

**FROM INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE: THE GIRL CHILD IN  
POST 1980s INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut  
for the award of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English**

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This is to certify that Ms. Reshma K.R. has incorporated the corrections/suggestions made by the adjudicators.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**From Innocence to Experience: The Girl Child in Post 1980s Indian Fiction in English**” submitted to the University of Calicut, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bona fide research carried out by **Ms. Reshma K R**, under my supervision and guidance. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Reshma K R, hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**From Innocence to Experience: The Girl Child in Post 1980s Indian Fiction in English**” which is submitted to the University of Calicut, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a bona fide record of research carried out by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title or recognition.

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## **INDIAN GIRL CHILD: HISTORY, FICTION AND REALITIES**

Indian English fiction is rich with extensive varieties of characters, plots, and narrative techniques, covering the entire span of human life from childhood to adulthood. A close socio-literary analysis reveals the various nuances and undercurrents of recent Indian English fiction. It has surprised the readers with its brilliant amalgamation of social significance and fictional potential. New trends in Indian English literature display various attempts at the revival of the marginalised, including young women and children. It focuses on the relative significance of humanity in the social spaces and attempts to highlight a celebration of individualism as a better way towards liberation and self-realisation.

Girl children seem to attract the attention of recent Indian English writers due to their marginalised position in society. It is part of a general shift in understanding the needs of the hitherto less visible presences in the society around the world and especially in the third world countries. Women, Dalits, aborigines, blacks, sexual, religious and ethnic minorities have received increased visibility in the recent years. Constitutions have been modified in most countries to legally accommodate these previously marginalised sections of the society. Children have been always a marginalised section of the human population everywhere in the world as they depend on the adults to fulfil their requirements. The need for uplifting the status of children has become a social need in recent times. However, not enough is done to ameliorate the position of children and the concept of the healthy upbringing of children is far from being realised. Girl children face more hardships through gender discrimination apart from being part of the marginalised. The general attention towards the position

of children being so unsatisfactory the condition of girl children is unimaginably worse.

In most of the social instances, girls are conveniently avoided because of the general understanding of the culturally imposed weak status of girls in society. Art and literature that deal with girl children are a very rare phenomenon and such representations whenever they are made fall outside the general canon and are read by only a small section of the society. Girls mostly are represented in art and literature as part of domesticity and are considered as the miniature version of women rather than as growing children. In such cases, very often the purpose is to impart moral lessons to girl children and give them a tutorial on housekeeping.

In Indian writing in English, girl children seem to occupy a far lesser space than is occupied by male children. Despite the new surge of interest in the studies relating to various marginalised sections of the society, the discussions relating to the rights of the girl children remain in the dark. A comparative analysis of the frequency of the representation of the various marginalised sections of the society in art and literature would bring out the relatively low depiction of female child characters in literature. Children, wherever and whenever do occupy some space of importance, tend to be gender wise presented in favour of the male children. Child protagonists who appear in Indian English fiction are likely to be more often boys rather than girls. These primary observations make obvious the fact that writers are more comfortable giving the nomenclature 'child' to a boy rather than a girl. They seem to be doubtful about a girl child's fictional potential, her abilities and her significance in society. In fiction too, as in normal social life, girls occupy the margins facilitating the normal process of life



to go on without denying the imposed definition and the explanation of their existence. They seem to occupy the position of adult women rather than children.

An in-depth analysis of the recent Indian English novels shows that the depiction of girl child subjectivity has changed tremendously in course of time, and Indian girl children have apparently established more visible selfhood in recent novels. It is also observed through the texts that the girl protagonists seem to reduce the incongruities of girlhood presented in fiction so far, and try to establish a new personality which seems to redefine girlhood in a more positive way. Thus the thesis argues that the post 1980s Indian English novels establish a new identity and selfhood for the girl child protagonists moving from the innocence of childhood towards the experience of a new girlhood.

For convenience, the thesis has been divided into five chapters and a conclusion. The present introductory chapter shall briefly discuss the history of the representation of girl childhood in Indian writing in English and tries to find the frequency of the depiction of girl child protagonists in fiction from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1980s. The attempt is to trace the nature and the purpose of these representations and to find out how these representations are structured by literary, socio-cultural and economic factors. The present chapter also intends to show the underrepresentation of the girl child protagonists in the pre 1980s Indian English fiction and also the increased representation of girl children in the post 1980s fiction. The chapter that follows the introductory chapter attempts to understand the increased importance of girlhood in the global scenario by focussing on the various sociological and psychological studies on childhood because children seem to be the beneficiaries of

most of these researches. This chapter also tries to find the specific nature of Indian girlhood in social and literary contexts.

To study the peculiarity of girl child protagonists in recent Indian English fiction, five novels from Indian English writers have been selected. The analyses of these texts are done in the subsequent chapters to study how the girl children are represented in these texts through different spheres of childhood experiences. The subsequent chapters propose to study the different spheres of childhood and the various influences that shape the formation of these spheres in the chosen novels of five post 1980s novelists namely Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* (1993), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* (1999), P R Lakshman's *The Girl Child* (2007) and Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night* (2010). The third chapter shall study the 'the girl child in the adult world' in order to understand the life of the girl child protagonists in the world of adults. The fourth chapter will analyse another realm of the experience of childhood, 'the child's world', to infer the ways in which children create a world of their own within the adult world. The fifth chapter looks at the formation of a 'new girlhood' through the conflict between the adult world and the child's world. The chapter studies how the new girl protagonists cherish a new identity, unlike the real children. Thus the present thesis analyses the girl childhood represented in the post 1980s Indian fiction in English, and tries to establish how these novels may pattern the new girl and the new girl childhood.

The definition of child and childhood is constantly debated on the basis of the age of children and various agencies that employ these terminologies for specific purposes which define the nature and span of childhood. The scrutiny of the trajectory

and temperament of the investigation under progress, however, seem to lead to bitter realities hidden under the sham of social morality and cultural practices. This study examines the various ways in which childhood of girl children from different social backgrounds are constructed, represented and understood both by authors and readers of Indian fiction in English. It also attempts to analyse the fixation of identity and personality of girl children in the present social and literary scenario.

The study of the position of girl children in India naturally leads us to interrogate the sociology of childhood. The terminology 'child' is often attributed to a human offspring, as a marker of a certain stage in the process of the physical development from babyhood to adulthood. In 1989, The United Nations General Assembly in its Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defined child as “. . . a human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Detrick 115). The International labour organisation affiliated to the United Nations has designated fifteen years as the minimum age for entering the labour force, thereby clearly distinguishing a child and an adult in terms of employment and employability.

The definition and the age span of childhood vary according to different laws in India. According to the Census of India, child is a person who is below the age of 14 (Chopra 14). Indian Penal Code 1860 Sec.82 does not consider a person above the age of seven as child in order that he may be exempted from serious legal proceedings against him (Mishra 23). But in case of children whose mental ability has not reached the point of understanding the consequences of the criminal action which is held against him, the age of childhood is raised to 12 years as per Sec. 83 IPC (Mishra 23-24). Under The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, a child is a

person who has not completed 14 years of age (Wal 230). Dr. Girish Bala Chaudhury's studies give a comprehensive view of the Indian judicial system in terms of the definition of child in India. She mentions, "The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, requires a female to be 18 years before she can legally marry. Under The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986, a child is a person who has not completed 16 years of age and a minor who has completed 16 years of age but not completed 18 years of age" (Chaudhury 143). She also records that "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, defines a child below 18 years of age" (143). Indian judicial system thus gives a clear understanding of the term child and childhood and how it is protected, nurtured and nourished in the society controlling the atrocities of the adults on children.

Subsequently the effect of fixing the legal age for marriage of girl children also has implications with regard to the domestic violence and sexual abuse of young girls in India. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, in a way stood for the protection of minor girl children from sexual exploitation. But the larger majority of young children were left out of purview of any of these laws due to the lack of a specific law providing protection to unmarried girl children. There was no such law for the protection of children, especially girl children, against sexual harassment until 2012. But now Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is considered as a serious offence and has been considered as a major issue faced by girl children in India. Considering the relevance and the gravity of the situation and with the involvement of the Ministry of Women and Child Development in the issue, new legislation called the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) 2012 has been framed (Belur and Singh 1). The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 received the President's assent on 19th June 2012 and was notified in the Gazette of India on 20th June, 2012.

According to this act a child is any person below the age of eighteen. It refers to different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative sex, sexual harassment and pornography. The act considers abuses against mentally ill children and abuses by family members, police officers, teachers and doctors as more serious.

The Act also casts the police in the role of child protectors during the investigative process. Thus, the police personnel receiving a report of sexual abuse of a child are given the responsibility of making urgent arrangements for the care and protection of the child, such as obtaining emergency medical treatment for the child and placing the child in a shelter home, and bringing the matter in front of the CWC, should the need arise. The Act further makes provisions for avoiding the re-victimisation of the child at the hands of the judicial system. It provides for special courts that conduct the trial in-camera and without revealing the identity of the child, in a manner that is as child-friendly as possible. Hence, the child may have a parent or other trusted person present at the time of testifying and can call for assistance from an interpreter, special educator, or other professional while giving evidence. Above all, the Act stipulates that a case of child sexual abuse must be disposed of within one year from the date the offence is reported. The Act also provides for mandatory reporting of sexual offences. This casts a legal duty upon a person who has knowledge that a child has been sexually abused to report the offence; if he fails to do so, he may be punished with six months' imprisonment and/ or a fine ([www.arpan.org.in](http://www.arpan.org.in))

Biologically childhood is the period of one's life that comes between infancy and adulthood. Though in India childhood is generally believed to be the age till

fourteen, there are judicial articles and acts that define it as a period between and even beyond the age of 14. But the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 came with the new definition of child with a considerable alteration of the previous one and fixed the age of a child as any person who has not completed the age of eighteen years (Verma 107). Considering the umbrella clauses relating to the definition of the term 'child' in Indian constitution, and the popular understanding of the term in the country it can be viewed that for the protection of the girl child the definition of the girl child includes any female who has not completed eighteen years of age. Though there are adequate provisions made under the legal system of India for the protection and equality of girl children, the question of the actual implementation of these rules and the proper understanding of these rules are far from the intended targets.

Scientific or sociological explanations of childhood do not however give us any indication of the actual childhood expected, fulfilled and lived by the female child in actuality. The definition of girl child as a female between certain years of age may not indicate a childhood by any objective parameters. The expectations, the society has for female children very often reduce or sometimes completely take away the normal attributes and privileges of childhood. In society and in fiction childhood remains invisible and is an un-lived dream for most of the female children. They mature beyond their age and their childhood is left out from life.

The sociological studies about girl children bring out a totally different perspective on girl –childhood. There has not been sufficient attention paid by the sociologists about the condition of the girl child in the actual lived spaces. The insufficiency of data has to some extent crippled this study. Even though this study

limits itself largely to the novels chosen for study and how childhood is discussed in these novels, wherever possible it does relate to the sociological issues outside that frame the fictional representations.

While certain generalities may be attributed to the experiences of girl child in India, a universal notion of girl child and girl childhood are not possible to assume due to the diversity of the social condition in which girl children in India live. There are serious differences in the developmental patterns of girl children in India with regard to caste and class. The urban and rural background also shape the experiences of the child in different ways. To cut across such diverse experiences and to talk about a notion of girl childhood existing outside all these, is to create an imagined notion of childhood. Hence this study has also brought into discussion such influences and patterns of influence into discussion.

Girl children from the upper class privileged Indian middle class have relatively a secure yet otherwise problematic childhood which is different from the experiences of the girl children from the lower social and economic backgrounds. Women's Literacy and women's emancipation in India are closely related to the question of birth; women born into lower castes and classes are denied education compared to women born into upper castes and classes according to the available statistics (UNESCO 2002). While the enrolment ratio and literacy rate are significantly lower for women (56%) compared to their male counterparts (65%), the caste-wise and class wise data for women show that the disparity of access to education among girl children of various castes and classes is serious. (qtd. in Hickey and Stratton). The social, economic and academic marginalisation of women have been well documented and the same may be said about girl children also. The prevailing social conditions

don't leave enough scope for any kind of motivation or reward for educated girl children. Hence very often the feeling is that investing money on the education of female children is a waste of money which may otherwise be spent on their expensive marriages. Studies like the one conducted by Hickey & Mary Stratton suggest that Indians in general are enthusiastic about providing education to their children but the gender wise, caste wise and class wise disparities are still very unequal. The rural-urban divide in case of education and emancipation of girl children is also significant in India. Rural women spend a lot of time working for salary whereas the urban women have more time to spend with the children taking care of their education, which implies that urban girl children are not burdened in the same way as their rural counterparts to earn a living at an early age. Hence they can spend more time pursuing higher education and for them education is basically meant to improve their chances of better alliance when they come off age. Since Muslims and upper caste families don't encourage girls to work, their education is only meant for finding better marital prospects (Hickey and Stratton 67). Very often upper caste families consider it as an insult to send their daughters to work for pay. "...upper-caste families began to value schooling as a way to help daughters prepare for their roles as wives of administrators and mothers of administrators' children. Illiteracy continued to be widespread among all persons of lower castes" (Hickey and Stratton 68)

The experience girl children as a category of literature has not attracted the attention of writers or it is considered irrelevant, as is evident in Indian English novels. This is largely due to the forced maturity attributed to girl children. Girl children are not visible as 'children' in fiction written in India as they seem to have matured into the roles of grown up women in the early years of their life. While introducing girl child characters, misgivings of several kinds must have struck the authors regarding



the possibility of the acceptance of a visible female childhood and the way of representing it. The position of girl child in fiction therefore recreated the context and the space they occupied in the society. Establishing a visible identity for female children thus remains a personal crusade for the writers though this issue of historical invisibility has attracted political and social discussions. Recent Indian English writers have put deliberate efforts to uplift the status of Indian girl children who are preferably silenced and marginalised as part of the social practices. The childhood of a girl is not regarded as a significant theme to explore, and the experience of female childhood is neglected when a woman's life is portrayed in Indian English fiction. Though there are plenty of references to child characters in epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the girl children do not enjoy a full-fledged childhood and seem quickly move on to a matured self and the point of transition remains unnoticeable. Girl children are encouraged and even forced to develop attributes of grown-up female selves which eventually lead them to be miniature women with partially grown physical and psychological attributes. Growth seems to be the most important aspect of their lives and they are valuable in society only in their matured selves. While discussing the strange position that the girl child had to cope with, Sharda Iyer comments, "The mind, personality and the experience of the girl child are closed within parenthesis. Girls are the silent part of the family. What a girl thinks or feels about this social eclipse does not interest the writers" (87). Iyer's opinion affirms the basic concepts about women in India. Iyer summarises the position of the girl child with the statement that "She is like a cipher that acquires value only when a numerical digit is added to it" (87). The personality of a girl child is presented always in relation to the other members in the family and in society. She gains relevance as being daughter, wife or mother; but never gets opportunity to expose her personality, her

psyche and individual development as they are considered irrelevant and unimportant in any social context.

The fiction written around girl children hasn't attracted the attention of the readers like those written around male children. Indian English fiction written from the early nineteenth century to the latter half of the twentieth century has traced accounts of very few girl children as protagonists though it can be countered with the argument that the last decades of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century haven't produced much work of literary significance too. To understand the position of the girl children in Indian English fiction and how this section of humanity is conveniently underrepresented in fiction, a clear understanding of the development of Indian English literature as a specific genre is needed.

The emergence of Indian English Literature has to be understood in the specific historical and cultural contexts of India in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. A historical analysis would show that Indian English literature is still in its nascent stage. From the nineteenth to the early decades of the twentieth century there came a few writings, which may be categorised as Anglo-Indian. There was no special label given to works written specifically by an Indian writer or for the literature written in Indian context. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, “[an] early essay like Edward Farley Oaten’s *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908), . . . uses the term ‘Anglo-Indian’ to cover all writing in English about India without making any distinction between Indians writing in English and Englishmen using India as material” (9). K R Srinivasa Iyengar’s efforts in fixing the term and moulding Indian Writing in English as a special category of literature is done through his works *Indo Anglian Literature* (1943), *Indian Contribution to English Literature* (1945) and

a detailed survey titled *Indian Writing in English* (1962). The term has thus come to denote literature produced by Indian writers in English. Though Professor V K Gokak used the term 'Indo English' in this work *English in India: It's Present and Future* (1964) to denote translations from Indian literatures into English, there is no particular expression that may be used to distinguish works written originally in English and the works that were translated into English from other Indian languages. The increased use of English language as a medium of native literary output in India has roots in the political and historical circumstances in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The trend in upper-class families to send their children abroad to have good English education and the rise of the Westernised families in India has paved the way towards new literary experiments in English language. The general receptive environment for English fiction in India among the educated people and the urge to express in English to be part of or as part of the educated mass of the society have made many writers to use English as their medium of expression.

The Dutt family and the Ghosh family were foremost among the literary giants in the nineteenth century who gained enormous popularity. Their style was imitated by the sprouting geniuses who came later to be part of the literature of the empire. The early experiments were done in verse. Works dealing with the theme of childhood were not a rarity as most of them used it in their works as the most free and happy stage in one's life. Toru Dutt's poem "Our Casuarina Tree" is a craving for the scenes of her native soil and the rejuvenating memories of her childhood. The childhood was at best used as a relief from the agonies of adulthood. Sudhir Kakar makes the following comment while considering the importance of childhood with reference to the social and cultural scenario in India. ". . . different cultures shape the development of their members in different ways, 'choosing' whether childhood youth or adulthood

is to be a period of maximum or minimum stress. In India . . . it is early childhood rather than adulthood which is the 'golden age' of individual life history" (10). But in most contexts, the early childhood too is defined in relation to the childhood of male children who live a more visible and hurdleless childhood than the female children. Literary representations of childhood largely dealt with the childhood of boys in early works though some major writers like Toru Dutt attempted some personal accounts in their work delimiting the occurrence as a rarity.

Verse gave way to prose accounts which were largely the need of the conditions in India, a more political one rather than cultural. Tracing the origin of the modern novel Meenakshi Mukherjee aptly declares the modern novel to be “. . . the organic product of a particular environment in a particular society in a given time” (29). Though there was limited output till the last decades of the nineteenth century it moved to a high-flying point in the early years of the twentieth century. “The novel writing in English became a centre of attraction for Anglicised Indians and Indian English novel was encouraged by the colonised people for their identity and intellectual status” (Kumar 4).

Novelists gained a prominent place in Indian English writing as an extension of the storytelling culture of India. It seems to have sprouted as early as the eighteenth century but took time to grow to its present form. India has a rich tradition of folk tales and has to its credit great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Narasimhaiah traces the tradition of India in narrative literature to the time of the Rigveda and the Upanishads, “In one sense, India had a richer potential for the novel form than the west, thanks to the India's gift for story-telling which goes back to the Rigveda and the Upanishads” (XI). He appreciates the Indian writers for their ability to accommodate a

wide range of themes in their works and reminds Indian critics of their responsibility to recover the contributions of Indian writers: “. . . the Indian novel in English has shown a capacity to accommodate a wide range of concerns . . . and the distinguished critics of art and literature like Anand Coomaraswami, Aurobindo and others who must all help in recovering the rich critical heritage of India” (XII).

The political, economic, cultural and social system dominated by the English gave rise to the novel in English just like fiction written in the native language. *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) seems to be the first book produced by an Indian in English. Written in epistolary fashion, it sketches the experience of Dean Mahomet in the colonial army. It can be described as an autobiographical travel narrative, attempting a picturesque description of several significant towns in India, and it portrays a series of military disagreements with neighbouring Indian domains. The fictional accounts of this period were largely autobiographical like *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* itself. The personal accounts in fiction seem to be the best formula as V S Naipaul remarks “An Autobiography can distort; facts can be aligned. But fiction never lies; it reveals the writer totally” (63).

The socio-political atmosphere in India demanded themes of social significance and this trend continued in the works produced in the later years too. The development of the tradition of novel as a new genre in Indian literary scene is evidently not the product of individual achievement but rather the result of the collective output of the contemporary situation in India. Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s idea on the development of a work of art, has stressed the influence of this collective effort. As he says “ I have come to realise more and more that work, any work, even literary creative work is not the result of an individual genius but the result of a collective

effort . . . The very words we use are a product of collective history” (X). This extension of historical influences could be traced in Indian English literature too as it cannot be completely considered as a sub-genre of English fiction. It is more Indian in its subject and variety as it attempts to represent the Indian subjectivity and ethos in a more realistic outlook though it is written in a foreign tongue.

*Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay is considered to be the first English novel by an Indian writer. It was first serialized in 1864, and it marked the debut of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay as a writer. It tells the story of the pretty and passionate Matangini, who so bravely confronts the arrogance and the atrocities of a villainous man. This happens to be a significant account and an edifying sketch of life in the nineteenth century India. This initial attempt is also significant as the first novel which dealt with the life of a woman. It did not interest the public until it appeared in the form of a book in 1935.

Writers like Raj Lakshmi Devi, H. Dutta, Kali Krishna Lahiri and Khetrapal Chakravorti came with their literary experiments in English in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Raj Lakshmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* came out in 1878 (Kumar 24) and Kali Krishna Lahiri published *Roshinara* in 1881 (Dwivedi 3). Dutta's *Bijoy Chand* came in print in 1888 (Kumar 24). In 1895 Khetrapal Chakravorti published his *Sarata and Hingana* (Kumar 24) and Krupabahi Satthinandhan published *Kamala, a Story of a Hindu Life* in 1894. The *Hindu Life* tells the tragic story of a woman and her experiences as a child-wife, mother and a widow. This work is one of the earliest novels which dealt with the character of a girl child, portraying the trauma of a child wife questioning the practices of the society. Though the story revolves around the life of a young child, it is presented as a view of life from the point of view of a miniature

woman rather than a girl child. *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian life* (1895) by Krupabai Sathianadhan also like the previous work discussed the issues relating to gender, caste and cultural identity. Women writers who struggled to mark their position in the patriarchal society focused on the issue of gender discrimination but never delved deep to find out the crux of the unreasonable prejudices women faced.

The early accounts regarding the bigotry turned out to be a new point but submerged in the other socio-political issues which attracted the concern of the masses. The primary apprehension for the writers was surely the political and social condition of India. The writers never forgot to include the traditional Indian life, its customs, myths and ancient tales along with the issues of social relevance in Indian English Fiction. Apart from the socio-political themes, the integration of western ideas also merged in Indian fiction in the later years.

The earliest fictional pieces in the twentieth century were novels like *The Prince of Destiny* (1909) by Sarath Kumar Ghosh, *Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest: An Indo Anglian Romance* (1909) by S N Mitra, *The Love of Kusuma , An Eastern Love Story* (1910) by Bal Krishna and *The Dive For Death: An Indian Romance* (1911) by T Ramakrishna Pillai. The works written during this period were based largely on social themes and the portrayal of child characters was not very frequent. Women's issues were presented as part of the collective requirement of the time and hence no individual child got special attention in the works. There seem to be no work of special importance with the child protagonists, especially girls.

Though there was a relatively limited literary output from writers in the first two decades, the trend changed in the twenties. The Indian English novel gained the confidence of authors and readers and established a better status in the 1920s. Writers

were seriously anxious about the future of the country and about their contribution in making India an independent country. The non-literary issues like the need to focus more on the political issues deflected the emphasis to socio-political issues with far-reaching consequences. When men dedicated their works to the social cause, women too contributed to the social issues of the time through their works.

The early twentieth-century women writers included Cornelia Sorabji and Sarojini Naidu, both raised their voice in different ways to tackle social issues and maintained a prominent public life. Sorabji's anti-nationalist sentiments and Naidu's nationalist zeal produced works of two different streams. Sarojini Naidu wrote poems and Sorabji wrote fictional pieces about traditional women and their life behind the veil. Sorabji's works *Love and Life behind the Purdah* (1901) and *Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by one of Themselves* (1908) indicate her concern for women. She was the founder of the Social Service League in Bengal for the service of children and mothers. She participated in the movement to raise the age of consent and actively fought against child marriage. *Sun-Babies: Studies in the Child Life of India* (1904) is an important collection of short stories. Firdaus Gandevia, while tracing the contribution made by Cornelia Sorabji towards the cause of women and female children makes the following observation about *Sun Babies*. "Sun Babies is a collection of short stories which has as its subject, Indian children. Cornelia certainly has great faith and affection for children; they are portrayed with compassion and understanding and it is quite evident that the author sees in them the hope for the future of India" (110). *Sun Babies* includes a short story titled "Love and Death" which grippingly narrates the story of a boy and a girl, tied to each other by marriage at an early age of which they hardly have any memories. These two grow up and die unknown to each other. Such marriages were quite common during nineteenth-century



and the two individuals involved in marriages had no role in choosing their life partners. Sorabji's short story questions the rationale of such marriages. Cornelia's work *Sun-Babies: Studies in the Child Life of India* (1904) directly addresses the issues of children. She wrote *Shubala: A Child-mother* (1920) to fight against the system of child marriage and the trauma of repeated pregnancies at an early age. Like her contemporaries, her novels try to present the issues of social relevance. While observing the drift of Indian English fiction during this period towards a more solid literary presence, Meenakshi Mukherjee says,

Whatever be the language in which it is written, a novel by an Indian writer demands direct involvement in values and experiences which are valid in the Indian context. There was a certain lack of such involvement in the early generations of English educated Indians who hoped to create Indian literature in English, those in whom the involvement was direct and decisive took either to create activity in their own language or to constructive work in other areas like social reform or political organisation. The Indian English novel made a different appearance in the nineteen twenties then gradually gathered confidence and established itself in the next two decades. (18)

1930s and 1940s took a special turn concerning the themes discussed in Indo-Anglian novels. The far-reaching consequences of Jalianwala Bagh massacre, the non-cooperation programs conducted by Gandhiji and his subsequent arrest created a nationalist feeling among the masses. With the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930s Gandhiji became an icon for the writers and it resulted in the portrayal of characters in fiction that are committed to social issues. The major writers of the time like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Raja Rao produced novels of

nationalistic themes. K S Venkataramani's, first novel *Murtugan the Tiller* (1927) revolved around the Gandhian theme. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Ahmed Ali, K V Desani, Aubrey Menen and many others wrote novels during this period: but these writers were neglected in the later years. There seems to be no significant work by these writers which explores the personality and the significance of childhood. Child characters in Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya have different expectations to fulfil in order to be acceptable to the audience. They were largely guided by the zeitgeist. Sometimes there are remarkable accounts of them but the character's significance is limited to the backdrop of the nationalistic spirit. Their presences were subdued and forgotten under the more serious themes relating to nation building.

One of the significant child characters of Mulk Raj Anand's novels is Bakha, a boy in his teens. The boy appears in his novel *Untouchable* (1935) as a scavenger who encounters the stark realities from society as he belongs to the lowest stratum of people in society. Most of the events depict the way the boy gets humiliated being a scavenger and is not able to do anything to get rid of his present state of disgrace and misery. Though the novel revolves around the struggle of untouchables, it also presents a female figure, Bakha's sister Sohini, who is also the victim of social atrocities. She sometimes tries to be honest to herself by resisting the attacks physically and mentally from the upper-class people, at the same time she is presented as a meek figure who just couldn't do anything but to accept the realities. Though writers of this period discussed the issues of girl children, as in these rare instances, the focus of these works were still the prominent political, cultural and economic issues of the day.

Another of Mulk Raj Anand's important work, *Coolie* (1936) was written in response to the pathetic condition of children in utter poverty in India. The protagonist again is a boy named Munoo who's only fourteen years old. Munoo's attempts for survival include his being a rickshaw puller, a coolie, a servant etc. There are no significant girls in the novel but there are prominent women characters like the Anglo Indian lady Mrs Mainwaring, who represents Anand's attitude towards women. In the novel, Mrs Mainwaring wonders "Why didn't the world understand . . . how a woman gives herself in love, in hate, in pity, in tenderness, in playfulness and in a hundred different moods? What right had people to judge one?" (293). Though Anand has given importance to the status of womanhood there could be no girl of importance in the novel even though the plot revolves around the hardships of a boy child.

In his work *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) however Anand comes up with a slightly different theme even though it again talked about the oppression of the underprivileged, this time, a man and his family, who worked in a tea plantation in Assam. He has a fifteen-year-old daughter and the plot revolves around his attempts to save his daughter from the British soldiers. Like his male protagonists, women also appear in Anand's the fictional accounts who encounter identity crisis. The female figures that appear in his novels face harassment and discrimination, yet, they are submissive and passive. In *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), Anand presents Gauri as a submissive woman who later transforms herself into a liberated self. She slams the door against her husband and refuses to follow the conventional patterns set for women in India after the so-called ideal women of Indian legends and epics. She could never be Sita or Savitri. Her transformation is identified in the novel as her triumph. She proves here that she cannot succumb to the cultural conditioning of the society.

Like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya too wrote novels which discuss social and political issues. His *So Many Hungers* (1947) is a notable example which presents a realistic account of the Bengal famine. Like his contemporaries, he too has notable adult female characters but these portrayals are hardly revolutionary and these women cast in traditional moulds refuse to come out of the robes of traditional Indian women. A notable girl character of Bhattacharya is Kajoli in *So Many Hungers* (1947). With the story of Kajoli in the background, the novel presents the painful events of the Bengal famine. Bhattacharya presents Kajoli as “the innocent girl of fourteen” (Mehta 34). Her real age, however, is eclipsed by her heroic resistance to the events around her and in her personal life. She is thrown into the violent chaos of the Bengal famine. Even though extreme hunger and famine, compel her to sell her body to a wayside man, her inner strength and her high moral consciousness save her from the inevitable moral degradation, which is considered as a sin and more terrifying than death. Here in this novel, Bhattacharya presents her as the embodiment of Indian womanhood. In the novel the character Rahoul’s grandfather remarks “. . . she has a legacy of manners and proprieties to suit your new-fangled city ideas (25). *Music for Mohini*, published in 1952 presents a city-bred girl who had to cope with the traditional life of her husband’s family. She hates her mother in law and the village life. But later she understands that she can’t behave the way she thinks is appropriate and has to adjust with the situations she is in, for the sake of her husband. She buries her dreams and adapts herself to the environment around to become a lovely traditional girl who loves to live her life according to the wishes of her mother in law and her husband. She even joins in the traditional rituals and willingly offers her blood to the Goddess, to give birth to a son, for the sake of her family. Luckily her husband saves her and she comes to know that she is pregnant and becomes happy that she has fulfilled her duties as a

woman, wife and a daughter in law. The novel here presents the ultimate duty of a woman in Indian tradition. Though Mohini is a city-bred girl she gradually fits herself into the traditional family boundaries though she at times feels uprooted. Bhattacharya presents the dilemma in Indian women and finds that it is better to fit in the traditional Indianness rather being a misfit.

Another important novelist of the time is Raja Rao, who contributed to Indian English literature early in the 1940s with a renewed nationalistic vision. His novel *Kanthapura*(1938) discusses the impact created by Gandhi during the independence movement in India. The events in the novel take place in the highly charged up atmosphere of the freedom struggle and lead to the resultant violence and unrest. After *Kanthapura*, Rao didn't write much till the 1960s. It took another twenty years to produce his next novel which turned to be a semi-autobiographical work titled *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) which carried a sequel titled *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) -a novel that continues the discussion that he started in his previous novel. Even though *Cat and Shakespeare* portrays a couple of female characters including a five-year-old girl child named Usha, the general philosophical nature of the novel obscures the significance of the girl child. Like his contemporaries, there are no notable girl children in his novels produced during these years.

R K Narayan, on the other hand, produced a few well-appreciated novels during this period. R K Narayan produced one of the most significant novels of the time *Swami and Friends* (1935) which deals with childhood confusions and disorders of its child protagonist. The work appears to be a turning point in Indian English literature celebrating the sweetness of childhood. The dilemma and idiosyncrasies of the ten-year-old boy Swami are presented in a realistic way. There are no notable young

female characters in this work. We see Swami's mother and grandmother as the two females in the story. The story is told from the cultural milieu of India, foregrounding the middle-class family values and its practices in rearing a boy. The boy's indifference to his mother is a way of affirming the fact that she is powerless and less important than his father. The novel is a courageous attempt as it faces the risk of writing a novel with a child as its central character to an audience that was fed on fiction dealing with serious political events like nationalist agitation and freedom movement.

Cultural context and political background dominated the fiction written during the 1930s and 1940s. From the perspective of child characters, the only significant work of this period is *Swami and Friends*. Though this attempt was refreshingly new and radical and differed from the usual trends of the time it never included a girl child of significance in it. After the publication of *Swami and Friends*, Narayan produced the novel *Bachelor of Arts* (1937) which included three major female figures, Malathi, a fifteen year old girl who is presented in the novel as a young woman of marriageable age, Sushila, wife of Chandran (who is the protagonist of the novel) and his mother. His next novel *The Dark Room* (1938) has a female protagonist named Savitri, who is a homemaker. Savitri is married to Ramani, an employee of an insurance company. Savitri gets solace spending time in the dark room in her house when insults from her husband become unbearable for her. She tries to scare her husband with the threat of leaving him, but these threats won't solve their domestic issues. Her attachment to her children prevents her from committing suicide and gives her a reason to go on with her painful family life. *The Dark Room* portrays the condition of women in the changing circumstances. The sudden upsurge of notable women characters in the novels also leads to the need of such radical thoughts on the issues faced by women in the '40s.

Narayan once remarked in his memoir that, the novels instigated a need to make people aware of the women's liberation movement of the West. In his memoir *My Days* he declares:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of Woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the 'Women's lib' movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was ideal victim of such circumstances. (119)

The notable female figures from Narayan also assert the influence of West in India and how the writers adopt the western notions of womanhood as radical and the need of the hour. Apart from the theme of conditioned womanhood, the writers adopted various radical themes of social relevance of the time. R K Narayan continued to write for almost two decades after independence alongside other major writers. But the orientation of the writers during the decades following independence was more towards the understanding and description of the themes of alienation and dissatisfaction of its characters. They portrayed the psychological conflicts of individuals with great mastery. Writers like Manohar Malgonkar, P M Nithyanandan and others experimented with new themes and ideas. Nithyanandan's *Long Long Days* (1960) became the first campus novel in Indo Anglian literature. But sadly there was hardly any attempt at understanding the position of children especially girl children.

Khushwant Singh, one of the leading voices in the decade following independence, wrote two novels in the fifties, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959). *Train to Pakistan*, realistically portrays the issues and

events in connection with partition, is a notable achievement in his career. Arun Joshi's fiction deals with the issues of 'alienation' and the incompatibility of individuals in an increasingly hostile social atmosphere. This obsession with the themes of the alienation of individuals and the hostility of modern era towards individuals who are misfits in it, to a great extent reflected western influence. The age also witnessed the rise of a group of prominent women writers who joined men and tried to explore the vast realm of Indo- English literature. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai are prominent among them.

Kamala Markandaya's novel presents rural India and its suffering women. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) revolves around the story of Rukmani and her family. Rukmani gets married at the age of twelve to Nathan. The family is very much worried about the birth of a girl child to them. The novel puts in the picture a few touching strokes of how they suffered hunger and poverty after the birth of children and how Rukmani had to survive the predicament with her daughter. Rukmani loses her husband and all her sons except one in the struggle for survival. Markandaya here presents women who suffer in poverty and tells how they are compelled to sell their bodies. Apart from discussing the customary issues of child marriage, and sufferings of women due to patterns of social, and economic injustice, the novel also portrays the anxieties of girl child rearing. Her novel *Two Virgins* (1973) also explores the predicament of women but in under different circumstances. The novel deals with the story of two girls Lalita and Saroja and their search for freedom and individuality.

Nayantara Sahgal's early novels were set against the backdrop of political and historical events especially events related to the freedom struggle. *A Time to Be Happy* (1963) and *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) are notable among them. Sahgal's women



characters are old enough to face the situations they are in, even though deep inside they suffer loneliness. Maya in *A Time to be Happy* appears as a woman of no emotion. In her novel *This Time of Morning* (1965), marriage and post-marital issues are discussed. Nineteen-year-old Uma gets married to a thirty-three-year old bureaucrat Arjun Mitra who is always busy with his office work. She longs for his companionship but he is indifferent to her emotional demands. She longs for emotional and sexual fulfilment and he is also indifferent to her conjugal desires. Her disappointment and frustration force her to find happiness in the company of other men and she also takes to alcohol as an escape from the dull routine of her family life. *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) also discuss issues of marital life foregrounding the experiences of women. Sahgal has attempted a serious step towards the issues faced by women in the Indian context through her novels. Other women writers of same period have also portrayed women's issues in their works especially dealing with the problems of women who are compelled to live their lives according to the norms set by the society.

Another prominent woman writer in the post-independent India is Anita Desai, whose novels foregrounds the typical Indian atmosphere of her times. Anita Desai's first published novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) is written around the unhappy marriage and the subsequent conflicts between Maya and Gautama. The novel juxtaposes the life of Maya as a beloved child of her father and her life after marriage. Desai is concerned with the inner emotional struggle of her characters; here evidently the soft and sensitive Maya, who believes from her childhood that the world is like a toy for her. In Maya's words, it is “. . . a toy specially made for me painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes” (35). The novel tells us how she slips in to the world so strange to her and gets lost in its outlandish nature. Her intense desire for

love and care from her husband and his indifference to these worldly aspirations of his wife turns her hysterical. Even though the novelist does not delve deep into the issues of girl childhood, she sketches a childhood which is full of innocence and dreams which never materialises in the post-marital phase of her life. Childhood becomes an imaginary topography that allows her emotional escapes and provides comforts from the tensions of the adult world. It is the delusion of her childhood that allows her to live in the borderland of sanity. The attempt of the novelist is to slowly let the female protagonist escape the illusions of childhood rather than to explore the possibilities of it.

*Voices in the City* (1965) offers an elaborate account of the experiences of three characters Nirode, Monisha and Alma in the city of Calcutta. Nirode dreams of becoming a well-known journalist. He unsuccessfully runs his own magazine named 'Voices'. Monisha's life is a tragedy. She comes to Calcutta to live with her husband but she could never adjust with the joint family surroundings. When she learns that she is barren, she loses all acceptability and commits suicide. Alma suffers loneliness in the buzz of the city. She is unmarried and a free girl but she is not able to enjoy her freedom. She meets Dharma and later learns from him that he had a daughter eloped with her own cousin when she was fifteen years old. Dharma can't forgive his little daughter for this crime. Alma seems to be a frustrated girl who doesn't know what to do with her life she is just not happy with what she has. All these women character do refer to their childhoods but the focus is on their adult life rather than childhoods themselves. Even when childhood is treated at some length the dynamics of childhood are shadowed by the expectations of adulthood.

Many women writers in the sixties experimented with autobiographical narratives which included some aspect of the lived experience chosen from their lives. They included Venu Chitale, Zeenuth Futehally and Mrinalini Sarabhai. Attia Hosain appeared to be one of the prominent women writers of the time and who identified herself as a feminist and dealt with women's issues in her works. Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) revolves around the psyche of a woman. Like Hosain's novels, Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) also deals with the power and fate of women in the confined spaces of house.

The seventies faced a literary slump though masters like R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao were still in the forefront. There were many new writers dealing with various new themes. Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have just stepped in and the period doesn't witness any drastic change regarding the pattern and the style of literary production. *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971) *The Peacock Garden* (1979) *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976) *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) *Games at Twilight* (1978) were Desai's new experiments in fiction in the seventies. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) appears to be a work which has set the people on fire over the psyche of a prominent woman character Nanda Kaul. The novel also explores the psyche of the girl Rakha who is the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. Rakha, is not fashioned in the model of the traditional female child. She never cares for anything or anybody. She does not exhibit the traditional qualities of a child. "Raka meant the Moon, but this child was not round faced ,calm or radiant . . . Nanda Kaul thought she looked like one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin precarious legs" (Desai 39). It is difficult to establish whether the plot is about the child character Rakha or Nanda Kaul. Though there is a firm presence of a prominent child throughout the novel, the

plot largely moves in connection with the life of Nanda Kaul. Commenting on the focus of the novel and the drift of the story, N R Gopal says “It is difficult to say whether the novel centres around Nanda Kaul or Raka. Certainly, the novel begins with the focus on Nanda Kaul but in the course of the novel the focus shifts onto Raka (28). Going through the psyche of Nanda Kaul and Rakha, Desai focuses on the secluded life of two female characters one being the victim of the selfish realities of the world and the other being the prey to bad parenting.

Apart from Desai’s fiction, the exploration of human psyche could be seen in the novels of Arun Joshi also. *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) and *The Apprentice* (1976) came out in the following years with his typical heroes who suffer from inner identity crisis. The novels produced in the next decade gained acceleration with the sudden momentum created by the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) which put an end to the century-old confusions and agonies of the choice of language and the inseparable Indianness. In terms of output, it had been a great decade since the 1920s, and may well be marked as a turning point in literary history. The writers tried to rewrite history, drifting drastically from the norms set by the literary giants of the previous decades.

In an interview given in 2001 Anita Desai had been asked by Magda Costa to talk about the current literary scenario of India and also to comment on the present state of literary production in relation to the literatures written in the vernacular and in English in India. The question was “What do you think is the future of literature in Indian languages; now that Indian literature in English has become so strong?” (Kundu 1). Desai briefly summarises the changes that had come in fiction in the post-Rushdie era not only in terms of the quality of literary output but also in terms of the quantity

of the output. The increase in readership, the willingness of publishers to introduce new writers and the general increase in the confidence among writers, were a few of the factors that resulted from the huge success of *Midnight's Children*. She further commented,

It's become strong in the last two or twenty years; when I started to write it certainly wasn't. There was just a few of us who were writing in English; had a lot of problems in finding publishers, there were very few readers, and no more seemed very interested at all in our work. I think things changed very dramatically – and I can put a date to it: it was 1980 – when Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*, and it had such a huge success in the west I think in India also. Readers and publishers took notice of it. After that there was a whole new wave of new writers. I think it was the success of his book that gave them such confidence encouraged them to write (Kundu 1)

She also points at the contribution of *Midnight's Children* in terms of setting up new models for the new writers. The 1980s generation accepted the model of Rushdie and discarded the old ways of representations.

I think we all need models, and he was a model for that whole generation in the 80s. Also it is a growing confidence in English language when I started to write there was a lot of questioning: can you really express the Indian Experience, and Indian ways of thinking and speaking in the English language – a foreign language? But I think by 80s everyone accepted the fact that English had become an Indian language and it was not going to disappear, it had taken roots and had started growing not in any artificial manner but in a very natural

manner. Indian have taken it to our world and tuned into an Indian language (Kundu 1).

She contrasts the difference in the level of confidence with which her generation of writers used English and that of her daughter's generation.

So now they are writing with a kind of confidence. I think it is not questioned anymore. I was always questioned about using English and I no longer am. I don't think my daughter has ever been questioned about it. There was a certain amount of resentment by writers in the Indian languages, because all of the attention it has received in the west [ . . . ]. (Kundu 1-2)

Effervescence created by the new trend moulded a new generation of writers who wrote with confidence and dazzled the enthusiastic readers, who were eagerly waiting for novelty in the texts and the talents behind it. The miraculous individual fame of a few new writers in the global market further expanded the scope and reach of Indian fiction in English. The new fiction shed its traditional heavy fluff to soar high in the vaster realms of world literature. The strategical innovations incorporated by the writers made them enjoy a constant international audience. They found it easy to publish their works abroad. The subject matter in effect was based on a setting which has global significance as in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986). It is a novel in verse. Seth's *Suitable Boy* (1993) revolves around the life of a nineteen-year-old girl Lata. His work *An Equal Music* (1999) tells the story of Michael, a violinist and his love affair with the pianist Julia. The increasing migratory patterns and the new demographic shift in the twentieth century resulted in grouping some literary texts as 'diasporic'.

The old writers continued to interest the audience but their range was limited. However, works like Mulk Raj Anand's *The Bubble* (1984) and Raja Rao's *Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) were successful. R K Narayan's Malgudi novels continued to appear. *A Tiger for Malgudi* was published in 1988. Arun Joshi's posthumous novel *The City and the River* (1990) dealt with subjects of political significance, though the age created delight in framing the new attempts in the mysteries of magic realism. Rushdie used this technique in his works like *Midnight's Children, Shame* (1983), and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) through the allegorical blend of the natural and the supernatural. After R K Narayan, it was his turn to create a group of children who would rewrite the history of India. Rushdie's magical children went for a surprising endeavour though to be suppressed at a later stage in their lives.

The magic continued to work through various writers of the time like Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) and Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants* (1988) which were attempts at redefining the form of narration. These experiments with the form continued to dominate the age. However this dominant genre hasn't dimmed the possibility of social realism in Indian context. *A Suitable Boy* (1993) by Vikram Seth fascinated the readers like the fictional pieces of Rushdie. Mistry and Allen Sealy's acumen in balancing and mixing history has opened up the possibility of writing about ethnic themes. The decades after the eighties thus seem to have produced works that moved between social realism and magical realism.

The historical novel still had its place in the dying decades of the twentieth century, as in R K Narayan's regional fiction and the all familiar themes like the east-west encounter also continued to interest audience ( for instance *The Inscrutable*

*Americans* (1991) by Anurag Mathur). The varieties of themes attracted the readers and the writers responded to the newfound interest of the readers. Jayant Narlikar added a new genre called science fiction to Indian literary scene. Apart from Narlikar's *The Return of Vaman* (1989) and *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992), Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) too shows the expert use of this new literary genre. The public got a glimpse of the new experiments in science fiction which stretched the creative imagination of the authors and attracted both the young and the old readers. The major writers were still fascinated by the European formula in fiction and did their best in building new trends and fashion in Indian English Fiction. The experimental zest of the authors led them to explore new and less familiar themes. However, one significant character that missed the attention of all these writers is prominent child characters especially girl children.

Like male writers, women writers also made use of the new opportunities offered to them. Kamala Markandaya's *Pleasure City* (1982) and Jai Nimbkar's *Come Rain* (1993) followed the fashion of the time and discussed conflicting themes like tradition and modernity, east-west encounter etc. The practice seems to have continued in the works of R P Jhabwala also. Anita Desai's women characters demanded space and her works explored the life and mind of young women who suffered from inner conflicts. Like male writers, these women too shared the themes and trends of the age like magic realism but women writers, unlike men seem, to be more obsessed with giving prominent roles to female characters who explore the opportunities available to them or the lack of it, the stress and conflicts they face in everyday life and their resistance to suppression. Nina Sibal's *Yatra* (1987) is a notable work which shows the influence of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In her novel Sibal creates a female protagonist, Krishna who could be a sister figure to



Rushdie's hero Saleem Sinai. Like Sinai's gift, Krishna too has magical powers. Her skin changes colour according to her experiences. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* too deals with the experience of a woman. Rani Dharkar's *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997) tells the story of a curse on a family. Because of the curse women in the family give birth only to daughters and the novel delightfully narrates the events that follow the life of these unwelcome members. *Smell* (1999) by Radhika Jha revolves around the life of young Leela who is obsessed with strange odours. Though the novel talks about cultural conflicts it also gives a detailed account of what happens in the mind of its female protagonist. The haunting influence of grandmother on young Mini is the storyline of Sunny Singh's *Nani's Book of Suicides* (2000). The protagonist here also believes that he has magical powers. The novels that appeared during this period are predominantly affected by the charm of magic realism. Rushdie was a prominent influence for the writers of the post 1980s fiction. The confidence spread through the work made the writers explore the possibilities of the child's psyche in adult fiction. It can also be noted that the number of girl child protagonists increased after the 1980s.

Arundhati Roy is a notable writer who won the 1998 Man Booker Prize. She was awarded the honour for her magnum opus *God of Small Things* (1997). The novel narrates the story of Velutha, an untouchable in a Kerala village, is narrated through the consciousness of a young girl Rahel. Rahel's mother Ammu also is a victim of family and social oppression who functions as an 'other' to the menfolk in it. Roy's work brilliantly portrays the psyche of the girl Rahel and how she internalises the bitter situation in her life with her own intelligence and conclusions. Lakshmi Kannan's *Going Home* (1999) Suma Josson's *Circumferences* (1994) and *A Video*

*Fridge and a Bride* (1995) present a comprehensive survey of the predicaments of young women in society.

In the novels dealing with women protagonists, the theme of marriage seems to appear as a social necessity. It is presented as the natural and preordained destination for young girls, and novelists are very much aware of these marriage stereotypes that govern the life of young girls. In *Circumferences* (1997) young Sarala never gets a word of appreciation from her parents about her talent as a painter as they are more concerned about her marriage with the most eligible bachelor in town. Belinder Dhanoa's *Waiting for Winter* (1991), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), Shama Futehally's *Tara Lane* (1993) and Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover* (1992) give a thorough study of women of different ages against different social and cultural contexts.

Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) projects the consciousness of a young girl whose immigrant identity, and the following confusions to cope with the new surroundings are detailed with great caution and sincerity. Novels produced in the recent years are noted for the writer's special concern for young girls especially novels written by women writers who are enlightened by virtue of living in an age that has debated much about the female child and her gender shackles. Nayantara Sahgal's recent novels have focused increasingly on the horror of specific female experiences. *Rich Like Us* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) are the notable ones. Tracing Indian English literature in general and Indian English fiction in particular from the eighteenth century to the present day literature, it can be noticed that the girl child characters and woman-centred novels are increasingly portrayed in the post 1980s than ever before. It is seen that Indian English fiction has come a long way in constructing

and delimiting the roles assigned to the female characters, expressing and presenting more and more Indianness in every walk of life. But it is apparently outrageous to know the position of Indian girlhood which is given a very limited role and space in Indian fiction. The girl child's consciousness is not allowed to evolve along the lines of a boy's childhood. She is stripped of the attributes of a child to be given the role of a woman at an earlier age. She is a creature that grows very fast to play the role of an adult in early childhood. Highlighting this invisible childhood of female children till the 80s Kirpal says “. . . the girl child was seen only as a child de-sexed, possessing universal traits of a child, and of little interest to society. As a character in literature and as a unique member of society, she has been largely invisible” (Kirpal, VII).

In literature, the girl child has been invisible as a member of the society as the novelist gives her no role of importance. But after the 1980s she has started to engage the attention of the writers and readers more seriously. We witness more novels being written around the figure of the child, giving importance to the consciousness of girl children in particular. When such factors become recurrent and noticeable it becomes a trend and the phenomenon has to be put under study to research out the valid reasons behind it. The invisible factors that shape the psyche of a girl child and determine her role in the society are seriously investigated. How far does the role assigned by the writer to a character become influenced by contemporary insights into female child psyche is also researched worldwide. The studies along the above lines have clearly indicated that even though the improvements in the condition of the female child is far from being satisfactory, it has definitely shown enough to suggest that the post 1980s girl child is a less marginalised one than any previous decades. Anita Harris in her work *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2004) talks about the

immediate reasons for the global attention the young girls gained in recent times. She puts forth two reasons for the phenomena, worldwide.

First, changed economic and work conditions bined with the goals achieved by feminism have created new possibilities for young women. Successful campaigns for the expansion of girls' education and employment have coincided with a restructured global economy and a class/gender system that now relies heavily on young women's labor. Second, new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunities for young women, making them the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity. (6)

This phenomena of the increased visibility of girl children in all walks of life attracted the attention of many critics and theorists and it leads to further investigations. To study the phenomenon in Indian English fiction and to find out the recurrent pattern of such increased portrayal of the Indian girl child we need to go back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or even beyond. A detailed analysis of the presentation of child characters in art and literature produced in India reveals that so far the girl children had limited roles and never gained any prominence in art as a child. The reason could be more social than individual but the whole context in constructing a peculiar identity for a girl has to be marked significant for the social set up rather than realistically portraying what a girl really is.

In ancient Indian literature, the girls after their birth vanish into insignificance as the story progresses. Like Lord Krishna's foster sister, she is either killed young or forgotten. ". . . the girls that survived and grew up to become important characters (such as Sita and Draupathi) were not worth writing about in their girlhood. They

engaged writer's interest only as young women, that is, when they could play the role of wife and mother" (Kirpal IX). The pre-independent Indian literature appears to be a continuation of ancient literature as far as the portrayal of the girl children is concerned. They are presented not as children but as women camouflaged in little bodies. As Kirpal says ". . . 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). In India the girl child is a marginal figure. Jasbir Jain's opinion gives a better picture. She says that "The reasons for marginalisation are many- the role of family, the attitude of society towards marriage and morality" (79). So Jasbir Jain considers the marginalisation as an outcome of the traditional practices of the society. But according to her "In language literature radicalism does not necessarily reflect the modern urban sensibility; it is a radicalism related to down-to earth situations. There may be a deviation from stereotype but not perhaps the dismantling of it (79).

But in the post-independence period, the girl children seem to get more representation. The child characters carry the burden of the past especially the models set for them in ancient literatures. In novels, the adult narrative voice that speaks for the experiences of children limit the possibilities of a child's lived experiences. The child character always needs a narrative device to free herself. She could express herself only if she is free from the clutches of the society and the definitions attributed to her by the society. She has to narrate herself in order to be represented. So the narrative strategy has to be a unique one. "Several narrative perspectives have been used to free the girl child from the dominance of the family structure. Amongst these are travel, elopement, abduction, being lost, abandoned or orphaned, even early widowhood" (Jain 80).

This thesis aims to study the various factors that build the psyche of the Indian girl child. Indian authors discuss various aspects relating to the life of girl children in Indian society through the recent fiction in English. The need of the genre appears to be the need of the time, as the issue of the lower status of girl children is discussed in various political and social backgrounds. This thesis investigates Indian English novels written after the 1980s and the increased portrayal of female children in them. The girl children in these novels represent the underprivileged girls in India. These girls have taken cues from ancient literature, myths, nursery rhymes, folktales, poems, and literature to analyse the present status of girl children in India. The recent political and social movements and ideologies like feminism and recent studies on anthropology have contributed much to question the status of girl children in society. The representation of young girls in various social media, especially television commercials have contributed tremendously in understanding the status enjoyed by the girl child and the attitude towards the global girl child. The study on the Indian girl child would be useful to establish the credibility and the rationality of gender roles in the fictional accounts of girl children. She is moulded by various factors like the society, her mother, the space given to her in family and society and various forces within and outside the collective social situations that regulate her own body and mind.

Socialisation is a dominant mechanism in shaping the girl's psyche. It dominates the lifestyle of a girl from early childhood. It defines and presents the role attributed to womanhood and manhood. Girl children, being the underprivileged social being have no choice, but to accept it. Supporting the argument of Sheila Ruth, Viney Kirpal says that "The picture of ideal womanhood and manhood are presented to each as a

required model, not as a choice” (xiv). According to Kirpal the Indian thought process and rules are different. He firmly believes that

There is a collective violence in the Indian psyche that regularly seems to seek victims from among those perceived as inferior or different- girls, women and low casts. The same psychology also works to keep the weak subjugated and suppressed with the use of brute force. Often our only justification is religion and sometimes not even that but a peculiar self-righteousness rooted in the supposed violation of arbitrarily devised social norms and values such as birth in the case of the low caste, and chastity and honour in the case of the female person. (xiv)

According to Manu “A man conquers the world by the birth of a son; he enjoys eternity by that of a grandson; and the great grandfather enjoys happiness by the birth of a grandson’s son” (Prabhu 242). Children’s position in a culture is placed between the society and adults, so they are placed perfectly to observe and comment on the conflicts with both without bias. The study attempts to present the image of women through the perspective of girl child in fiction. And also the study aims to find out the present position of girl children and the necessary precautions to be taken to build a better self-perception in girls.

Traditional Indian narratives, folklore, and children’s literature from India prior to the 1980s are virtually devoid of girl characters with agency, and Indian children’s authors have turned for their inspiration to the British children’s literature that so strongly influenced the development of English- language children’s literature in India in the aftermath of Independence (1947). “The majority of Indian writers of children’s fiction are women, for reasons that undoubtedly have to do with their putative

understanding of the child ‘sensitivity’ ” (Rajan 102). Middle-class girls play the central role in these texts. They are empowered and progressive; they act to expand or even reject traditionally prescribed social roles for Indian girls by insisting that girls and boys are equally valued members of society and deserve equal opportunities, particularly in relation to education and self-determination. Rejecting prescriptive traditional constructions of girls as passive, dependent, restricted to the domestic sphere, and less valuable than boys, contemporary Indian women writers both celebrate girls and imagine girlhood as an empowered state by positioning girls as central to the narrative and by positioning girls and women as part of powerful interconnected webs of family and community relationships.

Discussions on the portrayal of female children in the post 1980s fiction involve complex negotiations between gender and tradition and seek to re-write traditional Indian patriarchy. As mentioned earlier, the new trend in presenting girlhood in fiction is done through the analysis of the five novels by five different novelists such as Shashi Deshpande, Mrinal Pande, P. R Lakshman, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Kishwar Desai.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the first novel by Shashi Deshpande, one of the notable Indian English writers, which grabbed a lot of attention in the literary world. Deshpande’s novels are rich with girl child characters bearing the shackles of compulsory dogmas imposed on them and they “. . . cannot quite shake off their background and the manner in which they have been brought up” (Atrey 246). Born as the second daughter of the poet and dramatist Sriranga in 1938 in Karnataka, Deshpande is still considered as one of the prominent novelists in India. She is the winner of the Sahitya Academy Award in 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence* (1988)



and she received Padma Shri Award in 2009. Deshpande's Indian experiences reflect in her middle-class women protagonists and in their domestic surroundings. Apart from portraying these women, Deshpande also deliberately peeps in to the childhood and maturation of her women characters and tries to find out the impact of the childhood on them.

*Daughter's Daughter* by Mrinal Pande is the most remarkable contribution that brilliantly presents the lives of girl children in Indian society. Like many of her contemporaries, Pande is concerned the position of women in India. Being a television personality, journalist and a notable writer she has contributed much in the form of articles and stories. The novel *Daughter's Daughter* is a well-written account of different events in the life of a growing girl who finds it difficult to cope with her present situation at home. Pande's writing has the power to turn our attention to the gravity of the situation and she was honoured in 2006 with Padma Shri by the Government of India.

*Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is another of the chief contributions to the genre. Born and brought up in Calcutta, Divakaruni's deep understanding of contemporary India and her personal experiences as an Indian woman are reflected in her novels. The way of narration and the relevance of the theme in the present cultural condition in the society have made her works getting translated into 29 languages. Her novels and stories are made into films and plays. *Sister of My Heart* is an outstanding work by Divakaruni which portrays the life of two Indian girls. The events in the novel explicitly point out the different stages in the life of a girl from childhood to adulthood. The novel is also a brilliant account of what

happens in contemporary middle-class Indian families and how girl children and women are treated in Indian society.

*The Girl Child* is Princess Reineeta Lakshman's first novel. This novel revolves around the theme of female foeticide and highlights the undercurrent of hatred towards females in India. P.R. Lakshman is a Fiji- Indian who identifies herself as an Indian novelist. The novel also highlights the experiences of a Western-educated Indian girl, her childhood and her experiences at her in-laws in Punjab, and her struggle to escape the suggested foeticide by the elders in the family.

*Witness the Night* is a debut novel by Kishwar Desai that realistically portrays the miserable lives of two girls in a Punjabi family. Though the novel is Desai's first attempt, it attracted much attention due to the contemporary relevance of the topic. The work won Costa Book Award and it has been translated into more than twenty five languages. Born and brought up in Punjab, India, her novels are replete with the image of contemporary India and the predicament of young girls in India. Apart from *Witness the Night* Desai has also written novels that are based on and inspired by many real-life incidents. *Origins of Love* (2012) deals with the story of adopted children and *The Sea of Innocence* (2013) is inspired by the Delhi gang rape incident that occurred in December, 2014. Desai's novels seem to possess the power to drive the reader's attention towards the present situation of young girls and women in India.

The recent Indian English writers have contributed a good deal of novels based on the present social situation and the position of young girls in India. Atrocities towards women and girl children are on the rise. Sociologists and psychologists view the situation of girls and women in India as part of the patriarchal culture. The emerging importance of girl children in the social and literary contexts could be seen

as the offshoot of the leading campaigns on the need of producing better citizens in future for the growth and prosperity of the country. The Campaigns launched recently like "Save the girl child, educate the girl child" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2015 to ensure the rights of girl children and to protect girl children, show the gravity of the situation in India.

## THEORIES OF CHILDHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

Children are known to be the future of mankind. They represent the future of the world, its growth and its potential to develop further, to explore and expand different dimensions of human life. From time immemorial childhood has been considered as the most significant stage of human growth and development. Civilizations gave it new meaning and importance with time, and the term itself became synonymous with the future of the world. As has been famously declared by the British Romantic poet William Wordsworth, “The Child is father of the Man” (3), child holds a very significant position for the philosophers of romantic literature. Mahatma Gandhi elsewhere observed the radical potential of children to bring about real difference in the world “If we are to teach real peace in this world . . . we shall have to begin with the children” (227). Children are significant for the potential they hold for the future; for the adults they could one day become, for the possibility of controlling the future and for continuing the past and the present in certain specific ways. The importance of children and childhood has obsessed the mind of all philosophers. Nation building process and its chief architects envision the role of children in the state and the ways in which they should be carefully and usefully trained and socialised into creating ideal citizens. In literature too children have become significant agents of radical changes that are expected in the society. The girl child protagonists in recent fiction seem to represent the new experiments taking place in various other fields of study. For a broad understanding of the topic this study has incorporated the views of various philosophers concerning the role and significance of children and childhood at appropriate places. However, the emphasis of this chapter is on the theoretical perspectives of childhood in relation to the questions raised in this thesis.

As hinted above children have immense significance for the future of family, society and the nation. Despite the criticism from various quarters that governments are not sensitive enough about the issues relating to the care of children, nations across the world prioritise childhood in their health, education, poverty reduction and other national plans. Children and childhood are put under a special category of scientific investigation to analyse and find possible developments for a better future of the nation. Archaeologists, anthropologists and other social scientists have invested time and money on the study of the development of children through historical investigations and also through the analysis of the present state of children in the world. They study childhood as a stage of growth and development in human beings from birth to adulthood. A renowned historical anthropologist, Jane Eva Baxter defines childhood as a “. . . prolonged period of dependence during which children mature physically and acquire the cultural knowledge necessary to become accepted members of society” (1). This and many other definitions of childhood treat childhood as a period of learning socialisation and various skills that give children acceptability in society as its members. However, the specific gender-related differences in the growth and acceptance pattern of children bring into question some of the most accepted norms of child rearing. Growth and maturity of girl children and boy children seem to have notable differences in terms of the differences in experiences against different cultural and social contexts. Feminists and cultural anthropologists study these gender differentiations and prejudices as differences in social, cultural, economic and political status of the respective genders in the world.

These differences in rearing girls further affirm the fact that girls live an entirely different life compared to boys. Girlhood is an important phase in a woman's life, since childhood experiences in many ways leave deep impacts and impressions for a

lifetime. To investigate the complexity of life resulting from the differential treatment of children based on gender, a comprehensive study of all the combinations and permutations of social, economic and cultural practices are required. In order that a study of this nature be significant, a survey of the position of the girl and boy child from a historical perspective is required at the outset. This will, within the permissible scope of this study, be undertaken in the following paragraphs which will provide an overview of the status of girl children in historical, literary and other relevant documents.

The term 'girl child' is used to represent a girl who is in the process of development from infancy to adulthood. Psychological and sociological studies based on the analysis of the physical and psychological developments of children have revealed that external influences of various kinds create patterns of internal conflicts in the life of children. These could be due to the direct or indirect influences of adults or the compelled social structuring on individual and personal lives. Studies have also revealed the complexities involved in character formation in different cultural and social contexts. A deep investigation is required to analyse the growth and development of girl children within the temporal and social planes. Scientists in different fields have observed, conducted experiments and analysed the growth of infants and the impact of childhood on the development of individual.

Developmental psychology has contributed much to the understanding of the period of growth from childhood to adulthood. According to developmental psychologists, human infant goes through different developmental stages to acquire physical and psychological maturity to become adults. The process of development in human beings is a complex process and it involves various stages in which they

acquire physical maturity and internalise the external realities to gain psychological maturity. The first stage of child development, according to the developmental scientists, is the period known as infancy. It is a period of two weeks from birth; babyhood follows infancy and extends up to two years. Elizabeth B Hurlock, a well-known developmental psychologist, categorises human development from birth on the basis of the physical and psychological growth of a child. According to Hurlock “Childhood begins when the relative dependency of babyhood is over . . . and extends to the time when the child becomes sexually mature, at approximately thirteen years for the average girl and fourteen years for the average boy” (114). After this long period children step in to a shorter period known as puberty which is considered as an “overlapping period” (Hurlock 197) from the end of childhood till the beginning of adolescence. Adolescence extends up to eighteen- “the age of legal maturity” (Hurlock 223).

Psychologists, sociologists, and developmental theorists study the social and cultural development of children in different social contexts. A well-known psychoanalyst and feminist sociologist Nancy Chodorow states, “According to psychoanalytic theory, personality is a result of a boy’s or girl’s social relational experiences from earliest infancy . . .” (83). She further affirms that “The nature and quality of the social relationships that the child experiences are appropriated, internalised, and organised by her/him and come to constitute her/his personality (83). Chodorow’s findings reveal the close relationship between the development of personality in children and the influence of society on them. The debate on childhood and its relevance in literature, media and in social life in general comes as part of the advancement of science and the progress of sociological and psychological theories. The development of children and the influence of childhood orientation on adult life

especially in terms of masculine and feminine values have been analysed in the twentieth century. “[In] any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and in connection to other people more than masculine personality does” (Chodorow 82). The social gendering of children and the fixing of gender notions at an early stage of life reveals the social necessity of learning sexually appropriate behaviour so that children get acceptance from adults around and from friends and peers. The behavioural practices and duties assigned to girls and boys are differentiated at the early stages of life and children learn to steadily maintain these differences throughout life.

The inferior status of girl children has interested sociologists, psychologists and literary theorists because of the absence of any real physical deformity or mental abnormality in girls in comparison with boys. They realise that the difference and discrepancy are only because of the social understanding of gender. However girls are often made to consciously and unconsciously feel that there is something seriously wrong with them. Children see the negative stereotypical references of girls in almost every aspect of life. They witness that 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. Insights of feminists into society and literature have led to the scrutiny of the various situations encountered by girls in life. 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 twentieth 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 the future females.

The study on human development elsewhere has necessitated further analysis of childhood which could create deep impact on the behavioural changes in adult for better or worse. The focus of the study brought in to question the future traumas and disturbances in females which seem to be an extension of the impact of childhood experiences. Charles Darwin's studies on childhood in his works like *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) and *Biographical Sketch of an Infant* (1877) triggered interest in childhood and child development. The prolonged juvenility in humans compared to other species is seen as a key factor in human evolution and development.

The images of children change with the changing times and are contingent upon the social attitude and political situations of the time. 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. Philippe 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 attributed to children and the classification of children as a subgroup within adults who are to be protected and cared against the hazards of life is a recent construct. 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)

From these investigations it can be noted that the concept of childhood is a social construct. In the long history of Britain, the need for giving special care and in evolving a system of life for children was under discussion only towards the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Smidt points out how religious training played a significant role in the system of John Wesley, the Methodist leader who “. . . 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 the child gave way to the romantic concept of the child that appeared in the works of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The innocence in childhood came to be treated as the wealth of one's life which man gradually lost as he grew older. This romantic concept of childhood gave way to a very cruel system of economic exploitation of them during the industrial revolution. The social and political situations of the period attributed an element of evil to children. Smidt observes that “The Evangelical Magazine in 1799 referred to children as being ‘sinful polluted creatures’ ” (5).

During the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, child labour became a significant social feature and witnessed many children being deprived of childhood in the hurdles of life. In 1883, a Royal Commission declared that childhood spans only till the age of

thirteen. But in all these situations there was notable difference between children from rich and poor family backgrounds. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the increased role of the state in regulating various aspects of childhood.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the world witnessed a new way of studying the unexplored recesses of human minds through the tools of psychoanalysis developed by Freud. Freud proposed theories on the importance of childhood, its events and experiences and provided insights about the mind of children and childhood. Freud explained the development of personality from childhood to adulthood through the psycho-sexual stages. Freud's theories were based on the concept of libido which he believed was the life force of all human beings. In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) alternatively titled as *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, Freud presents his theory of sexuality, in its particular relation to childhood. He outlines five different stages in the development of a child -oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. Each stage is explained in terms of the gratification of the libidinal urges of that stage. The incomplete gratification of libido leads to a fixation during the adult life. His studies on childhood were specifically directed at explaining adult behavioural disorders.

Jacques Lacan has also contributed to the development of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Freud and Lacan have made specific observations regarding the development of children especially concerning the concepts of femininity and masculinity. Toril Moi's observation is interesting in this context. For Lacan, Moi observes, ". . . femininity is a position constructed in language, a position that can be taken up by men as well as women . . . the difference between Freud and Lacan was

that Freud's femininity theory was essentialist whereas Lacan's was constructionist" (842).

Anna Freud further developed the ideas of her father Sigmund Freud on the development of children. She is believed to be the originator of child psychoanalysis along with Melanie Klaine, a well-known psychoanalyst of the time. Her observations and theories later influenced Erick Erickson an American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst who contributed largely to the psycho-social development of human beings.

Erickson's study on human development is based on conflicts in developmental stages. His work *Childhood and Society* (1950) focused on developmental stages in humans. He divided the human life cycle into eight different stages of development such as infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, mature adulthood, and old age. In every stage of development, people face some crisis which has to be faced and resolved by the individual to enter successfully into the next stage of growth.

The conflict in different stages of human development may cultivate personal identity, and the failure in tackling the conflicts may result in the confusion of role. 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 the 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, development of a child involves

social interactions which results in acquiring the symbolic knowledge of the culture. The 1990s witnessed a new shift in childhood studies. 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.

The development of the attachment theory is one of the notable developments in the field of psychology. John Bowlby, a British psychologist and psychoanalyst, focused his studies on children and their attachment to their parents. Mary Ainsworth examined the relationship between children and their mothers and focused on differences in building attachments between individuals. Another group named behavioural theorists focused on influences of the environment on one's behaviour. John B Watson, B F Skinner and others insisted on the observable behavioural patterns which rather than unobservable mental conflicts. These theories obviously focused on the psychological aspects on the development of children rather than their physical growth process. For these social scientists the development of a child-centred study is a key to understanding the social positioning of children in various cultural contexts. The literary representation of children also has its impacts because children, especially girl children seem to have benefited from these studies. Along with the sociologists, feminists too have analysed the complexity of this social positioning of children according to their gender. The feminist ideals have significantly altered the conception of the girl child in the literary and artistic fields.

Feminist scholars have been analysing the gendered spaces of girl children from the eighteenth century onwards. They studied gender discrimination at a deeper level and have found out that the natural man-woman dyad had been constructed centuries before according to the patriarchal power codes of those times and were in course of

time made to appear natural. The constructed nature of the subordinate position of women was scrutinised by the feminists with the tools made available by recent explorations in the sociology of child development. Feminist studies have revealed the construction of gendered spaces occurring in all developmental stages from birth to adulthood. And it can be noted that any writer who comes to talk about the issues of gender is readily pulled into the vortex of the prejudices of gender. “. . . since a woman was desired to be a mother of sons only, she was expected to perform austerity and penance for begetting sons alone. There was no mention of daughters then and this attitude of preference for sons continues even today” (Kaur 70).

Sexist and gendered spaces within family and society do not always presuppose any specific gendered practices by the individuals in the family. Gendered practices became natural and normal because of a gradual and continuous patriarchal and social construction of gendered space specific to men and women. Feminism questions these unethical and unintelligent biases and suggests anti-sexist and unbiased living condition for women. Women-centred issues are always related to feminism and while discussing issues of young girls in Indian fiction it is desirable to explain it in relation to feminist ideologies. It is women thinking about and finding solutions for women's issues. But when it comes to girl children the practice has to be a little bit different. The younger generation unaware of the social structuring and gendered moulding of their lives make themselves more and more entrapped within it. The elder women need to find solution to the issues in connection with the discrimination of girl children in India. Feminists of all generations seem to have considered the developmental stages of girl children in their studies.

Feminism as a movement appeared in the West as part of the awareness of the sorry state of women and the inadequate rules which could do nothing to protect the rights of women. From the early sixteenth century till the seventeenth there were uproars against the denying of basic human rights in the light of the new concepts of citizenship and humanism. Till the 1700s there were hardly any improvements in the condition of women and they were the invisible members of the society. They never enjoyed any rights from the government as citizens and never had enough opportunity to educate themselves. Economic independence was unattainable for a woman even if she is in possession of properties or enough wealth because the law says that it will be bestowed to the husband after marriage. Marriage insisted that the husband should take care of his wife and bearing male children was the chief duty of a wife. She had no rights on her children because legally they belonged to the father. Feminism was inevitable in such social circumstances and its early advocates fought for equal rights with men.

The early attempts at seeking a way out of the very confining circumstances of the eighteenth century had found expressions in the speculations by Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). It was in a way a general study of the hardships faced by women in the eighteenth century England and has become a key text which made women to think about and analyse their position in the patriarchal society. For Wollstonecraft “The conduct and manners of women in fact evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state” (7) and she finds the reason behind such a mental state in women. She finds women “. . . like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at

maturity” (7). Wollstonecraft’s observations include the early childhood and adulthood in females. For Wollstonecraft childhood is a status which takes with it innocence, softness, goodness, virtues, and weakness; and the same is attributed as the qualities of girl children and women. According to Wollstonecraft, childhood is a not state which can be restricted to any period of time in one’s life and she affirms that it is extended even to adulthood as it is considered as the virtue of womanhood. Men are even instructed by formal and informal sections of their surroundings to ‘protect’ the innocence of girl children. Wollstonecraft is in disagreement with this permanent state of innocence attributed to women and she comments that “Men indeed, appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood” (21). Thus the girl child lives a double life, a responsible adulthood in an early age and an innocent childhood even extended to her adulthood. A woman’s life doesn’t change at any stage in her lifetime; the degree of acceptance to it proves her life to be a success or a failure. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* rightly argues against the making of the feminine self and persona by special training given to girls to become good women in society. Wollstonecraft argues “. . . children, I grant, should be ignorant but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness” (21). She is against the way women are treated in her society filling them with the qualities of a child- “. . . viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone” (9). Wollstonecraft’s thoughts to improve the state of women of her time and her plea for basic human rights made later generation to think of the need to demand their basic rights and opportunities in lives.

However, these thoughts coalesced to become a series of movements in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century to be known as the first wave of



feminism. It was largely a phenomenon emerged in the context of urban industrial society and the liberal socialist politics. They aimed at acquiring equal opportunities for women giving more importance to suffrage. In *A Plea for Women* (1843), Marion Reid appeals for women's equal status in society. Reid writes, “. . . it is designed to show, that social equality with man is necessary for the free growth and development of woman's nature . . . “ (v). Along with Reid many other scholars also challenged the present status of women in society. Against James Mill's “Essay on Government” (1821) William Thompson drafted a reply through his work *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men*, (1825) dividing women in to three groups – wives, adult daughter and women without husband or father, pointing out the sufferings of them in the male designed world.

The publication of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* in 1869 and Harriet Taylor's ‘Enfranchisement of Women’ attacked the concept of women fulfilling her duties as mothers. According to Mill women's nature is artificial and this artificial nature is attributed to her as part of the male domination. He longed for the equality of women with men in all social spaces. J. S. Mill argued that “. . . what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural simulation in others” (269). His views are presented in relation to married women in general and do not refer to girls directly. But they touch upon very important areas that are of relevance to girl children. The activities of the first wavers challenged the domesticity of women. Virginia Woolf's work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) are considered to be the seminal texts of this canon.

After the movement for suffrage, the first wave faded to nothing forgetting feminism for decades. The late 1960s witnessed the emergence of the second wave and it extended up to the 1990s. It began with the protests against the Miss America pageant in 1968 and 1969. They felt that the beauty contest was a 'cattle parade' degrading the position of women to an object of beauty constructed by patriarchy. These radical feminists called themselves redstockings, a term derived from bluestockings, which referred to eighteen and nineteen century educated and strong women. The second wave feminists fought for women's liberation. They were radical feminists. The change in thoughts immediately resulted in a change in the manner of functioning -reform movements became radical revolutions. The second wave came as a powerful bang on the prevalent practices and longed for the emancipation of women. Betty Friedan's 'National Organisation for Women' and Mrs Hunkins- Hallinan's 'Six Point group' etc put the activists in the limelight. The movement was increasingly theoretical adopting strategies from the neo-Marxist and psychoanalytic studies. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) Helene Cixous' *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) are the key texts of the second wave. The influence of the later studies in psychoanalysis outwitted the theories of Freud on women and their natural characteristic of dependency and sexual frigidity. Most of the writers gave importance to child rearing and the positioning of girl children in the social backgrounds. According to Shulamith Firestone children are treated as part of the family for specific purposes.

The child within these conjugal units now became important; for he was the product of that unit, the reason for its maintenance. It became desirable to keep one's children at home for as long as possible to bind them psychologically, financially, and emotionally to the family unit until such time as they were ready to create a new family unit. For this purpose the Age of Childhood was created. (Firestone 86)

From her view, it is clear that the bordering of one's life to this particular period is a task planned and maintained to keep the social chain intact for the better future of human beings. She also observes that school played an important role in maintaining this segregation of children from the adult group forcing financial dependence and a strong bond towards the family.

Robin Morgan is another activist whose edited work *Sisterhood is Powerful* published in 1970, has become one of the remarkable works of second-wave feminism. It is a compilation of essays by prominent radical feminists discussing the issues of women and the need for radical feminism. Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) is the result of a survey on some of Friedan's classmates from Smith College. In the work she points out 'the problem that has no name' found among the women of the 1950s and 1960s in America. The work basically is an investigation on women who seemed to develop some psychological and physical exhaustion without any proper cause. Friedan tried hard to digest the feminine mystique trend that was so obvious in the 1960s-the trend refers to a willing acceptance of a protective patriarchal social, economic and familial structure to an independent lifestyle by women themselves. Even college girls trained themselves to become good housewives than preparing themselves for the higher pursuits in the educational sector. They dreamed

of gaining a diamond ring than a university degree. Friedan points out how a women's college adopted, in defence, the slogan, "We are not educating women to be scholars; we are educating them to be wives and mothers" (Friedan 150). The 'sex-directed educators' (to use a phrase from Friedan) arguments regarding the curriculum, which was so conspicuously demeaning for women did not invite any kind of retort from women. "A social order can function only because the vast majority have somehow adjusted themselves to their place in society and perform the functions expected of them" (Friedan 123). The mystique of feminine fulfilment was so literally followed in this community that if a little girl said: "When I grow up, I'm going to be a doctor," her mother would correct her: "No, dear, you're a girl. You're going to be a wife and mother, like mummy" (225).

Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1968) marks the radical feminist outburst on the sexual stereotypes. She refers to writers and their literary outputs as a way of subjugating women. Germaine Greer in her most influential work *The Female Eunuch* (1970) talks about how women are presented in public, and how her sexuality and self got suppressed in the traditional mould of womanhood. "She is more body than soul, more soul than mind. To her belongs all that is beautiful, even the very word beauty itself. All that exists to beautify her" (Greer 63). Greer's ideas are provocative and this work demanded an action against the oddities of social construction of women. She has given ample evidences of cultural practices of child rearing in making a woman or a man out of it. "The Girl struggles to reconcile her schooling along masculine lines with her feminine conditioning until puberty resolves the ambiguity and anchors her safely in the feminine posture, if it works" (Greer 18). She further explains the situation that "When it doesn't she is given further conditioning as a corrective, especially by psychologists, whose assumptions and prescriptions are described as the

Psychological Sell” (Greer 18). Greer’s observation clearly states the different practices in making a boy or a girl. According to her “When little boys discover the advantages of coyness they are eventually shocked out of them when their baby curls are shorn, but the little girl is praised and encouraged to exploit her cuteness. She is not directly taught how to do it, she simply learns by experience” (85). Greer’s work *The Female Eunuch* is a brilliant work which explores the possibilities of child rearing practices apart from lingering on women’s issues. Girls and boys are trained in different spaces at home and society. She states that “Little boys can get out of their mother’s way, eventually want to and are encouraged to. Little girls are not” (Greer 86). The need of the reassessment of the self has led to the construction of identity by herself and by others. Women who were content with what they have, seem to have started thinking of their importance and rights as human beings, and have come to know the need to shatter the assumptions of feminine normality which is the construct of the patriarchal society. The identity for a female self is not created by herself but by society. Even her sexuality is shrouded and suppressed by them. Germaine Greer presents her views confirming the transformation of femininity to a deformed state. “What happens is that the female is considered as a sexual object for the use and appreciation of other sexual beings, men” (Greer 17). She further states that “Her sexuality is both denied and misrepresented by being identified as passivity . . . The characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate—timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and precocity” (Greer 17).

Adrienne Rich an American feminist and a poet discussed her view of motherhood and womanhood as a fundamental issue of feminist scholarship in the provocative non-fiction *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). She examines her own experience as a mother and the approach of mothers

towards their children and the influence of society on them. Helen Cixous, a French feminist, on the other hand, discussed the positioning of women and men in literary texts. Her concern is presented in her work *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), a text which is thought-provoking and liberating as a feminist text. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), are about texting women and texts about women. They proved to be a few of the most challenging of feminist discourses in contemporary times. The second wave feminism gave a new face to feminism and made people witness how women are made in culture and texts. They were more concerned about the identity of matured women rather than children or girls. A change in the concepts of the second wave could be seen in the 1980s with the publication of the article "The feminist Standpoint" by Nancy Hartsock. The work celebrated a shift from the celebrated equality of feminism to a different approach. This different approach appeared in the works of prominent women writers like Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow who specialised in psychoanalysis. Gilligan's views on women's productive capacities are presented in her work *In a Different Voice* (1982), and Chodorow presented her findings in the work *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978). Both the works celebrated the hitherto neglected capacities of women. And they found it as a source of empowerment.

The second wave gave way to the third phase of feminism in the 1990s which is called as the third wave. This new wave is the outcome of the postcolonial and post-modern world view. They assert the notion that "It's possible to have push-up bra and brain at the same time" (qtd. in Mansell 112). But the third wave gave more importance to the status of girls and their identities in various literary and cultural contexts. It said to have begun in the 1990s and continues to the present. It marks the

end of the second wave or rather feminism itself. They no longer find it valid to fight for justice. The new women stress on girl power. They create an arena where they perform and build their own strength and the possible extensions of their power in different fields of life. The writers today in India seem to have been influenced by the post face of feminism arguably through the way they deal with the girl child protagonists in the recent fiction. The social situation remains the same. But the approach of girls towards the discrimination changed in a notable way.

The major post feminist offshoots like 'Power Feminism', 'Girl Power' and 'Chick Lit' enhanced the way girls are to present themselves in society. Against the second wave feminism, which oppressed and rejected femininity, Girl power seems to exhibit and display the power of girls through femininity. They encourage women to enhance feminine bodily attributes that are part of the stereotypical femininity displayed through Barbie dolls, feminine ways of dressing, and make-up and fashion magazine as means of female power. The new approach of female empowerment has influenced writers in a remarkable manner and there appeared chick lit, which displayed young girl protagonists who are independent and self-confident, trusting their abilities and femininities.

The concept of power in girls has become strong when the post-feminist wave strikes the world. Post-feminism can be seen as a reaction against the incongruity of concepts and practices of the second wave feminism. It highlighted the more 'girlie' part of a woman than the adult part. According to Stéphanie Genz, and Benjamin A. Brabon, critics popularised the term with wide range of definitions "... ranging from a conservative backlash, Girl Power, third wave feminism and postmodern/ post structuralist feminism" (1). But it can be clearly said that postfeminisms are for the

younger generation who seek power and strength. They reject any association with the previous waves and the post feminists declare themselves as a new group of feminists. It is the replica of new generation of girls who appear in novels that reject the notion of tradition and untie the bond between traditional and new girls. Though the post feminist generation in many contexts confines itself within the borders of the white, middle-class and heterosexual experiences, the concept extends itself breaking the boundaries to fit the theoretical framework in Indian context. It also explores its pluralistic constructions of meanings in association with time, space and cultural contexts, and also extends to, interpret and understand its multidimensional regional and cultural variations.

In order to interpret the position of the girl child characters created in the 1980s Indian literature, an insight in to the phenomena of feminism and its development in connection with the younger generation is necessary. As Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A Brabon opined, “. . . it was the popular press that resurrected the term in the 1980s” (18) indicating a shift from the second –wave feminism. Postfeminists have developed their new approaches to feminism and the status of women as a backlash of different traditional feminist conceptions. They seek for more power and strength in women rather than representing women as victims of the social atrocities.

Power feminism is one such concept that developed as an offshoot of post feminist beliefs. Naomi Wolf defines and talks about the concept in her work *Fire with Fire* (1993). She explains the term in relation to another term ‘victim feminism’ which comes into being “. . . when women seek power through an identity of powerlessness” (147). On the other hand power feminism seeks to outwit the victim feminist notions. According to Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A Brabon “Power feminism means



identifying with other women through shared pleasures and strengths, rather than shared vulnerability and pain” (69).

Anita Harris is one of the post feminist critics who has significantly contributed to the subject of new girlhood. Harris’s views on girlhood and gender identity is presented in her work *The Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. Her study focuses on “. . . current representations of young women, the material conditions within which they live, and the new ways they are able to challenge both of these” (*Future Girl* 8). She has analysed “. . . how and why young women have emerged as the central subjects of discourses . . .” (9) and “. . . looks more closely at the construction of young women as successful in education and employment” (9). Indian English authors seem to have been influenced by the ideas of power feminism as a source of empowering young girls. The literary representation of girlhood highlights the power nurtured by young girls as the way to reject the normal submissive female identity.

Michelle Superle also has influenced the recent Indian literature in English focusing largely on children’s literature. In her work she examines more than one hundred English novels by Indian writers published in the post 1980s. In the work *Contemporary English- Language Indian Children’s Literature: Representations of Nation, Culture, and the New Indian Girl* (2011), she examines the way girl child protagonists gain power in the Indian English novels. Though the western studies on women and young girls have influenced the whole world, Indian society to a large extent has kept itself insulated from these influences.

Indian society has a clear demarcation between men and women and, their expected roles and contributions to society. It greatly depends on the social

psychology of the population nurtured by religious and other cultural factors. The Hindu culture shapes the social psychology of people in India. Nayantara Sahgal's observation in this regard is interesting. She notes " All Indians are not Hindus but all Indians must reckon with Hinduism since it is the dominant setting, social and psychological atmosphere" ('Schizophrenic Imagination' 34). So the Hindu culture influences Indians in the cultural practices even within family relationships. Studies on Indian culture made by John R. Aiello and Donna E. Thompson summarise it as ". . . representing the accumulation of norms, customary beliefs, and socialisation patterns which are used in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another" (108). The present cultural practices in India show the impact of centuries old culture and its influence on the people though it has undergone considerable changes.

Indians have acquired cultural knowledge and socialisation patterns as part of the influence of myths and legends, and the age-old cultural practices prevalent in ancient India. Early Sanskrit texts by well-known thinkers from India like Shankaracharya and Vivekananda, have left deep impact in the unconscious of the Indian people. The influence of other religious groups has added more customary practices to the already existing cultural codes of the country. There are similarities in dressing, eating, and the use of ornaments in all religious and cultural groups in India, and also in the rearing of children in social groups and in different cultural situations. These similarities can be seen in all Indian social groups. This general Indian ethos can be called 'Indianness'. Sudhir Kakar explains this uniqueness of Indians in his work *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. Indianness according to Sudhir Kakar is ". . .the network of social roles, traditional values, caste customs, and kinship regulations with which the threads of individual psychological development are interwoven" (*The Inner World* 3). Specifically it is the

directive of caste systems and traditional family regulations. It is passively cultivated in every Indian during the growth process. The traits of these value systems remain dormant in the child till it gets a better soil to sprout.

Child development, a universal process, has its own unique features when it is viewed from the Indian context. In the very early stages of life, a child gets initiated into the nuances and subtleties of Indian identity or 'Indianness'. The 'Indianness' is the soul and power of Indian identity. Indian family structure is evidently patriarchal and the people in most of the states in India follow rigid views regarding their caste and family values and tradition. This 'Indianness' influences every aspect of their life. To make it more precise, the caste system and the rigid customs in India restrict the choices of many people in this country, especially people from rural areas and women folk, though educated Indians are striving to come out of this bond. Times of India in its official news website dated 13.05.2007 documents the statement of Shashi Tharoor who says that ". . . in the villages caste may still dictate where you live, whom you eat with and who you marry, it is more difficult in the cities to pick the shoulders you might rub with on the bus, and this is leading to a major decrease in urban caste-consciousness". But still, the culture runs through the veins of Indians.

Indian history, myths and legends reveal the characteristic Indian outlook towards girl children in Indian society. The society is essentially patriarchal in its culture. Hindu mythological records evidently prove the absence of girl characters in it. Vinay Kirpal scrutinises ancient Indian Literature and finds that ". . . there are no girl children or characters" (viii) in the Indian legends. In the legend Ramayana, Kirpal finds that "Raja Dasharath . . . fathered four sons his only progeny after years of penance and yagna to the gods. That even the gods felt the need to reward his devotion

with boy children signifies the deep rooted preference for sons in our society” (Kirpal viii). The influence of these legendary figures and their practices has deep impact in the cultural consciousness of Indians.

Adi Shankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani observes that “*Jantūnām nara-janmadurlabhamataḥ puṁstvām tatovipratā*” (2) i.e human beings are the supreme among all living beings and within human beings men are the best and within men, Brahmin men are the greatest. It asserts the importance of being born as a human being and also as a man. A clear patriarchal scheme of thought could be seen in this statement. And also there is a hierarchy of all living beings in the Indian system of thought. There is no conception of equality. People are placed at the various levels of caste and gender hierarchy. It is a very rigid power hierarchy that cannot be easily overlooked.

This hierarchical system reflects in families too. The head of the family is in most cases the eldest male member. If there is no male member, the eldest woman will be the head of the family though the other male members may influence the thoughts and actions of her. Indian family longs for a male member in every generation of it to keep the thread of the family to future heirs. Sons belong to the family and daughters belong to some unknown family where she is sent after marriage. Sons have the complete right over the family and its belongings. The entire wealth of the family goes to him. But the dowry system in India compels parents to spend huge amount of money on the marriage of their daughter to maintain the status of the family or just to make the marriage happen. To be born as a male member means an increase in the status of the family and dignity for the mother who gives birth to the son. In the same way, the birth of a female member is not appreciated like the birth of a male member.

Because she doesn't belong to the family and also is a threat to the family that she may one day take with her a considerable amount of wealth to her husband's house.

Sons are welcome members of the family and also necessary members of the family for the social, cultural, economic and religious reasons. They have various duties in connection with the rituals and practices of the family. He is the one who is to do the rituals after the death of the parents. There is a firm belief in the Hindu culture that if the sons don't do the essential rituals after the death of parents, the souls will never get moksha (salvation) or will never be able to set itself free from earthly bonds. The presence of a son to perform the rituals and his duty to burn the pyre will lead the dead towards the ultimate aim of salvation and thus the son is respected and cared for than a daughter. Daughter's duties and responsibilities are always in connection with her husband's family.

Death, rebirth and dharma are the core ideas embedded in Indian culture. The system of belief is similar in Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Douglas Davis summarises Indian belief systems at birth, death and rebirth. He refers to the idea of birth and rebirth from Holm and Bowker who have done significant work in studying Indian cultural and religious belief patterns:

The broad traditions of Indian religious community hold belief in the transmigration of souls, where the life-force passes through many existences in striving to obey universal moral principles yielding increased benefits and resulting in an improved form of transmigration at its next cycle. This process of reincarnation or transmigration is often called *samsara*, while the moral advantages or disadvantages accruing from the way life is lived is often called *karma*. Samsara and Karma provide the basic dynamics lying behind the

traditional Indian caste system into which people are born and the rules of which should be followed during life so that in the next life a better state may be achieved. This general perspective lies behind Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism [ . . . ]. (Davis 84)

Indians also believe in rebirth. They believe that life is a journey which takes lots of rebirths to attain moksha or freedom from the birth-rebirth cycle. The deeds of this life may affect the next birth and thus entangle oneself again and again in the birth-rebirth cycle. So people should give respect to elders and men or to higher class people because they are believed to have attained supremacy in the process of the life cycle affirming once more the opinion of Adi Shankaracharya. The belief of supremacy stresses the fact that men are to be given respect and are to be taken care of by women. Men are supreme because they are born as men. Women are inferior because men have superior status over women in our society. The unequal status of men and women is there in all walks of life. It is seen in our rituals, customs, and family gatherings and celebrations. Thus the birth of a boy in a family is a happy event and the birth of a girl on the other hand, a depressing incident.

Dharma is a concept which the Indians consider as the inner scheme of every action of human beings. According to Kakar “ . . . dharma is variously translated as ‘law’, ‘moral duty’, ‘right action’ or ‘conformity with the truth of things (*Inner World* 41). He further explains that “ . . . dharma is the means through which man approaches a desired goal of life” (*Inner World* 41). Every individual has his own duty towards the goal of salvation. Thus in India people have a consciousness that something terrible may happen if they go against the customs and traditions of the family or against the words and decisions of elders in the family. People believe that all are trapped in *maya*

or ‘the false perception’ and we never know the scheme of things in life unless we come out of *maya*. To know the future and the exact way to find the things around them, Indians trust astrology and the words of saints, both believed to be out of the scheme of *maya*.

When a child is born and gradually comes to follow these schemes of things in life, his/her gender wise upbringing becomes complete. 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, *Inner World* 61). Even though there are subsystems within the larger tradition of India, and many counter traditions too, these rebel movements are eventually subsumed by the mainstream because it is hardly possible for these rebel traditions to run parallel belief systems for generations to make a big difference. Almost all children in India are brought up within the cultural practices which influence the later psychological development of the child. It becomes part of him even before he thinks of a better choice.

The girl child is born to transform herself like other female members who share specific behavioural patterns bestowed as part of their role and status in the family. The individuality of girl child is restricted within the family code of conduct which makes them the typical Indian woman who is to be ready to become the darling of her in-laws and her future husband. The making of a girl child in Indian context is a step by step process from birth to youth. The construction of her identity and her role towards the fulfilment of duties regarding her person is entangled with the future and the status of the family to which she belongs.

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 their lives according to certain rules and have to make themselves ready for marriage which is the ultimate goal of life.

The status of women in India differs in some contexts like the division of caste in which the lower caste man is inferior to a higher caste woman. In all contexts family and caste give an Indian child inferior or superior status in life in which he or she has no choice at all. The Indian way of categorising or recognising individuals depends on the gender, caste and family of that person. The difference in attitude towards them depends on these factors. If a child plays with another child of different social status, parents restrict or discourage him/her. The grouping among people starts when children are too young to understand why these discriminations are all about. Girls are encouraged to move around with girls and boys too are encouraged to find their own sex groups. The children thus learn to create their own groups according to the gender, caste and family to which they belong. In this way the culture enters the environment of child before he or she understands the significance of it. As Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar aptly states, “. . . 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, feminists and other social reformers have brought about the idea of the need to analyse the status of the girl children in India who lose their individuality in the process of growing up. The socio-psychological moulding of a girl child that leads to her tame acceptance of the inferior gender status at an early age as the best survival tactics has been seriously analysed. The factors that contribute to her suppressed identity has been a serious question discussed among the feminist circles in India. The girls are compelled to live according to the pattern in which the eldest family members including her own mother and grandmother have been brought up centuries before. The new born girl is bound to fit herself into the robe set for her. There is a positive discussion among the people working towards the emancipation of girl child in India as to how these social patterns may be changed to accommodate the new girl child in the new India of the new millennium.

The process of the acceptance of “girlhood” starts early in a child’s life. Though there have been studies regarding the construction of this uniformity in a girl’s life there were limited number of literary outputs which discussed the construction of girlhood. Anthropologists, Ethnographers and developmental theorists have started observing the lives of children more avidly in post 1980s. “It was the early 1980s and prevailing methods for studying children were heavily influenced by Piaget’s theorising that children invariably experienced life through a structured series of developmental stages” (Aitken 4). In India child welfare and Save Girl Child Forums also contributed to improve the substandard living conditions of children especially girl children. Female foeticide, child labour, child marriages, the increased killing of newborn girl children, inadequate schooling for girls and the inferior status of girl children in families have necessitated a drastic step towards the improvement of girls in India.

In India, 'feminism' is a much debated and misused term. It is sometimes regarded as a cultural misfit in Indian society and is considered as an offshoot of western culture. The academic feminism that is practised in the urban spaces of India is criticised for its lack of sensitivity to the issues of women in the rural expanses of India. Indian women are sometimes blamed for following the footsteps of Western females who fight for various kinds of freedoms that are culturally not congruent with Indian context. Resistances to the sexual freedom, demanded and practised by women have been very severe in the recent past. But the movement gained popularity among the educated masses of India who understood the importance and need for a drastic change in India, where women are valued always in comparison with men; where women are considered to have no individuality and any right of their own. According to Neeru Tandon "There is still a tendency to perceive it as the result of 'moral corruption' of women imitating 'foreign' or 'western' trends, arising from their unrestrained freedom and leading to promiscuous sexual behaviour" (169). Women and young girls are the concern of the feminists worldwide today. It has even entered all the medium of expressions of entertainments, realities and fiction.

Feminist insights on the current status of girl children in India and worldwide has had deep impact on Indian English literary outputs in our country. Most of the novels dealing with girl children by Indian writers, seem to reiterate reality rather than spinning out imaginary tales. These texts prove that the culture is always hidden in texts and contexts. As Hans Bertens says, "Writers can never completely escape ideology and their social background so that the social reality of the writer will always be part of the text" (70). The Indian English literary outputs cannot be counted as part of the Anglican literature as it was called in the pre-independent times. The values, belief systems and practices discussed in the recent literary texts appear to carry

disturbing images of hidden cultural undercurrents hitherto unnoticed and considered part of our value systems.

Indian English writers seem to have been influenced by the atrocities and gender discriminations faced by girl children in India. The advent of feminism and its approach to the challenges of the age old customs and practices in society have had deep impact on the writers in general. The novels in recent times evidently reflect these advances of feminism, the new psychological approaches and the contemporary scientific approaches towards the development of human beings. Anita Desai once remarked in an interview that “There is a feminist movement in India, but it is very different from the Western movement. In the West, there is movement towards abandoning the old order, to bring in a new order. The Indian woman is always working towards an adjustment, a compromise” (‘Literary India’ 168). She further elaborated on this point saying “Few Indian feminists really contemplate total change. Working towards an adjustment through the traditional role is much less drastic, much more Indian. I think Indian feminism is more practical than theoretical. It is expedient rather than ideological” (‘Literary India’ 168). As Desai’s observation suggests, feminism in India is an amalgamation of Western feminism and Indian tradition and culture. It is a bringing forth of new opportunities and advancements for females in the new cultural context of India. Women in India fight for equal opportunities and equality in fundamental rights. They seek power and opportunities to establish their abilities on a more pro-feminine platform rather than a patriarchal one.

The history of feminism in India dates back to centuries to a point of time in history when there was a serious rebel voice raised by certain social reformers for abolishing Sati, the practice of committing suicide on husband’s funeral pyre. The

eminent social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy successfully abolished this compulsory ritual, through various campaigns. It could be seen as the first attempt to stop atrocities against women. Prominent women's movements in India emerged as part of the Quit India Movement. During the post-independence times these movements received momentum with more women in work force and lesser in domestic confinements. The patriarchal tradition and the caste and religious diversities have influenced feminism in India. This has also lead to various caste specific movements in connection with the feminist movements in India. Gandhian nationalist movements also influenced women movements and lead to a serious engagement with the women centred issues in connection with the political uprisals of the time. Anti-rape movement in the 90s evoked a need to think and act against other atrocities against women in India. Apart from the various movements aimed at improving the position of women in India, the report published by Government of India *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* in 1974 can be described as a big leap towards raising the status of women in India. It focused on women's health, economic status, political involvement etc. It also analysed the impact of law and the issues of gender on women in India. On the whole, the British rule and its aftermath influenced women and their status in India in various ways. According to Jasbir Jain “. . . history of British rule in India has impacted women in three different ways (*Writing Women Across Cultures* 117). First of all Jain notes how British rule influenced the central issues in connection with women in India. She notes that “ (i) women were the site on which imperial and colonial strategies were worked out. Child marriage, polygamy, sati and widow remarriage all became central issues . . . ” (*Writing Women Across Cultures* 117). Secondly she finds “ (ii) Women came to symbolise nationhood and with the myth of woman as the motherland being identified with them, they came to be treated as

custodian of culture. Thirdly, “ (iii) They found legitimate space which promised them identity and selfhood within the freedom struggle even if it was within conventional frameworks and moral values which valorised sacrifice and self-effacement (*Writing Women Across Cultures* 117). Child marriage is a crucial issue India still faces. When considering girl children and the impact of feminism on the upliftment of the status of girls in India the focus is largely on the issue of female foeticide, child marriage, bride burning and torturing in rural areas etc. Through Jain’s vision it becomes clear that womanhood in India is cultural specific and feminism attempts to scrutinise the culturally specific assumptions and impositions on women. The above historical survey suggests that Indian feminism is not an extension of western feminism but a culturally specific national movement. Though it is connected to and shares the ideas of various western feminist ideas, it still maintains a nationalist outlook. While talking about feminism in India, Jasbir Jain has commented that “Feminism is culture specific and women’s lives are culturally constructed and the process of socialisation are rooted in their social reality” (*Writing Women Across Cultures* 116).

The general aversion of Indians to western feminism has restricted its growth in the Indian scenario and has given a completely different face to it. Tandon observes that “. . . the aims of Indian feminism should lie in the spread of education, economic sufficiency, preservation of human rights and in the awareness of the desire for liberation from mythical and social values which constrain women as well as men . . .” (169). Sisir Kumar Das’s influential study also maps similar patterns of emancipation of women through education. He states that “By the beginning of the twentieth century when the demand of woman’s education had received much wide support and social approval than it had ever before, a much more congenial climate was created for the writers to raise the women question to a larger readership . . . ” (323) which according

to him “. . . included a viable component of women readers themselves” (323). Sisir Kumar Das’s study gives a perfect picture of women portrayed in literature in India. He finds the three distinctive states of women’s lives as they are portrayed in literature, one, “. . . the portrayal of woman within the domestic space where marriage plays the most crucial role dividing her life into two clear cut phases: pre-marital and post-marital” (323). He refers to the second state as the “. . . emergence of forces challenging traditions . . .” (324) and the third being “. . . the construction of a new image of the Indian woman necessitated by the spread of education . . .” (324). The findings of Das too lead to the point that the writers today are more concerned with the image of new Indian woman. In the case of girl child protagonists too it can be seen that there is a drastic change concerning their position in society and in literature. According to Sisir Kumar Das,

Marriage being obligatory for the Hindu woman, as sanctioned by the Dharma Shastra, the life of a woman revolves around marriage and her position is determined with reference to it. It is partly because of the importance given to marriage, the childhood of a girl did not receive proper attention in pre-twentieth century literature. Once the girl, whatever be her age, is married she is not treated as a child anymore; the marital status obliterates, as it were, her childhood. (325)

It may safely be averred from the above discussion that girlhood and womanhood are treated as inferior to boyhood and manhood respectively. The Western observations and Indian ethos reveal the fact that there has to be further improvement in the status of women to attain equality with man. Literary and social approaches to enhance the status of women have put things in a positive light. The

future assures a better status for girl children and women; and the future is not far. Indian English novelists play an important part to lift the position of girls in India through their fictional outpourings. The analysis of recent Indian English fiction may lead to a better understanding of the status of girl children in India and also would help to spur the need for a logical approach to enhance the position of girl children in India.

Girl children presented through scientific enquiries, medical investigations and also through literary and artistic pursuits have presented the life situations of many real-life girls who are otherwise silent in the mainstream. Indian English literature also has presented many notable child protagonists performing prominent roles in the adult fiction though the number is less in comparison to children's fiction. In literature, children's fiction is put under a separate category and labelled as children's literature or juvenile literature with prominent child characters, as they are intended for child readers or young adult readers. But the representation of child characters in adult fiction is a rare phenomenon and it is rarest when it comes to the representation of girl children. When analysing fictional roles attributed to the girl child characters, it is evident that their number is less in comparison with the male child characters. The reason could be the bewilderment in placing such creatures, who are pushed into adult world before they mature and are denied the phase of childhood in their lives through generations of wrong child-rearing practices that prevailed in society. Though Indian art and literature are rich with child characters, girl children seem to have been deprived of the role of a child in many contexts. While discussing the position of girl children in Indian fiction, Sharda Iyer notes that the denied childhood of girl children is a feature of even ancient Indian literature. "There are no girl children as leading characters or for that matter a character is making its presence felt. Girls did grow up to be important characters as in the epics, but it was not felt necessary or worth

lingering on their childhood phase. They were of interest only as young women to play the role of beloved, wives and mothers” (86).

From Sharada Iyer it is evident that girl children are not presented as they really are in most ancient Indian literature. The misrepresentation of girl children and their lives through literary fiction shows a misrepresented livelihood for girl children in society. These fictional presentations also show that the stories about girl children have notable social significance and it cannot be considered completely fictional. As Neeru Tandon puts literature as “. . . an interpretation and compilation of history, anthropology, sociology, psychology and a host of other areas” (22). Thus the representation of the lives of girl children cannot be considered as only an aspect of the fictional world, rather it also represents a general trend and view of society on women in general and girls in particular. The gendered and sexist presentations of girl children who mature beyond their age have instigated inquiries recently and have led to the necessity of presenting them in more realistic roles which may present the real life of girls and their lives in different social contexts. The novelists in India have taken pains to turn the attention of readers to the childhood of girls in their fiction who were camouflaged for ages within the adult robes.

Drawing significantly from the contributions of feminists and taking cues from the cultural background of India, the new Indian girlhood presented through fiction seem to have a unique sense of selfhood. The insights of Meenakshi Bharat on the children in Indian subcontinent in her work *The Ultimate Colony* (2003) focus on this peculiarity of the child personalities in adult fiction. Bharat’s studies suggest that child protagonists possess a different personality compared to the real children. She argues



that the children in recent fiction are not innocent children but “ highly aware” (121) of their problems and are creatures with the hindsight of the author.

It is seen through the study that the novels by Indian writers in the last three decades show an increased engagement with the theme of children, especially girl children. They focus their attention on girl children who are either denied a life of their choice or are socially moulded and reared in an entirely different way compared to boys. These children have serious problems in dealing with the adverse and sometimes hostile world created by the in their lives. The way of the society has in some way necessitated the writers to talk about children who are denied proper care and support in different fields of their lives and are given an inferior position in comparison with their male counterparts.

## GIRL CHILD IN THE ADULT WORLD

Indian social system evidently shows a clear demarcation between child-rearing practices for boys and girls. Gender identity creates unequal distribution of roles among children in the patriarchal social system and the gender stereotypes lead to gender discrimination and also towards inferior social status for girl children in the adult world. Novels dealing with powerful girl child characters in a broader sense explore different perspectives of the growth of girl children in Indian society, their experiences in the adult world and their assimilation towards the politics of gendering in the social system.

Adult world can be defined as an all-encompassing cultural spectrum where social activities are fashioned and performed by adults. Adult world is present everywhere and the children are encouraged to understand and assimilate the norms of the adult world through their interactions with the adults. According to the renowned sociologist Chris Jenks, “This adult world . . . is a benevolent and coherent totality which extends a welcome to the child, it invites him to cast off the qualities that ensure his differences, and it encourages his acquiescence to the preponderance of the induction procedures that will guarantee his corporate identity” (9). Precisely these induction procedures include the imposition of gender norms in children at an early age. However this chapter investigates girl children in the adult world and their experiences in the adult world. The study focuses on the life of girl children depicted in the five recent novels taken for investigation and tries to find out the way the gender norms are imposed on the child psyche, children’s unique experiences in the adult world and the volume of knowledge gained by them in an earlier age through these experiences. The chapter analyses different similar incidences from the novels to

establish the general trend of how socialisation and gendering is imposed on children in the present Indian culture. This chapter limits itself to the dynamics of the relationship between girl children and the adult world. Viney Kirpal and Sudhir Kakar, the most notable among the critics who discuss the crisis of girl children in India explicitly aim at the growth of children in India as the outcome of the traditional cultural and social practices. This study aims to discover the factors affecting the formation of the psyche of a girl child, which, as Kirpal and Kakar demonstrate, is the sum total of the patriarchal tradition in India. In the Indian social scenario it is the outcome of the “. . . religious ideals and historical traditions as well as social institutions which are specific . . . to Indian society” (Kakar 1). Recent Indian fiction in English demonstrates this particular aspect of the Indian girl child as part of her life in the adult world and looks at how “. . . the growing girl is indoctrinated to contain, withhold, conceal, [and] suppress her real self” (Kirpal xi).

The novels dealing with girl children focus on the adult world and its influences in the psyche of growing children. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, P R Lakshman's *The Girl Child* and Keshwar Desai's *Witness the Night* are the novels chosen for investigation and they appear to focus on the life of girl children in the adult world and the impact of customary social practices on girl children. As part of the experiences in the adult world, children understand the gender norms in the social system and their compulsory participation in the norms and practices of it. The novels project girl children from various social circumstances and discuss how the life of these young women are being constructed in the patriarchal social system and the way social circumstances become life-threatening and traumatic for girl children when the families prefer sons to daughters.

Indian English fiction like many other genres of the kind is used by many writers as a platform to reciprocate on the social issues subdued tactfully in the domestic settings. Clara Nubile, referring to the recent Indian women writers who present girl children in their fiction opines that “. . . women writers –far away from each other in time and space –merge cruel reality with fiction. A girl child seems to be a disgrace to these fictional Indian families” (20). And the cause of this disgrace is much debated in recent fiction. The childhood of a girl which is a cultural construct evidently demonstrates gender norms. Jane Eva Baxter defines childhood as “. . . a culturally specific construction that ascribes roles, activities, and behaviours to individuals, but on the basis of their position in the human life cycle” (3). According to Baxter “These cultural constructions of identity often overlap . . .” (3). A girl child too is susceptible to such multiple roles in her childhood. As Baxter rightly confirms “. . . a young girl is socialized not only into her role as a child but also into roles that are culturally determined to be feminine” (3). The feminine roles attributed to girl children somewhat erase the possibility of the role of a child in them. Gender segregation in society and its impact of hierarchising the inferior and superior positions attributed to children according to their biological sex lead them to live a confused and struggling life without any specific solution to the problem they are facing. The status of girl children in India is such that it is not a single issue but an overlapping of multiple issues in connection with their life choices. The social, cultural and religious practices to fix feminine roles in early childhood result in denial of the child’s world for Indian girl children. S. Gurusamy finds various cultural practices resulting in the discrimination towards girl children in India. Gurusamy’s studies make it clear that “Customs, rituals, traditional practice frequently make a girl lesser child who is denied optimum opportunities. . .” (18).

As part of this study, the incidents in the novels that deal with exclusive female experiences are isolated and grouped together to understand how the child's psyche works when she encounters the adult world. The study broadly focuses on how girl children are socialised in the adult world, and how children become aware of the need to have a gendered identity in their lives. This chapter also looks at the power politics in Indian families so as to analyse the status of girl children within the familial structure. Different incidents portrayed through the novels demonstrate how girl children become part of the gender norms early in their lives which in many ways restrict and redirect the growth possibilities in the life of a girl child in the adult world.

Children are socialised into the adult world through the visible and invisible guidance of the adults. From the adults, children understand the norms of individual life in a society. The consciousness of gendered identity and the development of individual identity are built as part of the knowledge gained from the interactions with the adults. Adults attempt at imparting gender norms in children as part of socialisation and the positions taken by adults to build special behavioural patterns in boys and girls create different kinds of 'childhoods' for them. Sometimes in such circumstances, children become victims of discrimination and gendering which badly affect their childhood and their future.

The Indian English writers have contributed much to highlight the shocking favouritism for sons and the challenging childhood for girls in India. They have made it a point to discuss such issues with the public through the novels. The girl children who appear in these novels are from different places and from diverse social circumstances. They share the unique methods that they adopted to cope with the world they live in. Through different ways and through different methods they develop

capacities to learn and reject the gendering and discrimination faced by girl children. However, this chapter focuses only on the life of girl children in the adult world.

Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* brilliantly narrates the story of Sarita, and her traumatic experiences in the adult world during her childhood days and its impact on her adolescence and adulthood. The novel explicitly portrays the undercurrent of patriarchal power structures limiting the capability of Sarita, the child character, in her journey towards freedom. The work deals with the story of the disturbing family life and the traumatic childhood of Sarita. It brings forth the fear, trauma and suffering of the child Sarita who had to face a heart-breaking tragedy in her childhood. Living with her parents and younger brother, Sarita grows within the traditional practices and beliefs of the family. Sarita's mother is a traditional Hindu woman who despises her daughter and loves her son. The neglect and hatred from her mother and the knowledge of a secondary position in the family and in society make her shrink into a world of her own. The incident that changes her life into a tragedy is her younger brother Dhruva's death by drowning. One afternoon Sarita and Dhruva go out in the woods to play. Sarita and Dhruva play in the mud nearby a small pit filled with muddy water but later come to know it was a deeper pond dug by brick workers to soak bricks. After sometime when it was about to rain Sarita wanted to return home. She warns Dhruva who was deeply immersed in his play and does not want to return. Sarita walks from there and calls him again to follow her home. Then she watches him falling into the muddy water and goes back thinking that he will come back as she believes it is only a bit of muddy water. She finds bubbles coming out of water while she witnesses an image of Dhruva in the water. But then she makes herself believe that Dhruva can't drown into it and believes he must be at home. She leaves the place thinking what she saw is some sort of a nightmare. She understands the gravity of the

situation when she finds Dhruva missing and is later found dead in a pond. Though Sarita grows as an unwanted and uncared child, she tries to overcome the intensity of the discrimination through her lonely walks and wanderings. But after this incident her life becomes more tragic. The situations at home worsen when her own mother starts accusing her for the death of her brother though everybody knows that it was an accident. After this incident her childhood becomes traumatic and pathetic. Her escapes from trauma, accusations and prejudices may be interpreted as her own way of moving towards the solution to the problems she faces. She asserts her freedom by running away from her mother and chooses to live with a man of her choice and later when she finds it difficult to tolerate her husband, comes back home to her parents with her children. She eventually learns to control her life and finds out the best way to tackle her problems, by emphasising her own worth and independence. Shashi Deshpande concludes the story with the understanding that woman can't assert her freedom unless she realises that she is sufficient for herself.

Mrinal Pande in the novel *Daughter's Daughter* explores Indian girlhood through the childhood of Tinu whose life is always on the move from one place to another. The loosely connected series of episodes are seen through the eyes of Tinu, a girl child growing up in North India shortly after India's independence. She travels between her grandmother's house at Almora in the foothills of the Himalayas, and Gorakhpur where her uncle lives. The novel tries to highlight the emotional journey of Tinu and her realisations of the world around through the various unpleasant events she faces. The narrator-protagonist Tinu grows from the age of two to ten during the course of the novel. Tinu's struggle for survival starts when she faces discrimination for being a daughter's daughter in her maternal grandmother's home where son's children are given much more attention and care than daughter's children. In the novel,

Pande discusses various incidents in the adult world through the eyes of Tinu and her elder sister Dinu. Pande discusses the world of adults, its influences on children and examines how the adult social norms affect the growth possibilities of girl children in India.

Kishwar Desai's debut novel *Witness the Night* is a crime fiction that revolves around the life of a fourteen-year-old girl Durga who is suspected to have murdered thirteen of her family members. When the novel opens, the protagonist Durga is in a juvenile home for investigation of the murder case. A social worker named Simran helps Durga to recover herself from the trauma of the disaster of her life. From Durga, Simran understands more about the Atwal family where the child Durga belongs. Apart from Durga, there is another prominent girl child in the Atwal family who is Durga's elder sister Sharda. The plot revolves around the life of these young girls and their unpleasant experiences in the family. The children Durga and Sharda understand early in their life that they are neglected and seen as burden in the family. From her sister, she finds out how both of them narrowly escaped being the victims of female infanticide. Both the children were to be killed as soon as they were born as per the general tradition of female infanticide in the family. But they escaped and were brought up as unwanted children. The children later find proofs of further killings of the newborns in the family just because they were all born as girls. The situation at home becomes traumatic for the girls when the family comes to know about the relationship of her sister Sharda with a man and her pregnancy. One day Durga's sister suddenly vanishes from home and nobody seems to bother where she is. Durga realises that survival is going to be tough for herself too when the family discards her sister from her house without any notice. While searching for her sister she comes to know that their own parents dumped her in some mental asylum to torture her. Durga



never hears anything about her sister till the family brings home her sister's son who survives because he was born as a male child. Durga is shocked to witness the approach of the family towards girl children and the unconditional love towards boys. The injustices that she suffers in the family force her to think of a permanent solution to the problem she faces. She wanted to live a better life, so she decides to kill all the thirteen members of the family, including her own parents. The novel seems to justify the retribution of Durga by projecting the cruelties towards girl children in various reputed families in North India.

Like the plot, the structure of the novel also attracts our immediate attention. Every chapter in the novel opens with a confessional note by Durga. Through the confessional note, the readers are introduced to the night of the murder of her family, the way she executed the act and how she stayed there in the house full of corpses the whole night as part of the plan. These notes are her reminiscences and observations about the Atwal family, herself and her sister Sharda, and also about other people who influenced the girls. The writer has put the notes of Durga in italics to emphasise its importance. The novel *Witness the Night* provides us with a powerful girl child protagonist and her ways of stopping atrocities against girl children using violence.

In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni narrates the life of two Chatterjee girls, Basudha (Sudha) and Anjali (Anju) from birth to adulthood. The life of the two Chatterjee girls is very much entangled with the tradition and practices of the family run by their mothers. The financial position of their mothers decides the scope and expanse of their dreams. Anju's mother Gouri runs the family with the income from the family bookstore, while Sudha's mother Nalini takes care of the domestic needs. Sudha and her mother Nalini who live in the Chatterjee household are

just some distant relatives. But Anju and Sudha develop a bond beyond what is normally expected of cousin sisters. The course of their life changes when their parents chose an early marriage for both the girls. The novel discusses the life of the girls in two parts. The first half of the novel is about the childhood experiences of the girls and the second part is about the adult experiences of them. The later life of the two girls again projects the malpractices and atrocities of mainstream society against women even though this study does not go into the specific nature of these evils against women as they form another area of studies.

Set in 2002, P.R. Lakshman's novel *The Girl Child* revolves around the issues of female foeticide from the experiences of Priya who had almost forgotten the mistreatments she had received from her family during childhood for being a girl, before coming to Punjab as the wife of a typical Punjabi boy whom she had met in New Zealand where she was living with her parents. Her pregnancy and the knowledge that it would be a girl child completely reverses her optimism in family and married life. Everyone anticipates a boy child and when they were told of the baby girl they are extremely disappointed and expect her to abort the baby. The novel focuses on the unborn and the unwanted girl children in India who become victims of the cruel practices of various cultural groups in India. Priya, the protagonist of the novel is a Western-educated Indian girl from New Zealand, who comes and settles down in a Punjabi family after her marriage. In exploring the childhood and adulthood of Priya, the novel discusses the issues of female foeticide practiced largely in the northern regions of India. The plot revolves around the unborn girl child of Priya and her stubborn resistance to sex-selective abortion. She understands from her mother-in-law that the sex of the child can bring luck or ill luck to the mother and to the whole family because girl children were looked upon as burdens in Indian families. Priya's family

had migrated to New Zealand during her childhood and she stays there till her marriage to Gurveer, a Western-educated Punjabi boy. On her return, initially, she feels completely at home with a loving family of eight members. The family welcomes her with due respect. But soon enough, Priya encounters conflicts when she realises the extent of love towards boys and hatred towards girl children in the family. She finds the Indian ways totally strange but tries hard to gel with the new cultural surroundings. Love marriage and the love relationship become bitter when her mother-in-law suggests female foeticide as the family needed no more daughters.

The girlhoods presented through these recent Indian English novels attempt to divert the attention of readers from the blessed nature of childhood in general to the darker side of growing up; the specialised childhoods and the roles for girl children in the adult world. Analysing and interpreting the imposition of specialised childhoods for girl children in India often lead to age-old customs still prevalent in the adult supervision and rearing of children in India. A further analysis of the adult world is needed to understand life of children under adult supervision and to study the impact of adult influence on children. The socialisation practiced in the adult environment leads children either to construct or to deconstruct the adult notion of girlhood or boyhood.

The various practices carried from the older generations to the present world of child rearing belong to traditional India, and are evidently effective in most of the families. In an Indian family, the adult has the supreme power over children and children depend on adults for fulfilling their needs throughout their lives. Children seek support and care from adults because of their inability to fulfil their needs alone at an early age, and also because of their inability to free themselves from the cultural

clutches of the Indian family unit. On the contrary, adults too depend on their children when they grow up, for economic support and care. The need for a better bringing up of the child and the proper conditioning of childhood behaviour is necessary so that the adults can depend on him or her in future. Thus the childhood is always looked over as a step towards a better future for adults. Thus some specific behavioural codes are attributed to them for a better future life and their consciousness is conditioned through specific daily routine and customary practices. The diverse practices submerged in cultural codes result in implementing specialised roles to children and which is considered to be normal and customary in various cultures. According to Gurusamy,

The paternal joint family system confined women's roles to the domestic sphere; allocated subordinate status; authority and power to women compared to men, and practiced sex segregation in day to day life. Men were providers and protectors of family; hence boys and girls were trained for different adult roles, statuses and authority. (18)

The discrimination of girl children is the result of such diverse traditional practices in families and in different social groups. The general tendency of Indians to follow tradition and religious practices can be one of the root causes of it. The discrimination faced by girl children in the different stages of their lives make them think and act according to the roles attributed to them. The girls in the recent fiction are no longer ready to be victims of such practices of gendering. They essentially develop a need to change the present anomalies towards girl children and gendering. The girl child protagonists do not expect any phenomenal changes in the attitude of adults to the children rather they try to think and act in their own way for an improved

state of livelihood for themselves. Though the study moves from the discrimination of girl children towards the empowerment of them, the present chapter deal only with the position of girl children in the adult world and the way girl children face discrimination in different walks of lives through different notable incidents.

The novels taken for study seek to find the gradual moulding of individual identity in children and its central role in leaving deep psychological impressions on children which may affect their future life. 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 and to raise their position at par with their privileged counterpart. Childhood, as a crucial stage in one's life, is taken as a platform for the further development of the individual. Authors are keen to go after the life of children presenting them in different fictional roles as a means of providing the readers a still relevant topic of interest. Recently there have been serious discussions about the natural developmental roles of children and the adult's shaping of it according to their personal needs and the needs of the society. In our social situation, children may not be allowed to grow or live according to their wishes.

The specialised roles and rules for children in the adult world vary according to the cultural codes and gender roles of the society. And also roles attributed to children show a naturalistic agenda of not going off track to the usual pattern of the positioning of a child's life in the adult's world. Commenting on Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* (1993) in the forward of the novel, Lakshmi Holmstrom adds that the "child's world constantly jostles against the adult world and the contradictions of that world" (9). The studies on the child's natural tendency to go against the attributed roles that restrict them in the limited spaces around the home have revealed that the

children have turned rebellious. Children, especially girl children tend to be more rebellious in recent fiction. The struggle is to get access to more natural spaces they need to build their own individual characteristics devoid of the social and cultural frames.

Children who appear in novels seem to live markedly different lives in the presence of adults and in the peer groups. Children thus seem to manage personal spaces in a very intelligent manner to build and nurture individualistic viewpoints and unique behavioural patterns negotiating or rejecting the adult influences. This is true especially of girl children pushed to step into the role of responsible adults in their early age. Novelists attempt to highlight this unique approach of girl children that helps them to enhance their position as a real child rather than acting out the role of a miniature woman, by being themselves.

Different thematic approaches are introduced in the fiction that appeared since the 1980s by providing prominent roles to girl children in order to assert their role in society. Post 1980s novels have presented girl children at different stages of life their growth, facing the social atrocities and also overcoming these difficulties with their own way of finding solution to it. Writers never leave a situation unresolved in the case of girl children. Indian English fiction that appeared after the 1980s shows a great shift in focus from the adult protagonists to prominent child characters who deal with the issues of gendering in more effective ways. The major aim of writers seems to divert reader's attention towards various disparities prevalent in the contemporary social system. Children are introduced in such circumstances to peep into the issue for a better view of it.

Girl children in India face shocking discrimination in the gendered spaces of society. The concern for a more free and flexible space for girl children, and the difficulties faced by girl children in the restricted socially constructed private spaces must have initiated novelists to focus their attention on more child-centred novels which reveal the need for a better living condition for girl children in society. In those novels, it is seen that the life of children evidently shifts between two separate spheres i.e. the space created by adults, to be named as the adult world and the hidden space created by children themselves, called as the child's world. The life of children moves between the world of adults and the world of children and vice versa. The conflict that arises between the two spaces provides the soil for the greater characteristics in children. The influence of adults can be of such intensity that children may not be able to survive against the specific set of rules created for them. Boys find it easy to cope with the environment provided for their growth because of the patriarchal nature of the living conditions in India. Girl children in many ways are puzzled to find the awkward situation they are in, and the reason being the basic gender difference. In such circumstances, girl children show their power and ability in their own ways not to cope with the situation anymore.

Novelists have taken up the responsibility of raising the issue to a serious level, to analyze and find out the reason behind the inequality faced by girl children in modern India. Children grow up in specially constructed surroundings which are set for the proper development of the child. Adults are bound to provide better soil for physical growth and development, intellectual advancement and psychological progression and the overall development of the child. The child grows under the supervision of the adult witnesses and understands things that are unknown to him.

The adults are their role models whom they imitate consciously or unconsciously as part of their daily life.

Literary works which appeared in the recent times highlight the special position of girl children in the adult world. The gendered spaces seem to obstruct the freedom of girl children and limit the activities of girl children compared to boys. The spatial analysis of childhood allows us to find out the root cause of the discrimination, and this is done in recent Indian English fiction by introducing the theme of traumatic childhood and its effects on the young mind, through prominent girl child characters. The general trend reveals that children are at their best narrating events around without prejudices. They raise questions in situations where adults prefer to be silent. Thus recent Indian English fiction seems to put children in the midst of family problems and social issues for them to question and fight. Children are introduced in the midst of such circumstances to find out the exact nature and depth of the issue. The approach of children and the approach of adults to such situations seem to be different, and the children's approach of blatant intrusion into the core of the issue seems to provide a clearer perspective on social and family issues.

All these novels collectively reveal this new trend in Indian English fiction. The stories written in the last three decades seem to be a sincere attempt at examining the present state of girl child in India, and they also herald a new social reformation which the country is badly in need of in the present social situation. The young writers of India are keen to present social realities in their fictional works. Princess R Lakshman in the Author's Note to her novel *The Girl child* mentions that her book ". . . was inspired by many real life events that occur in lives of women in India" (195). Though female foeticide is illegal in Indian society, there are places where people still kill their



girl children before or after their birth. P R Lakshman's novel projects the atrocities towards girl children as an inevitable practice driven by social, cultural and economic necessities. Being part of the patriarchal society elder women in the household also become part of such practices unwittingly. Kishwar Desai, in the 'Author's Note' appended to her work *Witness the Night* clearly states that ". . . the characters and places in this book are entirely fictional, the events which take place are not" (212). Ben East's article on Kishwar Desai further confirms the reason behind Desai's writing of such a novel. Desai reveals in the interview that, "The linkages and the narrative are a fiction, but the rest, I'm afraid to say, is all true . . . . The book is a conflation of two real events: a woman came to my office in Punjab who learnt her parents had given her opium when she was born, . . . girl in Bengal who had been accused of murdering her entire family" (2).

So it can be said that the novel is not a fictional account of some imaginary events, but a sincere record of the cruel realities that are still present in our country. These novels are in a way making the readers think that it is high time that such atrocities against girl children are stopped. In such contexts, the adult world becomes a threat for girl children. The protectors become destroyers and the children rise against them to survive and to stop the illogical traditional gender priorities.

Like Kishwar Desai, Mrinal Pande too packs her fiction with realities. She mentions in the 'Author's Preface' to her novel *Daughter's Daughter* that they are "stories of survival" (10). Her own words in the 'Author's Preface' to her novel *Daughter's Daughter*, reflect her concern about such issues that are prevalent in India. She states how girl children face so many difficult situations in life before and after their birth. "I know even as I write this, girls are being destroyed in wombs by new

techniques, being tortured and burnt for dowry by older ones, and crimes against women are generally registering an undeniable increase everywhere in the world. No, survival is no easier for our young girls today than it was for us” (10-11).

The above statement clearly indicates that these stories are not just stories but they are ways of retelling some social realities. The five novels briefly discussed above focus on these realities through their female protagonists drawn from different family backgrounds. There is an immediate remedy demanded by each of these novels in terms of redressing the issues discussed. The novels seem to share situations in the life of girl children in connection with the social, religious and cultural practices that are deep-rooted in family lives. All these novels highlight events and situations in the life of girl children where the adults interfere to suppress them resulting in the impaired intellectual development of girl children.

These novels also discuss how preference for male children is the root of the mistreatment of girl children. The preference for sons is an age-old practice in the Indian context. It is part of the cultural system of India. The well-known psychoanalyst and writer Sudhir Kakar mentions this age-old preference for sons in his work *The Inner World* (2012). He finds that “. . . preference for a son when a child is born is as old as Indian society itself” (67). He mentions Vedic verses and confirms the assertion of the need for sons in families. He says “Vedic verses pray that sons will be followed by still more male offspring, never by females” (67). Tradition is bound to these patriarchal systems of practices which demand the need for a son to carry the family lineage to extend it to the next generation. Many sociologists and psychologists from India and abroad have noted the neglect of female children leading to heartless disregard for daughters in rural north India. Affirming the observations of the well-

known cultural anthropologist Barbara Miller, Elizabeth Croll mentions that “. . . the ways in which an intense desire for sons . . . directly tied to the fatal neglect of daughters . . . as an indigenous method of birth or family-size and gender control . . . .” (qtd. in 55). She is shocked to find that, it is “. . . so serious that young females could be deemed ‘endangered’ ” (qtd. in 55). The novels in recent times highlight such domestic events which explicitly portray the outcome of such heartless preference for sons and negligence towards girl children. Also, the necessity of sons remains valid through these sorts of religious customs that are still prevalent today.

In India, sons are believed to be the real wealth of the family. The chosen novels repeatedly assert this notion practised in different families and in different places all over India. The dowry system and the patrilineal system in families affirm the patriarchal practices in many religious and cultural groups. Indian patrilineal system affirms that it is the duty of sons to take care of the family and its name. Meenakshi Gupta opines that “In India, most couples prefer male children because of the feeling that boys will carry on the family name” (44). The daughters are believed to be part of her husband’s family but sons are part of the family. Sons contribute to the wealth of the family as part of his duty to enhance wealth by finding suitable jobs and bringing a good amount of dowry to the family. But girls never contribute to the family. She is the one who snatches family income as dowry when she gets married and thus considered a burden. Kakar rightly observes that, “. . . a daughter normally is an unmitigated expense, someone who will never contribute to the family income and who, upon marriage, will take away a considerable part of her family’s fortune as dowry” (68). But still, the family considers it necessary to give the daughters sufficient amount of dowry while they marry her off, as they believe that it increases the prestige of the family and it also assures safe life for a girl in her husband’s family. In many

contexts the dissatisfactions from the in-laws have led untimely to the death of the newlywed brides due to ‘unfortunate’ accidents or suicides.

The position of a girl child in family is basically a social construction which demands much valued life for a son who is to become the saviour of the family. According to Vibhuti Patel Indian society blindly prefers a male child. Religion gives importance to the male heir and thus female children are always a liability. Patel refers to some traditional blessing welcoming only sons and not daughters. She says “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’ ” (Patel 7). These prayers and wishes carried through generations also carry with them the connotations of unwelcome daughters in the families. The novels discuss many such situations in which they openly declare their preference for sons and only sons. In the novel *The Girl Child*, Priya encounters similar circumstances from a family which she thought to be the most loving and caring. After Priya’s marriage to Gurveer, she too becomes a victim of the maniacal dimensions of obsession for male children in her husband’s family. Priya painfully recollects: “Papa-ji places his strong flat palm on my head and blesses me to give birth to a healthy son” (82). Priya wonders why the family members are so concerned about the gender of the child. But later her mother in law explains to her that “. . . what better joy for any woman than to have a son for your first born? Later may be try for girl, but only if you want. But we have Harpreet already, nah? No need for another girl” (93). From her mother-in-law, Priya understands that the family is not ready for another girl child.

In another instance, Priya encounters a beggar at a temple who wishes her a boy child in order to please her, “Bibbi ji, ek paisa de do, dekhna Bhagwaan tumko beta

dega” (151). Priya becomes astonished to hear the beggar woman pleading her to donate one rupee so that God will grant her a son. These new experiences shock the sensibility of Priya. Priya’s sister in law, Paramjeet had already suffered the consequences of giving birth to a girl child. She recalls “Since our wedding day every single person in the Choudhary clan had been blessing me to have a son. Not once had anyone mentioned the joy or even the normalcy of having a girl” (4). In Indian families, the elder women teach the newly married girls the customs and practices of the family. In most of the cases, the elder women are helpless to skip these practices because they fear being thrown out of the family and also that they don’t want to risk the wrath of the ancestors and gods by deviating from the practices of the past.

In the novel *Daughters’ Daughter*, Tinu’s mother tells her how she cried when “. . . a third daughter had been born unto her” (52). Tinu’s grandmother too was worried and wishes, “Oh for a son, that could have rid her daughter of those repeated child-bearings” (52-53). But when a son is born to the family the grandmother tells Tinu and Dinu that “You too have a brother now. . . . He’ll protect you and carry on your father’s name” (85). Tinu observes this discrimination clearly in many contexts at home and explains how she understands the position of herself and of other girls in the family through these incidents. Tinu remembers the privileges her cousin Anu has in comparison with the girls in the house for being one of the male members of the family. She uses the expression “icing on the cake” (76) to refer to men at Grandmother’s house. Anu is the adorable son of her uncle and Tinu is surprised to see how privileged he is. “The youngest man being Anu, the boy, the male heir to the line. If he does not want to study, the teacher is sent away. If he has cold, he can lie in bed and suck mints and not rinse his mouth later” (76). What she tries to reveal here is that men are always given more preference and freedom than the women at grandmother’s

house. She uses the expression of “icing” to show that men are always liked and preferred more. Also after the birth of her brother, she witnesses the increased attention on the boy; “My mother is smiling with pleasure, and my younger sister, unattended, is whimpering nearby” (84).

These shocking situations in the adult world make children understand how complex is the life of girl children in Indian society. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter*, when Tinu's mother denies a bowl full of special broth after the birth of a son, grandmother compels her. “Drink it up, drink it all up, . . . you will be breastfeeding a son this time” (85). The extra care for the health of the boy child accounts for the shocking accounts of malnourished girl child in Indian society. The extra nutrition offered to the male child comes at the cost of severe undernourishment of female children. The girl child is often deprived of primary health care like breastfeeding. Mona Khare and Arunprabha Khare point out that “A number of anthropological studies have revealed the fact that girl infants are breastfed less frequently, for shorter durations and over shorter periods than boys” (210). In such circumstances, girls are brought up with decreased immunity. In many cases, it is done in anticipation of the next pregnancy and the hope for a boy child soon after the birth of a girl, a way to alleviate the thought of the bad luck that just happened. It also refers that “Breastfeeding inhibits fertility, so households that have not met their desired number of sons will stop breastfeeding children earlier in hopes that the next child will be a son” (Bharadwaj, Dahl, and Sheth 255). Because of these unhealthy practices, the healthy growth of a girl child becomes a real challenge in the society. But when a son is born, mother is given more nutritious foods so that the son grows healthy and powerful. And also there is no hurry for the birth of another child.

Novels deal with such malpractices with the objective of seeking public attention. The situation presented in *Witness the Night* is quite unique. It refers to gender discrimination in its shocking dimensions. The Punjabi Atwal family in the novel is not yet ready for a girl child. This family represents many such families in Punjab which still wipe out their girl children in the new age with the aid of new technologies. They just go for abortion or kill the newborn when it turns out to be a girl. Young women who are the mothers of the girl children cannot resist the pressure of the elders of the family when a collective decision is taken to abort the girl child because of the fear of estrangement and lack of sympathy from any quarter. While referring to the unacceptable male-female ratio in various states in India, Darshan S Tatla concludes that “In the post-independence period, Punjab continues to trail behind other Indian states” (110). According to the senses of 2001 Punjab marked “. . . just 793 girls per 1000 boys, the lowest among the Indian provinces” (Tatla 110) though the Indian law prohibits such atrocities. Statistics reveal that the killings still go on and most of them are not reported.

The preference for sons thus leads to atrocities towards girl children which is the key theme in most of the recent fiction dealing with girl child protagonists. The mad rush after male child makes people compromise family values. There are occasions in the novel *Witness the Night* where the illegitimate son of Sharda is welcomed with utmost joy. When Rahul, Sharda’s son came home they keep him dressed as a girl to ward off evil eyes. “. . . he was being brought up as a girl. I thought he was a girl when I came to the house because he was dressed in a frock and had long hair” (95). According to Durga “. . . they wanted to prevent the evil eye from falling on him. So he was made to wear frocks and ribbons” (95). They can’t afford to lose a boy even if it is the illegitimate son of their daughter. Sharda, the mother of the illegitimate son, is

admitted to a mental asylum after much torture and was about to be killed for conceiving the child of a married man. They decide to spare her life when they come to know from the amino synthesis test that it is a boy child. This incident shows that irrespective of the legitimacy of the child boys are always welcomed.

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* gives us another perspective of son preference practiced in the adult world. The first born girl child Sarita faces discrimination when Dhruva, a male child is born to her parents. In all celebrations and festive activities he is given more importance and preference than her. She remembers, “There was always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday... My birthdays were almost the same . . . a festive lunch . . . an aarti in the evening; but there was no puja” (169). And the girl too is made to believe that it is not the same to be a boy or a girl. In such circumstances, young girls are taught to be content with whatever they receive from elders. Girls learn early in their life that they have to sacrifice many comforts and desires for being girls.

In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, the narrator explains how Bidhata Purush, a deity, comes down to earth to decide the fortune of newborn babies and never comes for Anju and Sudha the first night they were born. Their aunt tells them that “. . . Bidhata Purush doesn’t come for girl babies” (18). The girls have already heard the elders talking about them that “. . . girl-babies who are so bad luck that they cause their fathers to die even before they are born” (18). Because the fathers of both daughters were believed to be dead in some accident in their adventurous journey of treasure hunt. The various events intertwined to the plot of the novels explain how the girl children are denied in India. As John. P. Jones rightly observes,



[ . . . ] among all the people of India the birth of a daughter is the most unwelcome of domestic events. The evils which surely awaits her, and the greater possibilities of sorrow and suffering which surround her, the great burden of expense and of trouble which her training, and especially her marriage, will entail upon the family –all combine to make her birth a much dreaded event. (158)

The sorrow of the birth of a girl is alleviated only when a son is born to the family. But in the contexts of no sons at all, there will always be a surrogate son who may not be a biological son adopted from within the family circle, or a male heir adopted from outside the family. This male intruder takes over the place of the eldest daughter in the family. This dominance of a male child in the family is a usual feature of Indian culture and the recent Indian fiction reflects on the various permutations of this practice. It affirms the fact that son is a basic necessity for a family. Some religious or cultural rituals are performed by only sons in India. Kakar points out “The presence of a son is absolutely necessary for the proper performance of many sacraments, especially those carried out upon the death of parents and imperative to the well-being of their souls” (*Inner World* 68). The general religious and ritualistic nature of Indian society makes it very essential to have sons. Indians believe in rebirth and salvation of souls through proper sacraments. So many families cannot think of living their lives without male children to do the death rites for them. Sometimes this leads to adoption of male children even if there are female children of their own in the family. In Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, protagonist Sarita thinks of the predicament of her family when she heard about the death of her mother: “. . . her first thought when she heard of her mother’s death had been . . . who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her” (21). Shashi Deshpande’s novel explores the context of

this particular tendency in Indian families. After the death of Dhruva and the marriage of Sarita the family gives shelter to a boy named Madhav who is in no way related to the family. He lives with them as a family member and is preferred over their own child Sarita because the family is trying to find consolation for the lack of a male child in him.

Kishwar Desai also mentions the practice of adopting sons in families in the novel *Witness the Night*. In the novel, Durga wonders when the family adopts a boy when there are their own girls as legal heirs. “. . . I knew now why Amla used to say girls are nothing but trouble –which is why my father adopted Jitu, his own brother’s son” (68). These similar events led to the conclusion that a son must be there in a family, either their own or a surrogate one. It is a basic necessity in Indian families. From the world of adults’ children encounter such situations from which they understand that there is a special position for sons in every family. The gender biases within the family lower the position of girl children because girls are not believed to be a necessary part of the family.

The discrimination towards girl children in families depends sometimes on the position of parents in the family. Children learn from the adult world that their position and value in the family depends on the position of their parents. If the girl child stays in the household of its mother, the child is treated badly in comparison with other male children in the family and also in comparison with the children of male sons. Thus children learn how their own position in the family is dependent on the sex of their parent. Children are better treated in the family of their father and at the same time, inferior position is bestowed on them in their maternal houses especially if it’s a female child. Daughter’s daughters are twice neglected as they are daughters and also

they are daughters of daughters. The novel *Daughter's Daughter* by Mrinal Pande highlights this discrimination in the adult world. In the novel, the events highlight how the girls are neglected in the family of their mothers. The novel records the preferential treatment of children in the families of their fathers. Being daughter's daughter is to twice suffer the negligence and inattention of the family. The differential status of children in the family and in society is believed to be the result of the inner structure of gendering in the society and in the structuring of social groups. In the novel *Daughters Daughter* girl children Tinu and Dinu, at their maternal grandmother's house understand and accept their inferior statuses. Tinu observes, "Anu, the son of their daughter, would be treated to a slice of mango, or a toffee from his hands. Never us. We were daughters of a daughter. We earned indulgent smiles at best." (26) In another context, Anu explicitly says to Tinu and Dinu "You sit there. You are Daughter's children! We'll sleep here near Grandmother" (31). Children at a very young age understand the hierarchy in the family. In Tinu's uncle's house also son's children enjoy more love and care. The peacock made of Zari which Tinu finds in their uncle's house is forcefully bestowed into Anu's hands with the interference of adults when they find the children fighting for it. Tinu remarks about Anu, "He is the son's son he knows, and he cannot imagine anyone refusing him anything in this house for long" (34). Thus the sons are given utmost care and consideration. Sons are also exempted from some difficult religious rituals like fasting. Tinu remembers how Anu was given consideration while others fast in festivals. "Anu . . . does not fast but is given all special treats because he is the son's son. I am a daughter's daughter. I must fast to get special treatment" (46).

Tinu's observations reveal that the adult world imposes such stereotypical gender norms even on small children in India. Children internalise and practice it

internally imitating the adult male or female. The young girls understand these gender norms through various practices at home and live according to the rules of the family. Tinu says “I had been denied the holy prasad of Ishta- the family deity” (72). She explains the reason given to them by the aunts of their cruel act to children. “. . . but when Dinu and I edged close, The Aunts had smiled and said no, it was not to be had by the daughter’s daughters. It could only be given to son’s children . . .” (72). This statement becomes a blow to the child Tinu and she had no way but to accept her inferior status in the family for being the daughter’s child. She seems to be trapped in the family without being able to find any solution. Tinu realises there is very little that she could do to alter it.

The adult world presented through the novels highlights many atrocities and disturbing practices which affect the life of girl children. Girl children become victims of gender discrimination even before their birth in more shocking ways. Sex determination and selective abortion are practiced in many parts of India where girl children are treated as burdens by the family members. Female foeticide or femicide is practised in many families, rich or poor, to escape the future money loss through dowry. The adult world thus regulates the birth and growth of children according to their gender. As Anita Singh puts it, "Discrimination against women starts in the foetus, proceeds through systematic undernourishment in childhood and deprivation of education in adolescence, and ends in domestic violence and bride burning" (66). The hatred towards female fetuses and atrocities towards young babies are practiced in many places in India. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has marked such instances in her novel and she explains how the new Indian women handle such issues. Apart from Divakaruni Shashi Deshpande, Mrinal Pande, Kishwar Desai and P R Lakshman have included such instances in their girl child centred novels. It could be a way of asserting

the present state of girl children in India, and to highlight its relevance in contemporary India.

In the novel *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni mentions similar occurrences which explicitly portray different practices to know the sex of the unborn child. In the novel Divakaruni deliberately puts such instances to make people know how such practices become customary and normal in the Indian household. The conversation between the Sudha's mother in law and their relative and regular visitor Aunt Tarini, reveals that she already knows the sex of the unborn child by amino synthesis test, though such practices are considered illegal in India. "After all we wouldn't want anything to happen to my grandson, would we?" (204). Sudha didn't know how Aunt Tarini came to know about the gender of the child. Later she finds out that the practice of amino synthesis test is done in every family to retain sons and to abort daughters. On another occasion when Sudha doesn't conceive for long, her mother-in-law takes her to a temple. "Pray to the goddess for a son" (233) Mother-in-law tells Sudha, which meant to pray only for a grandson. Sudha's words to her sister Anju further affirm the displeasure and hatred towards girl child in Sanyal family. ". . . when the test showed that it was a girl . . . my mother-in-law said the eldest child of the Sanyal family has to be a male –that is how it's been for the last five generations. She said it's not fitting, it will bring the family shame and ill luck . . ." (259). Compelled to leave her in-laws to save her child Sudha comes home. At her own home from her own mother she hears another version of coping with the in-laws by aborting girl child foetus. Her mother says to her "A woman can have many children, after all, but a husband is forever" (265-66).

After the birth of a girl, many families in North India try to kill the child using various methods. In the novel *Witness the Night*, the mass murder of a family occurs as the result of Durga's revenge, against the killings of girl children in the family by the adults. The death of her baby sisters and the abandonment of her sister Sharda was enough to make her think of wiping off the whole family to prevent further disaster.

As mentioned earlier, in most of the circumstances, family members are compelled to be part of the atrocities because of the social structuring of individual families. Some instances in the novel reveal how other family members including men take care of the girls, but at the same time it also shows the tradition of compelling people to hate girl children. In the novel *Witness the Night*, Jitu, Sharda's brother, who is actually her own cousin adopted by the family because of the lack of male children, adores Sharda. Durga mentions in her note that, "*Jitu always adored Sharda. He used to call her Sita when he wanted to tease her, because he said as a little boy he had discovered her buried in a pot in the ground*" (82). For Jitu she was the mythological Sita, the daughter of earth mother who came from the earth and with all dignity went back to the earth mother when Sita was not ready to accept any more denial from her own people. But here Sharda's story is different. Durga's description of Sharda is interestingly similar to the account by many survivors who faced atrocities through their own family's unwillingness to accept girl children in the family anymore. Durga notes, "*At first they gave her opium and put her in a pot of milk and twirled it around. Miraculously the milk turned to butter and the crying child still lived. The opium did not put her to sleep. The midwife got worried and ran away, because she thought Sharda had inverted feet, the sure sign of a witch . . .*" (82). But the incident never stopped her grandmother. "*. . . my grandmother picked up courage and instructed that the wretched girl be buried in a clay pot in the earth at night. Unfortunately for her,*

*the dogs dug her out and Jitu brought her home, still crying for milk*" (82). Jitu not knowing the plot tries to make the baby alive by feeding it. *"He soaked milk in cotton wool and fed her as he did the little puppies. And so Sharda became Sita, Ram's wife, was also found in the earth. She became Jitu's special child"* (82). Unlike Sita, Sharda didn't have the option to take a decision to leave her household with dignity. On the contrary, she had to live according to the decision of her family members who turned her sane world in to an insane one through the torturous life in the mental asylum. Jitu had to be part of this plot as part of the adult world. But Durga was never ready to try her luck. She knew her life can be snatched anytime like Sharda's who had to suffer it again in her life when she tried to choose a man in her life. Durga wonders *"How is it that a girl can in sixteen years, go through the same experiences twice over. Except that they couldn't put her in a clay pot, she was too big now"* (82). Durga understands that if Jitu can turn against Sharda, anything can happen to herself too.

The situations around her go out of control when her own parents turn against her. Desai's confession regarding the plot and the blending of real-life instances in her fiction is a real instigator of thought in the new generation of people in India to think before they blindly follow the tradition. The world of adults in these circumstances becomes a threat for children like Durga who finds the solution to it getting involved in more crimes. The investigations through the novels lead to find the strange behaviour in girl children in the recent fiction in the adult world will surely take the observers towards the impact of the undercurrent of a social hatred towards the young girls. The collective consciousness of the inferiority instilled with the female gender can further lead to the social positioning of male and female gender in the family structure according to their power. The main key of power comes from the financial freedom and the ability to maintain financial independence. But in such cases, duties

bestowed on girl children partly fails them to gain equality. In Indian families daughters are entirely different from sons: Sons are the saviours of the family, so the future of the family is bestowed on sons.

The growing girl child understands the meaning of her life from the adult world. They understand a notable disparity between their lives and the life of boys in the same household. In most situations the superiority bestowed on a boy child is based on the anticipated benefits from the future heir of the family. When sons are given special treatment in the novels referred, it also unabashedly accepts the fact that Indian social system welcomes such preferences for sons apparently on selfish grounds, obviously with the fear of dissipating into the flood of poor people. To safeguard the financial status of the family the culture demands such a methodology. The wealth of the family has to be protected for the future generations and also the family name and prestige has to be upheld. Discussing the different outlooks towards daughters and sons In India Elizebeth Croll affirms that “. . . sons are openly spoken of as the only important sources of permanent familial support and financial security” (118). The preferential position given to male children could be linked with the future benefits and support from the male child who could be the rightful heir to the family. On the contrary, the girls have only a temporary existence in the house of her parents as she belongs to a different family where her husband belongs. Thus the familial responsibilities stress her future role as a responsible and obedient wife than a loving daughter. The mother has to give her daughter healthier guidance at home so that nobody should blame the girl or her mother for not following responsibilities at in-laws after marriage. In all traditional families, girls are endowed with a symbolic significance towards the family. The family reputation is in the hands of her as she represents the culture and the tradition of her own family wherever she goes. So she is



not allowed to do anything against the will of the family. Thus the name and prestige of a family depend mostly on the power and the wealth of its men and the modesty of its women.

In *Daughter's Daughter* Prakash, the deaf-mute cousin of Tinu is sent to predict the sex of Tinu's mother's next child. ". . . he has made the sign of money box with his hands. That certainly meant a boy didn't it? Girls were bad cheques, they were like auctioneer's decrees. Boys brought in money, land, gold- everything. Girls just took away things" (83). The girl children are always thought as a liability on the family. Girl children are not expected to contribute to the financial requirements of the family as they will live their future life after marriage in the house of their husbands. Rather she is expected to take the role of other elder women in the family with proper womanly virtues with the expectation of serving the in law's family. In many contexts, they are expected to take the role of a good mother or the caretaker in the family with limited resources and powers with hardly any contributions expected to come from them in the social realm. Thus, the duty bestowed on women and the expectations of girl children are different from their male counterpart. Because women are not expected to make money and the money is not expected to be spent on them too, except the compulsory dowry. Though the dowry system is illegal since 1961 with the Dowry Prohibition Act, the practice still goes on (Willerton 131). The instances of giving dowry are not reported as it could be a threat to the future of the bride. Many families think of it as an investment without returns and it is practiced in communities throughout the country because marriage means bonding of two families rather than two individuals; and it is a sponsored way of advertising the virtues and wealth of a family to other families and places.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita is expected to complete her education quickly to get married to a suitable gentleman. Her dream to become a doctor is viewed as a financial burden by her mother. “But she is a girl” (144), says Sarita’s mother when she tells her father that she wants to become a doctor. Her mother’s later conversation with her father is interestingly true to many similar cases in Indian society. She says, “. . . medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper. . . . Let her go for a B.Sc. . . . you can get her married in two years and your responsibility will be over” (144). Marriage always comes as a compulsory event in a girl’s life, even she chooses it or not. Also marriage expenses and dowry is always a threat to the family when a girl is born. In such circumstances, the family cut short other expenses on the girl child which seriously hamper the life choices of her. Here it becomes more and more evident that in India individuals are less important than families. An Individual identifies himself or herself in relation to the parents, grandparents or the entire family itself. The financial position of the family and the patrilineal system structures individual members of the family. In such circumstances, the less privileged will always be the young girls. Approaches of the families towards girl children differ according to the social, cultural and familial contexts. Thus sons are treated with care and are given more freedom. The conclusion doesn’t mean that girls have no duties towards the family. But the duties girl children are given are entirely different, just to safeguard the family name which is again a trap to follow the patriarchy. In this way, proper code of conduct is given to young girls in every stage of growth till adulthood.

In the adult world, girls are compelled to follow the code of conduct of the society. Indian society gives respect only to girls with proper womanly virtues. In the

novel *Sister of My Heart*, it becomes notable that the improper behaviour of girls causes serious damage to the status of the family in the society. “Do they care that they have smeared blackest kali on your faces? Of course not. Do they care that in this one afternoon they have undone everything we have been trying to build up for years” (79). The response from Nalini, the mother of Sudha, is noteworthy when she comes to know that her daughter Sudha went out to watch a movie with her cousin Anju. The coincidence of a man sitting near to them brings more damage to the situation, as it is not allowed for girls to have any connection with any men before their marriage. And also if anybody watches them sitting beside a man or talking to one is a matter of shame. It is expected that a girl should not have any association with any man or she should not try boys’ tricks of watching movies or going out in town without the escort of parents.

In the novel *The Girl Child* Pande mentions the code of conduct to be observed by children in any reputed family.

A good son or daughter sees their life partner for the first time on their wedding day. A good son or daughter makes love to their life partner for the first time the day after the wedding. And a good son or daughter announces they are expecting a baby six weeks later, at most. An even better son or daughter announces they are having a son. (56)

Apart from girl children, the social system also asserts the proper code of conduct for all its adult family members. In reality, adults transfer cultural codes to the young ones in the family. Thus the adult world is the key to the younger ones towards the value systems and rules of the society. The family name, as the people believe, depends on the behaviour of the family members. When it comes to girls, things

become complicated when she is restricted to move around freely in public. It becomes an offence to go out without the escort of family members, because the family considers it unlikely for girls to go out and participate in such entertainments, as it may make them bit on the lower side of perfect girls whose duty is to keep the family balance by being a perfect girl according to the social norms. Michelle Superle, analysing the recent Indian English novels states that,

Duty is a central concept in novels, and one which extends beyond girls. This could be due to the fact that Hindu society was traditionally structured around the idea of dharma, which required each person to do her or his duty; learning to do one's duty was an important component of the *niti* taught in the *Panchatantra*. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that literary critics identify a pattern by which girls find a balance between not only tradition and modernity, but also self and duty. These are also crucial tasks for Indian girls [ . . . ]. (50)

Anju defends her act by telling the mothers that “We just went to the cinema. You're making it sound as if we went and got pregnant” (79). But these offences impinge on their freedom and the family considers this as the best way of punishing girl children-clipping their wings. “Sudha and Anju, since you seem incapable of being trusted, no more pocket money for you until you start college. Give the clothes you bought to Ramur Ma – she will dispose of them. I will let the nuns know that from now on you are to be kept in your classrooms each day through recess” (81). In such circumstances, the family believes that the reputation can be ruined by the act of their daughters. Nalini explains her act, “Only her mother to watch out for the reputation she is determined to ruin. That is why I've decided that she is not to leave the house, not even for school, unless Ramur Ma accompanies her” (82). It is revealed that every

individual is expected of certain duties and is to live according to the value systems of the society. The events like these lead again to further complicated conceptual framework of the society. One such thing is the purity concepts of women in India.

Purity of body and mind of girls are considered to be of utmost importance by the society. The body of girls are considered as an epitome of purity. In their younger ages girl children are treated as the replica of goddesses. Netty Bonouvrie's studies of Indian subcontinent reveal the indisputable godliness bestowed on women and young girls in India. She finds that "In many Hindu families, young, pre-pubertal girls are worshipped as manifestations of goddess: sometimes even of a mother goddess" (121). Bonouvrie also documents similar practices in Indian society: ". . . reason for their veneration is their great purity. However the loss of that purity . . . entails that the girl becomes a danger to the family" (121).

According to traditional Hindu practices, ". . . [a] girl who has not menstruated is considered to be . . . an embodiment of a goddess" (V.Das 91). Different manifestations of goddesses are bestowed on her depending on the circumstances. In some social groups, girl children are treated as goddess Lakshmi, the god of wealth and are believed to bring wealth in the family. The different contexts which mention such imposition of godliness in girls in the novels reveal that it is compulsory for girls to grow according to the expectation of the family as an epitome of purity, and also it is a way to alleviate the sorrow of the birth of a girl child in the family. In the novel *The Girl Child* the girl Harpreet, nicknamed as Preetu was unwelcome in the family. She is the first child in the family, daughter of the protagonist Priya's brother-in-law and is expected to be a boy. Knowing the displeasure of the family Priya's brother-in-law announces the birth of the girl as "Lakshmi aaii hei, Goddess of wealth is here,

Lakshmi aaii hei” (7) He announces the event like this because he too knows that the imposition of godliness may alleviate the damage already done in the family.

In some other contexts, the worship of a girl child as goddess happens when she gives way to her baby brother. The girl child who is born before the birth of a boy is sometimes referred to as Goddess. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu wonders how the status of her sister is elevated to the position of Goddess after the birth of her brother. “This is my Laxmi daughter . . . She has brought a brother on her back” (85). The luck of a girl is always determined by a male heir. It also implies the wealth she has brought to the family in the form of her younger brother.

In the novel *The Girl Child*, Priya’s mother considers her elder sister as their Lakshmi. “Her karma's fine. She brought us Lakshmi” (86). But things are different when the parents expect the second child after the birth of a first girl child. In such circumstances, the second child has to be a male child because the family will never be ready for further damages to the mother or to the entire family anymore. Priya’s parents already had a girl child, the elder sister Pouja. And Priya’s mother was compelled to give birth to a son to save the family from further humiliation. “Coming seven years after my big sister was born, the second child had to be a boy. At any cost. Multiple trips to the temple. Offerings of money, prasadam, red Mata-shingaar shawls. Anything to please the goddess” (30). All believed that the next child would definitely be a boy. And to add further confirmation on their presumption “ . . . a dread-locked swami at the Durga temple told my mother that the second child would definitely be a boy” (30). But it turned to be a girl again and the issues at her own home begin with another unwelcome daughter. Here we can see that even when the family gives godly

status to young children, it will always be in connection with other male members and belief systems.

In the novel *The Girl Child* Paramjeet, Priya's sister in law, remembers her predicament. She shares her dilemma with Priya. "There was always demand for a boy. Your Pa-ji is the oldest son in this house and someone has to carry the Choudhary name forward" (8). After Harpreet's birth Paramjeet literally enters into a do or die situation. But surely with God's grace her second child turns to be a boy. "I don't know what I would've done if I'd another girl instead of Rannu" (8). She can't think of the life she will be leading if she gives birth to a girl again. Girl children are often considered as epitome of goddesses like Lakshmi who is to bring prosperity and wealth to the family. But the Choudhary family doesn't believe it that too. They are sure that, ". . . wealth has not come to us, wealth will be taken from us" (7). This is the concern of the family when it is a girl. Bi-ji, Priya's mother-in-law tells her that "Having a daughter is like watering a neighbour's plant'. You feed her, clothe her, educate her, invest in her, but at last she is paraaya dhan, a stranger's possession" (128).

The godliness and purity in a girl vanish after her first menstruation. She becomes a threat to the family and a threat to herself. Menstruation thus becomes a life-changing event in the life of a girl child. The adult world set such norms and believes and is imposed on the girl child. During menstruation women have to follow certain rules in the family. A menstruating girl is treated as dirty and impure. She is restricted to take part in any of the family ceremonies because her touch can defile even other human beings. Though these practices are traditional, it is still practised in many households in India. The practices and restrictions to girls during their

menstruation are different in different parts of the county but in almost all places menstruation means contamination.

In south Indian families, she is given a separate place to live and nobody touches her during the period of menstruation. Her sexuality after she has started menstruating is considered a source of danger to the family. According to Veena Das first menstruation in girls is celebrated and in some parts of India a special ceremony is held to “. . . announce the event to the near kin” (91). Veena Das further explains that, “The girl is henceforth treated as impure during menstruation and is subject to special taboos. The severity of taboos varies from region to region. Till recently, in many parts of southern India, menstruating women had to move to an ‘outhouse’ specially reserved for them” (V. Das 91). In some parts of India she can’t touch anything as it would defile or rot things. The family has to take care of the girl’s future and is put an eye on her constantly as she could even bring bad reputation to the family. The girl’s choices are restricted to the predilection of the family members. She has to keep herself away from boys which “. . . may completely confuse or bewilder the young girl who has not been taught to expect this” (V. Das 92).

Apart from the differences in practices with regard to the male child, the body of the female child has different implication in comparison with the male counterpart. After the first menstruation she instantly metamorphosed to a woman. She doesn’t need to have a mental development or maturity for this expected maturity. And she is to live like any elderly woman even if she is in her teens. Shashi Deshpande uses the word “curse” to explain it when she presents it in the case of her protagonist Sarita. “You’re a woman now” (123). Sarita’s mother tells her after she has started menstruating. “But she did not feel then that it made her any different. She was the



same Saru, with the burden of that curse added on her as an appendage each month” (123). Though the girl doesn’t feel of becoming adult because of psychological or physical immaturity, menstruation is in all sense a direct entry into the adult world.

The adults take it as their responsibility to prepare the girl child ready for marriage, because of her physical maturity beyond her psychological readiness. The fear of the girl being a threat to the family name is one reason to plan the life of the girl child before she becomes even aware of it. The social system bestows it as the responsibility of parents to get their girl children married to a suitable boy of their choice. The rule of marriage in Indian culture suggests that it must happen in the boundary of religion and caste system.

Caste system too affects the peaceful life of girl children in Indian society. The girl has to follow the undercurrent of caste system when it comes to her education, marriage and choosing a life partner for herself. As G M Dhaar and Robbani put it, it is “. . . the most striking and uncompromising feature of Indian society. . . a permanent attribute of an individual” (188). According to them an individual “. . . takes birth in his caste, marries within his caste, lives within his caste, and dies within his caste” (188). Individual freedom is restricted and there is very little possibility of thinking and acting outside the norms and demands of the caste system. The choices available for a girl within the rigidities of the caste system are minimal and she is expected to fit into the laws of her caste.

In many situations girl children are unable to tackle issues that they confront, on their own, because of lack of individual freedom. Though the caste system was introduced into the cultural context of India by the Aryans to indicate the different occupations followed by groups of people, gradually it led to a rigid classification of

people on the basis of their birth. Thus the unholy nexus of caste system, religious practices and gender norms took the control of the life of girl children. The life of a girl is lived in such a way that she doesn't get a chance to mingle and develop a relationship with people of other castes. Indians generally follow patrilineal system in it, girl is married off to other families after marriage. After marriage she is made to live according to the caste and customary practices at the in-laws.

Novels that deal with caste issues also discuss the place of girl children in relation to their caste. Events in novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Sister of My Heart*, *Witness the Night* reveal the fact that in the adult world caste system restricts the life of girl children according to its norms. Durga's sister Sharda was tortured for being in love with a low caste man. Durga notes "*It was to do with our high caste stature and the low caste stature of the man she wanted to be with. It was to do with her being a witch and a snake child and disobedient. It was to do with her being a girl*" (82). Durga here explains the outcome of her sister's love affair with a low caste man.

The expectation of family members goes like this. Sometimes the family will not think of compromise in implying such rigid rules on their children. If anybody goes against the will of the family, it will result in to abandonment of the person. This usually happens with daughters and rarely with sons. In the novel *Witness the Night* the girls are always under surveillance and boys are not. Durga and Sharda are compelled to grow under the rigid rules, but their brothers are not controlled when they use drugs or entertained by prostitutes. Though the family still worry about the bad behaviour of the boys, but are ready to accept them as they are. But girls, when they try to live their lives out of the rigid value systems of culture, caste system and

social values; they are completely wiped off from the family. The girl children are just tolerated and not loved or wanted. Thus if a girl questions any of the traditional patriarchal systems or the resultant rules inside the family, she is excommunicated; even her traces are removed from family records even from family pictures. The girls Durga, Sarita, Sharda try to live their lives outside the norms and customs of the family so they had to face the same predicament.

In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the girl child Sarita chooses her life according to her wishes. She prefers to pursue her study not succumbing herself to an early marriage and, later chooses a life partner of her own choice. The result of showing her strength and confidence in living her life on her own ability and strength makes the family abandon her without leaving any trace of her in the family. “There were no photographs of herself, she noticed without emotion. As if she had indeed annihilated” (58), Sarita realised coming back home after a long while.

The novel *Witness the Night* also marks a similar incident. The social worker Simran visits Durga’s house after the mass murder comes to know that the girls didn’t exist for the family members. “. . . there weren’t any photographs of either Durga or her sister. There were a few other portraits of men and women, probably other family members, but it is as though the two girls have never existed” (49). Durga and her sister Sharda are the representative figures of girls facing gender discrimination in India. Sharda lost her life. Durga somehow escaped another tragedy. These children are just like the outcasts of the adult world.

The lives of girl children in the novels reveal that they are not treated as belonging to their own family. They are either belong to the future husband’s family or belong nowhere. So the girls are always brainwashed to link their future in connection

with other male members, whether it is their father, brother, husband or son. But when the girls enter into their teens they are compelled to restructure their lives according to the ideal womanhood accepted by the society. Sarita's mother also thinks from the same point of view. Mother carefully makes her child also believe that there is something mysterious about being a woman. And being that, her sole responsibility is to get married to a handsome boy and live the rest of her life taking care of her husband and in-laws. In some way, the influence of this thought opens a way for her just to switch from the power of mother towards her freedom though it was again a wrong choice. Sarita's mother's words have surely influenced her thought process. Deshpande confirms this notion through a glimpse of Sarita's mind.

Don't go out in the sun, you'll get dark . . . to her girlhood, when every look in the mirror had been a vague search for reassurance . . . do I look nice? . . . it had been a furious attempt to please someone else. At first everyone, then a generality of males, then a nebulous 'right man', who would some day miraculously fall in love with her, thinking her beautiful. (124)

Sarita hasn't seen her mother showing any kind of love or compassion towards her. Sarita is surprised when she gets a gift from her mother. "You're a big girl now. Time you had something nice to wear on your ears. We must make you some gold bangles next year" (171). Later she comes to know that it was also part of the marriage plans for her. Sarita's mother also rejects her plans for higher studies and of becoming a doctor too. She decides to break the authority of her mother. As a child she still needed somebody to support and provide for her. When the adult rules seem to obstruct the autonomous space, the children choose between their priorities and the adult priorities. Here Sarita goes on to shout. As Gottdiener and Budd mentions

“women only shout when they say “No”, which means no when a very private space is about to be violated – one of the only space women can call their own.” (qtd. in 27)

The novelist never tries to create acceptable thought pattern for her heroines. They behave the way they feel like, either by unknown social influences or as a way to escape the unwanted situations.

Through all the stories the writers make it clear that in Indian culture, the young girls are treated as not belonging to their own family. Elder women always approach girl children to prepare them for the in-laws'. Mrinal Pande's girls too are treated the same way. Anu and Dinu's tuition teacher once remarks of their capacity for concentration. But the aunts don't feel it as a necessary thing for girls because they believe that “. . . girls eventually needing skills only to roll out chapattis and boiling dal and rice” (48) Tinu observes, “. . . Aunts . . . think being bookish is silly, especially for girls. No other children in the house are forced to sit with textbooks during holidays, they say” (110). Tinu knows that “Grandmother also feels it may affect our eyes ultimately and we need glasses” (110). From the conversations of the grandmother and other ladies at home, Tinu understands their worry concerning Tinu and her sister's marriage and future life. She listens to her grandmother saying “And you know how hard it is to marry off girls with glasses” (110). The conversation surprises Tinu. In another instance, Hira di, a friend and helper at grandmother's house tells Tinu the reason why Tinu was denied the prasad of Ishta in front of other children. Hira di tells to sad and sobbing Tinu, “See they love you so much, but people don't want girls to get too used to their father's or grandmother's house. One day they are all to leave their father's house, see? And then they will have to go to their father-in-law's house” (72). The peculiar approaches to girl children are explained this way in the novel. The character Hira di too makes her daughter ready for the husband's

house by beating her hard. Tinu witnesses her grandmother's agreeing tone when she asks Hira " 'Shame on you Hira for hitting a marriageable girl,' but her tone says she agrees that giggly and frisky marriageable daughters need to be tamed" (72). The critic K A Kunjakkam mentions why Indian girls are given training before marriage. ". . . the idea behind the training is that the daughter will soon become wife and will go to live with a mother in law" (15). Kunjakkam also stresses the fact that "No mother wants to be accused of not teaching her daughter everything there is to know for becoming a proper woman" (15). In the novel *Sister of My Heart* Anju says how Sudha's mother tells them ". . . how good girls should behave . . . makes up little rhymes with morals tagged onto them. *Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mother's name; wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching their family's fame*" (23).

So every girl child is given training to become the best daughter in law in the adult world. The training sometimes includes stitching and cooking lessons at home. Sometimes the compulsory learning of stitching and embroidery too were ways to increase patience in women. "I learn no embroidery though I'm too restless and impatient" (75) agrees Tinu in the novel *Daughters Daughter*. In the novel *Sister of My Heart* Sudha's mother Nalini brings home teachers to make Sudha and her sister Anju learn stitching and cooking.

[. . .] middle-aged Brahmin woman whom Aunt has hired demonstrates elaborate desserts . . . . The Brahmin lady also gives us lessons in the complex laws of orthodox Hindu cuisine: milk and meat products must not be mixed. Non-vegetarian items must be cooked in separate vessels. The left hand must never be used when serving food" (109).

Sudha mentions the way she was given training at home and outside to learn to behave and talk well with others. She takes Sudha to her friend's house to give training to “. . . conduct myself in company” (91). In these contexts it is revealed that daughters are treated as belonging to the future husband's house and are trained to become the best among them. Sometimes the pre-marriage training makes girl children sacrifice many opportunities in life and abandon their inborn talents and abilities.

In *Witness the Night* Durga finds it difficult to accept the partiality shown towards the capable and intelligent girls in the family. She remembers that boys “. . . went to a proper co-educational boarding school where they learned to smoke and drink, but my sister and I ‘got ready for marriage’ ” (53). Marriage is the compulsory part of life. Marriage is never a choice, it is done with compulsion. Whether the girl likes or not the girl has to get married when she is old enough. Durga remembers: “My sister was, I think, cleverer than the Boys . . . She could look at the stocks and shares . . . She would study the trends over few weeks and then make a complicated chart and my father would then invest in the shares” (53). Durga sadly realises the brilliance of her sister and the way it gets exploited and used without any return. “. . . the shares? . . . They were all put in the name of the Boys. Nothing ever came to my sister” (53-54) Durga further says that “. . . girls were wealth, but wealth which belonged to someone else, i.e., the husband” (54).

In the novel *Sister of My Heart* Aunt Nalini is the person to execute the patriarchal power structures in the family. She follows the customs and traditional practices of society and imposes it on her own child. Like all Indian mothers she too gets her daughter ready for in-laws. Other ladies in the neighbourhood agree with Nalini that the Chatterjee girls must be tamed properly. “Nalini was right, a good

beating would have taught them to behave right, to obey rules. You wait and see, their trouble are just starting. Everyone knows what happens to girls with that sort of high-nose attitude” (27). Nalini too finds a way to tame her daughter by bringing a bed sheet on her birthday with some words written on it, “*Pati Param Guru*, the husband is the supreme god” (63) She asks the seller of the bedsheets, “I want something that will teach my wild and wicked daughter the proper womanly virtues . . . “ (63) The seller too agrees with her and tells her “Madam by the time she’s finished embroidering the hundredth *Param Guru*, I guarantee you she’ll be the perfect wife” (63).

The training for creating the best daughter in law starts at an early age in a girl child’s life, because an early marriage is always easier for the elders. In the novel *Witness the Night* Durga agrees that the younger girls are always on demand in the marriage market. She mentions that “. . . *girls were like horses: the young fillies were easier to manage than the older ones. And the younger they were, the more they were in demand*” (54). But sometimes it becomes so difficult for girls to cope with the strange situation in which they are going to get trapped for a lifetime. Durga and her sister learn from the neighbourhood about the tragedy of a young bride. “. . . *we had just learnt that next door, the girl who had gone away as a bride had come back as a corpse within a month, she had been burned because her dowry had been insufficient*” (54). The news like these make them tensed thinking about their future too. “*We cried to Amla that we did not want to be paraaya dhan. Couldn’t we become Boys? Boys were safe, they got shares, they did not have to leave their homes*” (54).

As mentioned earlier the dowry system is the core issue that makes parents worried when they see their growing daughters. Anju’s mother like all Indian mothers is worried about the dowry she has to accumulate for her daughter’s marriage. “. . .



when I get to her room, mother asks me to close my eyes. Then she puts into my hands something at once hard and velvety. It is an old jewellery box, and opening it I gasp at the pair of bird-shaped earrings inside, sparkling against blue silk . . ." (55). Though it is the best birthday gift ever for her at the same time it shows the beginning of a process which is going to change the life of a girl forever. "From now on, she adds, each birthday she is going to present me with a piece to match—bracelet, ring, ornamental comb –just as her mother had done" (55). It can also be noticed that even if there is not much compulsion to follow the patriarchal social rules, the family members try to execute it in the family as part of the continuation of a tradition.

From these cultural practices and customs of the adult world, girl children understand that the sole purpose of a girl's life is to serve and please a male. The adult females always try to make the girl children the best for the coming bridegroom and the girls have to act according to the wishes of the elders. To fit into the society the girls have to be beautiful, sensible and productive. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Mai- Kaki suggests, when Sarita rubbed her fingers with butter, "Do this every day and your hands will be so soft and smooth, your husband will never let go of them" (163). The advices, guidance and suggestions for a girl child are always associated with the idea of pleasing a male. To please her man the girl needs to keep her in perfect shape. In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha's mother Nalini personally advises her daughter to look perfect. Sudha remembers ". . . all those evenings she spends teaching me to tie my hair in the newest styles, shaping my eyebrows into perfect arches . . ." (91) Anju also knows how her aunt is worried about her daughter's looks. Anju recollects how her aunt disliked her daughter being on the terrace during day time. "Aunt N. doesn't like her to be up here in the daytime because

she says all that sun will make her dark . . .” (58). She knows that dark girls are not in demand when it comes to marriage.

In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* When Sarita is not allowed to go out in the sun, and Dhruva, her brother is allowed to go out, she feels that she is trapped and suffocated inside a system of rules set by her mother. The mother’s sexist attitude to her children makes Sarita uncomfortable. She hates this domineering adult presence in her world. Dhruva is exempted from the same restrictions that are placed on Sarita. He could go anywhere and play with anybody. But there was always a debate when Sarita does it.

*Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker.*

*Who cares?*

*We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.*

*I don’t want to get married.*

*Will you live with us all your life?*

*Why not?*

*You cant*

*And Dhruva?*

*He’s different. He’s a boy. (45)*

In this way, the girl children are repeatedly informed of their biological sex and its inferior status in the society. Her life is entangled with the society and she has to act and live according to its norms. The adult world set these norms for her from her birth

to death. For the girl marriage is a social necessity. Even in families that have Western-education and upbringing Indians prefer to go back to the traditional practices. In most of the instances leaving the tradition means cutting off the roots. So the families keep the cycle to go on. Kishwar Desai mentions how the Western educated girl Brinda alias Binny was married to a Durga's cousin in the traditional way.

[ . . . ] a girl like Binny, after she had tried her first drink, had her first boyfriend, worn her first mini skirt and lost her virginity, would be wrapped in a red bridal saree and parcelled off to a traditional family. Her parents would have dreamt of this since she was born. And from that moment onwards, her British modernity would be carefully concealed beneath her red silk dupatta. It would never reappear. (39)

There is no option of not getting married and remain in the house of their parents if she is a girl she has to get married and leave the house. Children often express their dislike to the thought of leaving home. In the novel *Witness the Night* Durga thinks all the time "I did not understand why I had to be married. Why couldn't I stay in this Bhoot Bangla of a house for ever and ever? My brothers would be married and they would bring home a bahu each. I also dreamt of bringing home a lovely blushing bahu for my mother. Perhaps then she would like me" (36) Durga even finds a solution by asking her sister to marry her " . . . so that neither of us would ever have to leave the house. It was the best solution" (36).

The novelists here disagree with the present system of life suggested inside the cultural India, in which the girls are always placed beside the adult females who is to live their life to serve and please the male. They project the life of girl children in the

adult world confined in the space of adult females. It is more because of the construction and segregation of definite masculine and feminine spaces. Gottdiener and Budd state that “There is an implicit understanding that the domestic realm is a feminine space while places of action and public meeting are masculine ones” (qtd. in 27). The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* reveals the presence of different spaces which children occupy in the process of their growth. Girl children are important only in some contexts in the adult world. Haldi- Kumkum is such a ceremony in which daughters of the house have special roles. It is a ceremony for married women and in this occasion they exchange turmeric and vermilion powder. Those are symbolic of their marriage and a prayer to the long life for their husbands. Sarita remembers the ceremony held at her home and that was the only occasion she was regarded important. “Sssh, Dhruva, let that alone. It’s not for you. That’s for girls.” (57) Sarita’s mother says to young Dhruva. The complexities of the culture and the value systems gradually create a consciousness of being a girl in children. They gradually accept their state of being a girl and try to include themselves with the framework of it.

The process of the acceptance of “girlhood” starts early in a girl child’s life. But in most of the cases this happens in children within the adult world. 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. The novels show many ways children cope with their position in society. 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)

Tinu's gets enough opportunities to observe the life of a girl around during her journeys from her parent's house which shifted from one town to another. These journeys help her to learn and define her position inside the family structure. Sarita, Tinu, Anju, Sudha, Priya, Durga and Sharda all define and position themselves inside the adult world according to the adult norms facing the contradictions beyond their comprehension. The world of adults brainwash the girl children to fit themselves inside the adult norms as part of social demands. For girls, the social system sets rules which inherently accept the lower status of girls. It expects girls to be fragile, to be powerless and to be dumb to make her life easier in the society. It says that suffering is part of women's life. Many women believe it and teach their daughters to suffer and to cope with it. Priya's mother in law is such a woman who succumbed to the belief systems of the society. "Here is a woman who is independent, yet fearful of what society will say, She fears a system that has taught her, and many others like her , to suffer. For in suffering lies a woman's honour (107). The elder women in the family transfer the idea of a powerless femininity in younger girls who have to follow it to become the best daughters, the cheerful daughters in law and the perfect wives.

The novels highlight the age-old customs still practised in the Indian society in order to press forward the need to come out of the gender norms imposed on girls. All the novels narrate these social entrapments in one side, but surely look forward to overcome such depressing situations at home and in the society. The novels deal with the psychological themes related to Indian society which are demonstrated “. . . out of the interplay between universal process of human development and the Indian cultural milieu” (Kakar, *Inner World* 1). The girls obviously get a perfect picture of the society from the adult world, but the world of children tries to break the boundaries set by the adults.

## **CHILD'S WORLD WITHIN THE ADULT WORLD**

The previous chapter discussed the experiences of girl children in the adult world and how these experiences influenced the psyche of the growing girl children. These experiences seem to have led to the construction of a separate child space by girl children. This space despite being very limited and very often in the imaginary realm allows the children to develop a consciousness of their own and helps the development of a more potent adult personality. This chapter will analyse the nature and vastness of the new world created by the children within the adult world from the perspective of the novels selected for studies. Different novelists have presented this space from understandably different angles as their novels are set against different time and space. This plurality of perspective among the novelists on the nature and significance of girl child's space however doesn't negate the existence of this space altogether. The world of children is a space they create within the adult world in which they seek solitude and restrict adult interference and hence is vital to the very existence of children. This world of children includes their play areas, their meeting places and especially their dreams and private myths.

The novels with prominent child characters explore the possibilities of the child's world and demonstrate its potential to understand the adult world and to assimilate the knowledge of it in their growing self. The world of children cannot be fixed only to the activities of children in the adult world but, it can be extended to children's experiences in the adult world. The child's world in this way can be defined as a special space where children make use of the knowledge from the adult world, act out the formula of the adult world in their own ways.

This chapter deals with the ways the world of children is presented in the novels which open up another realm of childhood experience of young girls. This special space derives meaning from the physiological and psychological planes of the adult world which affect and influence the cultural development in children. It may include material spaces, places and also cognitive or emotive spaces. According to O'Malley:

The world of the child . . . is a miniature world, which underscores its putative insignificance in relation to the adult world, while at the same time carrying with it a host of nostalgic associations that confirm prevailing assumptions of childhood as an idealised, discreet and 'secret' space both physically and temporally dislocated from the adult world. (139)

The study about the world of children and how it creates a child culture is crucial in analysing the specific characteristics of girl children in India which needs immediate public attention.

Girl children in recent Indian English fiction throw light on the unique associations children create with the adult world. It is seen in the previous chapter that the adult world sets specific rules and regulations for girl children as an extension of adult influences on them intending for the better growth and development of children within the social system. But the adult world is only one part of childhood experience and the life of the girl child cannot be understood properly without the knowledge of the child's world, the secret space children nurture within the adult world. The novels under study explore this perspective of the life of girl children, which foregrounds the process of how girl children cultivate an individualised self rather than acting out the role attributed to them by the adult world. The present chapter attempts to provide an



assessment of the world of children and how the adult world gives way to the child's world in forming prominent character traits in children.

The novels taken for study clearly show that the novelists have taken care to keep the distinctive world of children as a separate sphere. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the girlhood of Sarita is presented through her unique ways of nurturing a world of her own within the adult world. For Sarita the adult world comprises the world of elders, especially her parents. But she maintains her personal world through her activities like playing and wandering alone or with other children. The novel brings out Sarita's childhood through different episodes of childhood experiences, and it maintains the child's space distinctly and as a separate sphere.

In other novels too girl children nurture their own personal spaces and culture. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* the whole plot revolves around the world of children including Tinu, her sister Dinu and their cousins. In the novel, the world of children is maintained through their games, fights with other children and their personal encounters with elders. The development of the cultural aspect of children is analysed in the novels by following their daily activities and their association with their peer groups and their direct or indirect associations with the adult world. According to Hirschfeld " . . . to understand how children contribute to making culture, a more appropriate focus would be the arena in which children do most of their culture making: namely, in their lives with other children, what is sometimes called 'children's culture' " (614). The world of these children in the novels builds a specific culture of children in which they experience the world in a different dimension. For the child Tinu the world around is mysterious and it surprises her with lots of new happenings around her. She witnesses the event of the death of her grandfather, the

stories of flying snakes her mother narrates, her illness due to measles and the event of the birth of her a baby brother –all these surprise her.

In the novel *Sister of My Heart* too the novelist maintains the child's world as the extension of children's experience in the adult world. Though the novel deals with it only the first half, it keeps the experiences of the girl children Anju and Sudha from their own perspective in the child's world. In the novel *Witness the Night* the child's perspective brings out an entirely different picture of the world around decked with hatred and disgust, as it is always the outcome of the child's experiences in the adult world. The story reveals the child's world through the narration of events by Durga and through her personal notes. It brings forth the way the child Durga keeps a secret world where she restricts any access by the adult. In the novel *The Girl Child* the world of children is a realm the protagonist maintains to build her own individuality. In this way it can be noted that the child's world creates a personal space for children and gives a distinctive culture for them in all the novels. It can be seen that to nurture their own culture children adapt from adult culture and create equilibrium with their own culture. And it is also obvious that the world of children is not something which can be analysed without referring to the adult world. As Judith Rich Harris accurately states “. . . children's culture is loosely based on the majority adult culture within which it exists. But it adapts the majority of adult culture to its own purposes and it includes elements that are lacking in the adult culture” (187). It contributes to the adult culture in its own ways while being part of the adult culture and wherever necessary sufficient detachment with the adult world is maintained.

The making of a child and its personality thus directly involve the amalgamation of both adult and child's culture. This cultural amalgamation is scrutinised in Indian

English novels where girl children handle prominent roles. The girl children Sudha, Anjali, Sarita, Priya, Durga, Sharda, Tinu, and Dinu, who appear in the chosen novels seem to cultivate a world of their own. In this personal space they understand their invariable involvement with the adult world and the need to create their own personal realm as a reaction to the limited possibilities in the adult world. The creation of their own space is a way of rejecting the adult cultural practices or playing the adult in their own meaningful ways. In the case of girl children who are victims of social atrocities, the adult world is shocking, surprising and unbearably hostile. Not all girl children succumb to the practices of society or the traditional familial practices. There are those who never let the adults influence their life and future completely. Children consciously build a psychological apparatus to scrutinise the adult practices and to find how the adult treatment of them can be made more favourable in future. To understand the world of children, and how they build their own culture within the gamut of the adult world, their actions and ways of life have to be carefully examined.

The child protagonists in the novels create a world of their own as part of building individual identity and personal space. This world of children is kept away from any interference from the adult world. It is the most secret psychological realm of children. Children build such secret planes when they are left alone and stealthily get out of it when any adult interference occurs. The adult Sarita witnesses the secret world of children in her daughter Renu. Though the study focus on the childhood of Sarita, the character Renu's experiences is also important as Sarita identifies her own childhood with that of her daughter. She accepts that the "... child is always like that. Full of secrets. Secret wishes. Secret fears. And yet the secrets of a child are as light as leaves. Blown away in a second of opening the door" (34). Here Sarita monitors what happens when the secrecy of their play is interrupted by adult interference. She

observes how the child comes out of the world of her secrets when the interference of an adult occurs. They never share the peculiarities of their worlds with any adult. It is a realm the child creates in its own personal space. Jay Griffith's observations on children and their special behaviours in different situations of life reveal the existence of a well maintained secret world of their own. She agrees that ". . . the most profound, creative and imaginative play stops when parents arrive on the scene because the privacy of the fantasy is crucial" (295). By keeping secrets, children assert their right to build their own individual personalities without the influence of adults. Griffith's observation proves the point that "In sculpturing their personalities, children fight for the right to keep secrets from their parents. They know myriad privacies, including a privacy of language in secret codes, a privacy of emotions and a privacy of play" (295). It is seen in the novels that privacy in children is crucial in building individual personalities. This behaviour postulates an inner urge within the child to keep its space uninterrupted from the adult world. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu recounts how children including her, explored and lived in the secret world of their own when the mothers were busy. The children involve in their secret wanderings when the adult's attention is diverted from them. At her grandmother's house Tinu's mother often tells her to go away when she is involved in gossiping with the other ladies. Children make use of these opportunities to go in to the orchard and eat lots of forbidden unripe fruits. Tinu says, ". . . we'd often play out ornate fantasies all our own, many of which involved great secrecy and deceit. We were resentful and thrilled that our uncaring mothers had no idea about what we were up to" (22). According to Jay Griffiths "Children sometimes need to shy away from adult attention, seeking solitude in private dens where they can tend their souls unseen" (295). It is a tendency in children aimed at building a unique identity for themselves. Jay Griffiths further

affirms that “Given the chance, these places are in the natural world, child-nature needing nature for its world-making, soul-making work, . . . which combine to give them a place of becoming” (295). In the secret world of children and the privacy of play, children nurture their wild dreams and imagination which play crucial role in their psychological growth.

In that way it can be said that the world of children is recognised by their imaginary and dreamy qualities. Children create their own personal dream world and interact with it as real world. They become masters of it and withdraw themselves into it cutting the link with the adult world when needed. The children depicted in the novels withdraw themselves into such imaginary circumstances and situations where they find comfort and freedom. For children imagination has no boundaries, they just extend the boundaries beyond the physical boundaries set by adults and through their imagination they move far beyond the adult world. The girl children that appear in the novels plunge into such dreams and imaginary situations. It is part of the child’s world. They force themselves to withdraw into such imaginary worlds to go away from the adult world. Ruth Griffith’s study on children and imagination points out that “Imagination is, in fact, the child’s method not so much of avoiding problems presented by environment, but of overcoming those difficulties in a piecemeal and direct fashion . . .” (353).

The girl child characters in recent novels use imagination as a tool to overcome their difficulties. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the child Sarita enters into the world of her imagination when the reality becomes so difficult for her to handle. It so happens that one day she was forced to take her brother too with her during her secret wanderings in the wood. She knew that her mother would scold her for taking

her brother with her, but she also knew that they would be safe if they return before her mother wakes up from her afternoon nap. While playing Dhruva fell into a nearby pond, making Sarita scared of the consequences she would have to face at home. She couldn't save him and he drowned in front of her eyes. Thinking of her mother's reaction she panicked. She couldn't bear the trauma of her brother's death in front of her eyes. She couldn't do anything to save him. Here the reality becomes so unbearable that she couldn't handle it. To undo the pain of the reality she steps into her dream world. She transforms the entire scene in front of her eyes into a dream. Sarita stops sobbing after sometime because she felt it can be a dream too, a nightmare from which she is going to wake up soon. She imagines with complete certainty that "... this was not real only a nightmare out of which I would eventually wake up. . ." (190) She is not ready to accept the fact that Dhruva is drowned in a pond and she couldn't save him. Thus she finds solace in the dream world, which is part of the child's world. Here the child Sarita creates a safe psychological realm where she feels comfortable. The dream world is a cocoon that human beings create to escape from reality. Stephen Grosz explains the way dream world is created when someone withdraws himself to a "safe house" (28) to escape from reality when reality becomes unbearable (31). This pattern becomes very obvious in the novels with prominent girl child protagonists, because the girls are always expected to have sense and sagacity beyond their age and hence are forced to confront such situations more often. They are treated more like adults and are expected to tackle problems on their own even though they prove to be incapable because of their young age and lack of experience. The fear of accusations and criticism from adults make girl children plunge into such imaginary world where they find solution to every problem they face in real life.

For the protagonist Durga in the novel *Witness the Night* imagination is a way of escape and a way towards freedom. She often gets worried thinking of getting married and going to a strange house. She also realises that the boys are privileged because they don't need to go anywhere because they are bringing their bride to their own house after marriage. She thinks of “. . . bringing home a lovingly blushing bahu . . .” (36) of her own to her house to escape the trauma of marriage. She even imagines getting married to her own sister so that both of them could live their life in their own house. These irrational bits of dreams and thoughts of Durga is a way of digging possibilities for finding a permanent solution for the situation she is in.

In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu escapes from a traumatic situation at home through her imagination. The episode of the child witnessing the quarrel between two parents is a fine example of the imaginative escape from realities. After coming back from her uncle's house, Tinu witnesses verbal fights of her parents. She is shocked to see her parents fighting. Then she closes her eyes and slips to her imaginary world where there is always peace and happiness around.

I make believe that we are not home yet. That I am still asleep on the train and dreaming. That the voices I hear are the voices in a dream. That bed is shaking not because I am crying but because the train is moving along bumpy rails. That everything around me is a dream that does not involve going into the other room and facing terror sitting across table. (114)

Children slip into such imaginary situations when they are incapable of handling the situation they are in. Like Tinu, Sudha in the novel *Sister of My Heart* is also emotionally trapped into a situation when she thinks of her dead father whom she believes to be the most irrational and unpractical man. She believes that her own

father's childish demeanour led to the death of both her father and uncle leaving her cousin Anju fatherless and making her aunt a widow though they don't deserve to suffer so much. She believes that it is her father's greed which compelled her uncle Bijoy to go with her father for a treasure hunt ultimately leading to their death. She feels guilty of being the daughter of an irrational man. She always wanted to remove the tag of her father's guilt from her life. Her association with their driver Singhji makes her dream of seeing herself as Singhji's dead daughter. It is her way of lessening the grief of being a fatherless child and also a way to escape the burden of her own father's guilt. Divakaruni also presents Sudha as a child who is incapable of fixing herself into the more free world of children. She feels more responsible and dutiful than her cousin sister Anju. She feels that her father is responsible for the death of her uncle. Her imagination of being the lost child of their driver also implies the way of escaping the guilt bestowed on her through her father.

In some situations children reject the real world around them. Sometimes they don't differentiate dream from reality. They mix up dream and reality in their imaginary world. In such situations the children knowingly reject reality and live in a dream world. It is a way of overcoming disaster or difficulties, a way of skipping out of the reality in which they never want to be part of. They skip reality as a way of living their life more in themselves. This also means children consciously create a world of their own to step away from the adult world. They do it for the advancement and development of their self and capacities. It is a realm they create to know themselves in a better way. Deshpande projects how Sarita's daughter Renu experiences such withdrawals in to the child's world where she enjoys more freedom breaking the norms of the adult world.



*Renu, what is the matter?*

*Nothing.*

*Why don't you talk?*

*I don't feel like it. (21)*

In such withdrawals children experience independence and also they nurture the way to resist the adult world. The girl child Renu is expected to talk because she is a child and the likes and dislikes of children are to be regulated by adult control. Also the girl Renu is not expected to show such defiance especially at a young age. But she behaves the way she likes in her private hours. It reveals the fact that children don't live the life according to the standard set by adults.

The children's world moves freely between imagination and rationality; between dreams and reality. It is not always innocent, pink, or blue. They are not always filled with the fairy tales and dream heroes. They act as the projections of their own inner self which may differ from stereotypical child behaviour. It is a plane where children try to overrule the adult influences. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Renu behaves the way she likes. Sarita is sometimes surprised to see the child so much into her inner self. Once Sarita comes across a drawing by Renu which looked so strange because in the picture she could see a child standing alone in a forest and laughing with joy. Surprisingly Sarita asks Renu:

*What is this, Renu?*

*A forest. A thick forest.*

*And this child . . . why is she laughing?*

*Because she feels like it . You see . . . . (33)*

Here the child's behaviour shows her own free will which seems to be surprising and shocking for the adult. For Sarita, the adult, the child was supposed to paint the picture of " . . . sunny gardens, colourful flowers, cheerful sunrises and playing children" (33). But in child's world the stereotypical notions of child behaviours are not valid. The novelist paints this surprising world of children throughout the novel.

The world of children largely influences and creates a bond with the adult world showing a different perspective of life the little ones take part in. It also justifies their acts, whims and inner conflicts without the interference of the adults. For S. Catalano "Dreams reflect developmental functioning and help the child in mastering the tasks and conflicts associated with each stage of development" (45). Thus dreams play a crucial role in the child's development. He further explains, "Dreaming assists the child in adapting to the stages that occur through each consecutive stage of growth and development. Dream content also reveals the unresolved developmental tasks from previous stages which the child may be struggling to master or contain" (Catalano 45).

So children involve and become part of their dreams and trust the occurrences which are to influence them in the future. In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, Sudha's dream reveals the inner conflict of her being the daughter of a foolish and unpractical man. She used to identify herself with the driver Singhji's daughter. She also knew how the driver lost his whole family due to cholera epidemic. Still Sudha never knew any details about his daughter and her death, she imagines her as a little girl of her age. In her nightmares too, she starts seeing this girl with her own face. "I would wake up crying in the middle of the night because I had dreamed of a girl thrashing about on a mat delirious with pain. In the dream she had my face" (20). Sudha remembers how

her dream suffocates her. Here Divakaruni presents a girl who uncontrollably slips into a nightmare which makes her connect herself with Singhji's daughter and with reality and dream.

For Sudha, her dreams haunt her and make her succumb to it, and it reveals her personality. But Anju never succumbs to dreams like her sister. She is not at all ready to allow anything to influence her. She fights in her dreams. Sudha notices her face when she sleeps. “. . . Anju frowns in her sleep battling the demons of her dream world just as she has always fought, in her waking life, anyone who will not let her be herself” (130). These dreams project different personalities which are cultivated by children themselves. To construct a better personality in them children go wild in their dreams.

The novelists have taken care of maintaining specific set of real life child behaviours for girl children in the novels. The nature of dreams and imagination differ in girl children according to their age and experiences of lives. According to Brenda Mallon “In the pre-school years all sorts of conflicts arise, particularly as the child has to learn to control their instinctive, ego-centred side and learn to live within the norms of their social group. This is a demanding time, and dreams reveal the inner conflict of this transition . . .” (29). When they grow up the pattern of dreams also changes. Mallon's studies reveal that the children in the early school years “. . . become more aware that bad, unpredictable events can happen” (31). They imagine scary things and this anticipation of the fear and shock imaginatively prepares them to face the real threats as and when they come in real life. Though it projects their insecurity and loneliness, it also stresses the way children equip themselves to cope with such circumstances.

In the novels children imagine the worst incidences that could happen to them in their lives. These display their insecure status at home and the anxiety within. New experiences also influence the imagination in children. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu presents herself as an insecure and lonely child through her worst imaginings. The thought of refugees was a new thing to Tinu when they moved to their uncle's house. From the balcony of the house she watches the refugees moving down the lane. She takes them to be some sort of demons. "I was afraid Dinu and Kukki and I would slip between the open spaces and drop down among the scary refugees who passed below all day and night" (15). She couldn't think of going near those figures but still she imagines the worst possibility of falling from the balcony in to the midst of the refugees. Tinu in some way accepts the fact that she is afraid of them, but she scares herself in anticipation to destroy the fear in her. It also shows Tinu's insecure and uncared life at home.

In the novel *Witness the Night*, Durga too slips into terrible dreams at night. She feels that she is buried and the soil makes her suffocate and she thinks that she is going to die. Her sister Sharda wakes her up to make her realise that it is only a dream. The dream has further implications which show the inner fears and traumas of real life. The girls who appear in these novels consistently project their inner conflicts through their dreams. Durga is a child who escaped various murder attempts by her family. She knows that female children are killed or buried alive in her family. It is also to be said that children face the worst situations of life in those nightmares. They warn themselves of the disasters and threats and push themselves to find a solution from their entrapment. According to Piaget children consider dreams as something which are made inside them. The trust in dreams comes because of this belief of children. So dreams and imagination are not the unreal part of life for them. To a child the reality

itself extends to their dreams and imaginations. According to Piaget “. . . the child’s thought more nearly resembles a sum total of inclinations resulting from both action and reverie” (Piaget 25).

In the novel Durga is compelled to think of the night she murdered the whole family as a nightmare in her life. But she always relates all her dreams to the event and feels that those dreams instigated her to do such a thing. When Durga sees her sister Sharda, she sees in her all the girl children suffocated and buried in the field behind her house. She says “I cannot forget any of it, I cannot forget these unfair dreams that force me to do different things . . . I want to be like everyone else but the dreams don’t let me rest . . .” (205). Sometimes these dreams become instigators and children trust them and act according to it. Desai’s uses the dream world of Durga as the projection of her inner self. It is in her personal world Durga moulds her personality and perspectives.

The child’s world may not always restrict itself to the consciousness of one child. It can be extended the consciousness of other children too. Young children extend their boundaries to include the elder ones as their most trustworthy companions who often bind the boundaries of reality and imagination for them. For younger ones the elder children represent a trustworthy adult who can influence them in many ways. In the novel *Daughter’s Daughter* the elder Dinu is Tinu’s cue to the adult world and the dream world of children. Tinu sometimes gets highly impressed by Dinu’s knowledge of which Dinu has no clue at all. It also implies the fact that the child always realises the power in the adult. So the elder children in a group of children are more trusted and respected by other children. Those who exercise and instigate adult power in children to control them will not be their favourites, rather someone who

protects the child's thoughts and preserves and nurture their imagination is the favourite of children.

In the novel Tinu narrates one such incident which made her admire her elder sister. On the occasion of the death of their beloved grandfather, Dinu explains to Tinu that “. . . our grandfather is actually a God now, and at night he would become a star, and that it was he who had created the hill for us. . . .” (16). Tinu was surprised to know about the knowledge her sister has about death. Tinu trusts her sister's imaginative stories even though sometimes it becomes difficult for her to believe the eerie world her sister creates. Dinu's imagination gets easily transferred to the younger Tinu even though some of those are highly unacceptable to Tinu's understanding of things around. Dinu tells Tinu that “. . . all big people were really ghosts who put on mother-face and father –face in the daytime and then ripped them off when the lights went off . . . I made her tell it to me many times and each time inside me I'd say No! No! No!” (17). This incident shows that Dinu's stories have already made Tinu believe what she says, but still she doesn't want to believe it fully. She tries to believe it only because it is explained by her elder sister whom she believes to have more knowledge than herself.

Thus the world of children involves their dream world which sometimes is triggered when they listen to stories or imaginary tales. Children love to listen to stories and to be part of those stories as the extension of their world. Stories narrated to them also carry cues to the world around. Stories create a very comfortable yet imaginary space for children. Children love stories from their elders like the way they listen to and believe the narratives of the elder children. In *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni uses stories to convey to the children Anju and Sudha the politics of the

world around them. The story of Bidhata Purush is one of those that Anju and Sudha listen to from Abha Pishi, their aunt. Pishi tells them that Bidhata Purush didn't come to take away the sweets offered after their birth. She believes that “. . . Bidhata Purush doesn't come for girl babies” (18). These stories are used in the novel as ways of transferring an adult belief system and prejudices into children. From a very young age children understand their inferior nature through these stories narrated by adults. The stories are another way of opening up the adult world to children. Children construct, reconstruct and evaluate the status of children from the adult accounts of various life events. “ ‘ What nonsense,’ . . . ‘There are no demons’ “ (15). This is how Anju responds when she listens to Abha Pishi's stories. She doesn't believe any of it. Sudha says “This is how she is . . . always scoffing, refusing to believe” (15). Anju is portrayed as a rebel child who tries to reconstruct the adult belief systems. The world of Anju is full of logic and the demons don't fit in it. But Sudha is a child who is wonderstruck in the adult world. Sudha believes that Bidhata Purush must have written Anju's future like this. “You will be brave and clever, you will fight injustice, you will not give in. You will marry a fine man and travel the world and have many sons. You will be happy” (21). The stories and the belief systems of the adult world instil sources of prejudices in the mind of the child. Children collect information regarding the adult world through these stories.

In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Dinu and Tinu hear lots of stories about ghosts and spirits seen by people and those stories are used by the novelist to give a glimpse of the adult world around them. When children understand the adult world through stories, it creates an entirely different impression in the mind of children. These stories create a deep impact in their personal world. Tinu listens to stories of ghosts entering human beings. “Someone said that this was because once upon a time

the family had ill-treated a daughter –in –law and she had cursed them on her death-bed” (21). These stories give girl children a bad notion about marriage and its aftermath. In *Witness the Night*, Durga hears from her friend the story of a bride-killing triggered by the greed for dowry. After listening to the story Durga becomes very upset. She comes to know that her future and the future of her sister are going to be tragic after marriage. Many contemporary novels portray such incidents in families where the bride is either tortured or killed or both due to insufficient amount of dowry or because of the inability to give birth to male heirs. Stories like deities entering young women and the ghosts of young women taking revenge on other people in some way is a method of empowering women. These scary stories work as shields to lessen the atrocities towards women. But young children understand the way of the world towards women through these accounts.

The children in the novels appear as part of a culture and as part of the society. It is a fact that the social setting influences the growing children. The formation of individual identity in children can be identified as the outcome of these external influences. Stuart C Aitken’s insights are very useful in this regard. What he finds in growing children is the multiplicity of differences reflected in their identities. According to him “Children grow into the pretention of identities that reflect race, class, gender, bodily experience and other socially constructed differences” (7). “These axes of difference . . .” as Aitken finds as constructed as part of the social structuring of the individual “. . . are not singular or additive but they constitute rather multiple transgressive and transformative features of identity” (Aitken 7). During the analysis of child behaviour as reflected in the Indian English novels, it is seen that the identities and individualities nurtured in the child behaviours are built not as a manifestation of adult world but as a rejection of the adult world in their own ways.



There is an attempt at building a better world in children's own private culture. Evidently children create their world acknowledging the adult world and its nature, but it always foresees the possibility of an improved world or a similar world of their own led by themselves. Children long to move forward to adulthood and cultivate adult culture in them but with notable differences from it. This would suggest that children are engaged primarily in becoming “. . . with perhaps some minor variations . . . what their elders already are” (Toren 461). The variations or the practice of new possibilities and experiments are the real key to the individual development in children. The imposed gender norms for girl children are the challenges young girls face in Indian society and it is the primary concern of contemporary Indian English writers. It could be seen that children nurture power in their world to face the adult world in a better way. The world of children presented in these novels experiment with the new possibilities of life for the oppressed and denied girl children.

Girl children appear to be the weaklings of the family in all these novels but they try to have a new life contrary to the traditional life imposed on their sex. They peep into the adult world and try to find meanings in adult interferences. These encounters sometimes make them somewhat doubly powerful and extremely radical. The direct encounter of the adult world happens when children sneak into the adult personal space where there is no space for children. The creation of the world of children happens easily when they encounter situations in life where they are restricted, invigilated and controlled on the basis of adult cultural norms. Though the world of children is made temporarily displaced from the adult world, it takes cues from the adult world which they are familiar with. According to Hirschfeld “. . . in constructing their cultural environments children engage in the same kind of activities, deploy the same kinds of relations of power, authority, and status, and draw on the same

moments of meaning as adults do as they create and inhabit their own cultural worlds” (615). The space built by adults is not sufficient for their queries and their experiments. So they create spaces where they act according to their whims and fancies.

In the case of girl children the gender norms and cultural practices restrict their growth possibilities. The girls are not ready to passively accept the roles assigned to them. They try to survive, to fight back and try to learn better ways for a change in their restricted lives. It also reveals their survival instincts. Elizabeth N Goodenough mentions that “Entomologist E. O. Wilson considers this the early quest to construct secret space a ‘fundamental trait of human nature’ of ‘ultimate value to survival’” (VIII). So the young girls are in way showing their struggle to survive and to change the possibilities of their lives. This need of survival happens when they are exposed to gender norms and restrictions which demand a cultural life and life practices for the girls, with no space for individual values and abilities.

In India, like any other part of the world, children grow up in specialized gendered spaces constructed by the adult community. The gender demands of specialised roles for boys and girls affect their physical and psychological growth but children try to alter these norms in their own private spaces. Political advancements in India have triggered the need to nurture the future generation with ample opportunities and good prospects for life. Apart from that, the healthy growth of the mind and the intellect of children are also a much-debated topic in modern times as it assures a good future for the country. The possibilities in children and the need to enhance their potential reflected in many fictional pieces also point to the concern of writers towards

a social cause. The marginalised position of girls catches the eye of the writers and a genuine concern gets expressed in many of their creative works.

The recent Indian English novels put forth girl children in different situations in life. It projects the ways in which the girls create a world of their own for a better advancement of their individual selves. It also portrays different life-threatening situations in which the young girl children are trapped in India because of gendering and sexism practiced in different social groups. The environment in which children live leaves deep impact on the development of their psyche. Also the physical well-being and intellectual growth of children vary according to the environment in which they live. Within the social system we find specialized gendered spaces that permit or forbid natural advancement of children. The increased attention on the boys gradually leads to the neglect of girl children whose life seems to be in crisis. In India boys always identify themselves with the authoritarian father and enjoy the vast masculine space. Girls on the contrary grow under the special guidance of mothers and restrict themselves to the limited space provided to them. As Kakar observes, Indian girl children and women have “. . . no sphere of their own, no independent livelihood and no activity, no area of family and community responsibility and dominance, no living space apart from that of men, within which to create and manifest those aspects of feminine identity. . .” (*Inner World* 70). Women do not have any relevance without the reference of a man in traditional Indian families. Women are reluctant to ask for more space in the patriarchal system because they are convinced in their early age that less space means more feminine and more space means less feminine or more masculine. So to become the best daughter of the house they have to be submissive and be content with what is provided for them.

The world of children includes elements borrowed through their keen observation from the adult world. Children decipher meaning from the act of adults. And they develop their own logic to create liking or aversion towards different situations or things in their lives. The growth of human beings from infancy to adulthood also involves various physical and psychological growth processes. It involves the development of individual self and identity, and understanding of specific gender roles and gender identities. Developmental psychologist John W Santrock, defines gender identity as “The sense of being female and male . . .” (397) which he says “. . . most children acquire by the time they are 3 years old” (397). Gender role according to Santrock is “A set of expectations that prescribes how females and males should think, act, and feel” (397). It may sometimes vary according to social and cultural influences. The physical changes may affect children’s personalities during the early growing periods necessitating a different consciousness of space. Children are great observers and they easily find out disparity between boys and girls. Children learn from surroundings that some children get more respect than others bringing into their lives the economic equation and a space that accompanies it. The character conditioning of girls involves the understanding of the economic disparity that accompanies gender equation. This process of conditioning is a way of instilling the accepted gender roles in girl children to accommodate them inside the society. The child’s world internalises such conceptual conditionings of the adult world sometimes in a more rebellious manner. The conflicts of these imposed rules get reflected in the growing mind to create meanings of their existence.

Different incidents mentioned in the novels project the way gender identity and gender roles are imposed on young girls as part of socialisation. The mind of a child is deeply affected because of the incomprehensible and unconvincing roles attributed to

children. In their own ways children outlive the situation that they are in. In their own world they try to mimic their male counterparts to become more acceptable members within the adult world. The world of children includes their own unique ways of acting and behaving and imitating the ways of other children who receive more acceptance in the adult world. In the novel *Witness the Night* Durga thus prefers to act like a boy rather than a girl.

*Even though I was much more of a boy than a girl (at least in my own mind) and I was always climbing trees and breaking my bones, I was never treated with the same sort of respect the Boys got. I tried to do everything they did, including horse-riding and cricket. I even learnt to smoke (which no Sikh family could tolerate) and abuse like them, but all I got were slaps, and all they got was love and praise. Even their smoking was shrugged off as a childish prank. It was a chasm that I could not cross: I had longer hair than theirs, and so I would tie mine in a turban, wear their trousers and shirts, but no one seemed to appreciate any of it. (35-36)*

In the novel *Simran*, the social worker comes to know some facts about the personality of Durga. She gets the information from the daughter of Simran's old acquaintance Amrinder who happens to be classmate of Durga. Amrinder's daughter Sangeeta recalls: ". . . when we were younger she was quite a tomboy, she was always playing cricket with her brothers. She would insist on wearing trousers or shorts like them, outside school. Weird" (45). Durga in her own peculiar way tries to become one like her brothers. She thinks that the respect and care they get will also be given to her if she becomes capable of doing things like her brothers. Same practice can be seen in other novels too. Like Durga the girl child Tinu in the novel *Daughter's*

*Daughter* also wanted to be like her cousin Anu. “I hate my long plaits and I want a spiky crop like Anu’s” (46). That’s what she says when her mother ties her hair in plaits. It explicitly depicts the consciousness of the child trying for a better life like boys.

Shashi Deshpande projects such gendered spaces in a family structure which impose gender norms in children leading children to nurture their own personal private space to counter the imposed rules. In *The Dark Holds no Terrors* Deshpande’s girl protagonist reluctantly experiences such discrimination in her own house. Sarita remembers practices in her family which differed for girls and boys. The child Sarita’s world is thus filled with the thought of accommodating herself too into the position enjoyed by her brother. Sarita remembers how Dhruva was given more importance in the family. When Dhruva goes out with their father he sat on a seat reserved for him on his bicycle. “Dhruva perched in front of him on the small seat specially fixed there on the bar” (105). Sarita’s consciousness affirms the fact that “The reserve was perhaps part of an old fashioned attitude that daughters are their mothers’ business” (105). The shifting of responsibility of female children to mothers or mother figures who spend their time inside the house meant that the girl’s world is part of the elder women’s world. The outside is reserved for boys. This reservation and discrimination make the rebel girls to explore the restricted spaces. Sarita the rebel child denies the adult women’s world and explores the men’s as well as boys’ world through her secret wanderings. The situation also suggests the child’s confusion and conflict regarding the distribution of spaces between her brother and herself. The adult interferences suggest and try to convince children to remain in a gendered space rather than a neutral one. Gottdiener and Budd affirm the notion of womanhood as the basic conflict seen in women in general. “. . . [a] notion of womanhood is tied to space. I have a

fear of taking up too much space as though space is masculine and the more feminine I am, the less space I consume . . .” (qtd. in 27). So women are made to believe that it is unlikely for them to ask for more space. And this notion leads the elder women to maintain the pattern of their restricted feminine space in the younger generation too.

Similarly in the work *Daughter's Daughter* Mrinal Pande presents how the world of children is restricted to the limited space provided to them and how children try to overcome it through their uncustomary practices. The girls in the novel are trained to be submissive in most of the domestic events. They are given instructions to behave and act by the elder women of the family. Their own mother tells Tinu and Dinu that, “Girls should not laugh too much” (49). Because she believes that when a girl laughs too much all will surely need to cry too. So they believe that it is bad luck for girls to laugh. It suggests that happiness is unlikely for women. She can't laugh, and she can't express her feelings the way she wants, rather she is to behave within the gendered social codes for girls. From these events it is seen that in India our practices are so much connected with our traditional belief systems which always offer less space for girl children. But children in the novels seem to explore the restricted spaces and extend their secret world beyond the boundaries to find more meaning to their lives and personalities.

Gender discrimination affects and influences the world of children in many ways. Some girls survive the discrimination and preferences, but some succumb to it. The novels referred to present girls who tackle such shocking circumstances in life, and also girls who pathetically surrender without resistance. The analysis of various events mentioned in the novels leads to the ways in which gender consciousness affect and influence young girls in different stages of their lives. It is seen in their association

with the adults and also in their association with the peer groups. The world of children is largely influenced by the social gender norms. At a very young age children encounter incidents which position the status of girls in comparison with other boys. The world of children balances this inequality through many secret practices which include acting and exploring boys' ways. It can be analysed as a way of exercising the freedom enjoyed by their male counterpart. The adult world signals the superiority of boys in all walks of life and the girls understand the discriminatory practices as part of gender. “. . . this active self-stereotyping process is heightened by children's moral development which causes them to view social and sex-role conformity as a moral imperative until they reach post-conventional thinking” (Lutz and Ruble 139). Girl children who appear in the novels display this post-conventional thought early in childhood which they nourish in their personal spaces through different methods. In their world children scrutinise the conventional ideas in their own ways and find a way to escape the imposition of conventional thoughts in children. In the novel *Witness the Night*, the protagonist Durga's views are expressed through her writings. She analyses her plight, her family and the world around through the information gathered from girls in their family. Her notes reveal her unbiased thoughts about being a girl and the difficulty in continuing her life in the customs and practices of the adult world. Here the child's consciousness reveals itself through her account of a series of occurrences which left deep impact in her life. Durga recollects her past in her notes which she keeps as an expression of her genuine self.

*Trying to be a girl is not easy. There a few comforts that you are born with or can attain. I know they dress you in frocks and put ribbons on your hair, bangles on your arms, anklets on your feet, teach you to sing and dance and bake cakes, but what about your Inside-you? The Outside-you can smile and cut vegetables*



*and sit with legs crossed and say 'namaste auntie' but the Inside-you is always angry and looking out of the window and wanting to run with the Boys. (53)*

Here the notes represent the world of child Durga. The notes are not her way of expressing her admiration towards boys. But she shows her yearning to achieve the freedom boys enjoy throughout their life. She wants to involve with the better world of boys. Here the larger space consumed by boys appear to attract the girl who is compelled to withdraw herself into the comfort of the four walls of the family. The incidents in the novels affirm the fact that "From early childhood an individual's social development has a specific spacio-temporal dimension which is given by gender" (Moore 61). This segregation could be seen even in the assignment of duties and responsibilities in daily life. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita feels confined into the limited space provided by the adults and she tries to overcome the restrictions in her personal hours. The child Sarita's world is beyond what she is provided. Secretly she explores the restricted world around when her mother goes for an afternoon nap. She goes out and explores different places and walks around the way she likes. She never takes her younger brother Dhruva with her as she feels that he obstructs her freedom. The boy child in all the novels represents the extension of the patriarchal world. Boys are presented as a more privileged class than girl children. In the novel *Sister of My Heart* the sisters encounter the same restriction of space. The children try to explore the outside by going out secretly for a movie which turns out to be an event of revelation for them. They come to know their boundaries and are given strict orders from the adults to act the way girls do. The events mentioned reveal the child's way of demanding more freedom. They try to explore freedom like boys do. It also reveals that girl children try these ways to gain more love and respect when they are denied by people around.

The girl child Priya's world was the world of boys provided by her parents. "Mine is blue . . ." (30) Priya remembers. In the novel *The Girl Child* Priya is brought up in the middle of colour blue. She finds the reason that "blue was the first colour I began to recognise as a baby since all my clothes and toys were bought before I was born and they were all blue. Blue, the colour to decorate a boy child with!" (30). Young Priya's conversation with her mother reveals the mystery behind this. This conversation is important as it reveals how the circumstances compel a girl child to build her world in response to the mistake of the adults.

"Why blue?" I asked her in my four-year old voice when she related the temple-sadhu episode to me.

"It is the colour of the boy", she explained

"But I'm a girl " I protested, confused . At the time I couldn't see what the big deal was about being a boy or a girl.

"Yes, but you were supposed to be a boy . The gods told me . But, beti, its bad karma both yours and mine. Something must have gone wrong at the very last moment." She continued to explain, her words slicing my tiny heart into small bits. (86)

From her mother she knows that it is the colour of boys and the parents expected a boy instead of her. She was expected to live her life more in the fashion and standards set by the adults for a boy. Priya was curious to know the colour of a girl and asks her mother:

"Ma, what is the colour of a girl?"

She smiled her Promise Clove toothpaste smile and said, "Pink, beti. The colour of girl is pink."

I've hated pink since". (86)

Priya doesn't like the standards set by the adults for her. When it is pink or blue she doesn't like it because norms are forced upon her. Priya is anxious of having to live a life of a boy while being a girl and continuously having to fulfil family and social expectations of a male child. However, being a girl, the power and privileges of a male child will be denied to her. But on the other hand she will have to cope with the expectations and frustrations of her parents for not being a male child. She will have to opt for an all blue exterior with a pink interior.

Children ask for more freedom of choice while adults act according to the social standards set for girls and boys. The Children who appear in these novels question the social standards set for them. For they need to cultivate the freedom to build their own individual identity outside norms and standards. Priya thus tries not to associate herself with the girl part in her life. Because she comes to know from her mother that she hated being a girl. The adult, Priya's mother opens another plane of life in the adult world, which changes the conception of young Priya and her world. The child's world here is built according to the notions of adult mother. Her mother's influence makes her completely reject the pink and girlish side of her.

Likewise children observe and understand the politics of the adult world in their own ways and find meanings from the practices prevailing in the adult world. There are episodes of childbirths, marriages, and birthdays that children observe in the novels. They understand from the adults that these events are observed without much of happiness when girls are involved. The birth of girl children always worries family

members. “Too many girls! Too many girls in all the good families!” (26), commented Sahib Badbajue, Tinu’s Mami’s uncle. From these words children understand that it is not a happy thing to have too many girls in a family. In the novel *Daughter’s Daughter* Tinu witness her grandmother’s sorrow turned to guilt when “. . . the third daughter was born in her house” (53). In the novel *Witness the Night* too the children Durga and Sharda experience the hatred of the adults towards their birth in the Atwal household. In the novel *The Girl Child* Priya’s grandmother states her inefficiency compared to a boy child. She remembers “. . . when I achieved first place at school or won a debate or oratory contest, Daadi always dismissed it by saying something like, “. . . If only Vikas had a son instead of you he'd be making us proud today with more trophies” (31). The girl child Priya becomes confused to hear such a comment from her grandmother. “What my six-year-old mind couldn't fathom was how someone could do better than achieving first place in class. Her comments confused me” (31). The instances like these create deep impact in the mind of young children. They feel they are inadequate and artless. But they will never accept it and try to prove themselves capable in their world.

The events reveal that the world of children is full of experiments to ward of the incongruity they face in the adult world. They try to find solution through new experiments with their lives even when they accept their failures. Through these events it is revealed that the child’s way of understanding the world around is different from the adult’s way of experiencing it. The thought process in a child and the development of its mental capacities depends largely on its exposition to the world around. As Piaget mentions through his study “. . . the child's intellectual development is largely . . . the progressive socialisation of its individual thought, at first resisting adaptation to social conditions, then becoming increasingly penetrated by surrounding adult

influences” (28). The way Sarita explains her mother’s way of combing her hair needs attention. “I was sitting cross-legged in front of my mother who was combing my hair. She did it as precisely as she did anything else, making two neat partings” (113). Here Sarita interprets the way her mother parts her hair. She relates it to the way her mother creates entirely different spheres for her male child and her female child. The thought process in the psyche of the child Sarita is worth mentioning here. Her mother’s act of parting her hair brings forth a flood of memories in her revealing her mother’s past acts of making separate rules for herself and her brother Dhruva. Here for the child a regular domestic event appears to be something entirely different from reality. Though her mother has a separate agenda for the boy and the girl in the novel, it is notable that without much knowledge the child understands how a girl and a boy receive separate treatment inside family. The child’s way of understanding the adult world is completely different.

The resistance and adaptation seem to be different in male and female children in Indian social circumstances as they grow in different conceptual spaces of the adult world. Sarita is presented here as a rebel child who is very much dissatisfied with her own powerlessness. She feels defenceless in front of her mother. One day while enjoying the sight of a pony through the windows her mother stops her from watching it. The silly incident draws attention as it was interpreted in a totally unexpected way by the child. Sarita remembers how her mother turned her whole body away from the window. “I neither protested nor cried. I knew I was powerless” (113). In the child’s mind these incidents leave deep psychological impressions leading to lack of confidence. Children observe the adults and their actions all activities at home and outside very much to please the boy child. The child feels inferior when she witnesses the way her baby brother is given importance at home and the girl child is pushed into

the group of the elders denying their childhood. The girl, thus moved to the world of the adult woman, finds herself a misfit in such contexts. The thoughts of Sarita even go to the extent of questioning her own existence in her family. She understands that her brother always got extra care from her father and more love from her mother. He was her parents' favourite child. Sadly she understands that nobody is bothered about her. She asks, "Whose business was I then?" (105). In such a domestic situation girl children understands the politics of the society and why she is treated second to the boy child. Children often feel that being a child is being powerless. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu's realisation of her powerlessness of being a girl is notable. She says that, "To be small is to live on cast-offs. Nothing that you wish to share will fit anyone else" (114). So they try to grow faster and try to make themselves self-sufficient.

In the novel *The Girl Child* Priya describes the unhealthy situation in her family in connection with her birth. She links the birth of herself as the root cause of the disagreements and fights in the family. "... I wondered if Ma had felt disappointed when I was born because she too had been hoping desperately not to have a daughter for the second time. Though disappointment was probably a much nicer word" (8). Priya knows it is a better word than hatred. Because she knows "Ma had felt hatred at the first sight of me. May be if I'd been a boy Ma and Pappa wouldn't fight so much and would love each other the way all my friends' parents loved each other" (8). The instances reveal the child's consciousness in different situations at home and outside world. The children seem to understand the policies of family structure and their own position in it through these events. They accumulate meanings from the adult world and try to find the cause behind their position in the family structure and thus analyse and make their status more meaningful through their own solutions to it.

When the world of children is analysed deeply it can be noted that children do not keep any ill feeling towards the adults. They sometimes become frustrated when they can't get answers to their innocent queries beyond what is permissible. At the same time children get inspired through respectful adults too because they like to imitate adults and see their own future in them. Sarita's choice of her life to become a doctor sprouts from such an admiration. Sarita recollects it as a life changing incident. One day in some ceremony she meets a lady who is different from other ladies in the family. Sarita remembers, ". . . she was somehow superior to all the other women there. Later as the women talked, I learnt that she was a doctor. And so I put the two together" (140). Here the child understands the fact that to gain respect she too has to become a doctor. This was Sarita's inspiration to study more effectively and to become a topper in class. According to Carl Ratner ". . . children learn to imitate adults because adults constantly model successful behaviour" (164). These successful adults are defined as the 'significant other' by Joseph Woelfel and Archibald O. Haller. It may be attributed to any person whom the child feels impressive and valuable. Paul B Horton and Chester L Hunt explain it in relation to the child's conception of the significant other. According to them:

Significant other may be influential because of the roles they fill (parents ,teachers) or because one has selected this significant other as important (popular celebrities, best friends, favourite relative, boyfriend or girlfriend). They are important to us, and therefore their ideas and values tend to become our ideas and values. (98)

Children become inspired by these people who seem to support the thoughts and actions of the young ones. The affinity to these role models or mentors happens when

children don't get attention in their own households from their own family members. In that way the attraction is directed to someone who values child's worth. The novels show the child's world open for these adults who sneak into the world of children to influence them as their supporters. The admiration sometimes will be towards mentors too. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter*, the unwanted girls suddenly get attracted towards their teacher Harish who comes to teach them at home. Tinu remembers, "My blues end suddenly one day, with the arrival of Harish Massab. A thin, dark and jovial young man, he is engaged to tutor the children of the house" (46-47). The arrival of the new tutor makes the girls happy because they find in him somebody who supports and appreciates their thoughts and capabilities. The gender discrimination is no longer valid in such situations and the girls feel happy and contented when they are appreciated and encouraged. But the admiration towards mentors sometimes leads young girls to dangerous situations. The inattentive nature of the parents also nurtures more attraction towards such mentors. In the novel *Witness the Night*, Simran, the social worker who appears to help the Atwal murder case, sometimes sounds like the mouthpiece of Kishwar Desai herself. Simran is aware that ". . . this happened quite often if a child from a disturbed background met someone they admired and fell under their spell: a mentor, or a cult figure with whom they could identify" (70-71) . Simran mentions this in the context of Durga's murder case. She is well aware that, "Someone whom they idolised and who could easily groom them for any sort of crime, even murder" (70-71). Simran further explains, "The mentor could be physically out of reach and still affect children 'indirectly' . . ." (71). Simran's experience proves that "There had been far too many cases recently, of adolescents receiving unintended messages from these mentors and harming themselves or others in some mistaken notion that they were being 'guided' "(71). Durga's teacher was such a person who created such



an impact in the hearts of the two young girls who were lonely and unwanted in their own house. Durga says, “When she wasn’t in the room, I began to hold his hand. I began to understand why Sharda liked it so much, because I liked it too” (67). Sometimes these mentors become the source of inspiration for these young girls. Durga says “It made me study harder. As soon as the lessons were over, he would listen to what I had to say and then hold me very tight. No one had ever held me tight, except Sharda, so I felt very nice all over. He told me not to speak about it, but he needn’t have. Not after what happened to her” (67). In another way it can be viewed that the attraction towards the tutor is because of the hopeless status of girl children at home. This interactive space of the girl children with their tutors generates a transitional phase that connects the young girls to their future.

The world of children often involves acting out adult roles by them. It can be the outcome of the admiration for the power and influence of the adults. In the novel *Daughter’s Daughter* there are events which reveal the admiration of children for the powerful adult. In the novel Tinu’s mother is a compassionate figure. The father rarely comes to the scene as he doesn’t have relatives and the plot largely revolves around the mother and children who travel from one maternal relative to another. The mother’s superiority over children makes them act out her roles. Dinu’s imaginary world creates two children of their own. “. . . she had invented Lakka and Sunni, two imaginary children who were our children: hers and mine” (17). In the children’s world they act and perform the adult personalities. Children often play out the role of married women in their secret world. According to Lucy Hopkins these acts suggest that “. . . it is only in marriage that women can be considered powerful” (173). So the actions of children in a child’s world reflect or extend the patterns of the adult world through role play which can be considered as a way of encountering gender norms and

power structures in society and also redirecting power to them in adult attire and actions. As Hopkins rightly confirms, “. . . performing adult personas allows the children imaginative access to adult power, this also works to reinscribe the dialectical split between adults (as powerful) and children (as disempowered)” (173). They consider it a way of empowering themselves through the actions of the superior adult. “When children adopt the role or character of another person, they must consider what the other person understands, believes, thinks, and feels” (Howe 127). They try to boost their self-esteem by acting out adult roles. “Experiences with role-play, therefore, foster both intellectual and ethical development. Role-play in small groups can increase the child's self-esteem” (Howe 127). In the novel *The Girl Child* also there are episodes in which children secretly engage in role play. Girls play the role of adult female and the boys take the position of an authoritative male. “The upstairs balcony was where we flew our kites from, or wrapped ourselves in our mothers’ discarded saris to play housewives, shop-owners, or film stars” (32). These attempts at being adults, is a way of scrutinising adult actions. According to Lucy Hopkins “Performing as adults, children are able to reject, adopt and adapt the discourses that they see their relative playing out” (173). The child’s experiments of acting out adult roles suggest their ways of accepting the power codes in the families, and their own personal involvement in it as a powerful adult figure. Analysing the role play in children, Lucy Hopkins opines that, “The children’s adoptions of adult personas bring into play a number of seemingly conflicting discourses of gender, marriage, caste, and religion. Performing subject positions of adults gives children (imaginative) access to the power to which their parents appear to be entitled” (173). She also mentions that girls acting out the role of adult female affirm the power and powerlessness of female figures around them. She mentions that “. . . they dress as women suggesting both an

affiliation with the marginalised females in their adult life and a rejection of the notion that patriarchal power is central and all-encompassing” (173). In these ways children act out the adult stereotypes as an admiration of the future adult in them.

This struggle for gaining respect and making their presence felt in the adult community also leads children to rivalry with fellow children who gain respect of the adults especially their baby brother. It is a space where each child tries to establish itself as important and powerful. The space becomes gender specific when it involves siblings of different genders. Sibling rivalry or jealousy is the most common feature of child’s behaviour. Sarita was always a jealous child. Sarita remembers how her misconduct was taken seriously by the adult members at home and within the larger family. Sarita pushes Dhruva once from her father’s lap to see him becoming the Northern star like the mythological Dhruva. “The story had been later told to friends, relations and acquaintances, but without the vestige of smile, making a major crime of my childish misdemeanour. Or that was how it had seemed to me then” (168). Sarita was jealous of her brother who was given special care by her parents. In India the care of the boy is considered as the business of father, and girls are their mother’s business. But the girl child easily recognizes the fact that father is the person behind their well being and mother is obedient to the decisions of father. So the child chooses to be with her father to overpower mother’s preferences. Sarita too wanted to be with her father. She was jealous of her father’s special affection towards her brother. He used to take her brother out with him. She remembers that there was a special reserve for Dhruva in every occasion at home and outside, but no place for herself. She had to be with her mother.

In a similar way the pattern repeats with Sarita's Daughter Renu also. Renu narrates to Sarita when she went to beach with her father and brother: "We went to the beach yesterday. Papa took us. He brought us ice-cream. Abhi wanted one more. Papa said no. Abhi cried like a baby. I didn't cry. I had fun" (72). Here Renu is happy about her dad who didn't pay attention to Abhi, her younger brother. The rivalry between siblings happens when parent's attention is confined mostly on one child. The relationship between parents and children has been analysed in this study from a gender perspective which looks at the various factors that constitute the behaviour and psychology of children in relation to patriarchal patterning of child rearing rather than from a psychoanalytical perspective which explains the relationship between parents and children in terms of Oedipus complex. The rigid patriarchal system and the extreme importance given to male children almost nullifies the mechanism of Oedipus complex or the writers discussed in the study do not find it a significant factor in father-daughter relationship in the Indian context.

The actions that reveal jealousy or rivalry shows another way of seeking attention from parents. This way, children make their prominence felt in the society as part of being social entities, but when they don't receive enough attention they easily draw themselves into their imaginary world. The novels realistically portray the frustration of girls when attention is diverted to a male sibling. The hatred and bitter feeling continues to affect them till they realise that they are inferior to boys. Such realisation may lead these girls to find no solution to their problems and their acts to attract the attention of elders go in vain. The struggle for space among siblings results in unfavourable advantage to boys which get worse with the interference of adults as social instruments on behalf of male children. In this way it can be said that the child's strange behaviour is the outcome of the adult activities.

The action and behaviour of the adults in many ways influence children and it may affect the equilibrium of the child's world. Children sometimes peep into the adult world to understand the situation around them. These intrusions are not entertained by adults. They reject intrusion of children in the adult world either by punishment or by rejecting their notions. In such circumstances children feel that they are outcasts and this process speeds up the creation of their secluded personal world. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita becomes curious when she encounters a crazy looking lady who claimed to be possessed by some goddess. Sarita asks her mother "Why was she dancing like that? She looked crazy" (103). The reaction of her mother shocks her as she slaps Sarita on her face and warns her "Don't talk like that about things you don't understand" (103). Here the world of adults seems to be alien to Sarita who wants to understand it with the limited knowledge that she has. But the adult here restricts the intrusion of the child into the adult world supposedly because of the inability of the child to understand the adult world. In this way an intrusion into the adult world is blocked either through power and or by fear in children. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu traps herself in a similar situation. "When I asked what was the meaning of scoundrel, my mother gave my father a long look and he said to me, 'Get lost!' " (18). Here too the child's intrusion in the adult world is restricted through the power of adult. Tinu's curiosity never stops and she continues her intrusions. Once she heard some comments about her Maami- "She punished herself" (62). But when she asked what it meant she was told to get lost. In another situation the aunts shoo them away when they listen to the adult talk and asks "What is a paramour" (22). The aunts shocked to hear the child repeating their conversation and says "What long ears this child has... Shoo! Go now!" (22). Through these examples it is evident that conflict occurs when children cross the boundaries of the adult world.

The limited access to the adult world makes children to build their own personal space and culture. As Hirschfeld aptly comments, “Children not only live in the cultural spheres of the adults with whom they share a life space . . . but they create and maintain cultural environments of their own” (615). This cultural environment is created in response to the actions and the positions taken by the adults when they encounter children. The encounters with the adult world open up and limit the boundaries of the child’s world.

Educational theorists, Monica Varela Cuevas, Gloria Lara Millan, and Anne Reid have done a great deal of work on the various dimensions of learning among children and how children learn adult ways while interacting with them. They observed that, “Children explore, construct and become aware of their world using their minds, bodies and hearts with imagination and creativity, with feelings and values, while interacting with others” (345). These interactions largely happen when they peep into the adult world. The adult world always considers children as immature and incapable and therefore not needed to be involved in it. Girl children understand their inferiority in the adult world through their direct interactions with the adult world. But children don’t accept their lower status within the adult community and they continuously try to overcome their inferior position by trying to become more visible in front of the adults through their actions. In the novel *Daughter’s Daughter* Tinu observes that girl children learn things faster than boys to defeat them and attract the attention of the elders. She understands that “You were noticed therefore you were” (25). In this way the girls make sure of their existence in the adult world. These young children continuously seek attention of adults to prove their worth. They don’t like being pathetic and inferior in front of elders and other children.

The influence of people and society persuade children to differentiate between gender roles and gender norms connected to their body and sex. “She is more body than soul, more soul than mind. To her belongs all that is beautiful, even the very word beauty itself. All that exists to beautify her” (Greer 63). For a girl child her body is the real issue as she knows how much the elders are concerned about her growing up. According to Greer “. . . problems exist for the girl which the boy escapes because parents are more anxious about their adolescent daughters than about their adolescent sons” (99). From the adults, children learn the gender roles and the nature of it in the social structure. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita is made to be ashamed of her own body by her mother. The mother instils the thought in the mind of child Sarita that the growing girl has to be more careful in her dressing and behaviour. “You’re growing up . . . You should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it’s only your father who’s around” (62). The child Sarita is given a notion of the inferior status of a girl’s body. Children are not always convinced when gender roles and behaviours are imposed on them in the early socialising process. But for the girl Sarita “. . . it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father” (62). Girl children become conscious of their body and the inferior status of it, when they grow up. The body becomes a barrier to their freedom. The body of a girl has to be beautiful, fragile with all presentable feminine dispositions. She has to be fair, slim and beautiful. Girl children understand these adult norms early in their life. She knows if she is dark, and she knows that she will definitely receive less attention. “You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that” (61) Sarita’s mother commented on young Sarita. Similar incidents are mentioned in other novels too while presenting the growing up of young girls. In the

novel *Witness the Night*, Durga recalls how important it was to become fair and beautiful for girls. She was dark complexioned. And it was the real concern of the family. “My sister looked like my mother, she was equally lovely. My brothers were not as good-looking, but no one cared really, they were Boys and that was enough” (34-35) “I was meant to be the ‘kala teeka’. It is said that if everything goes well, the wrath of the gods descends on you, so you have to put a black mark somewhere on your body to deflect misfortune. I was the black mark for the Atwal family” (35).

Children withdraw themselves into the world of their own when they understand that their body has other implications in society. She comes to know that it is inferior to boys. Adolescent girls come to know from various situations at home that her body can be even the source of pollution and can be denied to take part in important household activities and customs. In many such circumstances girl children are kept aloof from others. According to tradition a woman who hasn't bathed, or a woman who is menstruating is a source of pollution. Likewise, a woman who had slept with her husband is also considered pollution. In the novel *Sister of My Heart*, the girls witness how their aunt suspects pollution in the servants in the family. Drying mangoes is an important job in the Chatterjee household. But the aunt Pishi can't allow anybody else to do it because she believes “. . . if the slices are touched by a woman who hasn't bathed, or has lain with a man that day, or is menstruating, they will turn furry with fungus” (32). Woman's body is considered a source of pollution and the reason seems to be menstruation- a shocking physical phenomenon of pollution. Menstruation becomes a real concern for young girls when they are informed that it is a life-changing event. Girl children, as they grow up, witnesses all those practices that turn woman's body into a most detestable object at home and in society. She becomes an outcaste because of her menstruating body which is a space



of divine pollution. She begins to identify herself with her polluted body and withdraws herself to her private space. Laura Fingerson observes the roles attributed to girls and identifies the femaleness and maleness through their bodies. She finds that “Girls’ bodies are designated female in part because of their experience of menstruation. Boys’ bodies are designated male in absence of the experience of menstruation” (78). Thus menstruation plays an important role instigating gender norms. It sets in motion the process of turning the female body into a space of self hatred and social repulsion.

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* brings forth the impact of menstruation in young girls and how it affects child’s world. The protagonist Sarita feels it as something mysterious and traumatic through the conversation of adults. “I knew about it, of course. Older girls casually dropped hints, and there were women, who looking covertly, curiously at me, asked my mother . . . Has she begun?” (62) Sarita doesn’t want to menstruate. Her rebellion shows her own ways to resist gender norms in her. “. . . I knew it was something that happened to all girls. But not to me! It was like death. You knew it was there, you knew it happened to others, but surely it couldn’t happen to you!” (62). Sarita prays not to become older because she fears menstruation. She prays to god ardently so that it doesn’t happen to her. “Oh god, let it not happen to me. Just this once and no more. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn’t happen” (62). She shows a way to come out of the gender roles and inequality she has to face. Girl children think of a way to overcome the problems that menstruation would force upon them. Because from the approach of the adults they know that it is something traumatic but inevitable.

Menstruation is not treated as a biological phenomenon in many of the traditional families. The religious and social implications of female bodies make life traumatic for young girls. Girls are pushed to secluded dark corners of their families where visibility is least during the menstrual days. Sarita remembers her period days as days of torture. She felt that it was worse than anything else she had experienced. “Not just the three days when I couldn’t enter the kitchen or puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being a pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed pollution” (62). The practices in connection with menstruation in India change girl children from within and continuously remind them of pollution and its inevitability. “. . . It was something quite different, much worse. A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother” (62). Here the child appears to be rebellious yet incapable of forcing any impact. The hatred towards a mother who continuously brainwashes the girl by highlighting her own insignificance as a girl child in family and society make her hate the whole race of women.

Though menstruation brings various restrictions in the life of a girl in traditional Indian society, it also represents a sudden opening of the adult world to children. This sudden entry confuses the child and the child finds it difficult to place herself within either the child’s world or adult world. The vast expanses of woman’s space within the girl become an undeniable truth for the child. This evidently confirms Fingerson’s conclusion that “It is through social interactions and society’s belief systems that we gender our bodies” (78). Sarita’s mother’s precautionary practices make the child feel that she is entering onto another part of the world. Though the child tries to hide this new identity and move on with her childhood, the world around her keeps deliberating

over her entry into this new world of which the child gets frequent reminders from various sources/agencies of the adult world. The episode of Sarita's encounter with a stranger boy needs special attention in this context. The novel traces Sarita's attempts at sloughing off gender norms imposed on her from outside. But the strange behaviour of the boy pulls her into the vortex of gender complexities and she fails to escape from it because the inferiority of her body has already taken charge of her mind and belief systems. For the first time she felt defeated when the boy tried to make Sarita feel that her body is fragile in front of his manly and powerful self, by blocking her way out of a room. This makes her pulled to the complex whirl of gender and she gets trapped in it. That was her first encounter with a boy who seemed to have overpowered her girlhood. She felt the way she became fragile and womanly. She says ". . . child though I was, I ceased to be one for the moment . . . that I vaguely knew had something to do with the fact that he was a male and I a female . . . Once away from his physical presence, it was as if I had been released from fear and the strangeness in myself. I was a child again (38).

Recent studies point out that children resist adult attempts at influencing their personality. Brett Laursen and W. Andrew Collins's studies reveal that, ". . . adolescents recognize that parents are not infallible, they increasingly question and resist parent influence attempts" (13). But in most of the circumstances girl children are made to cope with the limited spaces they live in. Boys escape these perplexed situations because of the patriarchal social structure in India. The masculine space is flexible compared to the feminine space. The girl is not very sure about the things that she is not allowed to do in comparison with her brother. From experience she learns the taboos and understands that there is a big difference between her brother or her

male cousins and herself. She realizes her inferiority of being a girl in comparison with them.

In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the protagonist Sarita struggles to cope with the situation at home, where she is treated only as an unwanted child by her parents in their attempts to welcome their son Dhruva. The novel revolves around the traumatic death of Dhruva and the accusations of her mother. Sarita remembers: “Dhruva was my kid brother who died when he was seven. He was drowned. I watched him drown. And my mother said . . . Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead?” (34-35). The ill-treated child Sarita’s predicament leads to circumstances in which she learns to reject and free herself from the clutches of her mother. Piaget’s remarkable observation is very relevant: “. . . the human infant is born with the ability to adapt to and learn from the environment” (Smidt 18). The growing girl child learns from the surroundings that there are specific codes of conduct set for her, and adapts herself to the restricted feminine space. The plot connects the subsequent events in the life of Sarita with the death of Dhruva. The novel presents death as tragedy not because of a child’s death but only because of a male child’s death. The whole family would have happily accepted the death of Sarita instead of Dhruva. Her mother asks her, “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead?” (34-35). Her mother’s accusing words remind her of the curse of being a girl child. “*She killed her brother. She killed her brother*” (145). She understands that she has to find her own space if she is to survive these traumatic adult interferences.

Detachment with the adult world is a way of creating child’s world away from adult interference. And a child’s association with other children creates a consciousness of self-sufficiency and independence among them. They forget the

association with the adults in their lives. They live only in the world of their own forgetting their inseparable association with the adult world. The novels display many such instances in which children live their lives in their world with other children unknowingly rejecting and forgetting the world of adults. Such occasions make children think and act independently. This deep involvement with the world of children also reveals the fact that such children are out of adult norms and standards. These instances don't apply to the routine play of children, because, ". . . routinized play, including games, serve to enculturate children to adult norms and standards" (Hirschfeld 614). The circumstances referred to here are their involvement and association with other children in the world of children without adult interferences. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita always plunges into such spaces. She remembers the skipping contests that she had while in school. She used to be the winner. But one day she was so deeply involved in the play with other children that she almost forgot time. "I went back to class suffused by a glow of happiness, almost literally treading on air. And then I discovered that the bell had rung long back and I was late. The other girls were at their places. Had no excuse for coming in late and I was punished" (110). Here Sarita represents the girl child who submerges herself into the world of children. Other girls are portrayed in contrast to Sarita because they are more ready to accept the adult world. Sarita lives her life more in the child's world. She never comes to realise the norms and standards of the adult world. Here Sarita is presented as a girl who couldn't fit herself to the adult's ways of life. In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* also Tinu forgets her association with the adult world and her position in it. She does it consciously to cut her link from the adult world. Tinu often encounters her mother secretly crying in bathroom. Tinu knows that her mother thinks "no one can hear her cry, but I do" (92). She secretly finds out what happens with her

mother. But she feels it awful. In that situation she makes a better choice “. . . I rush out and make a racket to forget the awful sound . . .” (92).

Analysing the events presented in the novels reveals that these have deep impacts in the future life. The childhood traumas may haunt the life of a person till the end of her/his life. The chosen novels present girl children who encounter such traumatic situations which in diverse ways haunt and influence their future lives. The novels depict various circumstances in which children trap themselves and become victims of adult cruelties. The relationship between father and mother deeply affects children. Tinu observes the fight between her parents. “Our parents’ quarrels are just about beginning to be visible to me. They generate a stupefying fear and grief that knot up my insides” (42). If it is the fights of her parents that cultivated fear and trauma in the child Tinu in the novel *Daughter’s Daughter*, it is her mother’s accusations that traumatised the life of Sarita in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In the novel Sarita is accused of her brother’s murder whenever she meets her mother. Once Sarita even tries to clarify her mother’s doubts when the pressure is so much for her to bear.

*“You killed your brother*

*I didn’t. Truly I didn’t. It was an accident. I loved my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn’t. And I ran away, I admit that. But I didn’t kill him”* (146)

But her mother never accepts her innocence. She asks her *“How do you know you didn’t kill him? How do you know?”* (146).

Sometimes even the rational explanation of the cause of traumatic events may not give solutions to girl children. It is seen in the novels that a change in times does

not necessarily mean a change in fortune for girls. Sarita in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* experiences the continuation and repetition of her own suffering in her girl child. She witnesses her own self in her daughter who grows in the same rebellious manner as she had been. She thinks, “Do we travel, not in straight lines, but in circles? Do we come to the same point again and again? Dhruva and I, Renu and Abhi... is life an endless repetition of the same pattern?” (173).

Knowingly or unknowingly the adult priorities are imposed on children to shape them fit in the adult world in their future. But sometimes the interferences of the adult may ruin the lives of children and create a halo of fear and trauma for the entire life for them. In different novels similar circumstances are presented so as to analyse the degree of influence these events have in the future of children. The society has its own rules for its people. The adults are the caretakers of such rules in society. Human beings in a great way depend on each other. They prefer a social life than an individual life. The world of adults has varied fears of being excommunicated from the social group itself. So the group influences the individual a great deal. People believe it necessary to educate children about the practices prevalent in society to mould them to fit in it. They are afraid to shatter the order or belief system because of the fear of exclusion from society.

In the novel *Witness the Night*, the character Durga is such a child who feels entrapped and suffocated inside the rules of the family and she even feels that her life is in danger and thus decides to wipe out the entire family in order to stop repeating the pattern of female foeticide in the future generation. It can also be noted that Kishwar Desai is not suggesting that nurturing violence among children is the solution for evils against women but she is ringing a warning bell to shock awake the society.

As Joseph L Zornado rightly confirms, “Violence on a wide scale cannot happen without rage, a felt sense of powerlessness and a desperate emotional need that informs the hopelessness that justifies violence”(xvii). Desai here is opening up another dimension of girls’ resistance. Zornado’s assumptions echo the circumstances in the real life of Durga. She is a girl who witnessed the cruelties of her parents towards her sister Sharda and towards her unborn sisters. Sharda and her sister Durga dig out the skeletons of their sisters who were buried alive for being girls by their parents. The children were afraid of the impending cruelties and Durga couldn’t resist her temptation to end the whole drama after her dear sister too was taken away from her by the family members. Her family shows her how desperate parents are to get rid of their girl children. Girl children were easily killed and buried to limit further damage to the family reputation. These killings must have triggered her own violence and made her think of solving her problems with the family by planning a mass murder. Obviously as Zornado says, “Relationships of violence and power reproduce individuals who participate spontaneously in violent relationships” (xvii). Zornado’s perspective makes it clear that Durga’s response isn’t totally misplaced. Simran in *Witness the Night* talks about children who are dragged into such crimes:

Over the years I had met children capable of most vicious crimes and it always saddened me, the loss of a childhood. Very occasionally, they were freed and able to walk out, but usually they grew up behind bars, and despite all my attempts to educate them into yoga, teach them music and song, even theatre, most of them I knew were just waiting for a chance to avenge themselves on the world that had robbed them of the one thing they would never enjoy again, their childhood. (14)



It could be the family or the society who are the real culprits. But the children lose an important phase in their life: their childhood. The novels focus on different dimensions and different approaches children take to affirm their status. Nurturing violence is the worst part of it. They plunge into violence in their difficult situations unaware of the aftermath of it. Simran's doubts about Durga's character in the novel opens another world of children "Oh... did she... have a boyfriend?" (20), Simran asks Ramnath, Superintendent of Police. Ramnath's reply is worth noticing "They would have cut her throat if she did! So maybe she cut their throats before they could do it" (20). The family has a way of wiping off the unwanted beings for a better social standing. And they justify their act. Durga is the murderer and Ramnath thinks she acted in the same way as her family members because Durga doesn't know any other way of reacting than to follow her parents' acts. And she never feels guilty of her acts. "I never did anything I did not want to. I know you say I was very young but I wanted it all, I think I even wanted them all dead" (206). The girl even justifies her act and never feels bad about it. She is completely convinced that she has to act and rage against the odds. And she feels contented to save her sister and to save herself. The novels show that children make their life contented in their own ways. The child's world is the realm where children weigh their actions and build their own culture.

From the various incidents mentioned in the novels we can easily deduce that girl children though born and brought up in different family backgrounds nurture a world of their own to build their unique personalities. They learn about their status in the family and try to position themselves in the adult world by creating a space of their own. This mode of nurturing personal spaces gives ample evidence to the fact that the world of children is the most cherished place of children where they cultivate their knowledge and experience of the world around. The children are trying to create a

better world than what is offered to them by the adults. They long for an improvement in their status. They assert that “A child's goal is not to become a successful adult, any more than a prisoner's goal is to become a successful guard. A child's goal is to be a successful child” (J.R.Harris 185). The adults should give some importance to their growth and development. The novels reveal this need of the time, the need for a better status of girl children in all planes of lives.

## THE NEW INDIAN GIRL CHILD

The process of gendering and enculturation of girl children in India has been frequently referred to in various social literary and other discussions due to the increased global attention on youth culture as the subject matter of the futurity. The identity of young people and their position in the current social order has become the unit to measure the future of the country as the youth is expected to personify the value system of any culture. In India girl children are part of the marginalised due to their social and cultural segregations. The diverse social issues in connection with the life situations of young girls have made more public attention bestowed on girl children, which seem to have been recognised largely as part of the social and cultural situations of the country.

The girlhood in India is specific to Indian culture rather than a reflection of the global youth culture. The material life of girl children in the current social system in India has been increasingly represented in fiction in order to question the insignificant position of these young people in different social situations. It has become a social need to scrutinize the position of young girls. The novels taken for investigation show new possibilities for young girls, even though they continue to be marginalised in the real society outside fiction. Focusing on the betterment of young girls, the novels attempt to show the need to give more provisions to improve the youth culture in India. The present chapter focuses on the ways of betterment suggested in the novels and analyses the practical possibilities of the suggested changes to make the young girls more able and powerful. The chapter also examines the new girlhood celebrated by the girl child protagonists of the novels despite the adverse conditions, and the way

they create new possibilities in their life denying the patriarchy and the traditionally ascribed roles.

It seems that the authors have created a brilliant blend of the personalities of real children with a new child prodigy who gathers information from the adult world and child's world like the real girls but use them in a much more intelligent manner to become more powerful and capable. This chapter also analyses the peculiar nature of the child narrators in fiction who are overwhelmingly involved in every single experience of their lives for a greater understanding of their position in the current social system radiating the anxiety of the socially committed writer who has used these girls to analyse their experiences in the adult world and child's world through the child's own consciousness to suggest ways to overcome the difficulties of girl children in India. Considering the nature of the child protagonists in the recent Indian English fiction Meenakshi Bharat observes that the children who appear in the recent fiction “. . . are not romantic idealisations of perfect ‘innocent’ children. They are all individualised, different, highly aware, informed by the hindsight of the adult creator of the child narrator” (121). The topic of the suppressed girl child psyche is taken as a serious issue in these novels and the writers keep this prominent thread through the child's consciousness in the novels. The prominence of such events is unlikely to be noticed by children as Bharat observes. Referring to the literary representation of child characters Bharat says that, “For a child, every event is an issue for the moment, to be forgotten, or at least, relegated to the background when the next one takes place. It is only later, with the hindsight of the adult, that they really become issues to be ‘recognised’, ‘negotiated’, and critiqued’ ”(150). In this way we can say that the children presented through novels demonstrate a new version of girls with more understanding like an intelligent adult. They present themselves with clear perception

and understanding of their experiences, showing new possibilities for the girlhood lived and celebrated through literary and social planes. This chapter attempts to investigate how girl children are perceived and heard through contemporary fiction where they revive their authentic selves by ensuring their participation in the society.

Apart from Meenakshi Bharat, this study affirms the findings of Anita Harris and Michelle Superle, about the new empowered girl and attempts to trace the features of this new girl in Indian English fiction. The girl children that appear in these novels present the life of girl children in India who are on the one hand suppressed, tortured and marginalised in the patriarchal society but on the other hand offer hope for a better future. They represent the future girls who are to act and accumulate power in a more logical manner than succumbing to the denial of opportunities in their lives. They carve an existence within the adult world and child's world without fixing themselves to new norms and are constantly looking for possible ways for a better life. These girls are a version of the new Indian girl who is self-confident and capable of living her life without depending on anybody or anything in the world. Anita Harris talks about these new girls representing the global youth identity in her work *Future Girl* ". . . as a vanguard of new subjectivity" (1). Harris finds the new girls who appear everywhere these days ". . . in the time of dramatic social, cultural and political transition . . ." (*Future Girl* 1) as possessing a new confidence and power in them. Their new approach to life makes them a new version of girls who live their lives with more confidence and power. Harris's observations affirm that "Power, opportunities, and success are all modelled by the future girl—a kind of young woman celebrated for her 'desire, determination and confidence' to take charge of her life, seize chances, and achieve her goals" (*Future Girl* 1). Harris finds the newness in girls in different walks of lives as a part of making themselves successful human beings, through new

ideologies. Harris mentions, “The evidence for these new ways of being is drawn from a wide range of areas: girls’ educational success; their consumption, leisure, and fashion practices; apparent rejection of institutionalized feminism; sexual assertiveness; professional ambitions; delayed motherhood, and so on” (*Future Girl* 17). The Indian girls who appear in the novels seem to share the identity of the global youth, while representing the Indian middleclass girl child, with a renewed sense of understanding to move against patriarchy. The novels largely bestow the label ‘new youth’ to young females who are more like the middle-class girls rather than girls who are spunky and seem to be much ahead of their peers.

From the previous chapters it is understood that children have unique experiences in the adult world and child’s world, and both spheres seem to act as catalysts to form the psyche of the Indian girl child. The young girls are constantly involved in understanding the social and cultural backgrounds in order to understand their own place in it. The question rises whether they have deeply understood the imposed girlhood and its impact in their individual and personal life choices. From their experiences in the adult world and the child’s world children seem to decipher meanings through their “connectedness” which further leads to “individuation”, as Jose Ashford and Craig Le Croy name it, to become more able human beings. According to Ashford and Le Croy, “*Connectedness* refers both to the adolescent’s sensitivity to and respect for other’s views and to the adolescent’s openness and responsiveness to other’s views” (437). In the novels connectedness towards the adult world leads children to nurture individual identity and freedom, which is one of the key attributes of new Indian girls who appear in recent novels. As Jose Ashford and Craig Le Croy notes “*Individuation* has two parts—separateness and self assertion. Separateness is the expression of individual’s distinct self from others. Self assertion

refers to adolescents' expression of their viewpoints and their clear communication" (437). From their studies they make it clear as to how the individual self is developing in adolescents through frequent interactions with the adult world. The world of children nurture separateness from the adult world and build self-assertion which further leads to individual self-expression. Though children who appear in the novels nurture individuality, they build their ability through their empathy with or indifference to the adult norms. This disconnectedness or detachment can be taken as the strength of new version of Indian girl children appear in the novels. The girls represent themselves as part of the social system and at the same time they ensure that it is good enough to think and act outside the customary participation in the conferred social roles.

The Indian girl who appears in contemporary Indian English fiction share some common traits which suggest that they all have a unique approach to life full of confidence. The young girls approach to success and failures are presented as personal choices rather than their destiny. They cope with such circumstances either by accepting the code of conduct set by adult community in their own ways choosing what they like or by rejecting and practicing secretly their own ways of better life within the available social set up. Various events in the novels suggest that ". . . young people are newly obliged to make good choices for themselves and set themselves on a path toward success with little support or security outside the private sphere" (Anita Harris, *Future Girl* 5). They show exceptional character traits that help them approach life without fear and help them adapt better. The girl children in the novels make themselves visible through their identity and individuality. The personal choices of these young girls are gaining importance as part of building a responsible

and visible identity for themselves. It addresses the dynamics of personal and civic spaces of young girls and the conflicts leading to the emergence of a new girlhood.

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a brilliant attempt by Deshpande where she presents a girl child facing social atrocities in contemporary India. According to Mukta Atrey, Deshpande “. . . has portrayed the girl child with deliberation” (246). Deshpande has presented the protagonist Sarita as trying to come out of the stereotypical representations of women in order to become a powerful and able person who would boldly go for her personal choices. According to Jyoti Kala “Sarita is an autonomous being trying to live on her own terms” (54). With all the unpleasant experiences of Sarita, the plot looks at how the girl tries to overcome her secondary position at home. As Kala observes in the course of the novel “She generates faith in herself and attains understanding of her true self” (54). The immediate reason for her self-emancipation is her encounter with a lady doctor at a family function which makes her think of the possibility of living a better life, being a girl. She witnesses the enormous respect the lady receives from the relatives just because she is a doctor. Her keen observations of the women around her make her understand that other women are so incompetent because they are denied opportunities of better education and financial independence. She understands that women in her family live under the impression that women are incapable of taking care of themselves. But Sarita wanted to push her boundaries to prove her abilities and strength. After meeting the lady doctor, Sarita comes to know that power and independence can be gained by becoming a professional. She understands, “Yes, that would be the key that would unlock the door out of this life which even then seemed to me dreary and dull. To get married, and end up doing just what your mother did seemed to me not only terrible but damnable” (140). She thinks of outwitting the



situation by making herself capable through education and through financial independence. She understands from various encounters with people at home and outside that through education she can choose a better future for herself. Thus education helps to free herself from the clutches of the old customs and patriarchal norms followed by her mother. She says, “I had to make myself secured so that no one would ever say to me again . . . Why are you alive? Why was I alive? The answer, I then imagined, lay in hard work and success” (50). At that moment she understands that there are options for her, either to live a life like other women dependent on their husbands or to live a life of her own with freedom. As Carolyn Jackson mentions “. . . 'girl power' discourses present girls no longer as plodders, but as having it all, doing it all, and having new-found confidence, ambition and opportunities” (45). Thus she goes after the dream of becoming a doctor to free herself from the patriarchal rules of the family. For Sarita education becomes the key to open the world of freedom.

The concept of girl power immediately poses a range of possibilities for Indian middle-class girls. Indian English authors don't seem to discard the Indianness in girls though their experiments are largely inspired by the western concept of girl power and DIY (Do It Yourself) slogans. While discussing the feminist point of view in the girl-centred novels of Deshpande, the literary theorist Mukta Atrey comments that, “Her feminism does not uproot the girl child from her given context, but tries to understand and define her in the framework of the various factors that shape her” (247). When feminist concepts are adopted and used in the Indian context it appears to create a new species of young women who are the Indian version of girl power subjectivity. As Harris mentions, the new version of girls appear to reject institutionalised feminism and the Indian girl child in the new era celebrate a more practical girlhood than a

conditioned womanhood. There is surely a co-existence of the traditional Indian feminine qualities and of course the girl power potential in girl protagonists.

To project the strength in girls, the novels depict various such incidences in which girl children are made inferior through their bodies by the patriarchal society and the way girls outlive the predicament by celebrating their strength. According to Superle “Indian women writers celebrate girls’ physical strength and freedom. However when the focus shifts to the body as a site upon which to play out cultural identity, some new Indian girls feel less confident in their bodies . . .” (161). This lack of confidence is managed through new self-awareness which is a prominent aspect in Indian girls. When issues in connection with girls’ body are presented in Indian novels, the novelists take extra care to brief it in few words. According to Leela Dube when menstruation is discussed in Indian contexts it is explained as “. . . the process of flowering or blossoming . . . and [use] expressions such as ‘her body is full’, ‘it is ripe’ ”(166) etc to restrict further discussions on it. But here in the novel it is presented as shocking, inevitable and damnable because the novelist expects Sarita to understand her body and to overcome the trauma of it as part of the girl power potential. Menstruation is no longer a threat to Sarita when she learns more about it. She says, “I began to study anatomy and physiology in my first year of medicine, that I was suddenly released from a prison of fears and shames. Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that” (63). In this way girl Sarita’s body considered as fragile and filthy becomes supreme for her. According to Superle the girl child protagonists in recent fiction celebrate their power through their bodies. Focusing on the amazing power the girls’ body has in different fictional texts Superle argues that “. . .[a] girl’s body is validated as a source of power,

and thus she embodies new Indian girlhood” (151). In this way the girl’s body has a different implication apart from the patriarchal meanings. The new girls project their body as the source of power.

The celebration of fairness and beauty concepts too are challenged through the novel. Girls are also warned to keep themselves beautiful and fair to win the hands of a handsome husband, or to make it easier for the elders to find a suitable match for them because the future life of a girl is entirely taken care of by the in-laws. But the new girls who appear in the novels prepare themselves to be independent so that the traditional concept of satisfying the beauty standards never becomes a criterion for them. Moreover the girls are celebrating femininity and beauty as part of the assertion of their individuality and self-expression. As Elizabeth Boyd and Abigail Bray rightly state, “Power means holding your head high no matter what you look like. It means speaking out when you’ve been told you have nothing to say. It means having the courage to believe in yourself when no one else seems to” (3). In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita is continuously reminded of her skin colour, and her mother’s concern of marrying off a dark girl like her. Sarita’s mother never allows her to go out in sun because she believes a girl has to preserve her beauty to make it easier for elders to find a suitable match for her. Sarita’s understanding of the way she is to prepare for a suitable bridegroom in no way matches her ambition of becoming a professional and to free herself from the clutches of the family. From her childhood, she had heard her mother say: “Don’t go out in the sun, you’ll get dark . . .” (124). Her skin colour and beauty is always viewed in relation to the right man who is going to marry her. Her mother’s concern about her makes her feel strange. Sarita’s rejection of the traditional beauty concepts set for her makes her free and self-confident. She is

no longer worried about how she looks, because she thinks that her sole purpose in life is to be independent and to live a more respectful life.

Through all these events it is seen that children are continuously trying to outlive the adult power. The decision of adults and the authority of adults over them make children rebels. They resist adult actions as part of their self-assertion and their new approach to life. They try to retaliate and fight back when they get trapped and when their freedom is restricted inside the adult world. The protagonist Sarita always had to fight back with her mother and always felt so incapable in front of her mother. She doesn't like the way her mother restricts her actions according to her likes and dislikes. One incident in the life of Sarita is worth mentioning in this context. One day Sarita wanted to go to a movie with her friend's family. Her mother didn't like the idea and warns her to not even to think about it. This was too disheartening for her. She plans to retaliate by going away from home. "I could go there, the place I have discovered some time back. I'd just go and not come back till late. And then they would get anxious, later frantic, and start searching for me. And if I was kidnapped . . . so much the better. She would be sorry she had refused to let me go to the movie" (186). Here child Sarita shows a way to fight an adult action. It is a way to restrict the adult intrusion into child's world. In such circumstances, the intrusion of adult norms in the child's world is restricted by children through the denial of adult action. This also applies to different ways of rejecting adult actions. A more remarkable example is the way Sarita rejects the decision of her mother by denying her brother calling her Sarutai. She doesn't want the adult norms to influence her so she threatens her brother to stop calling her Sarutai. She doesn't like her brother calling her Sarutai because it was the decision of her mother which acts through her brother Dhruva.

Don't call me Sarutai.

Ai says I must call you that.

I don't care what Ai says. Don't call me Sarutai. (44)

Children not following adults is a sign of applying their own intelligence to the things around. When Sarita is given rock sugar by a strange woman she met at the temple, she doesn't eat it though her mother had told her to have it. "But I could not eat the rock sugar she gave me. I held it in my hand for some time, then, stealthily, eyes fixed on my mother's face, I let it drop out. And only the stickiness remained. Feverishly I scrubbed my hands when I reached home to get rid of that" (102). These kinds of actions are the extension of their independence and the way of acquiring power to decide on their own. Such independent decisions of rejecting the adult actions are generally seen more in girl children than boys because in India girls are given instructions to be more responsible and wise in their decisions and actions. Also children do not always trust adults. The unsatisfactory actions of the adults make children decide on their own, resisting the adult rules to be implemented on them. According to Elizabeth Boyd and Abigail Bray, "Girl Power . . . [is] about having the courage to celebrate your difference, your uniqueness, believing in your own story and not someone else's vision of who you should be. It's about cherishing your unique self, taking delight in your eccentricity and wildness, being proud and kicking the same habit" (3). In the novel, the space Sarita uses as part of her daily activity is restricted by the adult interference, but still she takes the amount of space she needs for her recreation purposes. She never finds it illogical to live according to her choices in life.

The girl children in all these novels belong to different middle-class families and they are made to face different family issues. The girls ruled by family and social

rules seem to get trapped in it. But the novelists find an escape for them from the suffocating circumstances through the development of individual identity and the assertion of independence for the girls. The girl children in the novels are desperate for finding new ways to free themselves from the norms of the society. Even though they go through traumatic episodes, they assert their freedom, and try to find a better way to embrace the freedom of choice they dream of. This can be taken as a new trend in the novels that look forward for an independent and a meaningful life for girl children in India. According to Olga Ivashkevich:

Unlike the vision of the 1980s' feminists, which advised girls to go against the grains of traditional attentive-to-fashion and family-oriented femininity, the discourse of girl power is much more readily adopted by many girls and young women because it supports "girliness" together with emancipated feminine practices. (qtd. in 6)

The girl protagonists in recent fiction are living their girlhood in a fashion contrary to the characters presented in the pre-1980s fiction. The emancipated girls in a way lifted their position to the level of global girls with privileges enjoyed by them by empowering themselves. The new girls gain power through the celebration of femininity rather than by rejecting it. This amalgamation of power and femininity, which appeared to be contradictory in traditional feminine dispositions, is combined in the new girls who celebrate their life being girls unlike the other girls. ". . . the discourse of girl power paints an ambiguous picture of a super girl, a have-it-all female who is smart and career oriented yet enjoys domestic activities, embraces her sexuality without being submissive to men, and is autonomous yet dependable and caring at the

same time” (Olga 6). The Indian English novelists are inspired by this new version of girls who appear to be a version of power rather than a creed of powerlessness.

The novel *Daughter's Daughter* by Mrinal Pande highlights this positioning of girl children in Indian families. In his review of the book *Daughter's Daughter*, Alok Rai comments that “Pande is to be congratulated for avoiding the besetting sin of childhood memoirs - cuteness, that horrible adult affectation” (1). According to him “. . . when the author's avowed intent is to focus on the travails of being a "daughter's daughter" - twice accursed, . . . one feels nevertheless that childhood isn't what it used to be (1). Here Pande presents a different dimension of childhood in which the girl child is put in the midst of gender segregations and childhood traumas, for the protagonist to overcome it, through her renewed understanding of her selfhood. The protagonist Tinu's understanding of the discriminatory measures adopted by adults leads her to many conclusions about girl children's life. Tinu notes that “One discovered early, that as daughters' daughters, to be fantastical in an overpopulated home, where son's sons were the naturally favoured ones, was an immeasurably more effective way of attracting grown-ups' attention than being whiny or petulant” (25). Here the depth of the knowledge the child has surprises the readers. The novel is written from the perspective of the girl child protagonist who appears to be an all-knowing persona with more clarity of things around them. In the novel the narrative opens when the protagonist is barely two years of age and it spans the life of the girl till she is ten years old. Though the child presents the events till the age of ten, her presentation of the events with clarity makes her a super child who is a brilliant observer of the events around her. The narrative goes as if it is the account of the adult author who acts in the persona of the child.

In a patriarchal household the girl Tinu makes her presence felt by being mischievous. At the same time she feels that all the girls in the family do somewhat similar things to attract the attention of grownups to affirm their presence and existence. The girls understand early enough that being pathetic or demanding will never make them impressive rather it makes them undervalued in front of boys. Tinu feels that “Perhaps that is why girls in the family gave up crying fairly early in life and become vigilant pickers up of words and images that could make people laugh and wonder . . .” (25). Tinu notices that the girls run the race faster than boys to make themselves prominent members of the family. Mrinal Pande here makes the girls nullify the patriarchal beliefs of the inferiority of girls. As Superle confirms “. . . patriarchal portrayals seem to be precisely what many of the contemporary, English-language novels by Indian women authors challenge by refusing traditional images and unequal opportunities” (Superle 49). Dinu, Tinu’s elder sister who was just three years older than Tinu, looks more matured and capable according to Tinu. “Dinu was my lifeline . . . . She was less than three years older than I, but she already had a grip over everything” (16). Though the early maturity was valued by victim feminists as a minus point in girl children, the new girls nurture maturity and power in them in their early lives as rejection of institutionalised feminism. It becomes a necessity for them to acquire power and strength through constant observation and intelligence. They nurture this power being intelligent. In this way the new Indian girls are redefining the word ‘girlhood’.

Like Shashi Deshpande, Mrinal Pande also projects the important role of education in the betterment of future life for girls in the novel *Daughter’s Daughter*. The novels bring forth different methods to establish freedom for the future women through education. In *Daughter’s Daughter* too education becomes a key concept



towards independence. Though Harris talks about the generality of girls in the global scenario, it is very much observable in Indian girls too. Harris's findings give an idea of the new girl in the world that becomes powerful and capable through better education. The young girls use education as a solution to the problem they face in their lives. They strive for education for a better livelihood and economic independence. In the novels the abilities of girls are projected through education. All the novels demand the need for better education for girls which nullify the patriarchal notion of incapable femininity. The financial independence too is seen as a goal to be accomplished through education. It is seen in the novel that children become successful through education and the plot is structured in a way that the girls who opt to stand for better education and self-improvement never fail in life.

In the novel *Daughter's Daughter* Tinu's mother is particular about the studies of her children. She makes them study during the vacation. She compels the girls to understand the importance of education even though children are continuously discouraged by other family members. "Mother makes Dinu and me do our winter school homework each afternoon" (110) Tinu remembers. And how the other female members felt it silly to make girls compelled to study. Tinu's mother spares her from embroidery lessons because she does well in her class. "I tell Mother I cannot embroider like her sisters or Hira di's daughters. She says it's all right with her, so long as I do well in school. I am relieved. I hand Mother my report card, she is pleased and so am I. I have topped in the class and can avoid embroidery room" (91). This is an indication that education can make the girl sufficiently capable of becoming the best in society. Researching on girl children in Indian English novels Kirpal finds that ". . . education has played a significant role in the way girls have begun to look at themselves, at the value they have begun to place upon themselves" (qtd. in xiii)

Through these incidents it is seen that the girls in the novel gain skills to improve their abilities through their interactions with the adult world. Children take cues from the adult world to further assess and evaluate their status and think for the improvement of the individual selves. In the novel Tinu continues to maintain an independent identity. Though she faces several issues at home she never succumbs to the submissive female self. Tinu appears to be an inquisitive girl who always approaches the adults with her doubts regarding so many things around her. Whenever she approaches any adult in the family with her doubts they get rid of her by frowning at her because they find her not at all worth considering. The queries of the child Tinu doesn't seem to attract the attention of any adult because she is a girl who need not know and learn anything other than being a perfect daughter fulfilling her womanly duties. Tinu never gives up even when she is scolded for asking the meaning of 'scoundrel' and some other words. ". . . after I had taught myself to read , dictionaries became my favourite companions (18). Tinu thus learns to become independent and self-sufficient through her own ways.

In the novel Dinu is presented as a girl who surrenders to the social systems. Tinu is presented in contrast to Dinu. Dinu is shown in comparison with the protagonist to show how the protagonist gains power to outwit the current system in the society. Dinu unknowingly slips into the belief systems of the society and accepts her position in it. She tries to act sensible and wants to be part of the system and becomes contented with whatever she receives. One incident at home is worth mentioning in this context. After a quarrel with her father Tinu's mother becomes angry with children and insists on Tinu changing her socks. But Tinu does not listen to it and acts as if she is sleeping. She wonders why people have to be sensible always. Dinu knows that in such circumstances their mother becomes angrier. Though Dinu

asks Tinu to get up, she doesn't feel like listening to anybody. She feels pity for her sister who blindly follows her frail mother. She hears her sister's voice, "Her voice is urgent but gentle, . . . She is still taking no sides. She is acting sensible. I wish she wouldn't. I wish she'd rage, shout, fight. But I know she won't. Ever" (115). The novels reveal the ways of life of new Indian girl and shows with evidence how the new girls survive and live a better life in comparison with the traditional girl child. In the novels there are girls who follow tradition and the protagonist outwits the traditional boundaries to show how one can still survive and live a better life in the same social scenario. In all the novels there are such girls who follow tradition and who are invisible through their ways to fit in the patriarchal regime of the society. The protagonists break the walls and show how they win and how pathetic the life of the traditional girl is. Dinu knows how to behave and live a life in a patriarchal family and reminds Tinu of her duties and gives her directions. All children trust Dinu and her ideas. But Tinu never wants her sister to do that again. But she sadly realises that Dinu will never fight back. The girl children in the novel represent the real-life girl children who live a confused life because of the increased gender segregations in every walk of lives. The girls who try to acquire increased visibility are sceptical and perplexed to ask for more space and freedom. But it can also be noted that the girls represented in contemporary fiction try to create opportunities to assert their existence and importance in the society. It shows that girl children possess abundance of power and capabilities within the boundaries of Indianness. The power attributed to the girl children in various threatening situations in the novels uplift the personality of girls to a different level. The psychological maturity and power in personality are bestowed on the girl protagonists as part of nurturing a new personality for them. It is a way of asserting that the girls are not incapable anymore. This part of empowerment which

celebrates acquiring strength to stand on their own can be considered as the ultimate goal of presenting girl child protagonists in contemporary Indian fiction.

The girl child protagonists seem to build power in them through different methodologies. They nurture power in them by finding ways to become independent and confident in their lives. Thus the girl protagonists put forth a new ideology in their lives in order to question their limitations and optimise the opportunities available to them. Thus the first thing which attracts the reader's attention is the ability in young girls to find solutions for every issue they face on their own and to ward off incongruities of their lives. Another way of making their life worthwhile is by fighting for the denied opportunities, like proper education, to prove their worth in the society. The novelists also highlight the ways the adults support the young women to overcome difficulties in their lives. All these new possibilities presented in the novels project a new version of girlhood demanding their visibility in the contemporary world.

The novel, *The Girl Child* also asserts the importance of power in girls through better education and intelligence. The protagonist Priya, born as a girl into a family that was expecting a boy after the couple had their first girl child she was the most unwelcome member of the family. Priya remembers, "My childhood . . . was a series of reminders that I should have been a boy and a series of comparisons that showed I was not good enough like my sister and cousins" (31). Negligence makes her take refuge in her studies. The girl Priya grows in a family where she finds no significant place for her. She scores high in her class and becomes the best student, to prove her worth. ". . . I achieved first place at school . . . won a debate or oratory contest . . ." (31) She becomes topper in class. Though her grandmother never accepts her victory, she feels proud of herself. She frees herself from her grandmother's unkind words by

nurturing independence and power in her. Priya also stresses the fact that it is because of the lack of education that the women in her family behave so weird and think and act dumb. She remembers when her mother narrates to her the whole story of her birth. “Please let this one be a boy, begged my mother. Had her brothers let her continue her education she would have known from her biology classes that it wasn't up to her to decide if Pooja was a girl or I a boy” (30). Here Priya projects the pitiful state of uneducated women who blindly accept tradition and its illogical social practices. She believes that women continue to believe these ideas because of lack of education. Girls in the novels seem to find a solution through better education. It is a way of finding a tool to approach life in a better way. To fight discrimination and to assert their self, children try their own methods. Priya works hard to become the topper in the class in order to assert her worth and she uses her intelligence to fight those who don't accept her abilities. The attitude of the adults never disheartens these young girls. They consider every encounter with the adults as a way to learn and experience the world and to gain power through these experiences. The girls appear to be more capable and self-inventing while facing problems. In the novel *The Girl Child* Priya becomes aware of this discrimination from her grandmother. “. . . when I achieved first place at school or won a debate or oratory contest, Daadi always dismissed it by saying something like, ‘If only Vikas had a son instead of you he'd be making us proud today with more trophies’ ” (31). But these insults never dishearten Priya. She learns to fight it. “My ultimate weapon of defence was my big mouth. I learned to laugh at Daadi's insults, Ma's submissiveness to the whole thing, and Pappa's indifference to my existence” (31). Priya here represents a girl who has a renewed understanding of the social situation she is in. She reinvents her authentic self which is powerful and able. The criticisms and neglect don't make her lose her confidence but she nurtures

renewed power from all the shocking criticisms of elders. She mentions that “A plethora of unconstructive criticisms at home strangely gave me renewed confidence and made me a better performer on stage where I won many dance and drama competitions” (33). This new approach to the disturbing and exhausting gender segregations in the public sphere makes her able and powerful.

The girl children in the novels celebrate independence and individuality as part of asserting the power in their personalities. The young girls try to build their individual identity and nurture it through personal freedom. This is a prominent character trait consistently found among the girls in recent novels. Through the celebration of independence these protagonists try to fix an identity for themselves. According to Jose Ashford and Craig Le Croy, “Independence is a related aspect of developing an identity” (437). They found out through research that “. . . the adolescent’s connectedness to parents and the presence of a family atmosphere promote individuation in the adolescent’s identity development” (437). The novelists are carefully building individual identity for these girls to celebrate freedom and power and thus making them a new version of Indian girls with a more practical attitude to life.

In the novel *The Girl Child* P R Lakshman presents Priya as an independent girl who goes for her own choices in lives. Priya is a girl who acquired the courage to outlive the abuses of her grandmother, the hatred of her father and the helplessness of her mother. Priya projects her independence through her ability to acquire more space in the cultural constraints of the family, roaming around the city freely and choosing her life partner herself, and showing courage to go back home when she does not feel safe at the house of her in-laws. In the novel young Priya doesn’t understand the logic behind her grandmother’s excessive love towards male children. In peer groups

children retaliate towards the action of the adults in various ways. Because of grandmother's cruel attitude towards girl children in her family, Priya started referring her 'cruella' meaning 'evil woman'. Priya says: "Though we were taught to address our grandmother as Daadi, father's mother, I secretly referred to her as Cruella when I bitched about her to my school friends . . ." (31). Though it is an overtly harmless act by the children, it should be observed that, denial of support from elders makes the young girls to move on in their own methods.

Unlike other novels, Kishwar Desai's work *Witness the Night* has a different background in which the girl child protagonist is a mass murderer. In the novel the novelist introduces the protagonist Durga in a very disturbing situation. She is presented as the murderer of all the thirteen members of her own family but still appears to be calm and sane. Kishwar Desai here takes up another mode of narration in which the child's consciousness is very much elevated to the position of a completely different all-knowing persona unlike most other children. This is a peculiarity of the new girl protagonist who is in one way similar to the other girls yet different when it comes to their real purpose in life. Here, ". . . the 'artfulness' of the narration is obvious, preparing the reader for the acceptance of the tandem presence of 'childlike' ingeniousness and 'adult' sophistication in the implied appraisal" (Bharat 122). Kishwar Desai's novel shows the power of a girl who struggled to raise herself towards the state of empowerment and strength in a traditional family where the members have clear understanding of what is to be done with their girl children.

She grows up as a confused child who couldn't fit herself inside the norms of the family. The confusions and tribulations in the mind of young girls are assumed to be the outcome of imposed social belief systems which deny their equal participation in

different social circumstances. As Hirschfeld mentions “People everywhere and at all times have some beliefs about what children are and what should be “done” with them” (614). Society in its own ways decide what is to be done with the girl children as they are part of the general belief pattern prevalent in the country which confers weaker and inferior status to girl children. They are trained, tortured and tamed to fit to the adult world to be part of tradition and history. Durga tries her best to become visible among other members of the family by practicing boy’s tricks. The novelist presents Durga as a dark complexioned girl without any feminine charms. Also, the girl never feels the need to satisfy feminine beauty standards. She tries to position herself among boys by playing with them and wearing their dress and turban. Her understanding of the fact that to gain respect one has to do boy’s tricks makes her act like them. But later she comes to know that these immediate unrealistic and impractical solutions she found were not the real solutions to her issues. Like other girl protagonists in contemporary fiction Durga too seems to outwit the traditional notion of admiring the male counterpart and are moving towards self-fulfilment and through the acquisition of personal growth and power. Destiny and fate are not the criteria of these young women who continue to question and brood over for a better selfhood.

Like the other girl child protagonists Durga too is a brilliant observer. She observes the other girl children including her sister and tries to analyse their lower position in the family structure and understands how all of them are welcoming a uniformly pathetic future without any personal growth. Durga longed for a better life and better provisions for her. She has seen girls get married early and suffer, tolerate and sometimes die because of the patriarchal social practices which deny even the fundamental right to live their life peacefully. These girls continuously think of repositioning them within the gamut of the family structure. She thinks: “There was no



point in going to my mother because she had already told us that we were going to be married as soon as we were old enough. My father had also told us that no girl in the family had ever worked and there was no reason for him to educate us beyond school” (54). She has already found out that to attain the goal of self-sufficiency and independency she has to get better education beyond schooling. The depressive situation at home makes her desperate to unchain her for herself and for the sake of her sister. She understands that she has to make herself free from the clutches of the Atwal family and for that she needed better education beyond her schooling. She knows that even when the family agrees to educate her nothing good is going to happen in her life. She thinks, “I could go to school, I suppose, but learn what? Some of the girls in school like to talk about doing things and joining a profession, but I know all those are pipe dreams; ultimately, they will all get married, and then have children and be forced to stay at home” (66). She thinks of marriage as a trap in which she is soon going to be caught herself. She doesn’t want to listen and “. . . do whatever the darling Husband says” (66). Because she knows that, “It was important to be financially independent” (97). But her later understanding of the fact that the family prefers girls to be dead rather than keep them as a financial burdens makes her retaliate and fight for survival. This perplexing situation at home makes her a murderer. The girl never feels sorry for what she did and never feels shaken by the incident. Kishwar Desai presents her as a brilliant girl who understands her situation before it becomes unbearable for her. At the juvenile home she wanted to have her books. She is still hopeful that she will reach her goal. She has seen her own sister showing enormous amount of intelligence investing money in shares and making money for her father. Though Durga knows that it is possible for her to have a better life, she also understands that the patriarchal system takes advantage of the intelligence and ability of these young women. She has

also seen her brothers live a life of luxury without doing any job while her sister worked hard and made money to be deposited in her brother's bank accounts. These senseless and cruel practices at home make her act and find a permanent solution to her issue.

In the novel Sharda is placed in contrast to Durga. Both of them from the same family background face the predicament of their lives in different ways. Sharda, the eldest is a harmless girl who is always shocked to see the atrocities of her family towards girl children. The problem with Sharda is her approach to her family. Her relationship with her teacher ends in her pregnancy and she goes through the ordeal her family gets ready for her. According to Durga her sister suffered all her life because she was not able to fight back. When she understands she is also going to get killed she kills the whole family. She manages to be sane unlike her sister who succumbs to insanity because of the torture in the mental asylum. Here the life of Sharda justifies Durga's act of murder. Durga's way of celebrating her independence is different. Her life in the Atwal family is not a happy one but she demands her freedom and independence as part of her self-assertion and individuation. She wants to prove her existence in the world like any other human being. Durga projects her individual self through her anger and her unwillingness to cope with the situation at home. She remembers "This is what my mother told Sharda and me, that we should stop feeling sorry for ourselves –because that is what happened to all girls. Not just us. And then we Would Grow To Like It" (66). But Durga is not ready to like it. She demands her choice in life and insists on living her life the way she wants it. Thus she shows her anger when her freedom is restricted in the long corridors and dark chambers of the Atwal family. She doesn't want to take her hardships as her fate and thus she decides to solve her problem. Throughout the novel Durga never feels sorry

for herself because she doesn't want to build a fake submissive female identity in her like every other girl in her family. She comes to understand the importance of her individuality when she understands the hostile situation at home. She understands that it is high time to fight for all silenced girl children in her family when she too is at the verge of losing her identity. The girl Durga appears to be the most powerful girl who never succumbs to the situation she is in. She never stoops in front of fate. But she chooses to take her armour to survive. “. . . nothing in life is easy and that we all have to struggle to find ourselves and happiness” (204). These words of Durga make it clear how the little girl acquires knowledge of their dangerous situation at home because survival is the basic need for all living beings. She is still a small girl, but she turns to be an ocean of knowledge to face an entire army all alone. At the end she understands that she is “. . . still being swept by the waves of an angry tide, but . . . must allow the sea to grow calmer . . .”(205) She says, “. . . in the water I will find beautiful fish and colourful plants and coral reefs, and I must learn to swim with the tide, not fight it” (205). She appears to be a matured girl who never does anything out of anger and repents later. Here Durga appears to be a more matured girl who never feels sorry about what she did. It is her power, and it is all about she had to do to save the entire race of baby girls. She fights like a warrior princess for justice. Durga's words of her family and of her pathetic situation are noteworthy in this context. “They are all liars. They do things and blame me because that is the easiest thing to do. Especially now. Even if they told you that I used to drink the blood of cows and sit on a broomstick and fly, you would believe it. What about me? I was beaten, I was poisoned, I was raped, but no, that is unimportant” (61).

From these words it becomes clear that Durga, who is born and brought up in a traditional patriarchal household never finds suffering as part of the livelihood of a

woman like the other traditional women. She fights with the social system with her logic and proves to be more intelligent and capable rather than emotional and succumbing to pressures. Durga's deeds appear to be justified by the author. Desai has portrayed her not as a little girl but as a more matured human being. Durga here becomes goddess Durga, who restores goodness through destruction. Durga is presented as Goddess Durga, “. . . with the myriad hands and the skulls around her neck, the Durga who wants to slash and tear and hurt and wound . . .” (205).

In the novel *Sister of My Heart* we see an entirely new narrative technique in which the girls are compared and contrasted to make it easier to find how the life differs for two girls who have entirely different perspectives about life. Here the girls Anju and Sudha are equally important as the dual protagonists. According to N.D.R. Chandra, “In *Sister of My Heart* Divakaruni, by making her two female protagonists, Anju and Sudha narrate their stories alternatively endows them with not only the capacity to tell their own stories but also invests them with the power to interpret and shape their reality” (217). Anju has another spark of knowledge which makes her think beyond her boundaries. She is the power girl in the novel who is very inquisitive and refuses to believe what the adults convey to her. Anju is not dreamy and she hates the way others influence her. She is the new girl who thinks more logically and believes in herself. She despises all negative influences from her own family which she thinks are going to restrict her freedom. She says “I hate Aunt Nalini for constantly telling Sudha and me about how good girls should behave...” (23). “I hate even mother because she believes so much in me. It's like a rock in the centre of my chest, her certainty that I'm special. That I'll make something beautiful and brilliant out of my life, and be a fitting daughter of the illustrious Chatterjees” (24). The girl believes the way she is and is not ready to fit herself into the belief systems of the family. She wants to move on

whatever happens in life and never brood over the past events. Anju criticises Sudha the way she digs the past and dreams about it. She says that, “If you always look backwards, you’ll never get anywhere in life” (31). The girl Sudha seems to admire Anju and her intelligent thoughts. Anju is the new girl according to Harris’s standards who is self-confident, brave and never bothered about the way others see her personality. She is not worried about her looks or attitude. She doesn’t seem to bother, but gets irritated when one of the women guests tease her by comparing her dark skin with the that of Sudha. “I was so angry I couldn’t stop myself from telling her it was none of her business. Besides, I didn’t care if a bunch of silly people who didn’t have anything better to do compared our looks” (27). She doesn’t seem to worry about anything. This shows her confidence. When her mother becomes worried about her future and the dowry they have to accumulate for the marriage of two girls she tells her mother that, “Times have changed. A dowry isn’t going to be as necessary for us. After all, we’re both going to college” (58). She sees her future as an independent girl who is educated and capable of finding a livelihood of her own. She believes that she can support herself with her abilities. She doesn’t believe in her destiny like Sudha, who right away accepts her mother’s decision of early marriage for her after schooling. Anju becomes furious to know the decision of early marriage for Sudha and she tries to make Sudha understand the impact of her mother’s decision. She asks Sudha, “Without a college education, what kind of life are you going to have?” (87). She tells her how bad it is to live a life for her in laws, not at all doing anything for her personal growth and freedom. Anju says, “You might as well tie a bucket around your neck and jump into a well right now. You might as well put blinkers over your eyes and join the bullocks that go round and round the mustard mill. That’s all you’re going to be, a beast of burden for some man” (87).

Compared to Sudha , Anju is a very clever girl. She can't tolerate any discrepancies in the attitude of her family members towards the girls. "Why can't I wear trousers, or a maxi, or at least some kurtas once in a while?" (67), she asks her mother. But her mother tells her that the grown-ups have to decide what the girls should wear and how they should live their lives because they are more experienced than the girls. But Anju never listens to her mother and tells her that, "We would know as much about the world as you . . . if you didn't keep us penned in at home all the time like . . . like prize cows" (67-68). She knows that the girls are being prepared for the in-laws. Even when her mother reveals to her that it was the wish of her dead father, she doesn't seem to accept the logic. She asks her mother, "What's more important, a living daughter's happiness, or a promise you made to a dead man, who is dead because he abandoned us to run after some stupid scheme?" (68). She believes that her father was an impractical man and she doesn't believe it is logical for her mother to follow his dreams. In this novel too the new girl acts on her own logic. These new rebelling attitudes towards a particular system of life make the new girls different and more appealing in all the novels.

Analysing the novels it is seen that any plot on young girls is very limiting and appeals only to a subsection of humanity. But the gravity and the contemporary relevance of the plot look forward to a greater understanding of the term 'girlhood' synonymous with ability and power revealing a better future for humanity. It puts forth the complexities and multiplicities of girlhood contested in the social, cultural and individual planes. The children are presented within the traditional Indian background facing social atrocities and at the same time finding their own ways to outlive the difficult situation at home and in the society. The understanding of femininity and female personal choices make the young women to find similarities and differences of

her personal self in the world around. It is understood through the novels that social assumptions and suppositions on female disposition mask the real selfhood in young women. The girl child protagonists in this way propose a new selfhood for girl children in society. Thus the new girl protagonists are trying to rewrite the imposed identity expected out of the young women depicted so far in Indian fiction. Performing their identity through the new female subjectivity makes them to have a new social position with a flawless personality and selfhood. They try to establish their existence as important as any valuable citizen in society. They prove their worth through their own abilities and strength acquired from the difficulties they face. Thus the novels prove that the making of a new girl is part of an inward and outward empowerment through education and freedom of choices for girl children.

The protagonists in the novels analysed in a way are trying to bring the power to real life girls who are trapped in the cultural codes of Indian society. The youth icons may have influenced their behaviours, but they are more realistic and practical in the Indian context. The novels selected to analyse the plight of Indian girl child poses a different outlook for Indian girls. It brings forth a new dimension of life of Indian girlhood. It is more progressive in the sense that it indicates solutions to the predicament of Indian girl children. The girl protagonists reject the traditional notion of the girlhood attributed to them to move towards a better future. They scrutinise and fight to attain their goal to show that it is possible for girls to make themselves able and powerful.

All the novels discuss the lives of girls from different social backgrounds and show how the girls are trapped in the constraints of society. They are confused and puzzled about the roles attributed to them. These girls are put in circumstances in which their limits are pushed to a great extent that they find a way out of the crisis

they face. In many ways they seem to be trapped in the gender-specific norms of society. They are compelled to share a collective gendered identity rather than individual identity germinating from their own abilities. The individuality in them are not considered significant as the general assumptions about girls deny such attitudes from girl children. The recent contributions towards children and their adaptability in adult culture reveal strengths in them which in many ways challenge the adult way of belief systems. They reveal that “Children are not incompetent members of the adult’s society: they are competent members of their own society, which has its own standards and its own culture” (Harris 187). The child’s world and children’s growth patterns in it seem to make them more capable to deal with the disparities and the customs in the society in a better way. In this way girl child protagonists display the innocence of their childhood and also the experience of their power. In the five novels we find girls acquiring power in the same situation where they were victimised and tortured. They find new ways to resist the attitude of the society, which attempts to fix a better identity in the collective plane of femininity.

Apart from building a detached self the new Indian girl children who appear in the novels nurture a more powerful expression of their individual selves through their capacity for distinction for better opportunities in lives. The girls show uniformity in fighting against the injustices towards them. They make themselves powerful rather than demanding more from the adults. They make themselves capable so that nothing can be denied in their lives. They acquire education, knowledge and power to improve their lives and have more space at home and in society.

The Indian girl, though they celebrate the new girlhood in them, appears to be different from the new global girl. The Indian English novelists present their girl protagonists with a new attitude and approach to lives in the specific Indian cultural



backgrounds. They use their mind, body, intelligence and grow ambitious and independent to live a life of their own. The children achieve a state of power through their body, education and skills and no longer limit themselves to the code of conduct spun for them. From the details of the study of the theorists like Superle, Harris and Bharat, it is found out that the girl protagonists in recent Indian English fiction has the unique characteristics of a super girl who is an amazing blend of the Indian girl child and a super child. According to the social psychologist Christine Griffin, “ ‘Youth’ and ‘adolescence’ are powerful signifiers through which societies construct and consider their/our relationship with the future” (184). The young girls identify themselves with a new culture rather than the followers of the old. In this way it can be stated that the characterisation and representation of girl children in the Indian social set-up marks a new era of girlhood celebrated through Indian English novels presenting them in a more progressive and positive light to be looked upon as makers of future. The novels reveal that the girls have changed “ . . . the commonly evoked image of children [as] that of adult-in-making” (Hirschfeld 613). These girls project future girls who can’t be ignored and suppressed by the adult world. They extend their selfhood from their innocence towards the experience of a new selfhood. They can’t make others write future for them anymore. They are the makers of their own future. As Jay Griffiths rightly observes, “ . . . children are themselves both the author and the book of themselves. They are both the artist and the art and their task is to create themselves” (298).

## CONCLUSION

This study interrogates the ways in which the girl child protagonists are depicted in the post 1980s Indian fiction in English. The portrayal of girl child protagonists has been scrutinised through the lens of literary, social and cultural perspectives leading to a better understanding of the position of girl child both in fiction and in the world that fiction represents. The study has made use of various literary, psychological and sociological theories of childhood in general and its application to the Indian context in particular. Drawing upon the shreds of evidence present in the novels chosen for studies, the research explored the hidden realms of girl child subjectivity in Indian English fiction that resulted in the formation of a unique selfhood in girl protagonists. It is clearly observed that child psyche evolves from insignificance and total neglect to great strength and importance in the post 1980s novels. Thus it is argued that the girl children who appear in the post 1980s Indian fiction in English uniformly show a transformation from the innocence of childhood towards the experience of a new girlhood.

For an in-depth study of the new trends in the post 1980s fiction, a brief survey of Indian English novels has been carried out in the first chapter. This chapter has attempted to find out the changing trends in the literary representations of girlhood in Indian English fiction. It has been shown that while analysing child-centered novels there is a need to distinguish between the pre 1980s and the post 1980s Indian English fiction. It is found out through the study that the girl child protagonists in pre 1980s fiction are shockingly fewer in number. The girl child characters in most literary representations projected themselves as miniature versions of women than children. But the trend seemed to change in the post 1980s fiction and it is revealed through the

analysis that the post 1980s fiction visibly portrayed the girl children more frequently compared to the pre 1980s Indian fiction.

The increasing importance of childhood in the global scenario is analysed in the second chapter through the study of various sociological and psychological theories of childhood and womanhood. The scrutiny of the increased significance of childhood and girlhood in fictional and nonfictional planes led to the discovery that social and cultural movements worldwide have improved the status of young girls and uplifted their position in society. The examination of the contributions of the theorists worldwide clearly shows that children were the beneficiaries of these sociological and psychological researches done worldwide in recent times and this has influenced their social and literary representations.

The study of the literary representation of girl child subjectivity in the post 1980s Indian English novels is carried out through the analysis of five novels from five different Indian English writers of the post 1980s period. The novels chosen for investigation are Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*, P R Lakshman's *The Girl Child* and Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night*. These novels seem to portray the girl children moving from their insignificant childhood to a new girlhood. In the novels, the transition happens in the three realms of childhood experiences. They are the adult world, the child's world and the conflicting space of the adult and child's worlds. The experiences of girl child protagonists in the three realms of childhood are done in the subsequent core chapters.

The adult world and its impact on the girl children have been the major focus of the third chapter. The selected novels are analysed in order to understand the life of

the girl child protagonists under adult guidance and support. The adult world could be seen in all the novels which uniformly projected the supremacy of adult social practices in rearing the girl child. In the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the adult world has been demonstrated through the experiences of Sarita. Sarita's parents represent the adult world, and they fix a position for the girl child Sarita within the hierarchy of the family where she is given a status below her younger brother Dhruva. As part of the adult world, Sarita's mother imposes gender norms on her. Through her mother, she understands the impact of the adult world on her which restricts her growth possibilities. She also comes to know that the world of adults has no value for the girl children. For Sarita, this world of adults constantly tries to prove her subordinate status in society and tries to fit her into the norms of it.

Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* also presents the adult world through the experiences of the child protagonist Tinu. Tinu gets exposed to the adult social practices through her visits to her uncle's house and grandmother's house. The child Tinu witnesses the value systems and practices of the adult world through her aunts and grandmother. From the adult world, the girl understands her secondary position in the family being a daughter's daughter. She comes to realise that her subordinate status is the result of the secondary status of her mother in the patriarchal family which has no value for women or girl children. Through the adult world, she becomes aware of her doubly oppressed status at home being a daughter and a daughter's daughter. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* too presents the adult world through the practices of elder women at the Chatterjee household. The world of adults imposes itself on child Anju through the practices at home which constantly reminds her of the need to get married and the need to make her acceptable for the future husband. The impact of the adult world is such that the child feels trapped in the oppressive rules

and practices of it. P R Lakshman's *The Girl Child* too shows the presence of the adult world. Priya encounters the politics of the adult world in her own house and at the house of her in-laws. For Priya, her grandmother represents adult world because she executes the norms of it in the life of Priya. Her experiences reveal that the girl children are not welcome in any of the families and the adult world despises girl children and even the birth of girl children. The same hatred of adult world towards girls is seen in the novel *Witness the Night* too. Kishwar Desai presents the encounter of Durga with the adult world in her own house. The experiences at home make her believe that the adult world is full of hatred towards girl children. She comes to understand that girl children are not a necessity at home and that only those who survive the attempts of murder live in the family. After analysing the various events presented in the novels the study comes to the conclusion that gender norms are imposed on young girls at a younger age and this leads to their increased understanding of the adult world and the politics of it. They decipher meanings from the practices of the adult world and understand their subordinate status in the society. The analysis revealed that the adult world imposes its rules on children to tame them and to fit them into the adult cultural system.

The gender norms and the increased discrimination faced in the adult world lead children to nurture a world of their own. In the fourth chapter, the selected novels are analysed from the perspective of the child's consciousness. It is observed that there is an attempt at foregrounding the child's world which children maintain within the adult world. Scrutinising the novels, the study comes to the conclusion that children maintain a world of their own in order to nurture their individual personalities. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the child's world could be observed through Sarita's secret wanderings, her dreams, and her inner thoughts. Here the novelist

maintains the child's world in order to show the evolution of the child psyche and the formation of individual identity in the child. For Sarita, it is her personal space in which she celebrates her freedom of thoughts and actions. In Mrinal Pande's novel *Daughter's Daughter* the child's world is introduced in the protagonist Tinu's interactions with the other children in her family. It also represents the imagination and dreams of the child in which she finds her individuality and nurtures a much more liberated self. She executes the freedom of her personal world while at play with other children. Through the child's world Tinu understands the fact that life can be much better when she becomes more visible in her world and in this way she finds that her actions count. The child's world in the novel *Sister of My Heart* is found to be confined to the personal spaces of Anju and Sudha. The two children nurtured their world in their secretcies, imaginations, and dreams. From the child's world, they came to know their real personalities. P R Lakshman's *The Girl Child* presents the child's world through Priya's personal space at home and with the peer groups. Through the experience of this personal space, she becomes aware of her possibilities in life. The novel *Witness the Night* also presents the child's world with a brilliant exactness through the personal world of Durga. In the novel, the child's world is presented through Durga's interactions with her sister Sharda and their friends. The novelist presents this personal space through her personal notes and her personal hours with her sister Sharda. In her world, Durga reveals her true self and her concerns about her life. Through the depiction of the child's world the novels reveal that in the child's world the children try to suggest a better world for themselves without the interference of the adult norms. It is found out through the novels that through the child's world children highlight the incongruities of the adult practices and show child's own ways of projecting a better world for them.

But when adult norms are deliberately put into the world of children, a conflict occurs in the child's psyche and this leads to the formation of different girl child personalities. The formation of this new identity is discussed in the fifth chapter. From the study, it is found out that all the novels considered for the study feature the personality of its protagonist with this new identity. Shashi Deshpande creates the new selfhood through her protagonist Sarita. Her new selfhood emerges when Sarita encounters the adult norms which restrict her growth possibilities. At this point, she demands her choice in life. She demands better education to make her financially independent and free. Through education and new awareness, she comes to know that her dark complexion doesn't make her inferior and menstruation doesn't make her body filthy. She comes to know that she doesn't need to follow the patriarchal belief systems to make her acceptable at home and in the society. This new thought makes a new girl out of Sarita. Like Sarita, the girl child Tinu in *Daughter's Daughter* too acquires independence and a new selfhood. She makes herself more visible by doing well in her studies. Her constant struggles lead her to the discovery that she doesn't need to be sensible always as the patriarchy demands. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni too makes her protagonists know the worth of their life through their new identity. Though Sudha succumbs to the value systems of the adults, Anju comes out of it through her progressive thoughts and positive outlook towards her life options. P R Lakshman's protagonist Priya nurtures the new selfhood through her different approaches in life to overpower the patriarchy. She learns to laugh at the insults of elders. She becomes a good student through better grades and a good performer on stage to win trophies to prove her worth. In Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night* the girl child Durga becomes a new girl through her rejection of patriarchy. She comes to know that it is high time for her to act against the atrocities of patriarchal practices relating to the girl child. She

comes to understand that girl children do not need to succumb to the patriarchal pressures to live their life. She knows that it is possible to retaliate and move against the odds by believing in oneself. Through the chapter, it is established that the girl children are getting increased visibility through their new personalities. Through these child characters, the readers encounter new Indian girls who have been given extraordinary qualities by their creators. The girls are revealed to be all knowing personas who have the vision of their author. Thus the literary presentation of the new girlhood projected new Indian girls who are unlike the real children who are trapped in the world of innocence. Education, new opportunities and individual freedom for expression become the prime concern of these girls in their onward march towards self-invention and a successful future. It can also be noted that the other girls who appear in the novels, acting normal and following the customary child behaviours, fail in life for their bad choices. These girls are used in the novels as parallels to the protagonist to show the choices available for girls.

The girl children who appear in these novels evolve and assume certain unconventional and liberating identities and play the vanguard role to the future generation of young girls in India. These texts seemed to suggest radical possibilities in the reinvention of girlhood in Indian girls. They in a way are extending their possibilities through the power of fiction. Through the brilliant fictional accounts, these girls have created a special status for themselves making them more visible in fiction. Through these accounts, they prove that they are not incapable and the people around them are not incorrigible. They hope that things can change and their dreams may come true.



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