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**REVEALING PATRIARCHY THROUGH IMAGERY IN RAJINDER SINGH BEDI'S 'I  
TAKE THIS WOMAN'.**

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Abstract - Rajinder Singh Bedi was an Indian Urdu writer and playwright who belongs to the progressive writers' movement.

The novel 'I Take This Woman' won the 1965 Sahitya Akademi Award. It is an unusual story of a woman compelled to marry one whom she brought up as her own son. The story of Rano, married to Tiloka and tethered to a life of unyielding poverty, is actually a scathing critique of a social system where poverty is the root cause of all evil. In the novel, nature imagery plays a vital role in creating a sense of gloom that pervades the first part of the novel. Rajinder Singh Bedi successfully makes use of natural elements to set the tone of the novel, the nature plays a pivotal role in reflecting the mood of the characters in the novel. Nature gets animated and reflects the sentiments of the women oppressed in the patriarchal society.

Keywords – narrative technique, nature imagery, woman's oppression, gloom, critique of social system

'I Take This Woman' (Ek Chadar Maili Si) written by Rajinder Singh Bedi, it was one of the most powerful novels ever written. Translated in English by Khushwant Singh, "I take this Woman", received a Sahitya Akademi award too.

The story of Rano, married to Tiloka and tethered to a life of unyielding poverty, is actually a scathing critique of a social system where poverty is the root cause of all evil. The daughter of poor parents Rano is married off to Tiloka, an ekka driver. Though far from an ideal husband,

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Raano is largely content with her lot: her husband beats her when he gets drunk, her mother-in-law heaps abuses on her, and her parents have disappeared after dumping her at her husband's home. Yet, her life in the village, which lies in the shadow of the great Himalayas with the sacred shrine of the goddess, Vaishno Devi, is as happy as it can be under the circumstances. She worries about her daughter, Waddi, for Rano knows the lot awaiting a poor man's daughter - "O god, do not burden even an enemy with the curse of a daughter! She is hardly grown up when her parents throw her out to live among strangers; and if the parents-in-law don't like her, they kick her back to her parents' home. She's like a ball made of cast-off rags. Only when she becomes heavy with her own tears is she incapable of being bounced to and fro."(1)

One day, while ferrying a 13-year old girl for the village headman's lusty rendezvous, Tiloka is killed by the young girl's enraged brother. Rano finds herself widowed and bereft of the only protection she has ever known; her marriage, far from happy though it was, at least afforded her a measure of protection and a buffer from the hostility of her mother-in-law. In a land with a notoriously skewed male-female ratio, unattached women, regardless of their age or social status, pose a threat. Concerned friends and village elders put their heads together and come up with the only solution that custom allowed women in Rano's situation: she must be married off to her dead husband's younger brother. While the very idea is abhorrent to the two concerned parties – she because she has looked upon Mangal, her brother-in-law as her own child and Mangal because she is not just a loved sister-in-law but a mother-figure – individual will must be sacrificed in the face of a larger good. In a ceremony similar to a common law marriage, Rano and Mangal are not married around a sacred fire or a holy book; instead Mangal places a sheet over her as a sign of protection. A slightly soiled, somewhat tattered three-yard cambric sheet (a maili si chadar) then comes to signify a transference of shelter and security – from the dead husband to his younger brother, in this case younger by 12 or 14 years, one whom she looks upon as her own child. In return for this symbol of protection, the woman can continue to live under his roof, bear his children and perform all the duties of a wife.

In the novel, nature imagery plays a vital role in creating a sense of gloom that pervades the first part of the novel. Here nature gets animated and reflects the sentiments of the women oppressed in the patriarchal society. The novel sets its tone with the lines of Majruh - "Our blood is in the red of the dawn and of the dusk."

The lines suggests that the nature and the sun are in communion with humans. The author Rajinder Singh Bedi employs the red colour of the sun to convey the wrath of the nature against men who brutally oppress their womenfolk. The novel begins with the line -

"The sun was a deeper red; the heavens were a darker crimson as if spattered with the blood of the innocents; the stream of blood ran from the sky down into Triloka's courtyard, tinting the green of the bakain with the hues of the purple."(2)

The lines sets the tone for the forthcoming violence and tragedy. The sun's red deep colour is frequently used to convey nature's wrath against men for violating women. The brutal rape of a thirteen year old innocent girl followed by Triloka's death is hinted in the first paragraph itself.

The imagery of dogs poisoned by the sweepers of the Rural District Council is very brutal and macabre. Daboo, pet of Triloka's house sniffs the dead bitch Bori and callously passes away. Channo remarks that men are equally callous to the death and sufferings of women.

The red colour of the sun is used as leitmotif in the novel. A teenager girl is raped by Chaudhary. The sun is full of anger as if it is protesting against the molestation and murder of the girl child -

"No wonder then the sun had turned a fiery red! And no wonder that the God Surya had in his rage whipped his horses to a mad gallop, driven his chariot across the village well and disappeared behind the cotton fields! He had left his angry glow in the heavens."(3)

Mangal refuses to marry his sister-in-law and hides in a field, the place where Triloka was murdered. The villagers forgot the murder but not the faithful chronicler nature -

"The evening had become dark before its time; the sun has sprinkled the leaves of the neem with blood. The earth still smelt of blood."(4)

The nature's wrath has subdued with the murder of Triloka and punishment to the culprits. Nature moves from Summer solstice to winter solstice and the sun calms down making nights longer. Rano's marriage with her sober brother-in-law changes the wrathful tone of the novel to joyful tone. Crop yield is good, granaries are full and so the pockets of the villagers. After Triloka's death and punishment to the rape culprits women are revered. Girls of Kotla "became gentle in their manners and tougher inside".(108) The change is attributed to nature again -

" Some explained the change as due to the heat of the summer that gone by; others, by the winter to come. All of them found in it a subject for speculation and jest. This left the girls undisturbed."(5)

Rano's marriage with Mangal brings blessings and happiness. He treats Rano with great love and respect, earns honestly, and looks after the family responsibility and children. With the approaching winter Rano's life takes a new, refreshing turn and the wrathful sun with its bloody sunrays sets forever -

"The shades of twilight deepened into night. Even in the pitch black of the darkness a bright light played about Rano's face." (6)

"The character of Rano alone depicts the face of an Indian woman, her misgivings and the way society makes decisions for her. Her part carries the stifle and the shackles of being born under a stringent community . As she accepts the fact that a woman needs a man in her life to complete her and make her whole, the concept is heartrending. At a point of time she also accepts the fact that she has desires of her body, which have not met a death with the death of her husband. She just caves in as expected. The novel is setup in the typical like "Aho", "Oye Ni", "Tappa", "Tehmad" are used in abundance. In fact it can be completely called a touch of a writer who was born in Pakistan and post partition moved to India rural Punjabi backdrop, just adding more meaning to the story. As you flip the pages you see an authentic face of Rural India. Punjabi lingo also gives a sweet touch to the story."(7)

Initially reluctant, with time both Mangal and Rano get over their dilemma and find not merely consummation but passion also in a union that is at once primeval as it is prescribed. "In the hands of a less gifted writer, this story would have been a pathetic tale of woman's suppression and the wrongs that men do in the name of custom and continuity; in Bedi's hands it becomes a story of the triumph of the human spirit above time and circumstance. And his Rano becomes a flesh and blood emblem of courage and strength."(8)

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