

Quartet in Autumn: Marginalization of Older People

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Abstract

Comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners study literature across national borders, across periods, across languages, across boundaries between literature and the other arts and across disciplines. Barbara Pym, a celebrated British writer conscious of the marginalization and discrimination reflects the problems and hurdles faced by the old people through her work. Older people are not given much importance in the family or societies in decision making. Reference to the text, the researcher will analyse the struggles and problems faced by the old people regarding Barbara Pym's novel *Quartet in Autumn*. Age brings status and prestige to a man, not only in his family but also in the community, where it almost automatically confers political influence. It is the story of four office workers on the verge of retirement. Negative attitudes toward the elderly do far more to make an old person feel isolated and alienated than do the attitudes themselves. In many societies the aged are valued far less than in ours; indeed, they are assigned the lowest possible status. Society or community appears to think that the elderly belong to a different group. Societies attitude towards the old is deeply uncertain. Generally speaking, they do not look upon the aged as belonging to one clearly-defined category.

Keywords: Marginalization, society, elderly, isolation, older.

Introduction

Britain with their cultural identity, the multiplicity of languages, religions and sects, castes and creeds, races and colours, and ethnic patterns strive to be one of the important countries of the world. Regardless of their social varieties share their post-frontier status and their mentality towards the social orders, the matured individuals become a weight to the family, to society and the country on the loose. Hardship, separation and maltreatment to recognize self-

evident and covered up parts of how more seasoned individuals are frequently underestimated in their networks. These multiple domains of the investigation will produce findings that can inform better quality service, provision for older people and enable smart evidence-based policy interventions to be developed. In the country, elderly people experience loss of dignity and self-respect. One of the French Philosophers, Simone De

Beauvoir in her book called *The Coming of Age* seeks greater understanding of our treatment of elders. She quotes:

Old age is an autumn, filled with ripe fruit: it is also a barren winter, and we hear of its coldness, snow and frost. It has the sweet gentleness of a lovely evening. But it is also associated with the dark sadness of twilight (Beauvoir 1996, 211).

Atrocity against aged cut across all racial, social, cultural, economic, political and religious boundaries. It is impossible to ignore the fact that old people are increasingly marginalized in an aged marked by the faster and faster pace of historical change. The old persons know from experience what the others have yet to learn in terms of morals, customs and the techniques of survival. So in this paper, the scholar will analysis Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn* which belonging to different cultures, by comparing and contrasting to bring out the similarities and differences. Though old people are geographically separated, they are politically, socially, culturally and psychologically united. Their identities are localised, but their sufferings and the discrimination against them are globalised. Marginalization is an exploitative structure reinforced by governments, religious and social practices.

Age brings status and prestige to a man, not only in his family but also in the community, where it almost automatically confers political influence. Great age is also viewed as a sign of innate virtue and divine blessing, and it is undoubtedly for this reason that such extravagant ages were assigned to the early Biblical patriarchs. If old people show the same desires, the same feelings and the same

requirements as the young, the world looks upon them with disgust. In many societies the aged are valued far less than in ours; indeed, they are assigned the lowest possible status.

Older people tend to remain loyal to the principles and values acquired in their youth and mature years, or even just to their habits which, once formed, are painful to change. Yet interaction between the young and the old is free and comfortable within that context. The loss of status causes suffering, discontent and a sense of loss, but everyone at least knows what the problem is and can talk about it. The young can feel or express compassion with the old and the old with each other; they can extract those benefits which derive from their loss, for high status is always a mixed blessing. Ageing is a series of processes that begin with life and continue throughout the life cycle. It represents the closing period in the lifespan, a time when the individual looks back on life, lives on past accomplishments and begins to finish off his life course. Adjusting to the changes that accompany old age requires that an individual is flexible and develops new coping skills to adapt to the changes that are common to this time in their lives. There are many forms of social and economic marginalisation and their negative impact on the health and longevity of older citizens. Gender remains one of the primary structures that affect the quality of life in old age. Recent research demonstrates a variety of ways in which age and gender may interact, not to mention their relations with other power structures; comparatively, examine men and women at different ages to observe the differential impact of age and gender on their lives and to identify spaces of exclusion in old. Barbara Pym is one of the very important women writers of Britain. In all her novels she

has portrayed aspects of human life, which transcend the probability of British culture and attain the height of universality. *Quartet in Autumn* which deals with the life of Marcia, Letty, Norman and Edwin all work together in the same office. None is married, and each is nearing retirement age.

Problems Faced by the Aged

Failing health

It has been rightly said that we start dying the day we are born. The ageing process is synonymous with failing health. While death in young people in countries such as India is mainly due to infectious diseases, older people are most vulnerable to non-communicable diseases. The issue of failing health, it is prime importance that good quality health care is made available and accessible to the elderly in an age-sensitive manner. Effective care and support are required for those elderly suffering from various diseases through primary, secondary and tertiary health care system.

With age, muscle strength and bone density decrease and connective tissue is transformed becoming less elastic. This leads to increased vulnerability, to falls, fractures and frailty. Muscle function and, to some extent, bone density are best maintained by physical exercise. Modern life does not necessarily favour physical exercise at work or during leisure time. The age-associated decline in physical fitness may be aggravated by illnesses affecting bones and joints. Strain and trauma on the joints are risk factors for osteoarthritis limiting mobility by pain and impeding function. Today hip or knee replacements are effective means of securing mobility and independence in old age (Johnson 2005, 170).

For well being and prosperity, the staff of correspondence is foremost. Accordingly the broad decrease in hearing seriously influences the capacity of numerous more seasoned individuals to mingle and take part in day to day life, the local area and in social life. Weakness or loss of vision is another basic factor that hinders actual working and is a significant wellspring of handicap. Hearing misfortune might be because of hereditary factors yet is sped up by ear injury. Today the openness to uproarious commotion during relaxation time may have genuine outcomes in later life. In the by and by old partner, defensive gadgets were less being used and boisterous commotion during work contributed broadly to hearing debilitation. Amplifiers can remunerate progressively well for these conditions. Forestalling acoustic injury is today a significant general medical problem at work yet substantially less liked during recreation time exercises. Essentially, the age-related loss of visual convenience is remunerated by glasses and along these lines work is kept up. Waterfall medical procedure has gigantically improved with superb useful outcomes. Again co-dreary conditions, for example, diabetes speed up maturing by glycation and initiate retinal changes. By treating diabetes mellitus energetically, it is feasible to avoid diabetic microangiopathy. Evaluating for glaucoma permits early location and treatment in medication and specialized sciences may add to keeping up capacity and independence in the old (Johnson *ibid.* 173).

Economic insecurity: The problem of economic insecurity is faced by the elderly when they are unable to sustain themselves financially. Many old persons either lack the opportunity or the capacity to be as productive as they were. Increasing competition from

younger people, individual, family and societies mindsets, chronic malnutrition and slowing physical and mental faculties, limited access to resources and lack of awareness of their rights and entitlements play significant roles in reducing the ability of the elderly to remain financially productive, and thereby, independent.

Economic security is as relevant for the elderly as it is for those of any other age group. Those who are unable to generate an adequate income should be facilitated to do so. As far as possible, elderly who are capable should be encouraged, and if necessary, supported to be engaged in some economically productive manner. Others who are incapable of supporting themselves should be provided with partial or full social welfare grants that at least provide for their basic needs. Families and communities may be encouraged to support the elderly living with them through counselling and local self-governance.

Isolation: Isolation, or a deep sense of loneliness, is a common complaint of many elderly is the feeling of being isolated. While there are a few who impose it on themselves, isolation is most often imposed purposefully or inadvertently by the families or communities where the elderly live. Isolation is a terrible feeling that, if not addressed, leads to the tragic deterioration of the quality of life. This aspect is very true in the life of four members in *Quartet in Autumn*.

It is important that the elderly feel included in the going on around them, both in the family as well as in society. Activities centred on older persons that involve their time and skills help to inculcate a feeling of inclusion.

Neglect: The elderly, especially those who are weak or dependent, require physical and emotional care and support. When this is not provided, they suffer from neglect, a problem that occurs when a person is left uncared for and that is often linked with isolation. Changing lifestyles and values, demanding jobs, distractions such as television, a shift to nuclear family structures and redefined priorities have led to increased self-neglect of the elderly by families and communities. This is worsened the elderly are less likely to demand attention than those of other age groups. Our characters Marcia, Letty, Norman and Edwin all of them under goes the above mentioned problems in their life.

Age is not a thing to be pitied, to apologize for, to fear, to resist or to see as a sign of doom. Only the old can make age a bright and vibrant place to be. And so we must. If we don't, we stand to waste a full twenty-five to thirty per cent of our lives. And waste is always a pity. In many societies the aged are valued far less than in ours; indeed, they are assigned the lowest possible status. Yet interaction between the young and the old is free and comfortable within that context. The loss of status causes suffering, discontent and a sense of loss, but everyone at least knows what the problem is and can talk about it. 'As for old age, Seneca said, "embrace and love it. It abounds with pleasure if you know how to use it. The gradually declining years are among the sweetest in life. . . Even when they have reached the extreme limit they have their pleasure still" (Marcus 1887, 65).

Barbara Pym canon, a body of work that establishes her unique style and presages her lasting importance. In her work, she probes the human condition, seen through the prism of such quotidian events as jumble sales and walks in the

woods. Her characters are unassuming people leading unremarkable lives; Pym became the chronicler of quiet lives. Marcia, Letty, Norman and Edwin all work together in the same office. None is married and each is nearing retirement age. Letty has plans to share a country retreat with her long-time friend, Marjorie. Her hopes are dashed when Marjorie suddenly announces that she is to marry a clergyman some years younger than her.

After Marcia and Letty retire, each is faced with challenges. Letty suddenly has to move and Marcia has to deal with a loss of the routine that was an essential part of her life. Marcia gradually withdraws from the outside world, while Letty has to engage with it. Marcia eventually gives up eating and dies in pathetic circumstances. She has unexpectedly left her estate to Norman, in whom she had indulged a brief and secret semi-romantic interest. When Marjorie's fiancé deserts her for a younger widow, Letty and her friend decided to take the country cottage after all. By now she has come to terms with retirement, her world has expanded, and so she does not immediately move. She realizes that she has opportunities to make her own choices. Norman and Edwin play less central roles in the "quartet", as their characters develop in response to the absences and actions of Marcia and Letty. At the end of the book, Letty is looking forward to inviting Norman and Edwin to meet Marjorie in the country. She thinks this would be a huge "opportunity" for the quartet, which was previously so urban and parochial, even though they have lost Marcia.

Older people who are discriminated against or abused often experience it over and above other forms of marginalisation which renders them doubly vulnerable. Abuse on one hand, and health, well being are denied to the

elderly. In the novel *Stone Angel*, the writer says, "privacy is a privilege not granted to the aged or the young. Sometimes very young children can look at the old, and a look passes between them, conspiratorial, sly and knowing. It's because neither are human to the middling ones, those in their prime, as they say, like beef" (Laurence 1993, 6). Throughout the seasons and years of one's life, there are constant changes. Robert Browning in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" also has aptly pointed out that old age is the completeness of life:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

the last of life, for which the first was made.

Our times are in his hand

who saith, 'A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!" (Browning 1951, 1-6).

Many novels portray the sufferings of old people in their work such as Ernest Hemingway's *Old man and the Sea*, Margaret Laurence *The Stone Angel*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Woman destroyed* etc. highlight the agonies, sufferings, pain, isolation, abandonment and fight for the elderly. Old people in all the countries, be it first world nations or third-world nations, Canada or India are faced with similar problems. Barbara Pym a British woman novelist, has registered her voices against the elderly.

The creator starts in a similar spot as numerous current hypothetical, and insightful requests. Like women's liberation, my examination of advanced age wrestles with a circumstance which connections individuals straightforwardly with their actual appearances so they should think by and through the body

both to experience the world and to be experienced by the world. Also like feminist theory, the study of old age, in authors opinion, must not overemphasise the body, which, although crucial, can limit the study just as the body is perceived as limiting the experience of senescence. Also like feminism, old age studies affect people of different genders in acutely different ways. Men and women experience ageing differently because of how they are constricted to perceive self-worth.

Conclusion

To conclude, the novelist has portrayed the land and characters to which they are familiar.

Pym has presented a typical western woman with a strong will, raging nature, and the ability to succeed in life. Barbara Pym has depicted the picture of four elderly persons from inward knowledge. She has shown how these four elderly persons never lose their gusto for life in spite of all the varied problems and difficulties of her life. The lives enjoys and suffers every moment of life with the intense feeling of attachment thereby proving to the world that life is beautiful and meaningful in spite of all hindrances and hardship that clutter it. Marginalization is a common thing we see in society towards the elderly. Remember, one day all of us have to face this stage of our life.

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