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“A Cellar Full of Sour Beer”: Girl Child in the House of Indian Fiction in English with Special Reference to Mrinal Pande’s *Daughter’s Daughter*

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What are little girls made of, made of?

What are little girls made of?

Sugar and spice and all things nice,

That’s what little girls are made of.

The negative stereotypes of girl children are seen in almost every aspect of life. It is embedded in proverbs and nursery rhymes which unconsciously create the awareness of the disparity between girls and boys especially the way they are expected to behave in a social setup. Feminist insights into society and literature have led to the scrutiny of the various situations encountered by girls in life, and the different aspects of girl childhood presented in literature. There is an attempt at protesting the increasing discrimination against girl children in general, and also there have been attempts by various critics, psychologists and social reformers to understand and analyse the representation of girl children in children’s literature and in mainstream fiction. Despite the attention that children’s literature, especially representation of female children in literature, has secured in the 20th century as a result of the contribution of the psychologists and feminist critics, primary and secondary literature about girl children remain an area much to be discussed. It may also be said that even though the focus on women’s literature has encouraged many writers to represent the experiences of girl children in literature, it has also diverted the attention from girl children to adult females.

In the recent fiction in English written by Indian writers with girl child protagonists, there is an attempt at changing the traditional image of girl children who are hitherto presented as mute presences. The transition of girls from birth to youth is a less documented area because girls as children do not seem to interest the readers or the writers. The female always appears to interest the readers as a grown up girl and hence the girl child not portrayed very frequently in fiction. The girl child in most of the representations appears as the miniature version of a female who behaves according to the code of conduct prescribed for the responsible adult woman. This transitional period is depicted as the period of training where the girl child receives her lessons on how to become a very good wife and a very good mother. For example in children’s classical literature as Kirpal observes the girl child appears as an apprentice:

As in ancient literature, girl children are not presented as *girl* children. Their chronological age might place them as children but they appear in these works as “miniature women” ---child brides, child wives, child widows. They could be nine ten or eleven years old but the responsibilities they shoulder are those of grown-up women. (Kirpal ix)

This complete lack of attention on the childhood of girls is attributed to the lack of interesting events that outline their passage to adulthood. Mrinal Pande's novel *Daughters Daughter* (1993) in many ways is a unique novel that explores the childhood of girls. The novel presents the story of girls who are unattended and ignored by adults. But the narrative is constructed in such a way that the attention is always on the girls. The identity of the girls is acknowledged in relation to the parents or the other relatives. The girls are very often labelled as 'daughter's daughters' at their maternal grandmother's house, signifying the inferior position of their mother; and daughters carry the same inferiority in a more visible way. The *Daughter's Daughter* is a faithful rendering into thin fiction of the upbringing of girls in India, and also provides a critique of the formation of their identity in such surroundings.

Before launching on a detailed analysis of the representation of girl childhood in the novel of Mrinal Pande, it may be useful to examine some of the trend setting developments in children's studies outside literature. Childhood provides an individual ample opportunity to acquire skills and get trained to cope with people and environment. The child development is defined as the growth and maturity of the body and mind of the child. It also involves the development of linguistic, emotional and behavioural faculties in them. The child collects information from his or her surroundings and tries to develop potentialities as it grows. Historical and cultural milieu moulds the personality and furthers the development of the self. Horney observes that the real self is "common to all human beings and yet unique in each which is the deep source of growth" (17).

During the Renaissance period "throughout much of Europe infants were seen as miniature versions of adults – as adults in waiting" (Smidt 3). And during the Victorian period children were depicted as innocent beings in pretty soft coloured clothes. The images of children change with the changing times and are contingent upon the social attitude and political situations of the time. Philip Aries' French work on childhood which was later translated as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) explains that the concept of childhood is a new one and it didn't exist in medieval times. The concept of innocence was attributed to children and they were classified as a sub group within adults who are to be protected and cared against the hazards of life. Smidt observes how clearly Aries traced the changes in the approaches to children:

...the changes that came about between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries could be ascribed to three factors. First there was a change to what was happening within families as children became perceived of as more vulnerable and more valued and in need of protection. Then, at a later stage, children were seen as being in need of discipline and training. Third, with the development of schooling, children's ages were seen as significant and schools were seen as the institutions where children belonged (4).

The concept of childhood is a social construct. In the long history of Britain the need for giving special care and system of life for children was under discussion only towards the early 18th century. According to Smidt, John Wesley, the Methodist leader "urged parents to break the will of the child so that it could be subject to the will of God" (5). Rousseau depicted childhood packed with goodness in his work *Emile* (1762). Later this image of child gave way to the romantic concept of child that appeared in the works of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The innocence in childhood is the wealth of one's life and gradually man loses it as he grows older. This romantic concept of childhood gave way to a very cruel economic exploitation of them during the industrial revolution. The element of evil was attributed to children. Smidt monitors "The Evangelical Magazine in 1799 referred to children as being 'sinful polluted creatures'"(5). During the last decade of the 18th century child labour

outweighed the situation and witnessed many of them being deprived of childhood in the hurdles of life. The concern for children began to be discussed and in 1883 a Royal Commission declared that childhood spans only till the age of 13. But in all these situations there were notable difference between children from rich families and poor families The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the increased role of state in regulating various aspects of childhood.

In sociology childhood studies gathered momentum in the 1990s with the new sociology of childhood which set itself against the mainstream social psychological and cognitive developments. Discussions on childhood for many decades preceding the 1990s was dominated by Piaget's developmental psychology. This heavily concentrated on child's responses to environment. Family, according to this model plays an important role in the interpersonal interaction and development of the child. According to Vygotsky, a contemporary of Piaget, child development involves social interactions which results in acquiring the symbolic knowledge of the culture. The 1990s witnessed a new shift in child studies and development. As a reaction to Piaget, the new sociology of childhood emerged with a new perspective on child development by Jens Qvortrup, William A Corsaro, Lynne Chisholm et.al.

In a family, adults have the supreme power over children and children depend on them for their needs. Children seek support and care from adults because of their inability to fulfil their needs without the help of the senior members of the family. On the other hand the adult also depends on the child for the future social and economic safety. The need for a better bringing up of the child, and the proper conditioning of its behaviour and attitude to his surroundings, are necessary so that the adults can depend on them in the future. The image of child is also an adult construct. It is always presented as a transitional space in the direction of future. Thus some specific behavioural patterns are attributed to them for a better future life and their consciousness is conditioned for specific daily routine.

The making of a girl child in Indian context is a step by step process from birth to youth. The Girl child is born to transform herself like other female members of the family who share specific behavioural patterns bestowed on them as part of their role and status in the family. Her individuality is restricted by rules of conduct which make her the typical Indian woman who should be ready when time comes to become the darling of her in laws and her future husband.

Indian family structure is evidently patriarchal and in most of the states in India people follow rigid views regarding their caste and family values and tradition. This 'Indianness' influences the way family and family values are shaped. To make it more precise, the choices available to people in India especially to people from rural areas and women folk are restricted by the caste system and the associated value systems even though educated Indians are striving to come out of this bond. Shashi Taroor makes a very pertinent point in this regard: "in the villages caste may still dictate where you live, whom you eat with and who you marry...."

The head of the family in most cases is the eldest male member of the family. Indian family longs for a male member in every generation of it to keep the thread of the family to future heirs. The birth of a male member means increase in the status of the family and the dignity of the mother who gives birth to the son. But the birth of a female member is not appreciated like the birth of a male member, because son carries the family name ,and also he is the one who is to do the rituals after the death of his parents which Indians believe is essential to get 'moksha' for the wandering soul, to free itself from earthly bonds. The presence of a son is essential to perform the rituals and it is his duty and privilege to burn the pyre which will lead the dead towards the ultimate aim and thus a son is more respected and receives more care than a daughter. In India death is an important event as it is considered to

be the gateway to bliss or a better life. With ample rituals the soul will attain 'moksha'. Son is thus an inevitable part of the family. Girls don't do after death rituals.

When a child is born she/he gradually comes to follow these schemes of things in life. The Hindu cultural life is generally carried to the child through stories and songs by mother, grandmother or other elder members of the family. "...the nature of an individual's first relationship—with his mother—profoundly influences the quality and 'dynamics' of social relations throughout his life"(Kakar 62) . Almost all Indian children are brought up within the cultural matrix of India which influences the later psychological development of the child. It becomes part of him even before he thinks of a better choice.

Childhood in India is gender specific. Male children and female children are brought up in different ways according to familial practices and cultural demands. Indian girl realises at a very young age that she is different from her younger or elder brother who is evidently given preferences compared to her. She learns that it is because she is a girl and he is a boy. Girls have to live within the enclosures of certain rules and these rules are meant to prepare her for marriage which is the ultimate goal of her life.

The status of women in India is not uniform; it varies on the basis of the social, religious, and economic condition of the family in which she is born. For example a lower caste man is inferior to a higher caste woman. Indian way of categorising or recognising the individuals is based on the gender, caste and family of that person. The social attitude towards them depends on these factors. The socialising of the child with the peer group depends on these factors.

Girls are encouraged to move around with the girls of similar social and caste status. Children thus learn to create their own groups based on gender, caste and family to which they belong. In this way culture shapes the child before he or she understands the significance of it. As Sudhir and Katrina Kakar observe "...the possibilities of 'fluid' and changing identities in adulthood are rather limited and, moreover, rarely touch the deeper layers of psyche. So, in a sense, we are Spanish or Korean—or Indian—much before we make the choice or identify this as an essential part of our identity" (2)

Psychologists, sociologists, feminist and other social reformers have pondered over the idea of the need to analyse the status of girl children in India who lose their individuality in the process of growing up. Attempts have been made to study this social process of moulding the female child. This moulding makes her accept her status at an early age as she learns that survival is important to her than assertion of her identity. Thus girls are compelled to live according to the traditions in which the eldest family members including her own mother and grandmother have lived. The new born girl has no choice but to wear the robe stitched for her by her family long before her birth.

The process of the acceptance of "girlhood" starts early in a girl child's life. Though there have been studies regarding the construction of this uniformity in a girl's life there were limited number of works which discuss the construction of girlhood. The preference given to her brother makes the girl understand early in her life that it is just because she is born a girl that she has to live a less privileged life. Mrinal Pande's work *Daughter's Daughter* is a novel which gives us glimpses of the instances in the life of a growing girl who was regarded inferior because of her birth as a girl. According to Sudhir Kakar and Kathrina Kakar,

"The inner experience of being a girl...when adult eyes glow at the sight of your baby brother while they dim as they regard you, can easily become a fundamental crisis at the beginning of a little girl's identity development. This crisis, generally silent, is given rare eloquent voice in the fictionalised reminiscences of the Hindi writer Mrinal Pande who describes the reactions of her fictional counterpart, the seven-year-old Tinu, at the birth of her brother after three daughters have been born to the parents.(43)

Much before the birth of her baby brother the narrator Tinu learns from the elders that boys get preference over girls. Tinu gets enough opportunities to observe and experience the condition of being a daughter's daughter during her visits to her grandmother's house in Almora and her uncle's house in Gorakhpur. The shifting of her grandmother's family from Almora to Gorakhpur in the winter months made Tinu's mother and the other children move to their house where she learns to give up their "treasure in this house to the son's children"(32).

Being a daughter's daughter, Tinu's position in her uncle's house is below to all the other family members. Her uncle's son Anu is given preference and nobody says no to him and always acts according to his wishes. Even the boy too knows at an early age that he is the preferred one in comparison with the girls. In Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* Anu remarks "You sit there. You are Daughter's children! We'll sleep here near Grandmother"(31). Tinu and her sister had no way but to do as directed because they know they are daughter's daughters and have no right to say or act anything against the son's children. Lakshmi Holmstrom in her forward to Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* views it as presenting "the darker side of childhood"(9). According to her "the child's world constantly jostles against the adult world and the contradictions of that world: what the older people say or do, and what they actually mean or intend" (9).

The preference for sons is an age old concept in the Indian context. It has become part of the cultural system. The Indian girl is not a person who contributes something to the family. She is the one who snatches the family income as dowry when she gets married, and thus she is considered a burden. But still the family considers it necessary to give her dowry while they marry her off. Her position in family is that of a permanent guest who leaves the family after marriage and finds her rightful place in her husband's house as the carrier and the caretaker of a son who would become the saviour of the family. Vibhuti Patel observes how Indian society gives preference to the male child.

The ideology of subordination of women creates a social condition that considers a "girl" as a liability. Religion sanctions "son-preference" .We have a number of prayers that state , "Grant birth of a girl elsewhere, here grant a son". The blessing given to the bride invariably has a line, "May you be the mother of hundred sons".(7)

In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Pande portrays how the child Anu was given better treatment in his mother's house. Tinu witnesses the special care given to him by his uncle. "... Anu, the son of their daughter, would be treated to a slice of mango, or a toffee from his hands. Never us. We were daughter's daughter. We earned indulgent smiles at best" (26)

The Indian mind is moulded in such a way that they find it difficult to see their daughters leading a different life by learning or by their special skills. Better education and upbringing may vary from family to family, but the basic idea of the family regarding the future of the girl is to find a good husband and family for her, and in turn she be the most obedient and duty bound wife in her husband's house. Tinu's tutor once remarked of the little's girl's capacity for concentration. Tinu remembers her aunts' expression and statement regarding this. "The Aunts smile or say something about boys being boys and about girls eventually needing skills only to roll out chapattis and boiling dal and rice"(48). "When Dinu and I laugh too much mother gets angry and says we will now weep. Girls should not laugh too much she says grumpily" (49). Tinu's mother expects her and her sister to behave in the way all girls should. There are some behavioural patterns for girls. Once the children Dinu and Tinu were denied the prasada of Ishta. The reason was that "it was not to be had by the daughter's daughters" (71-72) . Hira di slaps her daughter. Though grandmother disagrees with it she still assumes that "marriageable daughters need to be tamed" (72). Both Hira di and Grandmother call their husband Malik- the master. Here the narrator so well knows that

they are being tamed for their masters. They believe that it is the duty of the mother to train her to become the best daughter in law lest she may spoil the family name. The only aim for the daughter seems to be marriage. When Tinu's mother made Tinu and Dinu do their homework their aunts feel it awkward and silly. Grandmother too was worried about being bookish as she believes that it may affect their eyes and they may need glasses in future. She also adds how difficult it is to marry off those with glasses.

The day her mother gave birth to a son is so auspicious for them. Dinu and Tinu were on their way from the school when they heard the News. Tinu remembers the gloomy faces in her family during the birth of her little sister and she immediately juxtaposes the festive mood of her brother's birth with the gloominess of her sister's birth. Everyone becomes so happy on the birth of her brother. Mother's face radiates with joy and the aunts bring a special broth for her. When she was reluctant to drink it grandmother compels her. "Drink it up, drink it all up... You will be breast feeding a son this time"(85). Their younger sister too got attention. Grandmother declared she is their "Laxmi daughter"(85) who brought a brother on her back, to protect and take care of his sisters and the family, who is to carry the family name.

The travels, the shift from one place to another and the practices of different families have increasingly influenced Tinu in the moulding her character and towards the end it is clear that she learned how to shatter her submissiveness and to assert herself by denying the words of her sister. The story of Tinu of course makes us witness the state of girlhood in India. There are progressive girls who get support from the male members of the family. But on a larger scale the condition remains the same.

Towards the end the work reveals how Tinu learns to behave against the expected ways. She realises the difficulty of being a girl and a child. "To be small is to live on caste-offs. Nothing that you wish to share will fit anyone else" (114). Now Tinu changes herself. The fights between her parents scare her. But she doesn't want to be in a confused state, she doesn't want to be in something which she doesn't like. Of course she feels lonely and scared. But she doesn't want others to see her crying. She covers her face. She doesn't want to be weak like her sister. Tinu feels pathetic thinking about her sister who couldn't do anything in a situation of agony, suppression and confusion. "I wish she'd rage, shout, and fight. But I know she won't" (115).

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