

## **A Comparative Study of Portrayal of the Girl Child in Short Stories by Select Indian Women Writers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is written on the comparison of the Girl Child protagonists in short stories of selected Indian Women Writers: *Her Story So Far* (Monoca Das), *Merry Killing and Other Stories* (Kamal Kumar ) and *The Inner Courtyard* (Lakshmi Holstrom), which are translated from regional Indian languages into English. In particular, this work studies the stories and compares: how girl children are doomed from the day they are born; how they are physically and emotionally exploited; how they are sucked sexually and how they are treated in the traditional land of India. The comparative study of the girl child protagonists proves that the plight of the girl child is the same and pathetic irrespective of community, caste, religion to which they belong and they are treated in a kind of 'apartheid' milieu. Furthermore, the paper presents an analysis on how the fictional girl children have been a victim to exploitation, giving scope for the further study of the plight of real girl child in the society.

*Keywords:* Girl child, physical, emotional, sexual exploitation, plight of the girl child, traditional land of India, short stories

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The girl child  
Who tells the story of  
the unfortunate girl,  
poor, dump, ugly and weak  
who passed away frustrated?*

Kamal Singh

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Till the beginning of the twentieth century, there was hardly any memorable representation of the girl child in the Indian Literature. A few writers like Sarat Chandra and Kapila Vatsayan, who are most incisive and sensitive authors, could penetrate into every layer of the woman's psyche to deal with an adolescent woman as a mistress, a wife courtesan or a rebel with rare insight, but girl child does not hold his attention. Muniruddin Qureshi and Viney Kirpal, in their book entitled, *'In Social Status of Indian Women'* argue that in the twentieth century literature of pre-independence period, "In the ancient times, girl children are not represented as girl children. This chronological age might place them as children but they appear in those works as miniature women---child brides, child wives, child widows. The girl may be young in age but the responsibilities she is depicted to be taken up are those of grown womanhood" (p. 7). All the three books, *Her Story So Far*, *Mercy Killing and Other Stories* and *The Inner Courtyard* deal with the plight of the girl child in various situations in the society, as well as how the birth of a girl child is hailed as inauspicious and unwelcome, and how customs, rituals, traditions and practices frequently make a girl child the "lesser Child" who is denied optimal opportunities and means required for the growth and development during various stages of childhood and belief of parents that education is of little value for girls. The struggles of a girl child start from 'womb to tomb'. It is a struggle to exist, a daily struggle to live with dignity and to be

treated as a human instead of a burden or a cheque waiting to be cashed or an object to provide pleasure or a machine to work and produce sons.

Girl child characters in *Her Story So far*, *Merry Killing and Other Stories*, and *The Inner Courtyard*, which are translated stories, are studied with the aim of analysing the situation of the girl child in different communities, patriarchal dominated and gender inequality societies. Although the short stories presented in these books could not be more different in terms of style, feel, storyline and outcome, a number of similarities make them comfortable. Different girl child protagonists in short stories have been analysed particularly for how the girl child is doomed from the day she was born and how she is physically and emotionally exploited. Each character has been analysed in every short story, i.e. how they are treated in the traditional land of India. The other reason for analysing these short stories is to look at the reasons why it does not matter what the girl child does, she cannot escape from her destiny and from being exploited since she lives in a patriarchal society. Another purpose is to investigate whether the situation of the girl child improves or if it becomes worse as time rolls.

*Literature reviews of the portrayal of the girl child:*

*'The girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of*

*the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reasons for this discrepancy includes harmful attitudes and practices such as female genital mutilation, son preferences-----early marriage--- Violence against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well being. As a result, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood*

(Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995)

Radindranath Tagore is one of the first, if not the first writer, to treat the girl child with consummate artistic skill. Some of his short stories *Post Master Kabuliwala*, *Sampat Subha* and *Strir Patra* (The wife's letter), in particular, present the girl child belonging to different social situations. Harrison (1983) says that "life events have affected Girl Child, what people have been through - pain, suffering, happiness, child birth." In the story *Strir Patra* (wife's letter), the protagonist Mrinal, a village girl married to a rich urban family, who finally revolts against the authority of her husband and leaves the family, describes the physical aspects of the girl's existence which are both discriminatory and undignified.

In the short story *Subha*, when the girl is given the name of Subhashini, who can guess that she will be dumb when she grows up? She is called Subha for short. Her two elder sisters have been married with the usual difficulties in finding husbands and providing dowries, and now the youngest

daughter is like a silent weight upon the heart of her parents. Night and day, her parents' minds ache with anxiety on her account.

Her mother especially looks upon her as a deformity. To a mother, a daughter is a more closely intimate part of herself than a son, but for Subha's mother, her dumbness has become a source of personal shame. Her mother almost hates her as a stain upon her own body. Subha never plays with other children. She is silent and companionless as the noontide. The thought of her marriage fills her parents with anxious care. People blame them, and even talk of making them outcasts. They married Subha off with a person, without revealing her dumbness and returned home. Thank God, their caste in this world and their safety in the next are assured. After ten days, when her husband finds that Subha is dumb, he marries other woman who can speak. The story portrays the feelings of parents who look at a girl child as a burden.

In *Postmaster*, the story portrays the plight of an orphan girl child's struggles of marriage, where marriage being obligatory for the Hindu women, as sanctioned by Dharma Shastra, the life of a woman revolves around marriage and her position is determined by it. Once the girl, whatever her age might be, is married she is not treated as a child anymore; the marital status obliterates as it was her childhood. The following comment of Lakhmi Khilani on Lalchand Amardinomal's Sindhi short story of *Nandri Nina* (1946) strengthens the situation. A suitable match was soon found

and Nina was married to Ratan, the only son of Seth Biharilal, and the childhood of Nina thereby ended abruptly and she graduated to womanhood without passing through adolescence.

A close study of the twentieth century literature reveals the taboos and prejudices against the girl child and the discriminating treatment between male child and female child. Although the psychological and sociological restriction that want to keep the girl child distinct from the boy child is not challenged by the writers, the awareness of the existence of those restrictions has begun to surface in some of the literature since the beginning of this century. The initial representation was more romantic than analytical. The child may appear as the embodiment of sweetness or the cruel world, the incarnation of joy or passivity created by writers, whatever is the form, and the basic mould remains romantic and sentimental.

Vallathol's Malayalam (Regional Indian Language) poem *Kochusita* (1928) is inspired by a newspaper report on suicide of Devadasi girl, who took this extreme step to protect her chastity. Despite the poet's concern about the girl child's misfortune and humiliation, Vallathol, the national poet, is equally concerned about the national idea of Indian women.

One of the finest projections of the girl child is to be found in the celebrated Bengali (Regional language of India) novel *Pather Panchali* (1929). Durga is juxtaposed against her world. She is the symbol of the Indian girl child with all her charm and sweetness, as well as humiliation and

agony. The child lived only for ten years and during these ten years, she was a part of poverty and meanness was all around her. She was a victim of social prejudice and discrimination, cruelty and love and affection that bind the society together.

Bibhutibhushan has created more girl children than any other Bengali writer of his time. There is pathos and compassion but hardly any protest or challenge. One of his memorable stories, *Puraaca* (1925) projects the helpless rural, uneducated little girl with a weakness for food. Born in a poor family, however, she cannot even afford one square meal a day, not even the cheapest vegetable. She is married and is resigned to the fate of oppression and future, as silently she accepts her premarital life. She dies without any complaint, not to speak of protest. Death appears to be a logical culmination of the suffering caused by poverty and human insensibility. The story records voice of suffering of countless Indian girl children tortured and muffled neglected and brushed aside.

About the girl in Tamil (Regional language of India) literature, writer Prasad (Sisir Kumar Das, 1995) states that 'she is neither to be heard nor to be seen nor even to be talked about'. A girl is of no use to the writer of mindless romances and soft pornography. A passing reference must be made to Pillaittamil, a literature form dealing with the life of a child, the boy and girl. An example for pillaittamil is *Minaksiammi pillaittamil*, compassion of the eighteenth century. Bharati wrote a poem *Pappappattu* (a song of a girl child), where

she asks the child to be free as a sparrow, and more significantly, in consonance with his devotion for 'Shakti', says do not be submissive and, do not be afraid of the evil doer: Moti mittitu vitu / Mukattii umilntuvitu (dash and kick them / spit on their faces).

The Telugu (Regional language of India) short story, *Putra Santhamam* (The Male Child) by Sri Adhi Narayanaswami (1907) is one of the finest examples of the father's attitude towards the daughter. The father is delighted when his wife Sitamma gives birth to a male child after four daughters. The son is pampered and spoilt by the father who is extremely cruel and contemptuous to his daughters. The story ends with a didactic note as the father in his old age depends on the care of his daughters. The story aims at a realistic portrayal of the male attitude towards girl children and conjures it very strongly. Gurajada Venkata Appa rao (Telugu writer) of the famous play, *Kanyasulkam*, wrote a memorable poem entitled, *Puttadi Bomma Purnamma*, a tragic story of a young girl given in marriage to an old man by her parents. The girl commits suicide. In 1914, the great Telugu poet Rayaprolu Subbha Rao wrote a poem *Shehalatha Devi* based on an incident in Bengal, where a girl committed suicide as a protest against the dowry system and to protect the honours of her poor parents.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Cornelia Sorabjis' novel *Shubala, a Child Mother* (1920) presents the young girl Subhala's plight as she is married at an

early age. The story is narrated by her aunt who protests against the marriage and then expresses her deep resentment as Subhala goes through early pregnancy, ill-health and other forms of suffering.

'An un-finishing song' marks Swaran Kumari's development as a novelist. She moves towards a story of psychological development of a young girl, shown from the age of eight to adolescence in search of love that becomes the goal of her life, is presented with lyrical sensitive touches of language. Attia Hosian's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is about a Muslim girl, Laila. Laila, the narrator, lives under the care of her aunt and uncle since her parent's death. The young child, Laila, reacts angrily to the gross social injustice that she observes within the family circles. Her aunt, Adida reasons with her and tells her that the traditional values require one to show respect for age, social status and relationship (Attia Hosian, 1961). Laila watches the old changing gradually, though many of the men and women refuse to change. Towards the end of the novel, Laila visits the old house, now empty, full of ghosts of the past.

Socialisation plays an important role in the construction of gender and bares the link between social values and the paradigms which suppresses her real self. The growth of the girl child in an Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it, coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty, the girl's burgeoning feeling of self identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed; the successful

formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that maintains between submission and revolt. Growth into maturity and selfhood in the course of confrontation with adults, the burden of the female child is more irksome than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only parents, but the society as a whole is influenced by the physical appearance of the girl child. This is a great hindrance to the inner growth of the girl child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the changing biological progress, and the girl's attitude towards the family and the parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established.

“Childhood is considered so important a period for the formation of the character and for the emergence of the value structure has largely been ignored as an area of human experience - specially where the girl characters are concerned” (Sharada & Iyer, 2007). This reflects both literary and social reality. Girls are silent part of the family. Shashi Despande has portrayed a girl child with deliberation. One girl child or more, her personality has been determined by how they are brought up in her family. In the Indian family, despite its patriarchal character, there exist many taboos such as women should not interact with men; if so, they abide to rules, etc. It is here that the female child is acculturated into her social role of daughter, wife and mother. Sarita, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, grows up as a victim of

her mother's sexist and gender bias. Sarita observes that her mother gives preference to Dhruva, her brother and the importance attached to his birthdays. She wonders why her mother shows partiality. The birth of a son, after sixteen years, which should have embarrassed Kshama's father in *Come up and Be Dead*, fills him with pride, which bewilders her. In *The Long Silence* (Shashi Despande: 1988), Jaya notices that her name has not been included in the family tree. “How can you be here? You don't belong to this family, you are married - you have no place here”. Does this not show the importance of the girl child in a family?

The girl child in India has been and is continuous to be portrayed as an orphan in society and popular culture, and grows up vulnerably despite there being several schemes for her benefits, said a child right activist. According to the noted Bengali writer, Nabanita Debsen, this biased portrayal has been reflected in poetry, proverb, prose and cinema of both yesteryears and the so-called modern variety. Sen quoted a sixteenth century Bengali poem, where Sita, god Rama's wife, says “I have no parents, I was found at a tip of a plough”, and this shows Sita as an orphan, not as a prince. It underlines the insecurity of a girl child who grows up without an identity (The Hindustan Times, 2006). According to Sister Namibia, the youngest victim of globalisation is girl child. The tales of girl child is one of the immense tragedies. Out of 400 million children (in India), at least 63 million are out of school, two thirds of them are girls. The structural

gender inequalities of society make the girl child very vulnerable (High Beam Research, 2002). Socialisation plays an important role in the construction of gender and bears the link between social values and the paradigms of male domination. N. Sharda Iyer, in her book entitled *Musing on Indian Writing in English* (2005), says that “One gets to know how a girl child is indoctrinated to a certain extent, she withholds, conceals and suppresses her real self - growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it”.

Writers like Mita Bhadra (1993) focused on the prevailing inequalities, discrimination against the girl child and gender discrimination, child marriages and child prostitution, as well as victims' living conditions such as exploitations. The Indian society is plagued by victimisation of girl child through performances of child marriages. Meta Bhandra's *Girl Child in Indian Society* aims at analysing the situation of the girl child emphasises on the rightful share of girl child—a concept which has found an appropriate place in the plan of action for implementing the world declaration on survival protection and development of children 1990s. The Chairperson of National Commission for Women, Dr. (Mrs) V. Mohini Giri (1999), says that even after many legal provisions, many girl children are dragged into prostitution. She gives valuable insights into the system of exploitation by citing many incidences in the book, *Kanya: Exploitation of Little Angels*. Maya Das

claims that the Indian society is still plagued by victimisation of girl child through performance of child marriage being signed in the Beijing Summit focussing on women's right (1989). In the article, *Where Daughters are Unwanted* (1995), Kishwar Madhu emphasises the magnitude issue of the selective abortions of thousands of female fetuses. Anuradha (1993), in the article *In the name of the mother*, brings out the importance of education rights for prostitute children and a judgement being passed to that effect by the Supreme Court of India in January 1993, granting permission for the admission of prostitute children into schools without having to state the father's name, which was the customary practice in school admission procedures. Dhar (2009) comments that 40 per cent of the world's child marriages take place in India, resulting in a vicious cycle of gender discrimination, illiteracy and high infant and maternal mortality rates. Sinha S. (1997) narrates that the girl child is deliberately deprived of love, affection and care, where she is treated as a second class citizen. Sinha M. (1995) says that girl child's life is shackled by the deep-rooted, inbuilt social prejudices. This review explains that the girl child leads a life of multi-curse, multi-abuse and multi-neglect, and it probes to compare how the girl child has been a victim to various exploitations.

#### **COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 'THE PORTRAYAL OF THE GIRL CHILD'**

In this comparative study of the portrayal of the girl child, protagonists like Shanichari, Munshi, Rukmini, Gauri and little girls in

'Death Comes Cheap' are victims of poverty. The story makes privy to the life of a young girl called Sanchari, who belongs to a tribal community and is sucked by various cycles of exploitation by poverty. Due to tribal movement and agitation, Sanchari and her family lose their livelihood. To rescue her parents and defend herself from shame, she gives up on herself to a whore, Guharman Bibi. Shanichari grieving mother's song:

"My girl could live on tubers. Wear leaves and buds in her ears Alas! Tree can't grow clothes "Dear ma", my girl said "so, the brick kilns I must go. "The brick kilns I must go". She says that their lower status makes them vulnerable accepting the circumstances and later she becomes the victim of male seducers. Rahmat uses her and throws her away after she conceives. In the same way, Gauri, in the story, *The Compulsion*, agrees to do domestic household work in a rich family. Her mother also agrees to send Gauri to the Memsahib (owner) family because the money they pay is high and so she can feed other children at least once a day. Gauri, a clever girl, learns all skills that help to do domestic work in Memsahib's family. They show a lot of affection for Gauri because of her efficiency in her work. However, she faces sexual harassment from Sahib. When Memsahib is out of town, they throw her out when she gets pregnant. Thus, these girls as child labours, faced sexual harassments from their employers.

As poverty is a primary factor that leads to violence, it affects the life of a girl child in different ways. It forces the girl child to

adopt prostitution as their vocation. John Ashbery's poem - *And the stars were shining* (p. 76) and Abid Merhti's *Poems by Street Children, Bombay, YUVA*, corroborate the pettiest position of the girl child.

*"The stars were still out in the field, and the child prostitutes plied their trade, the only happy ones, having learned how unhappiness sticks and will not risk being traded in for a song or a balloon."*

*"The moon is laughing at us, the stars weeping for us. We had tried to reach for the sky but we are sleeping on the earth. When we wake up darkness still looms all around us. Our morning lies far beyond in the horizon....."*

(Poems by Street Children, Bombay, YUVA)

Either the parents or the circumstances make the girl child travel in the worst way of life, which is prostitution. While comparing the girls in the story "*Death comes cheap*" and the girl child Rukmini in 'A Doll for Rukmini', it is the parent's passions for wealth that make the life of the girl, worse. Here, the father of the little girls and Anasuya, mother of Rukmini, exploited the girls for personal needs. Bakhru forced her elder daughter into prostitution and enjoyed with the money. When she elopes with someone, he forces his younger daughter into that perilous path which lays a brutal path for her death. His younger daughter is



raped and killed by gangsters. One character, Sita, in "A Doll for Rukmini", whose parents passed away has no other alternative but to approach a whore house and become a child prostitute. She gets pregnant before her puberty. This leads to the death of the little innocent Sita, for which she does not know what she really does with a man. The main protagonist, Rukmini, is raped by her stepfather and her mother sells her to a whore house rolling the dirty currency notes and goes away without even saying goodbye to her daughter. An aged police inspector who plays with the life of the small girl child and visits Ayee (whore house owner) is shown Rukmini and pounces her like a wild hunger lion. Rukmini cries, but is unable to escape from his hands. When the Inspector leaves the room, Rukmini comes out with dull face and starts playing again with other children shouting that she has won the game, without bothering what happened before. The old Inspector develops a great fancy for Rukmini and attends her every day. One day, for the first time, she asks the inspector about the death of Sita and says "Oh papa, take me away from here". It shows that Rukmini does not know what the relation is with an inspector; she goes with him in a fear that Ayee (owner of whore house) does not give food to her. The story gives a vivid picture of the girl's innocence and depicts her pathetic plight in the society, and how the girl nullifies the enjoyment of her childhood and fundamental rights, oppressed by the society and people. The life they are leading is worse than any other living being in the world. They are

physically and mentally assaulted by men in this male chauvinistic society.

Another girl child protagonist, Mushi, also suffers a similar exploitation by her parents in the name of marriage. Mushi, who is married to a person who hired her womb for money, becomes a mother at a very tender age. She not only loses her childhood and becomes a machine in doing household chores but also loses her life by giving her son to her husband.

Gender discrimination practices of gender inequality greatly influence the socialisation process of women in India. Most households, even today, prefer male children to female because 'they will carry on the family name' ("Girls" StudyMode.com.). Cultural norms and family livelihood strategies place girls' education at a greater risk than that of boys. Though nowadays parents are enthusiastic about sending girls to school for reasons that are economic, as well as socio-cultural, they are relatively more concerned with the education of sons as compared to daughters. Geetha B. Nambissan, Associate Professor at Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, says the 'temporary' status in their natal homes, the informal social contract that obliges sons to provide for the economic security of parents in their old age, the sexual division of labour within the family and the relatively greater burden of household and survival tasks placed on girls" are the order of the day.

Gender inequality prevailing in the society puts the girl child away from education. Though education is a primary

necessity for children, it is far away from her. The two stories *Rebati* and *The Library Girl* portray the struggle of girls for education. Girls, Rebati and Talat, are the best examples of suffering from lack of support from their family members regarding education. They both have similarities in their insatiable appetite for education, but social norms, communal norms and gender discrimination have stopped them from getting it. Rebati's father has desire to educate Rebati but her grandmother and her customs prevent her from getting any education. Talat, the library girl, wishes to be a tiny ant that moves between the letters of the words. But her father stops her schooling. Though her mother supports her education, her father rejects and says that his son, Tahir, needs education, and that the daughter, Talat, does not deserve any education. She is meant to learn to do household work. Gender difference is clearly seen in this short story. It is clear that boys like Tahir, though not showing interest in studies, his father supports his education. For girls like Talat, who has a thirst for knowledge, is deprived of education. The father presents a Burkha (black veil) as a gift to Talat; it symbolises that girls are prisoners in the blackveil of gender discrimination that hinders them from formal education.

Even in this global era, child marriages where the age of girls may be increased compared to earlier times, a perilous custom that is prevailing in the society will ultimately ruin the pleasant life. The short stories *Kanjak* and *Munshi* deal with the girl child suffering from child marriages. It is the

childhood which is precious for children, but when compared to a boy, girls lose health, wealth, education, etc. Daropati in *Kanjak* is brought up with the strict traditional rules of getting married at the age of ten. She becomes widowed within one year because of the death of her husband due to an illness, from a child Kanjak. She becomes a child widow who observes fasting on *nauvrata* days for the sake of her deceased husband and serves other Kanjaks irrespective of her age. As a child widow, she does service to her brother-in-law's family throughout her life, whereas Munshi parents have hired her womb in the name of marriage to a person who wants a baby for the survival of his family lineage. They hide the secret from her. At the end of the story, Munshi dies with an incurable disease. As per the analysis of the two stories, both Daropati and Munshi become victims of child marriage in two different ways.

Beauty 'myth' also plays a vital role in the life of a girl child. If she is beautiful and pretty, it will cause one sort of disturbance in her life or raise another problem. Two girl protagonists 'Sankina' in the short story *The Meeting* and 'Munshi' in another short story *Munshi* are both dark in colour and they look like servants. For this reason, Sakina's father does not bother about his daughter, who expects a fatherly love from him. He arranges to get her married without bothering about her decision, as permissible by the custom. He feels that performing her marriage is a great thing to do. Munshi's mother, Keli Bhabhi, feels that she does not get married due to her dusky complexion so

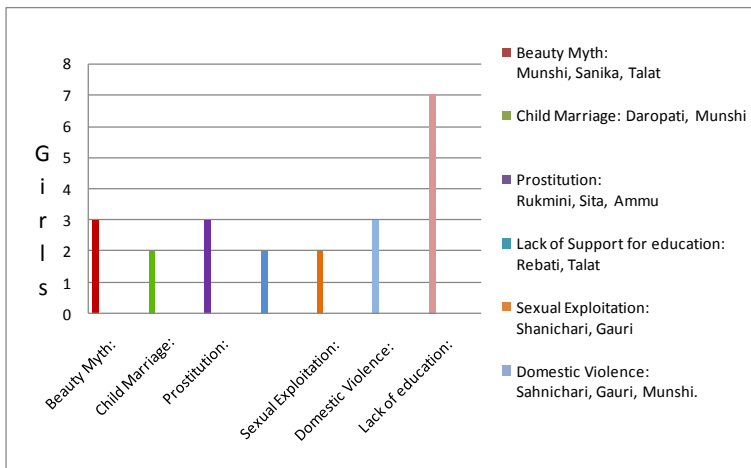
she sells her daughter's womb in the name of marriage. On the contrary, Talat faces problems due to her beauty. Her father brings Burkha as she is on the threshold of her adolescence. Her freedom and happiness are kept under control by making her wear Burkha, a traditional dress of the Muslim community.

As discussed earlier on, all the protagonists of the short stories, Sanichari, Rebati, Munshi, Daropathi, Ammu, Sakina, Gauri, Talat, Priti, Rukmini, Sita and unnamed girls from *Death Comes Cheap* are the victims of social and traditional roles, and all of them are exploited physically and emotionally. They are blind followers of their parents and customs of society. However, some characters like Ammachi in *In Memory* called, the girl child in *Girls* and Asha the daughter of Nirmala in *The Defeat* are not similar to the above characters as they question the society as to why they are ill-treated. Ammachi questions her

mother why she depends on Venkappayya and bears his domineering ways. The girl child in Mrinal Pandey's *Girls* questions her grandmother as to why they worship the girl child only during Astami days and why not daily. Similarly, Asha questions her mother about her self identity in the family. These girls protest the suppressive restrictions made by the family, society and tradition.

As per researcher's analysis, the girl child in the society is a victim of various factors. This happened not only in the olden days but also in the modern era. These short stories have been compared to real-life stories to examine whether the writer's portrayal of a girl child in literature reflects the real life of the girl child in the society, the struggling event to acquire primary necessities like education, food and care of parents. Are they still treated as secondary citizens in the society? After colonialism and its aftermath, partition and exile and changing social conditions provide the

*Analysis of victimisation of the girl children:*



specific background to universal themes of poverty and loneliness, childhood and age, sexuality, death and regeneration. Many of the stories are written from women's and girl child's perspective (Holmstrom, 2002, p. 11).

## CONCLUSION

In these short stories, it is discerned that the girl child protagonists have many common features that engendered the exploitation of them. The way the authors have portrayed the characters is different, but the factors causing or leading to the exploitation of the girl child are the same. The common factors such as poverty, birth in lower community, parents' negligence, lack of interest to educate the girl child, lack of importance in the natal group, child marriages, prostitution, sexual harassment, social and traditional restrictions and beauty of girl child, etc. have been identified. Unfortunately, in the study, only a few protagonists are portrayed as revolutionaries who questioned why the girls have to abide by age-old traditions and bear the harassment and torture, be it is domestic, physical or emotional. All the stories presented here have a denseness and richness of details of the actuality of daily life. A close examination of the socioeconomic parameters concerning the status of the girl child shows that the chronically deplorable situation is staring us in the face. India is a land of myth and fable, of tradition and modernity. The reality of modern India is its struggle for development, with people striving to overcome the problems of overpopulation, poverty, gender

discrimination, ecological degradation and urban decay. Girls are consistently short-changed in their share of resources, and implicit or explicit justification is given for this (for example, 'girls need less food than boys because boys work harder' and 'looking after girls are like ploughing other people's fields'). Hence, sensitisation about the value of girls' education and their equal rights to education, as well as eradication of misery and the betterment of the condition of girls, is very crucial to the survival of the girl child.

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