Chapter 6

The Need to Belong:

Conformity as Violence

in Dalip Kaur Tiwana’s *And Such is Her Fate*

An award-winning Punjabi novelist, Dalip Kaur Tiwana has penned twenty seven novels, seven collections of short stories, an autobiography, and a literary biography. Her literary works have won awards, such as the “Sahitya Akademi Award” for her novel *Eho Humara Jeevana* in 1972, the "Nanak Singh Puruskar" for her novel *Peele Patian di Dastan* in 1980, and the “Gurmukh Singh Musafir Puruskar" for her autobiography *Nange parion da Safar* in 1982, etc. In her works, Tiwana focusses on the suffering of the underprivileged and rural society. Complex internal struggle within the female psyche is also a recurrent theme in Tiwana’s works. For instance, in *Twilight* Harjit’s emotional involvement with a colleague destroys her marriage. Torn between her need for conforming to society’s norms and her lover she gets emotional support from Sonal who is an emancipated and nonconformist woman. Ironically, Sonal gets married just when Harjit’s divorce proceedings begin. In the second story entitled *Mark of the nose ring*, Kiranjit’s husband – an army officer – dies in the war even before their marriage is consummated. She refuses to wear the widow’s attire. Consequently, she is criticized and maligne for her disobedience. However, Kiranjit eventually makes peace with tradition by performing *shraadha* and sheds her nose ring. In both the
stories women come into conflict with societal hypocrisy. This chapter undertakes the study of Harjeet Singh Gill’s English translation of Tiwana’s novel entitled *And Such is Her Fate*.

*And Such is Her Fate* is a study in patriarchal violence that targets women in multiple forms. In this novel, Tiwana reflects the “social reality in order to force a rethinking of the knowledge, such a society lives by. The work is completely enveloped with a strong resonance of the power of human destiny and the vicious network of social predictability. The characters in the work have to submit to destiny as well as to the society” (Bhangu). The story unfolds in the lower section of rural Punjab where the sale of brides is common. It focusses on the plight of a woman named Bhano who is victimized by her family and by almost every person she comes across in her life. Bhano’s misery is rooted in alienation due to her being rejected by those whose lives are bound to her. Her suffering is also aggravated by her unequal socio-economic status as well as the label of impurity that is affixed to her by the religious-minded and morality-conscious community. The novel can be regarded as Bhano’s journey through life looking for validation and a place to “belong.” The narrative describes the manner in which Bhano’s need to belong forces her to conform to violence. The author also explores the abject treatment meted out to woman who is, in turn, helpless to fight her circumstances because of her socially fabricated dependence on man.

Tiwana begins the narrative by showing how Bhano is the target of malicious gossip in the village where her second husband Narain resides. Bhano’s misery-ridden youth is a consequence of her mother’s death and her brother Dogar’s illness. Her father sells her to a stranger in order to obtain
money to pay off his son’s medical bills. Bhano’s father thus uses her as a bargaining tool in order to ease his own life’s burden. Her happy married life with her first husband, Sarban, is destroyed by his four elder unmarried brothers who want their share of his merchandize. They deliberately hurt Sarban on a vital part on his body and, consequently, he succumbs to his injury and dies. The behaviour of Sarban’s brothers shows the mimetic character of desire. In Violence and the Sacred, René Girard observes that an individual’s desire for an object is provoked and fuelled by the desire of another individual (also termed as a “model”) for the same object. The struggle that ensues between the individuals for the possession of an object is ultimately transformed into mimetic rivalry. Girard states that violence is the eventual outcome of this rivalry. In the novel, the four siblings murder their youngest brother to fulfill their carnal desire for his wife. They try and cajole her into accepting their gifts of bangles to obtain her father’s consent over her marriage to one of them. Bhano, however, refuses to commit to any one of them. She realizes that it will merely lead to further family feuds (Tiwana 10). Moreover, she is aware that she will end up being sexually exploited by all of them. Soon Bhano realizes that her father has chosen to sell her once more to a stranger. This revelation forces her to attempt suicide.

The thing that Bhano desires most in her life is security. She yearns to belong to another human being. She is able to have a little contentment with her first husband Sarban. But when it is destroyed, she decides to end her life by drowning herself in the river Ganga. Jean-Paul Sartre says that the act of suicide is connected to an individual’s birth, for it involves the desire to return to the state of one’s birth, albeit in a negative manner. According to him, the
“facticity\textsuperscript{11}” of birth is the most elusive aspect of a person’s life. In fact, birth or the state of being-in-itself constitutes a “hard limit” that is inaccessible as well as “directly inapprehensible and even inconceivable” (\textit{Being and Nothingness} 556). The individual’s need to revert to the state of “in-itself” arises primarily because she wants to achieve complete control over her existence and, also, to escape anguish and nothingness. However, Bhano’s wish is to be “restored” to Sarban in death. Thus even in death she seeks another’s ‘being’ to attain a semblance of completion. She is saved by a man named Narain, who later marries her. Bhano repays the debt by trying to be an “ideal” spouse to him.

Narain is labelled as “the village boozer” by his community (Tiwana 1). Narain is an embittered individual. His first marriage – a business transaction – ends abruptly when his ‘bought’ bride runs away. The experience disillusions him about both marriage and the bride-for-sale business. As a result, he spends his time drinking and gambling. A good-for-nothing fellow, Narain is incapable of taking care of himself. Nonetheless, he is threatened by Bhano’s expert handling of the household economics. Narain refers to himself as Bhano’s “overlord” (195). His phallic consciousness views Bhano’s efficiency to be threat to his position as the master of his house. Hence Narain abuses Bhano in public, both verbally and physically. Bhano’s neighbour Santi excuses Narain’s behaviour on the loss of his mother at a young age. According to Santi, Narain must not be faulted since he has had no strong female influence in his life. Her viewpoint is indeed patriarchal for she imposes man’s transgression on the absence or presence of woman in his life.

\textsuperscript{11}Based on Sartre’s philosophy, the term “facticity” signifies all those concrete details against the background of which human freedom exists and is limit.
Patriarchy always justifies the violence exercise by the phallocentric being. Hence the community are vociferous in their defense Narain’s violent behaviour. On the other hand, they harbour a strong dislike for Bhano as she hails from a different village. They label her as a fallen woman despite being aware of her personal struggles. Bhano is publicly criticized for each of her actions. They frown upon her investing time in religious activities. When a young man propositions Bhano, the villagers blame her for enticing him. Her inability to give birth makes her the target of further criticism. Bhano thus is the quintessential victim of patriarchy. She represents the true marginalization of woman in a phallocentric society.

The narrative also reveals the manner in which woman’s existence finds its relevance only through fulfillment of other people’s wants and desires. Bhano’s taking charge of the finances causes a vast improvement in Narain’s economic status. But Bhano’s contribution in Narain’s prosperity is trivialized because she is not able to provide him with an heir. Here woman’s worth is reduced to her biological functions. Narain asks for Bhano’s permission to have a child through surrogacy but promises that her position in his household will remain secure. He chooses Bhagwanti as the woman to bear his child. Bhagwanti is another victim of patriarchy. Although a married woman, Bhagwanti is thrown out of her marital home. Her superstitious in-laws blame her for the death of their prematurely born grandson. Bhagwanti’s misfortunes make her embittered woman. For her, Narain’s offer is the sole hope for security. When Bhano falls ill and is admitted to hospital, Narain allows Bhagwanti to stay at his house. It gives Bhagwanti an opportunity to usurp the Bhano’s place in Narain’s household. It is a struggle for survival
between the two women and their success depends on the fulfillment of their assigned roles. Both women are the victims of patriarchy yet the desire for security turns them into competitors. Bhagwanti manages to secure her position in Narain’s house upon the birth of her son. Here the child is basically an instrument in Bhagwanti’s realization of her plan to secure a home for herself. Bhano, on the other hand, becomes a virtual outsider in her husband’s house.

The crux of Bhano’s misery lies in her yearning to “belong.” Martin Heidegger considers the concept of “belonging” to have negative connotations. In *Being and Time*, he states that only non-human identities are said to be “belonging to the world” (13). Similarly, he considers “belonging to others” to be an irresponsible act for these ‘others’ control the consciousness of the particular *Dasein*\(^{12}\), thereby depriving her or him of its own accountability. Such *Dasein*, in his view, is characterized by inauthenticity (13). Hence Bhano’s quest to “belong” to another entity makes her vulnerable to violence. She attempts to commit suicide, allows abuse at the hands of her alcoholic husband, endures Bhagwanti’s beatings, and tolerates the cruel taunts of her community. Her passivity thus is directly attributed to her need to belong. She tries to overcome this passivity. She attempts to immerse herself in different activities. Bhano invests her time in religious activities, takes charge of the financial aspect of her household, and is always ready to provide a helping hand to her neighbors. Friedrich Nietzsche terms this condition as “mechanical activity” which involves “absolute regularity, meticulous and

\(^{12}\)Martin Heidegger defines *Dasein* as an entity which “in its very Being, comports itself understandingly towards that Being.” He elaborates that *Dasein* is an entity “which in each case I myself am. Mineness belongs to any existent Dasein, and belongs to it as the condition which makes authenticity and inauthenticity possible” (*Being and Time* 78).
mindless obedience, and training in impersonality, in forgetting oneself” (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 112). Bhano chooses conformity as a substitute for her continuous yet futile attempts at “belonging” in the world. Mechanization and constant activity become the balm for her over-whelming guilt at falling short of the community including her husband Narain’s ideal for femininity. Bhano thus represents the passive yet self-destructive victim of violence trying to “alleviate her suffering existence” through the “hypnotic collective deadening of her sensibilities, of the ability to experience pain” (112).

In the end, Bhano is sold off to another eager customer by her second husband, Narain. The last scene of the novel highlights the figure of Bhano. Dressed in only her underwear, Bhano exits the village to meet the man who has bought her from Narain. It signifies her comprehension of the futility in expecting compassion and love despite her previous experiences of violence. Bhano is the quintessential other looking for validation and a sense of belonging in other people’s lives. She tries to work hard and be a good spouse to her husband; she nurtures the hope for social acceptance, she turns to religion to insert meaning into the “nothingness” of her existence. She does experience contentment albeit short-lived with Sarban. Consequently, she spends her life recalling her past to relive the experience of “belonging” to someone. Bhano also shares a very ambivalent relationship with Narain. He is a quintessential patriarchal subject who needs another’s subjectivity to authenticate his existence. In fact, he fears disintegration in the absence of a supporting other. In Bhano, however, Narain only encounters Nothingness. After Sarban’s death Bhano feels that her “insides have dried up…now nothing is likely to grow there” (Tiwana 18). The nothingness within Bhano
prompts the Narain’s phallic subjectivity to reject her. In the climax of the novel, a half-dressed Bhano represents the transhistoric passive victim of patriarchal violence. Her removal of her skirt is, however, an authentic act, for she finally understands that compliance to patriarchal ideology is itself an act of violence.