

Dalip Kaur Tiwana

I was born in a small village, but it has the reputation of producing the first revolutionary, Bhai Maharaj Singh who challenged the English people. So the small village has a distinguished history. When I was very small, I lived with my aunty, my father's sister and her husband *fufar ji* -who was Inspector General of Prisons in Patiala. They had adopted me because they had no child. When I was young, they sent me to a school. On that day, on that very day, teachers slapped a girl in front of me and I started shouting crying loudly. They sent me home, and then I said, "I don't want to study at all." Whenever they asked me to go to school, I started crying. My uncle said let her not study if she does not want to.

One year passed like this. Then as another year came my aunty said, "Her grandfather will take her away because he will say I have not given my grand-daughter any education -so why keep you her uneducated." Then my uncle suggested, "we can engage a teacher for her at home." A very nice lady, they engaged to be my teacher. She came, she told me, "we won't study, we will be telling stories, we will be gossiping" and I said, "Yes." She started me telling short stories, interesting ones. After 13-14 days she did not come, because she is ill. After waiting one day, I said, "I want to go to teacher's (*bhainji's*) house." I went there and there were so many books in her house. I said, "You are ill, how about my stories?" She said, "If you learn the language, you can read stories." I said, "Then, teach me." So, she started teaching Punjabi. After teaching alphabet book, she turned to teach me saying, "Let's learn little a bit of arithmetic." After one year she got me to sit for examination for fifth class and I passed. She then informed me, look, "Victoria School is just near my house. Everyday coachman will leave you there and you can come to my house." My mother (*Babe ji*) and she went to Victoria School. Its principal was a Bengali Mistress, Ms. Sen. Within one year as I passed fifth class, I was pretty small. I was wearing a frock and had my hair in a pony tail. (ਫਰਾਕ ਜਿਹੀ ਪਾਈ ਸੀ, ਗੁਤਨੀ ਐਂ ਜਿਹੇ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ ਸਨ). Seeing me the Principal started saying; "look, no, she is just too small for the sixth class." My mother told her, "yes, she is just a little girl but her age is nearly 10 or 11 years old," At that time nobody bothered about birth certificates or any other verification. She agreed and wrote my age as eleven. My main interest in that school was studying books from its library.

When I was in 10th class, there was a male teacher. We came to know that he has qualified in his third Master of Arts degree and he obtained first class, that is first class in the university. Before he arrived in our room, I just wrote on a chit, "Sir, we are proud of you." He came into the class, looked at everybody, and then in a stern voice asked, "Have you written this?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I also wish to be proud of you!" Then of course he started teaching us. That sentence he spoke to me on that day, I remember so distinctly. Whenever for all my books that I have written, the various awards I have been given, including Sahit Academy Award, I used to receive telegrams, messages and then came a post card. It was written from that professor and words were, "I am proud of you."

Then after passing my B.A., I said I will do IAS (Indian Administrative Service). At Delhi University, I joined M.A. History and Law course -this was double course. I started living in a hostel there. Here, principal from Mohindra College was known to my uncle. He asked my uncle, "What is your daughter doing at Delhi University?" My uncle informed, "She is doing double M.A. and she will also sit for IAS." The Principal told me uncle, "look, your daughter is quite feeble, she will be stressed with so much burden." Hearing this advice, my uncle was so terrified, he wrote to me immediately, "look,

come back." I replied, "no, I have paid fees, for both the courses as well the hostel bills and everything will be OK, nothing will happen." My uncle did not relent, he arrived in Delhi telling me how he felt without me, saying, "I don't know how long I am going to live. You have left me so early." Hearing his plea, I agreed to abandon the course and returned back to Patiala.

As I came back to Patiala, my uncle asked, "What do you want to do now?" I said, "Nothing." Then my uncle went to that principal and asked to tell me which is the easiest subject at master's level? The Principal said, "Punjabi." My uncle filled the application form there and then, paid the fees and arrived home with my roll number in his hand saying, "Beta, (daughter), from tomorrow you are going to join M.A. classes in Punjabi." I was shocked because my ambition was to become an IAS officer. Anyway I started my studies at the college. It had a magazine, some boys came to me asking if I could contribute something for the college magazine. I said, "I have not written anything, I have not thought about it ever." They said, "well, can you write." They just pestered me with their request, or just meet me on the pretext of writing an article. I wrote one day 'A Pippal Tree' is telling to children a story that how girls come here, how ਚਿੜੀਆਂ, ਪੰਛੀ ਗਾਣੇ ਗਾਂਦੇ ਸੀ (sparrows and birds sing songs). I gave this story to them. Our Principal read my contribution he was so impressed, he called me to his office and said, "your story is very good, ਜੋ ਔਰ ਵੀ ਲਿਖੀਂ ਐਂ ਨਾ, ਉਹ ਵੀ ਮੇਰੇ ਕੋ ਦਿਖਾ (let me see the other stories you have written)." I said, "I haven't written any." He said, "if you have not written, then start writing one story every week." I could not dare to refuse him. I was so caught out that every week I wrote a story, it was whatever rubbish came to my mind ਉਹ ਪਟਾਂਗ ਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਸਟੋਰੀਜ਼ ਲਿਖ ਕੇ, ਉਹਨੂੰ ਇੱਕ ਦੇ ਆਉਣੀ. I would give it to our principal. After 10-12 stories, he told me how one day a peon came to me to say that the college clerk says you got a merit scholarship, your money is in the office. Our principal said, "with that money, we can publish your book." I said, "no" Principal said, "we can do this, I will put my and some yours, we will publish a combined book." ਮੈਂ ਕਿਹਾ, "no." He said, "why?" ਮੈਂ ਕਿਹਾ, "My good stories will be thought of yours and your bad will be thought of mine." See, I was so stupid and ignorant then, ਜੋ ਮਾਈਂਡ ਚ ਆਉਂਦਾ, ਉਹ ਕਹਿ ਦਿੰਦੀ. He started laughing. He said, "no, ਤੇਰੀ ਇਕੱਲੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਈ ਛਾਪਾਂਗੇ" ਉਹਨੇ ਉਹ ਕਿਤਾਬ, ਕਹਾਣੀਆਂ ਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਇਕੱਠੀਆਂ ਕਰ ਕੇ, 'ਇਹ ਲਿਲ ਪੁਬਲਿਸਿਹਰ ਸਟੋਰੀਜ਼ ਓਲੋਨੋ' he published a book and he wrote 5-6 lines foreword. In that the last line of his foreword it said, 'one day she will be great writer and I will be no more.'

So that's how I became a story writer. There are many factors that have completely changed Punjabi life. Literature is reflecting that life, Punjabi life changed a lot after British took over Punjab. Our famous writer, Amrita Pritam wrote many things about liberation of women. She advocated a woman should be *azad*. She should be allowed to do whatever she wanted to do. She should be allowed to live as she wants to live. I would only say ਪਿਛਲਾ ਪੈਰ ਚੁੱਕ ਲਿਆ ਉਸਨੇ, ਅੱਗੇ ਉਹਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਕਿੱਥੇ ਰੱਖਣਾ. (As you take the forward step, if you don't know where to place it, it is no good.) Revolution means when you discard the old and adopt the new, the better one, but this deviation when you discard the old and you don't know where to go -what do we call it? So once they asked me to prepare a syllabus for M.A. classes, I started thinking about it, how can I prescribe this book or that book. Then I told them in schools through literature language should be taught. There should be proficiency in language. In B.A. degree through language, literature should be taught. In M.A. curriculum language, literature and philosophy should be taught. Philosophy does not mean the subject philosophy per se that we teach, no, I mean the philosophy of life.

I thought women have got some misconceptions about freedom. They think we are equal, but they forget they are not the same as men, here comes confusion. They are equal, they should be equal, but not the same as men. So, when nature has made them different, they should accept the difference. I think before anything else, in our society, may be in other societies also, people categorise women according to relationship, she is wife, she is sister, she is mother, first of all she should be treated as a human being.

Thanks