nasreen finds peace with her daughter Mehajabeen, but when she is sent to Lucknow to pursue her education, it makes Nasreen more introvert and lonely. Gap between her and Javed gets widened. She often remembers her childhood days which she spent in Paris and London in the company of Qadeer Mamon and Zammurad. The biggest loss which Nasreen suffered was that of Zammurad, her childhood friend. She fails to fill up the void left by the separation of Zammurad. She exclaims, "First I lost Zamurrad. I left her for almost a life time. Then they sent Mehjabeen away. Zamurrad? Zamurrad! I called, but there was no reply. Only the river answered from afar, slip, slap, slop. I know you will come back to me one day, Zamurrad one day, soon." (*My Little Boat*: 16)

Nasreen comments on the social issues throughout the narrative but refrains from commenting on the political issues. Nasreen questions the marriage, rituals, the phallo-centric society, the pseudo religious beliefs, communal disharmony. Nasreen abstains from hatred because of caste and religion, she can be seen with Lallan, son of Shanti from *Chamar Basti*, with sister Augusta at Church, and even with Shamsher, who is also in search of esoteric truths.

Sister Augusta, a close friend of Nasreen, who usually discusses religious issues with her is molested and Roy is imprisoned. However, it is revealed that sister Augusta was molested by Tarkunde and people associated with Saffron. Rahul Ganguly, a freelance journalist is asked to prepare a report on this event but is initially threatened and eventually killed by unknown men. Nasreen's troubles are multiplied by the events at Rahimganj. She renounces the killings of

innocents like Rahul Ganguly and molestation of Sister Augusta. She fails to understand why innocents are killed and monsters like Khushnud Mia live for long. Khushnud Mia is a close relative of Javed, who also sent a proposal of second marriage with Zohra Appa after the demise of Anwar Ali. He also looks after the orchard at Isfahan. He holds very stereotypical opinions regarding Islam and is the most hated among females at Isfahan.

Nasreen throughout the narrative looked at river Gomti, following besides Rahimganj. She wished to go to the river and ride down the river listening to the voices of the river, live life to the fullest. One fine morning she leaves the home, and rides the boat of Roy, in Gomti, which finally is drowned and Nasreen never returns.

The novel presents Nasreen as psychologically crippled character, who fails to overcome the losses that she faced at various stages of her life. One of the significant losses that Nasreen suffered was Zammurad.

When they took Zammurad from me they did not know we had mixed our souls and re-appointed them...that it was only in the expectation that one day we would rearrange the pieces of the jigsaw we had created and some great truth would be revealed to us as we ourselves would be. (*My Little Boat*: 34)

Though Nasreen attempts to suppress her thoughts of the loss of Zammurad, but the thoughts keep on visiting the conscious mind and make her less content with her life and people around. Throughout the narrative, she yearns for Zammurad. Javed despite being a very loving and caring husband fails to fill up the void left by the loss of Zammurad in Nasreen's life. Zammurad's absence from her life creates an inner storm in her life, which she could not overcome. She could not find Zammurad's replacement in her life, which drew her further to the quagmire of inner conflicts and psychological traumas.

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