

Liberative Understanding of Gloria Whelan's “*Homeless Bird*”

Kingshuk Ray

Lecturer in English, Department of English, Deshbandhu Mahavidyalaya, Asansol, WB

Abstract—This present article offers a feminist analysis of Gloria Whelan’s novel “*Homeless Bird*”, exploring the themes of identity, resilience, and empowerment in the context of Indian culture and society. Through a critical examination of the protagonist Koly’s journey, this paper argues that Whelan’s novel presents a powerful portrayal of female agency, resistance, and transformation. By analysing Koly’s experiences of abandonment, exploitation, and ultimately, self-discovery, this paper demonstrates how “*Homeless Bird*” challenges patriarchal norms and offers a vision of feminist empowerment and liberation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between gender, culture, and identity, and highlights the significance of Whelan’s novel as a feminist text.

Keywords— Family, Oppression, Poverty, Empowerment, Social-Justice

I. INTRODUCTION

Gloria Whelan’s novel “*Homeless Bird*” (2000) is a poignant and powerful portrayal of a young Indian girl’s journey towards self-discovery, empowerment, and liberation. Set in contemporary India, the novel tells the story of Koly, a thirteen-year-old girl who is married off to a man she has never met, only to be abandoned in the holy city of Vrindavan after her husband’s death. Through Koly’s experiences, Whelan masterfully explores themes of identity, culture, class, and gender, offering a nuanced and thought-provoking critique of the social and cultural norms that govern women’s lives in India.

II. ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the novel “Fate” plays a significant role in shaping the life of protagonist ‘Koly’ as well as the whole play. The word “fate” has a rich and complex history, with its origins dating back to ancient civilizations. The English word “fate” comes from the Old French word “fat,” which is derived from the Latin word “fatum,” meaning “that which has been spoken”. The concept of fate in ancient

Greek mythology was personified by the Moirai (also known as the Fates), three goddesses who controlled the thread of life for every mortal. The Greek word for fate, “moira,” is derived from the verb “meiresthai,” meaning “to receive one’s portion” or “to be allotted.” Over time, the concept of fate has evolved to encompass various meanings, including: The word “fate” has its roots in ancient Greek, with a complex evolution of meaning over time. In the novel Koly was the victim of fate. In the beginning she was destroyed by fate as she lost her Husband, became insecure about living, etc, but as the novel unfolds fate blessed her, she identified her own talents and achieved her life in her own way. With the blessings of fate, in Varanasi she got ‘Raji’ and many peoples to love and care about her, actually in the end she own in her life with the blessings of “Fate”. Fate played a vital role in Koly’s life to achieve her happiness. As the story unfolds, ‘Koly’, the protagonist of the novel stands as a defender of fate, she defeated the fate through her own willingness. At first she accepted the Fate, but gradually she defeated the fate by her own willingness. She was the representative of the woman who does not accept herself as the “victim of fate” but she accepted the fate as “Blessing of fate”. Though the novel shows the crucial aspect of fate in Koly’s life, but actually she was blessed by “Fate”, as if fate was not supported Koly she will never be as successful as grows in the concluding of the novel. Koly initially resigns herself to her fate, accepting the circumstances of her life, including her early marriage and husband’s illness, the difficulties she faces, suggesting that she has come to accept and even embrace her fate, and finally in the concluding she won with the ‘blessing of fate’.

In the novel “*Homeless Bird*” by Gloria Whelan, Koly is a powerful representation of a strong, independent woman in contemporary society. Koly’s journey from a young, married girl to a confident, independent woman is remarkable. Koly faces numerous challenges, including poverty,

abandonment, and societal expectations. However, she demonstrates remarkable adapting to each situation and finding ways to overcome obstacles. Koly, the protagonist of the novel stands as a defender of fate, she defeated the fate through her own willingness. At first she accepted the Fate, but Gradually she defeated the fate by her own willingness. She was the Representation of the woman who does not accept herself as the “victim of fate” but she accepted the fate as “Blessing of fate”. Gradually Koly finds purpose and meaning in her life, despite the difficulties she faces, suggesting that she has come to accept and even embrace her fate. By developing herself for her own importance, she wanted to live for herself and she grows herself for her own achievement. In the growing of the novel she met with ‘Raji’, ‘Maa Kamala’, and many others who supported her for growing in her life, by achieving support she reveals her threading skill and gradually she developed it with their support. As in the contemporary society women were unable to get outside from the home, so threading was a significant weapon for women to proof their inner strength, koly was also followed by that tradition. As we many see Threading is a traditional Indian craft that has been passed down through generations of women in Koly’s family, including Aunt Jennifer. Aunt Jennifer and Koly was very much connected through their passionate way of their threading skill, both of their life was drawn by their own middle of their threading skills. The needles of their threading were the only weapon for them to explore their inner hope, beauty, skill. Threading was blessing to Koly, by the skill she was able to proof herself in the community. She considers her threading skills as ‘Blessing from her mother’ as she achieved the skill by following her Mother in childhood. Threading holds cultural significance for both Koly and Aunt Jennifer, representing their connection to their Indian heritage and the traditions of their community. As in the contemporary society women were not allowed to step out from home, they had to lead and invest their whole talent in their household, besides their household management many of the womens were very much interested in searching a scope to proof their inner talent, so to proof it many of them had chosen the “Threading Skill,” in a very passionate way, but at first in the novel koly was not merely introduced her threading skills, but as the story grows Koly’s talent in threading skill, marked as very significant aspect of novel, as well as in Koly’s life. Koly’s embroidery skills become a source of

economic independence for her. She earns her own money, making her less dependent on others and more confident in her abilities. Throughout the novel, Koly asserts her self determination, making choices that may not align with societal expectations. Koly’s actions challenge societal norms and expectations. She defies the traditional role of a woman in rural India, instead forging her own path and creating a new identity for herself. Koly’s journey is one of empowerment. She finds her own voice, makes her own decisions, and becomes a confident, independent woman. Her story serves as a powerful inspiration for women and girls in similar situations.

Both Koly and Aunt Jennifer are trapped in their own ways. Koly is confined by the societal expectations and limitations placed on her as a woman in rural India, while Aunt Jennifer is trapped in a loveless marriage and societal norms that stifle her creativity and individuality. Despite their confinement, both characters exhibit resistance and defiance. Koly finds ways to assert her independence. Aunt Jennifer, on the other hand, expresses her defiance through her art, creating powerful and fierce tigers that symbolize her own suppressed desires and strengths. Threading serves as a bonding experience for Koly and Aunt Jennifer, allowing them to connect on an emotional level and share their experience. While Koly and Aunt Jennifer may seem like vastly different characters, they share common experiences of oppression, resistance, and defiance. Koly’s embroidery represents her creativity, skill, and independence, while Aunt Jennifer’s tigers symbolize her own spirit and desires. Embroidery and tigers serve as symbols of resistance and empowerment for both characters. Both characters’ experiences are shaped by intersectional factors such as gender, class, and social status. Koly’s experiences as a rural Indian woman are distinct from Aunt Jennifer’s experiences as a wealthy, Western woman, yet both characters face similar challenges and exhibit similar forms of resistance. Koly’s character has a significant impact on the reader. While Koly and Aunt Jennifer may seem like vastly different characters, they share common experiences of oppression, resistance, and defiance. Through their stories, we see the power of symbolism, intersectionality, and the human spirit’s capacity for resilience and creativity. Koly’s character represents the struggles and triumphs of many women in contemporary society. Her story highlights the importance of education, economic independence,

and autonomy for women. Koly comes to justify fate's actions, recognizing that her experiences, though difficult, have shaped her into the person she is today. Koly finds the positive in her circumstances, focusing on the opportunities and lessons that fate has presented her. By accepting and embracing her fate, Koly takes control of her life, making choices that align with her values and goals. Koly's journey is one of self-discovery, as she learns to navigate the complexities of her fate and find her own path. In "*Homeless Bird*", Koly's defence of fate is a nuanced and complex portrayal of the human experience. The novel also reflects as the mirror of the contemporary society as the Young Adult novel *The Homeless Bird* provides a glimpse into the traditional customs associated with marriage in the vibrant country of India. Koly, the heroine and narrator of this story, provides a view of India through a teenager's eyes. Gloria Whelan, the author of this novel, helps the reader understand the Indian caste system, the traditional expectations placed on young woman, and the religious culture that dominates India. Koly the protagonist of the novel also represents as a victim of child marriage which was very popular of the contemporary society. Koly has reached the expected age of marriage in India, so at thirteen she is required to marry into a family she has never met. The heroine of this story soon discovers that her husband is a sick boy who is on the verge of death. The parents of the boy needed the money from Koly's dowry to pay for a trip that they hope will heal Hari, Koly's sick husband. During the development of this storyline, there is also the forging of a good friendship between Koly and Raji. The friendship plays a very crucial turning in both of their life. In the growing of the novel Raji and Koly became addicted to each other. Their addiction turned into a love story. Koly teaches Raji to read, as Koly was supporting Raji to read, Raji gained an emotional bonding with Koly. Thus the love story of Raji and Koly in "*Homeless Bird*" is a beautiful and poignant one. After being forced into an arranged marriage and subsequently becoming a widow, Koly's prospect for love seem bleak. However, her chance encounter with Raji, a kind-hearted rickshaw driver, sparks a deep connection between them. Raji's love for Koly is unwavering and unconditional. He accepts her for who she is, a widow shunned by society, and showers her with kindness and respect. Koly, on the other hand, is hesitant to open herself up to love again, fearing the societal repercussions of remarriage. As their relationship blossoms, Raji proves to be a true partner to Koly,

supporting her dreams and aspirations. He even builds a special room for her embroidery, showcasing his deep understanding and appreciation of her passions. The love theme in "*Homeless Bird*" is not just a romantic one, but also explores the complexities of love in the face of societal expectations and personal adversity. Through Raji and Koly's story, the novel highlights the transformative power of love and acceptance. Raji's love for Koly is unwavering, despite her being a widow. Raji and Koly have a deep respect for each other's passions and aspirations. Through their love, Koly and Raji both undergo significant personal growth, overcoming their past traumas and societal expectations. Koly's life also transitions from a hopeless girl to a confident young woman who is taking control of her own destiny. She eventually makes enough money to buy a room where widows can live, and she brings beauty to that room with her embroidery. Raji, who has left for a while to work on his farm, returns to ask Koly to be his wife.

I want you to come back with me to my Village. You would like it there. We have all the things that please you." Puzzled, I asked, "But what could I do in your village?" Gazing down, Raji mumbled, "You would be my wife, of course." I stared at him. I had never imagined such a thing would be possible. I thought I must be dreaming. "But what of your family?" I managed to ask. "They wouldn't want you to marry a widow; such a marriage is inauspicious. And you own land. You would have no trouble finding a wife who would bring you a dowry." (Whelan, 84.)

As Koly was the victim of contemporary society so she was very much worried about 'Dowry'. She could remember how forcefully her parents provided 'Dowry' when she was about to get married to 'Hari'. So, according to her mindset dowry played a very crucial role in the context of marriage. But Raji's love for Koly was unwavering, she accepted her for what is by proving his love for Koly in the true sense of love relationship. After many abandonments of society, cultural and inner consciousness, Koly finally decided to marry Raji. Although she already had the willingness to spend life with Raji, but as she was a widow she never explored her feelings to Raji. But she noticed that Raji also wanted her without any problem and he also had respect for her threading skill, when she discovers that Raji has created a room for her embroidery, it was the proof of Raji's true love for Koly, as he knows that threading was Koly's passion

and he does not want to ruined it, she makes up her own mind to marry Raji. Thus after accepting koly as her own Raji proofs himself as Koly's true lover. The novel also portrays the significance of "Vrindavan" as it holds significant spiritual importance. This city in India is renowned for its sacred temples and rivers, particularly the Yamuna River, which is considered a symbol of spiritual purification. For Koly, the protagonist, Vrindavan represents a place of transformation and self-discovery. After being abandoned by her mother-in-law, Koly finds herself alone and destitute in this city. However, with the help of kind-hearted individuals like Raji and Sass, she begins to rebuild her life and discover her own strength. The spiritual significance of Vrindavan is also reflected in the city's association with the Hindu deity Lord Krishna. In Hindu mythology, Vrindavan is considered a sacred place where Lord Krishna spent his childhood. The city's spiritual energy and its connection to Lord Krishna's story serves as a backdrop for Koly's own journey of spiritual growth and selfdiscovery. In essence, Vrindavan represents a place of spiritual awakening and transformation for Koly, where she finds the strength to overcome adversity and forge a new path in life. Koly's abandonment in Vrindavan is a complex and multifaceted event that symbolizes loss, trauma, spiritual testing, and ultimately, renewal and transformation. The Yamuna river also played a significant role in the novel. The Yamuna river symbolizes Koly's desire for peaceful and rural life with Raji, in her embroidery, koly depict the Yamuna river and the reeds , and the hero's she saw there to represent her relationship with Raji. The Yamuna River, which runs through Vrindavan, symbolizes a life-giving force that sustains and nourishes Koly, both physically and emotionally. The river also represents a symbol of purification and renewal, washing away Koly's past sorrows and pains, and preparing her for a new beginning.

While "*A Room of One's Own*" by Virginia Woolf and "*Homeless Bird*" by Gloria Whelan may seem like vastly different texts on the surface, they share some striking similarities, such as by exploring the importance of independence for women. In "*A Room of One's Own*", Woolf argues that women need a space of their own to think, write, and create likeness in "*Homeless Bird*", Koly's journey is marked by her desire for independence, as she navigates the challenges of being a woman in rural India. There was a certain similarity in both of texts by the

significance of economic empowerment for women. Woolf argues that women need financial independence to pursue their passions and interests, like that in "*Homeless Bird*", Koly's embroidery skills become a source of economic empowerment for her, allowing her to support her and gain independence by providing the importance of education and personal growth for women. Woolf argues that women need access to education and intellectual pursuits to reach their full potential, as well as in "*Homeless Bird*", Koly's education and personal growth are central to her journey, as she learns to read, write, and assert her independence. Woolf critiques the patriarchal society that restricts women's opportunities and creative expression. In "*Homeless Bird*", Koly's actions challenge the traditional roles and expectations placed on women in rural India. Both texts represents the critique of societal norms and expectations surrounding women's roles and identities. Woolf discusses the intersections of class, education, and gender, while "*Homeless Bird*" explores the intersections of class, caste, education, and gender in rural India. While "*A Room of One's Own*" and "*Homeless Bird*" may seem like vastly different texts on the surface, they share a common thread – the importance of independence, economic empowerment, education, and personal growth for women. Both texts challenge societal norms and expectations, highlighting the complexities of women's experiences and the power of storytelling as a means of empowerment.

III. CONCLUSION

The novel reveals in a very powerful and a significant, passionate way which explore a young girl's struggle for independence and self determination. Through Koly's journey, the novel explores the power of hope and the power of the human spirit offering a compelling and inspiring portrayal of human capacity to overcome hardship and find hope in the darkest of time of hero.

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