



A Study of Dalip Kaur Tiwana's "A Journey on Bare Feet"

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Abstract

This paper offers a window into the more in-depth psychological understandings of Punjabi women's marginal lives through a critical analysis of Dalip Kaur Tiwana's *A Journey on Bare Feet*. Women's autobiographies reveal the dark corners of Indian society's feminine psyche. The sensitive and prolific Punjabi author Dalip Kaur Tiwana has introduced a fresh method and viewpoint for the investigation of social realities of significant female-related topics. She examines and outlines the amount to which a society has developed the caste, class, and gender discriminatory hierarchy. She investigates class, caste, and gender concerns, which, taken together, provide a thorough summary of the feminist work done to date to explain men's violence against women in a culture.

Keywords: Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Punjabi writer, Autobiography, Women writings

Introduction

A Journey on Bare Feet by Dalip Kaur Tiwana is a historical narrative that provides the reader with real-world glimpses into the life of women. It is a history, the history of those who have carried it (on their bodies) for a very long time, according to what she says about the book. This book is dedicated in honour of all those who have suffered because of history. Even while the novel tells the account of Tiwana's life, it also tells the story of Punjabi culture, customs, and beliefs.

Although Tiwana's story is primarily personal, every Indian lady goes through a similar struggle. *A Journey on Bare Feet* includes discussions of a number of issues that affect women, including dowries, women's education, the widespread preference for boys and women's position, men's drinking habits, early girl marriages, property disputes, and polygamy in the period before independence. The twenty-seven chapters of *A Journey on Bare Feet* lack any mention of time or year. This autobiography accurately describes Tiwana's life from 1935 to 1980 based on its content. In this piece, the forty-five-year period of Tiwana's life is skillfully interwoven. Dalip Kaur Tiwana, who was born on May 4th, 1935, describes her birth in the little village of Rabbon in the Punjabi region of Ludhiana, where she was raised in a privileged traditional family of successful zamindars.

There were a number of princely states in India during the period, which was before independence. The princely kingdom of India that Tiwana recounts in this autobiographical story, Punjab, was one of these. The functioning of the zamindari system in the Punjab province is highlighted in Tiwana against a

backdrop of colonial era. Tiwana first introduces us to her innocent, ignorant, but humble grandma in her memoirs *A Journey on Bare Feet*. She serves as the story's protagonist. The grandmother of Tiwana was a lowly Jatt woman who had married the wealthy Hazura Singh. Her grandmother had never gotten used to the lavish lifestyle of this royal family because she came from a well-respected zamindar family. This woman lacked the funds necessary to purchase a box of matches. Her younger daughter regarded her as a menial.

She inspired the name of the book after her younger son reprimanded her for wearing worn-out clothing and walking about the house barefoot. She clasped her granddaughter's hand while avoiding looking at her own daughter and son. She was unable to ask her grandfather to travel with her to Haridwar so she may take a swim in the sacred Ganga because of his overwhelming power in the household. She is a representation of the perpetually terrified Indian woman. Tiwana was raised by her grandmother to fear the Almighty and "his secret dispensation." Her grandmother had led a stereotyped life as the oppressed, silent woman in a small-town patriarchy. She was familiar with her oppressed position in a caste-based, feudalistic culture.

Tiwana used a story to illustrate how much her grandma accepted her inferior status in the culture she lived in. She recalled how her grandma was so afraid of losing the money that she was unable to fall asleep the entire night when Tiwana's grandfather gave his wife a hundred rupee gift before leaving for Nabha. She was constantly concerned, "What if I lose it? My parents are in no position to make good the loss." (Tiwana, Dalip Kaur: *A Journey on* 3) When Tiwana noticed her grandmother's uneasy state, she advised her to spend the money on necessities. What a big heart you have! My grandmother exclaimed in surprise at Tiwana's suggestion. "What a large heart you have! That's because you belong to an aristocratic family." (3) Her grandmother was aware that she could not possibly contemplate spending such a large sum all at once.

In the book, Tiwana describes how the class divide and its effects on the subalterns' psyches drove them to internalise their subordinate status in society. Tiwana holds her grandmother in the highest regard because of her unwavering love and teachings. She expresses the deep sense of gratitude she has for her grandma in these words: "When I was very small, my grandmother had breast-fed me. Surprisingly, her breasts had filled with milk. I was too young to know why my grandmother had nursed me in place of my mother." (2)

Tiwana's mother, Chand Kaur, is another pivotal figure in this story. Hira Singh's daughter Chand Kaur was a lowly peasant. The mother of Chand Kaur, Har Kaur, was a devout woman who passed away at a young age, leaving behind Chand Kaur, who was seven years old, and her two boys. Hira Singh and Sadhu Baba Bhagwandas took excellent care of the kids when she passed away. Baba Bhagwandas raised them like his own children, making no effort to spare. The Granth Saheb with all of its annotations, five texts, and saints' proverbs were among the things he forced Chand Kaur remember. (2) His religious lectures also educated her mind, turning her into a follower like her mother Har Kaur. He felt an unfathomable sense of affinity with the family. Only he went to Tiwana's family with Hira Singh to make the proposal for Chand Kaur to wed their son, Kaka Singh.

Tiwana also describes her mother's journey as a zamindar in *A Journey on Bare Feet*. "A dark and youthfully attractive woman who used to go about the house, unobtrusively, attending to her chores, and of whom I had never taken much notice." (2) She was resourceless because she had spent her entire life travelling on her bare feet. Because she had not given birth to a boy, the heir who would have continued the zamindars' lineage, she was considered a neglected lady in the family. In a marriage of five years, she had three daughters in quick succession.

She had experienced being caged up, suffering at the hands of her family, and having her own girls, who lived under the same roof, separated from her. She could do nothing when her sister-in-law took her daughter. She had no right to adore or express affection for her kids. Her disadvantaged upbringing in the "Rabbonwalli Family" and the fact that she is a mother of daughters are the main causes of her suffering. Chand Kaur, who came from a lower status, had also been victimised by the zamindari society since she was made to have children until her desire for a son was satisfied.

Simon de Beauvoir rightly notes in her article "Woman as Other" in *The Second Sex*

Woman is womb...We are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women... she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (21)

Chand Kaur was treated in the novel just as a "sex" and a "other." In a patriarchal/racial society, the preference for a son appears to be the primary justification for performing a marriage. If a woman doesn't conform or uphold the patriarchal society's expectations, is she destined to lose her sexuality, womanhood, and most importantly her identity as it has been formed by the society? Any violation of social norms is totally undesirable. Nearly every member of the household reprimanded Chand Kaur when she gave birth to her third daughter.

The grandmother of Tiwana chastised her daughter-in-law. –"What good are you if you cannot give us a son' or 'Oh God it's our bad luck that you have fallen to our lot. That bride of peepal tree house took no time in giving birth to two sons in quick succession. A lucky family indeed! And you." (Tiwana 17) Additionally, Tiwana's father threatened to have his wife (Chand Kaur) beheaded for breaking the bad news of the birth of a third daughter to him. Chand Kaur was an average Punjabi woman who suffered her entire life without harbouring any resentment or aspirations. She only wished for the safety of her children in her prayers. Despite the fact that her husband had severely abused her, she was in a fit of hysteria when he passed away.

As things grew worse, Tiwana's grandfather sought the advice of a Purohitji and requested that he find a solution by offering some ritual so that his daughter-in-law may conceive a son. He was concerned about the sudden birth of so many daughters into the family. The grandfather also questioned whether his son would have to be remarried if the same wife gave birth to a boy or not. Second marriage was not an uncommon procedure in those days; it was really quite

frequent. The older aunt's (Gulab Kaur's co-wife) statement that "It won't make a difference if there are three dead. There will still be a fourth one. Show me a Sardar who has less than four wives." (17) Here, the story makes overt allusions to the objectification of women, where they are seen as possessions or objects.

Chand Kaur's exploitation on the grounds of caste, class, race, and gender further demonstrated the reality that she was a disposable item. Tiwana relives the era when polygamy in India was out of control. While telling the narrative of her aunt Gulab Kaur, who had been married for a while but had no children, she brings up the oppression of men. Kaur is the second spouse of Tiwana's uncle, Patiala's Superintendent of Police General Sardar Tara Singh Sidhu. In an effort to have an heir, he had remarried, but that union had also failed to produce children. Gulab Kaur begged her parents to send Dalip Kaur with her in order to change her husband's mind about being married a third time.

Another issue that girls in Indian society frequently encounter is one that Tiwana describes in her memoirs. Tiwana remembers the day her marriage was finalised. When she was younger, girls were treated like commodities and presented to the groom. Depending on his decision, he would either accept her or reject her. Girls were forced to endure the slur helplessly. The boy's parents called off the engagement a month before the wedding. The marriage preparations had begun frantically in Tiwana's home. The fact that the rejected girls made it difficult for her family to remarry was a stigma for them. Tiwana's senior aunt Gulab Kaur added that "People would wonder why they had rejected a daughter of their family. People will talk. It will bring us bad name." (73)

Tiwana's self-confidence was destroyed when the proposal was cancelled, and remarks and ridicule only made her feelings of disappointment worse. She occasionally would stand in front of the mirror and question her beauty and appearance. She questioned whether she was a good girl. Why did they call her a girl without character? After it had been resolved, Tiwana's rejection for marriage was a very significant matter because it might have an impact on her sisters' chances as well. When Samrala aunt learned of the news, she hurried back to Patiala with her proposal and immediately began to plan the entire situation in order to set up the proposal for Tiwana's marriage to her sister-in-law's son. She spoke in such a sarcastic tone, "What belongs to the garbage dump must ultimately find a place there. Girls can't live in their parent's homes all their lives. They must go where they belong. Here's a good opportunity coming your way. Of course, you can try in other place. Nobody can stop you from doing that. But they would all insinuate that she is a once rejected girl, you may find yourself at a dead end." (89) Her talks even indicated a reference to dowry while covering up all the points, "Whatever you want to give, you can put it in girls' name." (79)

In India, girls are not asked to choose their marriage partner. Her aunt rushed to set the wedding date without first seeking her permission. Tiwana remembers, "They asked me nothing, told me nothing. I felt lost and forlorn in the melee, marked by the din and hubbub of a country fair. After school, I went straight to my room and read. Lost in the world of fiction I would soon forget the real world around me." (98) Tiwana performed four pheras around Guru Granth Sahib before returning to her in-house law's a few days later. Tiwana married

when she was in the eighth grade. As a young girl of twelve years old, she was sent back the next day to be retrieved after two years from her parental home.

After a day off from school following her marriage, Tiwana returned to her studies as usual. In the story, Tiwana discussed her identity dilemma after her instructor, Miss Sen, questioned her, "Miss Tiwana, would you desire to continue studying?" Because she was no longer Miss Tiwana, Tiwana wanted to remind her teacher of this. The following is how Tiwana expressed her predicament: "Then what was I. It struck me that I was nobody. Yes, I was nobody. When someone addressed me as Miss Tiwana, I felt like that I was leading a false life." (109) Girls' careers are not taken seriously in India.

In the book, Tiwana sincerely discusses the subject. When she returns to the school after being married, she feels betrayed and disrespected. Not all females are as fortunate to obtain this opportunity. Sometimes guys' careers are also affected by early marriage. Early marriage has been made illegal in India, which has significantly reduced this societal ill. Tiwana's relative Raghubir Bhai likewise suffered the consequences of an early marriage. He said, "At that time I was still in school. My parents never asked me about my opinion... But why should I be made to suffer for it?" (111) While narrating her own experience, Tiwana has interwoven a number of different threads. The odd tale of Dhanni, a little orphan girl, is revealed by Tiwana.

According to the story, a woman complained that her husband had picked up a girl from somewhere and brought her home when Tiwana's uncle served as the City Kotwal. After questioning, the police discovered that Dhanni's stepmother had sold her to an unidentified person, who then sold her to another stranger. Her stepmother was no longer prepared to accept her back. General Sardar Tara Singh Sidhu, Tiwana's uncle, took pity on the young woman and claimed her as his own daughter. When Tiwana reached adulthood, her uncle wed her to the Dhaliwal Police Superintendent's brother-in-law.

Sadly, her husband's treatment of her for making excessive demands for money to settle his family's problems caused their marriage to break up. He started abusing her more after she first appeased him by stealing money from her foster father (Tiwana's uncle). Unable to bear his cruelty for a long time, she refused to live with him. On her foster mother's (General Tara Singh Sidhu's first wife) askance, "But where will you live if you leave your husband? Dhanni in an anguish replied, "I will live neither here nor there. I will not live anywhere." (101) When she passed away from enteric fever, her foreboding prophecy came true and her sad tale came to an end.

Conclusion

Tiwana's autobiography reveals that women are considered second-class members of families and society. Her fate is the same whether she is from a higher class or a lower class. A common theme in some Indian women self-narratives is grief, disappointment, helplessness, and dissatisfaction. Through their autobiographies, women writers have paved the path for future generations and demonstrated that everything is possible with enough willpower. They are agents for social change. Women tend to write about both their girlhood and adult experiences in their life stories in a straightforward and objective way, using a range of understatement in place of expanding narratives.

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