

GENDER AS FATE: TIWANA'S "*EHO HAMARA JIWANA*"

Harleen Kaur

Lecturer

Amity School of Liberal Arts (English)

Amity University Gurgaon,

Haryana

Dalip Kaur Tiwana (1935 – Present) is one of the most famous novelists of Punjabi Literature. She was born on 4th May, 1935 in a small village, Rabbonwalla of Ludhiana, British India. She received a first division in her M.A. and then in 1963 became the first woman to receive Doctorate degree in Punjabi Literature. She then moved on to Patiala to join Punjabi University as a lecturer. She has been very productive novelist of contemporary Punjabi Literature. She has written around twenty seven novels (like *Agniparikhya* 1967, *Eho Hamara Jeewana* 1968, *Tilli Da Nishaan* 1970, etc), many short stories (like *Yatra*, *Ek Kudi*, etc), and an autobiography (*Nange Pairon Da Safar*). She has received many awards like "Sahitya Academy Award" (1972), "Nanak Singh Puruskar Award" (1980), "Dhaliwal Award" (1991), etc.

In one of her interviews she says, "I have faced problems because I am a woman. When I entered the field of literature, there were few women in it. However, I was fortunate to get good guides. I write one novel a year and complete the work itself in five days after the idea comes to my mind." Dalip Kaur Tiwana in her novels mostly depicts the 'other' (women) who belong to lower sections of the society.

The present paper discusses *Eho Hamara Jiwana* (published in 1968), which is the second novel of Dalip Kaur Tiwana that added Sahitya Academy Award to her hat in 1972. The title of the novel *Eho Hamara Jeevana* when translated into English is "And Such is Her Fate".

The protagonist of the novel is a downtrodden woman named Bhano. She belongs to the family of a poor farmer in rural Punjab. It depicts the tragic life of this woman who keeps succumbing to her fate and society. She is a representative of all the lower class women of rural Punjab of twentieth century. Bhano is caught in the clutches of her destiny that does not allow her to be a part of the society she lives in. She has no other option but to accept whatever her fate decrees upon her. She lives on the periphery and is time and again destined to be the 'other' because of her gender and class. Is it really her destiny that should be blamed for her state? The narrator puts the blame of her condition on her destiny. How about the role of the society in creating such conditions for her? The society and times she lived in could not afford a woman to live a peaceful life. The patriarchal setup of rural Punjab could not allow a woman to find a place for herself.

Harjeet Singh Gill describes Bhano thus, "She has no kith or kin. Once the bargain is struck, her relationship with her parents also gets detached. She lives in an island of social outcast even in a small village. She belongs to none. But socially and individually, she does not 'exist', she only 'floats'."

The novel opens in a village of rural Punjab where women were considered as objects and commodities that were purchased and sold (just like cow and cattle) at a man's will. The protagonist of the novel Bhano, was such one woman who was exploited and oppressed by her family and almost by all those who came in contact with her. She was doubly oppressed as she was a woman from lower rung of society. This novel can be read as Bhano's search for a home and place in the society. She submitted herself to the will of her fate and society, but the paradox was still she could not get a place in the society. The patriarchal setup of the novel did not allow a woman to lead a simple life of a wife and mother. Such was the plight of women in rural Punjab where they could be sold and bought as cow and cattle at man's will. This was a common practice that prevailed in twentieth century villages of Punjab where the brides were sold like commodities.

The narrative of the novel opens with a conversation between Bachni and Shanti about a new woman who had come to live with Narain, a drunkard and a drug addict. The woman's name was Bhano and she was seen with critical eyes by everyone since she was living with Narain without a formal marriage and was therefore not "chaste". Bachni, one of the neighbours of Narain spoke the following words about Bhano:

"But have you seen that wretch? A full-fledged woman to the hilt! God knows which innocent man she must have jilted before preying upon Narain! These hussies have no sense of shame. They like to have a new husband every day."

Bhano informed Shanti about her past and it was then that she regained her so called chastity and reputation in the eyes of Shanti. She recounted her past thus. Bhano was a motherless child. She had a brother named Dogar who was very ill. Bhano's father had done all he could to save his son. He had sold his land and his cows too to save his son. But more money was needed for treatment of his son. So under the influence of a neighbour the father sold his daughter Bhano to a man named Sarban at a cost of two thousand rupees. The daughter had to suffer for saving the son. Her life then took a different direction. The family to which she was married had no parents but only five unmarried sons. Sarban was the only one who married. The other four unmarried elder brothers casted lustful eyes on the new bride. They considered her to be an object that could be used by anyone of them, since their youngest brother had paid for her. In the early twentieth century rural Punjab, the skewed sex ratio was also one of the reasons why women were more prone to sexual harassment. The unmarried men had no option left and so they cast lustful eyes on all the women around. However, Sarban was an understanding husband, who soon realized the intentions of his lecherous brothers. He started living in a separate house with Bhano. The brothers were too jealous of his happy married life and one day in the fields they started fighting with Sarban. The result of this feud was that one of the brothers hit Sarban on his genitals and Sarban died on the spot. This act of injuring the genitals of Sarban can be understood as the frustrated sexual cravings of other brothers for Bhano.

After the death of Sarban, life of Bhano became more and more difficult. Her father decided to sell her off once more to one of the brothers of Sarban. She was terrified at this idea and decided to kill herself by drowning in the holy Ganga. But such was not her fate. Fate had stored something else for her. She was saved from drowning in Ganga by a drunkard named Narain. This time also she accepted the will of the fate and started living with Narain as his wife without a formal marriage ceremony. She was a "bride" for Narain who had come into his life free of cost and according to him she was a gift of holy Ganga.

Before Bhano came into Narain's life, he led a useless and meaningless life. His first wife, whom he had bought, had run away soon after his marriage. He was leading a frustrated

life always drinking. Bhano transformed the world of this drunkard. She took the task of transforming his house into a healthy home where humans could inhabit. She made him a human being. Bhano never questioned her fate and kept accepting the role that fate decided for her. The society in which Bhano lived also did not allow her to lead a peaceful life. The moment she started settling in the new role that destiny decreed upon her, troubles started to surround her. All the male friends of Narain, casted lustful eyes on her. Jagga, one of the drunkard friends of Narain attacked her and instigated Narain against Bhano. Narain believed him and scolded her. Even the neighbours questioned the chastity of Bhano but not Jagga, since Bhano was a woman and she had to be at fault all the time. Such was the patriarchal setup of rural Punjab. The friends of Narain also saw her as a commodity and not as his wife. She was a mere object for them, an object that could be used by anyone, since she had not married Narain as per the customs.

After spending about two years with Narain, one day Narain's sister Kartari came to their household. She was one of the few characters in the novel who respected Bhano. She accepted Bhano in the role of her sister-in-law. This made Bhano even more committed towards Narain's household. She was so much boosted that she worked very hard for Kartari's daughter's marriage. The thought that she was being accepted in the world made her happy. But this happiness was short lived. After Kartari left the house of Narain, the whole house became deserted and lonely. During the marriage ceremony of Kartari's daughter, Narain was provoked by one of the relatives that Bhano was good for nothing, since she could not produce an heir for Narain. She was a cow who could not produce milk and hence was useless.

Narain accepted this suggestion and decided to "buy" another woman as his wife. When Bhano came to know about this through Shanti, she was shattered and became even more alienated and isolated. Her short lived happiness evaporated. She became lifeless, spending more of her time in community service and reading of Holy Scriptures. This made Narain very angry and he often used to abuse her. Bhano became absent minded and was always lost in her thoughts. On one rainy evening, while working on the terrace, she fell from the terrace and got badly injured. She was hospitalized for over a month. Bhano's absence from home gave Narain an opportunity to bring another woman in the house. Bhagwanti was bought for six hundred rupees. This was another incidence in the novel that revealed the plight of women in rural Punjab. It also revealed their status as commodities that could be bought and sold as per the male's convenience.

On returning from the hospital Bhano saw the new wife in the household. She did not question Narain, but tried to adjust with whatever the fate had decreed upon her. She accepted the new role of a mistress that was given to her by the male dominated society. Bhagwanti, the other female of the house was very smart and intelligent. She was not ready to accept another woman in the house. She took Bhano for a ride. On giving birth to a son, which was believed to be a boon in this male dominated society, she was accepted as true wife of Narain. She got a place and position in the society. She was now a wife and a mother. This was the only privileged position that this society could offer to a woman. A woman who could give birth to a son was considered honourable. Bhagwanti was content since at least she was able to find a place, a sense of belonging, in this male dominated society. But the truth is that, this status of the 'other' (woman) was not as privileged as the status of the 'self' (man). On the contrary, Bhano was not even lucky enough to receive this place in the society, as she could not bear a child. Since the beginning of the novel, her fate had proved her to be a castaway wherever she went.

After achieving the privileged position of a mother, Bhagwanti got the power to rule the house. She convinced Narain that Bhano was a nobody, she was good for nothing. Narain then

accepted Bhagwanti's suggestion and decided to sell Bhano for a few hundred rupees. As far as Bhano was concerned, she had already started accepting the fate's decision. Bhano had actually started accepting the new setup of the house. She started nurturing Bhagwanti's son as her own. But the fate had something else in store for her. Her sense of being accepted was ruined once again by the society that she lived in, when Narain sold her off to another old man for a cow in return. The woman was again proved to be a commodity.

When we last encountered Bhano in the novel, we saw her following the old man who had bought her. She had once again accepted the verdict of her fate that considered her to be a castaway. She blindly accepted Narain's decision of selling her off.

Reading Bhano's life story in the conventional sense as a story of sufferance wouldn't be an appropriate way, in my opinion. Tiwana's writings are mostly imbued with a sense of spirituality and transcendence. Amarjit Singh Tanda appropriately comments on her works, "Over the years, she has moved from a preoccupation with gender issues to intellectual contemplation of fundamental human problems, and from there to spiritual transcendence. While negotiating the problems of life and death, tradition and modernity, men and women, towns and villages in her works, she remains committed to the Indian spiritual and ethical vision."

Hence, applying a western feminist paradigm to the character of Bhano would be a futile exercise. Her 'feminism' is entailed in her will to survival. Poor, illiterate and destitute, her plight is worsened by the inability to bear a child (whereas the western thought would consider pregnancy as detrimental to freedom). Her instinct and will for survival, is what ends the novel. Not her defeat.

Work Cited

- Tiwana, Dalip K. *Such is Her Fate*. Trans. Jai Rattan. Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1980. Print.
- Tanda, Amarjit S. "Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwana-A Leader of Punjabi Novel". Likhari, 19 May 2008. Web. 24 April 2014. <http://www.likhari.org>.
- Gill, Harjit S. Postface. *Such is Her Fate*. By Dalip Kaur Tiwana. Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1980. Print.