

Tree Without Roots Summary

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Summary

The Beginning: The Arrival of a Stranger: The story begins in a remote village named Mahabbatpur. It is situated near the Garo Hills in northern Bengal. A government officer goes hunting in the forest and suddenly hears the sound of azan. The voice is sweet and strong. Surprised, he follows the sound and meets a poor-looking man. The man says his name is Majeed. He claims that he has come to spread the light of Allah in a dark land full of ignorance.

The officer learns that there is a small village nearby. The man speaks softly, using religious words. He says that the people here have forgotten Allah. The officer listens and leaves. Through this short meeting, the writer introduces Majeed, the central figure of the novel. He is a poor and clever man who carries a small Quran with him. He has come here in search of a better life and wants to survive by any means.

The Discovery of the Grave and Creation of the Shrine: Soon, Majeed reaches Mahabbatpur. He notices an old and broken grave on the outskirts of the village. It is full of weeds and dust. A plan comes to his mind. He tells the villagers that he saw a dream. In that dream, a holy pir (saint) told him that his grave lay in this place and had been forgotten. The pir asked Majeed to come and take care of it.

The villagers are shocked and ashamed. They think they have committed a sin by neglecting a saint's grave. To please Allah, they clean the place and cover it with a red cloth (lalsalu). They light candles, burn incense, and offer flowers. The grave becomes a mazar (shrine).

Majeed becomes the guardian of the shrine. He begins to live near it. People from nearby villages come to pray. They believe the shrine has spiritual power. They bring coins, rice, and oil as offerings. The rich man of the village, Khalek Bepari, helps Majeed with money and food. Very soon, Majeed gains both respect and influence. Thus, a poor and hungry man cleverly builds his home, position, and power through a false claim.

Majeed's Rise as a Religious Leader: Within a short time, Majeed becomes known as a holy man. He prays loudly, quotes verses from the Quran, and gives speeches on sin and virtue. The villagers believe that Allah listens to him directly. They come to him for blessings and advice.

Majeed also begins to control people's personal lives. He tells them how to dress, speak, and behave. He scolds them for ignorance and disobedience. One day, he humiliates a poor man named Dudu Mia for not knowing the kalima. Another time, he punishes two boys who were not circumcised. He forces them to be circumcised publicly after Friday prayers. The villagers start fearing him

Majeed uses religion to make people feel guilty and helpless. They think they must obey him to please Allah. This fear becomes the root of his authority. By selling faith, he gains both power and wealth.

Rahima: The Obedient First Wife: After some time, Majeed marries a widow named Rahima. She is strong, simple, and very religious. She respects her husband deeply and never questions him. The village women believe she has special blessings because she is the wife of a holy man. They come to her with their sorrows and secrets. She listens kindly and prays for them.

Rahima becomes the link between Majeed and the women of the village. She feels proud but also afraid. She has no child, and that makes her sad. Sometimes she worries that Majeed may leave her. Yet she continues to serve him with complete devotion. Her piety and faith make her a symbol of silent submission.

Through Rahima, the novel shows how women are taught to obey both religion and men. Her kindness is real, but it is used to support Majeed's control over others.

The Tragedy of Hasuni's Family and the Spread of Fear: In another episode, we see how Majeed's influence spreads through fear. A woman called Hasuni's Mother, who often helps Rahima, asks her to pray for her dead parents. When Majeed hears of this family's quarrels, he acts like a divine judge. He rebukes the old father for allowing his wife to talk back to him.

Later, the old man is humiliated publicly by Majeed. He is told to offer sweet rice (sinni) to the shrine as punishment. Unable to bear the shame, he stops eating and disappears into a stormy night: perhaps ending his life.

This incident shows how Majeed's words can destroy families. He uses guilt and religion to rule over people's minds. The villagers are terrified of his anger. They start thinking that even a small mistake will bring divine punishment.

The Rival Pir of Auwalpur: After some years, a new pir appears in a nearby village named Auwalpur. People begin to visit him in large numbers. Rumors spread that this pir can even bring the dead back to life. Majeed becomes jealous and afraid. He fears that his fame and

income will fall.

To test the rival's power, he goes to see him. There, he finds a large crowd shouting praises. The pir climbs a tree, and his followers say he can stop the sun. Majeed argues that this is against Islam. He tells them to look at their shadows. They see that it is already time for the next prayer. The crowd becomes confused.

Using this clever trick, Majeed exposes the other pir as a fraud and regains his lost followers. Yet deep inside, he feels insecure. He realizes that his own position is just as fragile. Faith built on lies can collapse at any time.

Amena Bibi and Majeed's Hypocrisy: Meanwhile, Amena Bibi, the elder wife of Khalek Bepari, suffers from sadness because she has no child. Her husband's younger wife gives birth every year. Amena wants to bring holy water from the Auwalpur pir for fertility.

When Majeed learns this, he becomes angry and jealous. He cannot tolerate that someone else might gain respect. So he pretends to help Amena himself. He gives her "blessed water" and instructs her to circle the shrine seven times after fasting.

During the ritual, Amena faints. Majeed twists the event into proof of "evil spirits" in her body. He orders Khalek to divorce her to save his honor. The poor woman loses her marriage for nothing. This episode exposes Majeed's cruelty and lust. He hides his jealousy behind holy words.

The Coming of Akkas and the Defeat of Reason: Soon after, a young, educated man named Akkas returns to the village. He plans to open a school for children. He believes that proper education can remove superstition. Many villagers agree with him. A meeting is held to discuss it.

Majeed, fearing the loss of his power, joins the meeting. He asks Akkas, "If you are a good Muslim, where is your beard?" The crowd laughs. He quickly shifts the discussion to building a mosque instead of a school. The people, proud of their faith, support his idea. The educated voice of reason is silenced.

This incident shows how knowledge is lost to blind belief. The school could have freed the villagers from ignorance, but Majeed turns their faith into a tool of mental slavery. It is one of the saddest scenes of the novel.

Majeed's Second Marriage and the Rebellion of Jamila: After many years, Majeed feels lonely. He tells Rahima that he wants to marry again. Rahima, though hurt, agrees quietly. He marries Jamila, a young and lively girl. At first, she is shy and silent. But soon, her real nature

appears. She laughs loudly, talks freely, and questions everything.

Jamila does not follow Majeed's strict rules. She sometimes skips her prayers and sits at the door looking at people passing by. Her laughter shocks Majeed. He sees her as a danger to his authority. He decides to discipline her. One night, during a religious gathering, he faints dramatically to show his holiness. Later, he accuses Jamila of disrespect and orders her to pray all night.

When she refuses, he drags her out of bed. Jamila spits in his face. Enraged, Majeed ties her near the shrine during a storm. By morning, she is dead. Her feet stretch toward the saint's grave. It is a silent sign of rebellion against false holiness.

At the same time, heavy hail destroys the crops. The peasants cry, "What will we eat now?" Majeed tries to calm them, saying, "Trust in Allah." But his words now sound empty and weak.

The Ending: Fall of Faith and Rise of Truth: The storm and the death of Jamila mark the fall of Majeed's power. Nature itself seems to punish him. The villagers are filled with sorrow and confusion. Majeed stands before the ruined shrine, tired and lonely. He realizes that he has no real root in this village or in life.

The title of the novel becomes clear here. Majeed is like a tree without roots. He has grown tall with wealth, faith, and authority, but all of it is false. His life is based on lies. Without truth or love, he cannot stand firmly.

The writer ends the story with an image of hopeless faith and broken peace. The red cloth still flutters over the shrine, but beneath it lies emptiness. The villagers still pray, but their prayers cannot stop hunger or sorrow. Majeed's existence becomes a symbol of the human struggle to live even through deceit.

Main Idea and Message: Tree Without Roots shows a complete picture of rural Bengal: its poverty, superstition, and blind faith. It also shows how religion can become a weapon in the hands of a clever man. Majeed uses faith to feed himself, but in the end, he loses his peace.

The novel teaches that true religion is not fear or control. It is kindness, knowledge, and truth. Without these, faith becomes an empty ritual. Through Majeed, Rahima, and Jamila, Syed Waliullah reveals the tragedy of a society where ignorance kills freedom and where false saints grow like trees without roots.