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An exploration of the subjugation of women: A study of Dilip Kaur Tiwana's autobiography a journey on bare feet and novel and such is her fate

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the patriarchal norms and conventions prevalent in the Indian society through the works of Dalip Kaur Tiwana including her biography *Nange Pairan da Safar* translated into English as *A Journey of Bare Feet* and another literary work *Eho Hamara Jeevana* translated into English as *and such is Her Fate*. In both of these books Tiwana has recorded the incidents happened in the lives of various female characters including herself and she also tries to highlight in both the works that how female are considered as a weaker sex than male and division of labour is also done on this basis and they end up becoming sheer commodities and puppets in the hands of male dominating society and they are not even allowed to raise their voices against the brutalities. Tiwana herself suffers humiliation and atrocity in the hands of her first husband but at last she breaks down the shackles of the so called chauvinistic society and she emerges as new woman with new identity and she also becomes hope for other women in the society.

Keywords: patriarchal society, brutality and atrocity, oppression, weaker sex, violence

Introduction

The present paper traces the patriarchal elements present in the society and their impact especially on female section of the society through the study of Dalip Kaur Tiwana's autobiography *Nange Pairan da Safar* translated in English as *Journey on Bare Feet* and her literary work *Eho Hamara Jeevana* translated in English as *and such is Her Fate*. Tiwana's *Nange pairan da Safar* records the significant incidents of her life from her early childhood to the time of her divorce. The life of Tiwana is more influenced by the women of her family; she starts her autobiography by describing her grandmother who had a great impact on her life. The book not only narrates the memories of Tiwana but it also throws light on the patriarchal system prevalent in Indian Society. The literary work *Eho Hamara Jeevana* focuses on the plight of women in the male dominated society where the protagonist Bhano is often treated as a commodity and sold for little money.

Discussion: Human beings create a society which consist people, institutions, shared beliefs and cultural ideas. The new generation inherit those shared beliefs and ideas from their parents and again pass on those beliefs to their coming generation. The beliefs and ideas which they inherit become a normal part of their life and they keep on following them throughout their life span. Patriarchy is such a belief which became a part of society and is being passed on from one generation to another. Patriarchy is a male dominated power structure where woman is the subject of the power. Walby defines patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'. (Walby 20). In the ancient times the labour was divided between man and woman; according to their physical strength the man started hunting and cultivating food and woman used to take care of the house as women are always considered as biologically weaker sex than men and with the passage of time it became the belief system that women are meant for houses and the household duties were assigned permanently to them and women also willingly accepted these duties as their role without any hesitation and they didn't dare to oppose these norms and conventions, eventually the man became breadwinner and woman became homemaker. This division of labour confined women inside the four walls of the house where the man

became responsible for the 'production' of food and woman were obligated just for the 'reproduction'. As Simone de Beauvoir in her book *Second Sex* says that a woman is defined as a womb as if the only purpose of a woman is to give birth—"She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her". (Beauvoir 41). In a patriarchal society woman suffers oppression, inequality, abuse, violence, and objectification. Further Beauvoir says, "The triumph of patriarchy was neither an accident nor the result of a violent revolution. From the origins of humanity, their biological privilege enabled men to affirm themselves alone as sovereign subjects; they never abdicated this privilege; they alienated part of their existence in Nature and in Woman; but they won it back afterward; condemned to play the role of the Other, woman was thus condemned to possess no more than precarious power: slave or idol, she was never the one who chose her lot". (Beauvoir 110-111).

Chand Kaur, the mother of Dalip Kaur Tiwana suffers the most in the hands of patriarchal society as she is the victim of oppression, abuse, violence and objectification. She is a religious woman who spends most of her time reciting the hymns but due to her dark complexion and three daughters, she is not accepted by her husband. Such notions about women's beauty and looks are prevalent in Indian society where having a fair complexion is the definition of beauty and husband wants his wife to be fair. Moreover, there are a number of advertisements promoting this notion of beauty where one needs to have a fair complexion to become beautiful, get acquainted and acceptable in the society. For instance, for last decades the advertisement of fair and Lovely is alluring the female section of Indian society. Even the ladies in villages are also following the idea of getting beautiful by using Fair and Lovely. It is believed that fair complexion is the solution of every problem such as finding perfect match, unemployment, and even to boost up confidence. This very notion of beauty destroys the confidence and self-esteem of woman and she begins to feel inferior because she sees herself through the eyes of male around her. Herein, the concept of Looking Glass Self given by Cooley is completely befitting, wherein individuals start looking at themselves on the basis of how others view them and they become judgemental about their own selves. Furthermore, they start using social interaction as a type of mirror and others' judgements and evaluations are used to measure their own worth, values and behaviour. In the *Journey of Bare Feet* Chand Kaur faces embarrassment and humiliation from her husband just because of her dark complexion and she herself gets suppressed and bound to be responsible for her dark looks. Even her sister-in-law and mother-in-law make comments on her dark complexion and holds her responsible for the rude behaviour of her husband as she is deprived of this so called notion of beauty which can be used to control her husband.

Chand Kaur not only suffers for her dark complexion but also for being the mother of daughters instead of son. In a patriarchal society all the property of father is inherited by his son not by his daughter so a woman is obligated to give birth to a boy to pass on the legacy of the family to next generation. When Tiwana's mother gives birth to the third daughter everyone in the family get disappointed and her in-laws began to plan another marriage of their son to have an heir for the family staking her marriage. The female character Bhano from the novel *Eho Hamara Jeevana* also suffers the similar plight where her husband marries another

woman to have a son as the heir of his family. Chand Kaur does all the household work but no one acknowledges her efforts, similarly Bhano works tirelessly during the marriage of her sister-in-law's daughter and gets to know about the second marriage of her husband as a reward in return of her diligent work. The plight of these two women highlights the double standards and hypocrisy of the society where all the work done by these two women is neglected and they are marginalized as if they are emotionless creatures. Chand Kaur is not the only victim of this second marriage system but many other women also suffer the fate. The aunt of Tiwana is the second wife of her husband as the first one was not able to bear a child. As a child Tiwana thinks that it was normal to have more than one wife as she conceived this idea from the society where most of the males she knew have more than one wife. At that time polygyny was prevalent in India and it had become a usual part of so called Indian society and men could be seen with more than one wife. According to Hindu rituals it was not a crime to marry twice because it was permitted by ancient Hindu philosophers to marry more than once if first wife is proved to be barren or not able to give birth to a son. Thus this concept of new marriage was not only restricted to Hindu community but it made its place all over India even Punjab which is always considered the land full of customs and traditions was not restrained from this false notion of marriage.

Chand Kaur is also a victim of domestic violence. Whenever her husband gets angry and frustrated he beats her. Tiwana mentions an incident where her father gets angry and brings a sword with him and another time he brings a hunter to beat his wife. Bhano from the novel also suffers domestic violence when her husband beats her for a misunderstanding where one of Narian's friend falsely put a blame on her that she was trying to seduce him instead he himself wanted to get physically involved with her. In a patriarchal society where man is dominant he considers woman as a possession or commodity which he can use according to his own choice. Under the influence of chauvinistic beliefs Bhano's father treats her daughter as his possession and sells her daughter to get money for the treatment of his son. And when her husband dies, the brothers of her husband claims their right on Bhano as if she is a commodity which their brother possessed and with his death they felt themselves as the legal owners of her and they can treat her in whatever manner they want to. After this heart rendering and brutal incident her father again tries to sell her but she leaves the house to commit suicide in order to get rid of this humiliation and long lasting suffering. But she was unsuccessful in doing so and unfortunately she was saved by police and later on she was sheltered by Narian and after returning to his village he marries her. After the marriage of Narian's niece Bhano comes to know that her husband is going to marry again for having son and this unfortunate news was a sudden shock for her which made her depressed so much that she ends up hurting herself physically. When she comes back from the hospital she finds that her husband has already married to another woman. And after the birth of his son from that another woman, Bhagwanti he sells her to another man under the influence of his second wife forgetting all the sacrifices Bhano which she made for him. In her autobiography Dalip Kaur narrates the incident where her first husband comes after so many years and asks her to come with him. When she refuses to go with him he

threatens her that he will get her raped by goons. The behaviour of her husband shows that he doesn't consider his wife as a partner rather he thinks her as his property over whom he has full authority to do whatever he wants to do.

All the women in this autobiography are mere sufferers in the hands of male dominated society. They act as puppets without realising their own identity and their strength. They don't even raise voice against such cruelty, brutality and atrocities. As a mother Chand Kaur is not allowed to take decisions regarding her daughters. When her sister-in-law asks to take Tiwana with her no one from the family asks for her mother's consent whether she wants to send her daughter with her aunt. There seems a lack of intimacy between the relationship of mother and daughter as they don't spend much time together. In one incident she pleads Tiwana to sleep with her for one night as she is her real mother. Another female sufferer in the autobiography is the grandmother of Tiwana. Although she has a huge control over her daughter-in-law but she is completely under the control of her husband from whom she fears so much that she can't even express her desires directly to him instead she takes the refuge of her grand-daughter, Dalip Kaur. Moreover, she belongs to a poor family that she has a fear of losing money that her husband asked her to keep safely. Tiwana describes an incident where her grandfather gives her hundred rupees and she could not sleep because of the fear of losing it. She kept on worrying that, "What if I lose it? My parents are in no position to make good the loss" (Tiwana3). It shows that the relation between husband and wife is not cordial and based on love rather it has a foundation of fear and domination.

When a person is oppressed he/she tries to get out of that power structure to free oneself. In case of woman most of the times she doesn't realise that she is oppressed by the patriarchal elements of the society. The thoughts and notions of patriarchy become so normal that they don't think it as oppression rather they become a part of it that carries it on to the other generation. Gerda Lerner states in her work *The Creation of Patriarchy* that 'The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. For nearly four thousand years women have shaped their lives and acted under the umbrella of patriarchy, specifically a form of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance (Lerner 217). Chand Kaur who is the victim of patriarchy is ill-treated by her mother- in-law and sister- in-law due to patriarchal beliefs. Although they both are also women but instead of understanding the plight of Chand Kaur and helping her out they get equally involved on the torture performed on Chand Kaur. Tiwana also tries to highlight that not only the patriarchal setup is to be questioned but the whole social norms and conventions are to be blamed where the voice of woman is suppressed not only by the opposite gender but also by the same gender. Similarly instead of understanding the condition of Bhano the other women doubt her and think bad of her without even understanding her.

Conclusion

Thus, from the study of above mentioned works it can be asserted that the domination of Patriarchal society is still can be easily traced at every step of life whether it is domestic level or professional level. Women have to work under the surveillance of men although they are said to be free and are allowed to take initiatives. After the several decades of independence where India is considered to be one of the leading developing countries in the world but there is no development that could be seen in the situation of female section of the society and we are not able to change this chauvinistic mind-set, women are still treated as commodities to be used by men. Every day there are news related to women exploitation, sexual assault and acid attacks even though woman is the victim but she is held responsible for all the bad happenings in her life. Since her birth she has to remain under the constant supervision of men in her family, her movements and actions are always observed and even in some cases women in her family responsible for the brutality exercised on other women. Girls are always taught to behave in a certain manner in the society because their family considers them the honour of the family, so the boundaries have been set for them and they are obliged to behave in a particular manner. If a girl tries to breach these false notions and connections of the society she has to face the disastrous consequences. It also shows that ego of men is easily hurt by such actions and they can go to any extent just to satisfy their false pride. The movies like 'Chhapaak' are the perfect examples to highlight such heinous act that how a man harm woman physically if she is refuses. But here the question arises that how men can feel so powerful that they don't even think once to exercise such atrocities, the possible answer which comes in mind is that they are taught from the very beginning that they are stronger than women. Even their mothers in the family are responsible to teach their sons such false beliefs. Here the words of Shirin Ebadi are completely befitted which she spoke in an interview that 'Women are the victims of this patriarchal culture, but they are also its carriers. Let us keep in mind that every oppressive man was raised in the confines of his mother's home'. It shows that women herself has to break these shackles and try to emerge from these previously set conventions so that she can see her bright future same as Dilip Kaur Tiwana in her autobiography breaks the norms and false notions of the society and finds a new place in the society and gives voice to her dreams.

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