



The Agony and Dilemma of a Migrant Woman:

A Study of Veena Verma's Short Story 'The Purchased woman'

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Introduction: From the very existence of human beings, the man moved from one place to another in search of food. Even birds migrate from place to place for their survival. Now man has marked boundaries and territories, so it has become difficult to migrate from one country to another. But birds can migrate freely without any restriction and with full freedom. They are not forced to migrate, it all depends upon their will. But sometimes, some human beings are forced to migrate in an illegal way for different purposes. Mostly, women are forcefully migrated for sexual purposes or prostitution. Even migration is there for women after marriage. They migrate from her parents' house to her in-laws' house. They try to re-establish their identities at a new place. Woman migration is common everywhere. Even in Punjab, women are bought from other states to marry a person, who is unable to find a suitable match because of certain reasons like poverty and deformity. Because of poverty, poor parents are forced to sell their daughters. In Punjab, women were used to selling in the market of Jaito, known as 'Jaito di mandi' in Punjabi. Usually, women were purchased in the Malwa region of Punjab where agriculture was the only source of the income. In Doaba region the purchase of women was less as compared to Majha and Malwa region.

This issue of the sale of women has been taken up by many writers in the literature. Particularly Punjabi literature is replete with references to the sale of women and their forced migration. There is a Punjabi mini novel, 'Kudesan', means a woman of other state or country dealing with the subject of purchased woman. Dalip Kaur Tiwana, in her Punjabi novel 'Eh Hamara Jeewna', states the sale of 'Bhano'.

The woman, who is purchased from poor states or country, is known as Kudesan in Punjabi. But the English woman who comes or brought from a western country is known

as 'meim' in Punjabi. She is not forced to migrate but male prefers to migrate to her country. She is very well treated as compared to bought women, Kudesan. It seems an irony on poverty. Women are valued in the terms of economic utility.

Veena Verma is a well-known writer of Diaspora literature. Her writings' subject matter is taken from the people's actual life experiences. In the story, *The Purchased Women* Veena Verma brilliantly penned the plight of the purchased or a bought woman. She tries to present the problems of migrated women in this male-dominated society. The story deals with the bigger issues related to the forced migration and construction of female's self. It talks about the fabrication and construction of the patriarchal society in such a way that female is just a sex object. The story is about the sufferings of an astute, Bengali woman Lacchmi; who is a purchased woman. She is exposed to all sorts of mental trauma and cultural dilemmas that the other purchased females have experienced.

Methodology: The agonies of a migrant woman are revealed through the feminist study of this story. Feminism deals with the issues of gender differences and exploitation and it is based on the theories of equalization of men and women. It generally means a movement to achieve equality in all the spheres of life. It aims to achieve the goal of social acceptance and legal protection against the exploitation of women in cultural, social, political, economical and educational fields of life. On humanitarian ground, it is targeted for equality for all around development of women. It is a movement that wishes the world to be equal for both the sexes. This study involves a thoughtful discussion, deliberate effort to make this story universally significant.

Analysis: For every migration, there are some reasons i.e. better economic opportunities, job, the promise of a better life but in this story, Lacchmi is migrated from Calcutta to Punjab because of the economic crisis of the family. She is bought by Maghar Singh for sexual purposes. She is suffering from mental agonies by being uprooted from her place.

When villagers come to know that she is not married to Maghar Singh. Nobody dares to enquire him but they just blame the woman by saying –

“This is very bad; such scandalous activities have started in the village;

It will have a bad effect on the womenfolk...” (Verma, 115)

It is an irony that man himself corrupts the society by indulging himself in the immoral activities. Then he points out this issue himself. Such activities are the creation of a man but a woman can be easily blamed and suppressed. Nobody has a dare to question a male.

The woman in the story belongs to Bengali culture and she is suffering from the cultural dilemma. She represents her culture through her personality. She leads with her intelligence. Bengali women are known for their culture. On the other hand, Maghar Singh is a truck driver who can assimilate in a new culture without any difficulty because he moves from place to place.

Lacchmi refuses to take food from the dhaba. In a real sense, she is refusing for being uprooted from her own cultural identity. She remains hungry for three days and fell sick. It just shows her attachment to her own culture. She wants to preserve her own identity.

Perhaps, there is a fear in her mind that she cannot protest against his culture and to adopt his culture means to lose her own cultural identity. She can only practice her culture by the acceptance and approval of Maghar Singh.

It is said that people are created to be loved and things are created to be used. But the reason for human beings' sufferings is that things are being loved and people are being used. The woman is used here in the story as an object. The objectification of women can be proved with the quotation of Luce Irigaray from 'The Sex Which is not one'-

“For woman is traditionally a use value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity.” (Irigaray 31)

A woman is just a commodity for a male. Women bodies are used as objects as all the powers are vested in the hands of the men. The woman who is selling Lacchmi, demands fifteen hundred rupees for her. Maghar Singh does the bargaining for her price as a price of a product by finding faults in her body and features.

According to Luce Irigaray-

“As such, she remains in the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established; in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by subjects: workers, merchants, consumers.” (Irigaray 31)

Man only thinks in terms of his need and desire of her beauty as Maghar Singh says,

“Fifteen hundred rupees for this woman? No height, no charm, no beauty...absolutely worthless!” (Verma 120)

He is just watching her beauty in the terms of an object. In the terms of sexual objectification, Germaine Greer exhibits in her essay 'The Female Eunuch'-“Every human body has its optimum weight and contour, which only health and efficiency can

establish. Whenever we treat women's bodies as aesthetic objects without function we deform them.” (Greer 41)

Lacchmi is facing the sexual violence. As Veena Verma penned in the text-

“Her whole body would ache so badly that she did not have any strength to move.”
(Verma 117)

She does not protest against the sexual violence because she knows that she is a purchased woman. If she would protest she would be sold to another man. And there too she would face same atrocities. She is totally dependent upon a man. So the man has every right over her body. Simone De Beauvoir exhibits-

“But a woman cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to oppressors is not comparable to any other.” (Beauvoir, p xxv)

Sexual violence is used by the men as a way of securing and maintaining the relations of male dominance and female suppression. Man domination is crossed through the interaction with the power structures, such as race, class, age and status. These shape women's experience of sexual violence. As Maghar Singh says-

“Why are you crying? So many girls have come here, but they all went back very happy and cheerful. No one ever cried... what is your problem?” (Verma 119)

Extreme poverty conditions dehumanize the lower class society where selling one's body is not considered a crime. ‘In India, of course, there are many prostitutes who are compelled to adopt to feed themselves and their dependents.’(Haveripeth 38) As Lacchmi reflects-

“So many girls in her neighbourhood are sold in this way or given ‘on rent’ for a fixed time. Abject poverty prevailed in her colony where selling one's body was not considered a crime.”(Verma 122)

Perhaps she is justifying herself that it is not her fault to be a purchased woman. It's the fault of her fate. The story depicts the sex trafficking which is a severe crime in the society. Women are bought and sold for sex purposes from one place to another. Even parents are forced to sell their daughters otherwise their survival is much difficult. Simone De Beauvoir says that-

“Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will Undertake the moral justification of her;” (Beauvoir, xvii).

It is an only economic crisis for which women are forced into prostitution; otherwise, everyone has a dream of her prince charming. 'The biggest reason for involvement into prostitution is bad economic circumstances and conditions and poverty is the motivating forces to fend their survival of the family.' (Qayyum 403)

The whole story revolves around the problems of a migrated woman in the patriarchal system of society. Patriarchy means a system in which males control key resources which female have a dire need, giving male power over them. It is the male tendency to view himself as a unique and to subordinate the female to a medium for pleasure. Kate Millet says -

"Patriarchal, societies typically link feelings of cruelty with sexuality, the latter often equated both with evil and with power".(Millet 44)

In patriarchy society, the women are not allowed to choose a life partner of their own choice. Even they cannot protest against it. If a woman dares to try, honour killing is a result of it. Top priority is given to the groom's economic prosperity. In the society like Punjab, marriages are bargains. Women are bargained for property, relations, finance and honour. When Maghar Singh was an inspector, Karam Singh fixed his sister's marriage with him, without asking her sister's consent. When he came to know that his financial position is not sound as before, he breaks up the relation by saying-

"Our girl is not a dumb cattle, who can be handed over to any Tom, Dick or Harry."(Verma 119)

Maghar Singh also depicts the cruelty of male-dominated society by replying to Karam Singh that-

"Was she dumb cattle when you fixed her marriage with me without her consent?"(Verma 119)

A woman is just a puppet in the hands of male-dominated society. She can be used for their selfish purposes. A man still gets the benefit of patriarchy. Man's will is always imposed upon a woman. She has no choice except to accept the circumstances. If a woman does not accept the male authority she is called characterless or shameless.

Man's psychology is beautifully depicted in the story when Maghar Singh agrees to pay twelve hundred rupees because of the virginity of Lacchmi when old Madam says-

"She is a "fresh piece", Sir. You can take your money back if you don't find her a virgin." (Verma 120)

Maghar Singh, himself used to bring girls at his home but for himself, he wants to purchase a virgin. He thinks that it is a prestige for him to buy a fresh woman. In the *theory of Sexual Politics* Kate Millet comments on the male psychology-“So auspicious is the event of defloration that in many tribes the owner groom is willing to relinquish breaking the seal of his new possession to a stronger or older personality who can neutralize the attendant danger”(Millet 48).

From centuries the domestic violence is used to control the behaviour of a woman. Physical force is used to create fear in the mind of a woman. Maghar Singh has no legal right over her as he is not her husband. His father suggests him to marry Lacchmi, but he just wants to get rid of her. He threatens her that-

“Now if you open your bloody mouth again, I’ll crush you under my truck. What a leech she is!” (Verma 130)

But see the heights of the patience of Lacchmi , she says-

“River and woman are alike, when they co-mingle with anyone, they can’t be separated. I am the river and you are my ocean... you are my destination,” (ibid 129)

Again she is forced to migrate to another place but she feels attached to Maghar Singh’s house. She does not want to go into other hands. She is brutally beaten. In order to practice exploitation over women, violence is used as a device, so the male dominates and the woman is subordinate. A woman not just bears the physical pain but mental pain too. ‘Domestic violence has drastic and devastation effects on its victim’ (Parveen 79)

A woman is emotionally stronger than a man. Even the sufferings and sorrows of life can be easily bear boldly by the women. In most of the cases, when a man suffers from mental agonies he takes the support of intoxication etc. But from birth to death a female faces a lot of suffering in her life. In most of the families, a female child is less cared as compared to a male child. A female child follows most of do's and do not's. After marriage, a woman suffers separation from her parents and home. She bears the labour pains. She does household works. All these things prove that a woman is more patient in the sufferings of the life. A woman always remains under the authority of a male since childhood to old age.

Here in the story, Lacchmi bears a lot of violence of Maghar Singh. But even then she says to Maghar Singh-

“You are my man... my master, although for you I am only a purchased woman...” (ibid 120)

In these lines, Veena Verma focuses upon the relationship of master and slave. Man is the superior and master, where a woman is inferior and a slave to him. A woman is just like a slave for man. As Simone De Beauvoir in the 'Second Sex' states-

“Man and slave, also, are united by reciprocal need, in case of economic, which does not liberate the slave. In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying this need through his own action: whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hope and fear, is quite conscious of the need he has for his master” (Beauvoir xxvi).

Lacchmi is not self-sufficient, she is economically weak. As a slave she is bound to master for her needs, she is bound to Maghar Singh for her economic and social needs. ‘A woman who is unable to get any gainful employment and who has no supporter must either starve to death or earn her livelihood through prostitution’ (Haveripeth 35).

In this story, Lacchmi is suffering from identity crisis. She has no identity, no home and no family of her own. Her identity is questioned. She is trying to explore her existence and identity. Almost all the married women positively think that they have two houses-one of in-laws' house and second is of her parents' house. But here Lacchmi has no house of her own. She belongs nowhere, not to parents and not to that person who bought her. When she feels attached, even then it is tried to send her to another place forcefully by using violence. She tries to keep herself attached to Maghar Singh's house and says-

“Now where shall I go leaving my home, Sardarji?” (Verma 122)

But the stone-hearted man replied to her innocent begging that-

“Your home! Did your father build it?” (ibid 129)

She tries to convince him by saying that-

“When a woman enters a house, she makes it her home forever.” (ibid 120)

In the Second Sex, Simone De Beauvoir justifies her claim- “Woman may fail to lay claim to the status of a subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the other”(Beauvoir xvii).

She is really suffering from the trauma of losing her own identity. She is unable to claim her right over Maghar Singh's house but she has attached herself to that place. She tries to boost up the male ego by saying _

“You are such a strong man; can’t you provide shelter to a helpless woman?” (Verma 129)

The meanness of Maghar Singh can be seen when he says-

“Shelter? Do you think I have opened a charity house here? There are hundreds of women like you, throwing them on me. How many of them I can provide shelter to?” (Ibid 129)

It can be said that the females are more sensitive as compared to the males. Lacchmi is used instrumentally; she is just treated like a tool for sexual satisfaction. She has no identity and place of her own. For such kind of women, who are detached from recognition, Simone De Beauvoir exhibits that-

“They have no past, no history, no religion of their own”(Beauvoir xxv).

Here Lacchmi is facing the same crisis because she does not have a husband, family and home which are needed for the existence of every human being in a particular society. In traditional societies when someone was punished, he or she was used to ostracizing from the society or to send to exile. It was regarded as a severe punishment for the person who was terminated from his or her own society. But Lacchmi is suffering from that mental agony without committing any crime. This plunges her into an acute identity crisis.

Here in the story, the man has no legal relationship with Lacchmi. He is just an owner who purchased her for his selfish use. But he can control her in any way with his masculine authority. ‘Old testament reflects a society in which female sexuality was under the control of and the disposal of males’ (Kreitzer 18).

It is well said that ‘beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder’. Lacchmi's real beauty i.e. her virtuous nature and values are identified by Maghar Singh's father who advised him to marry her, as Maghar Singh already deceived by his friend who broke her sister's engagement with him. Here it can be said that there are some men in the society who really want to give respect and equality to a woman. Her real beauty is not identified by Maghar Singh. He rebuked him by saying-

“You slut! What black magic have you used on the old man? I know you Bengali people are masters in that you can turn a man into a fly and stick him to the bedpost. What magic potion did you give to my father that he has decided to give you his property?” (Verma 128)

The purchased or migrated women are not considered reliable. They are just purchased as a commodity. Perhaps Maghar Singh has a perception that a woman who is purchased and does not belong to his culture cannot be reliable and she cannot be proved a good wife. It seems he is ignoring her goodness knowingly because of the notions and taboos of the society for a purchased woman.

It is said that virtuousness is always rewarded. There is a victory of goodness over evil. At the end of the story, Lacchmi has created her place in the heart of a cruel and stone-hearted person. She has proved the power of women. As Richard Gorden stated in his essay "*The Power of Women*" through the character of Grimsdyke that-

"The power of women, my dear old boy. It is for them that men climb mountains, fight wars, go to work, and such unpleasant things." (Gorden 11)

Here too, in the story, the power of woman has proved. A miracle happens that changed the heart of Maghar Singh. It is a miracle of her love. He replies to Lacchmi –

"The storm is over, Lacchmi! No storm will ever blow now. We are at the safe bank now." (Verma 134)

Finally, Lacchmi is accepted by Maghar Singh. She has proved that 'Love conquers all'. A woman has power to change circumstances but a strong will should be there.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that woman trafficking and forced migration is a form of gender-based psychological violence against women. Its acceptance and approval by male dominant society make it an abuse of women. The overwhelming majority of victims of trafficking are women and girls. Those women are often victims of war, poverty, discrimination and violence. In 2015, Indian Express revealed that about 90% human trafficking is of girls who are forced into prostitution' (NCRB 2015). A wide range of strategies are applied to control women, these strategies include physical violence, verbal violence and sexual violence. There are many troubles faced by the purchased women in different cultures. They are served as slaves. They always feel uprooted. Patriarchy is the main cause of female exploitation. A woman who has strong willpower can conquer the heart of a man. She herself can change her destiny. But most of the women do not dare for their liberation. Most of the women try to adjust in the circumstances instead to revolt. Bell Hooks, in her book 'Ain't I A Woman' says, "Black women were told that

we should find our dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt and cope.”(Hooks 7)

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