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Journey of Women from Vulnerability to Valiance: with Special Reference to Dina Mehta's "*Getting Away with Murder*"

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“If you had kept your thumb
History would have happened
Somehow differently
But...you gave your thumb
And history also
Became theirs.
Eklavya,
Since that day they
Have not even given you a glance
Forgive me, Eklavya, I won't be fooled now
by their sweet words.
My thumb
Will never be broken” (qtd in Omvedt: 96)

From times immemorial, women has been chained and conditioned with stereotype image of softness, sympathy, beauty and as an idol of sacrifice. Such entrapment has restricted her vulnerably. Doll, squirrel, puppet, commodity, child-bearing machine, subaltern or a witch? This long- held list of endless beliefs or tags have been designated to the women world in the past and present milieu by the phallogentric culture. Their depiction in the literary works was restricted to the margin and traditional stereotypes. Simon de Beauvoir argues in her magnum opus; *The Second Sex* that “A women is never left to nature, but is surrounded with taboos, purified with rites” (178). Thus, women have always been regarded as subordinate both in life and literature.

Gender discrimination is so rampant in the contemporary computer age that many parents overlook their daughters. In the rural areas, a majority of the girls are expected to look after their younger siblings and help in the household chores from their early childhood. Even today, She is forced marry against her own wish, not to whistle, walk or laugh loudly like boys. She rotates in grips of the father, brother, husband, son and ultimately perishes like an unwanted creature without an identity. We already are facing an imbalance in our country -933 females to a thousand males, due to female infanticide.

However, times have changed. Literature of Marginals has become the torch-bearer in establishing the power, talent, potentialities and real identity of the Dalits, Women and Black Women. It has established the self –identity of the marginalized people. It would not be unjust here to mention Arundhati Roy who has remarkably shouldered and problematized the issues of gender- bias and the discrimination faced by the social outcastes in her outstanding novel *God of Small Things*. With the insightful emergence of women writing, literature has given ‘voice’ to the ‘voiceless’. When one shoulders and mirrors the evils of the society, he becomes the agency of disclosure. Literature probes the system of silence, social conditioning, the dominant social hierarchy, gender discrimination, female foeticide, infanticide and most importantly the heinous act of girl child sexual abuse. “Getting Away with Murder” the play by Dina Mehta also takes into the narrative, the above mentioned interlocking disastrous evils of the society.

The present article focuses upon the contemporary society in which one should be ready with ‘defense mechanism’ to give vent to the above mentioned emotions. Dina Mehta’s play breaks the triangle of shame, silence and secrecy. It manifests the significance of ‘self-disclosure’. The paper aims to study the psychological impacts of sexual abuse on girl child and how they can be treated towards normalcy through ‘male-female bonding’ and ‘female-female bonding’. It expresses the importance of ‘defense mechanism’,

'healing' and 'recovery' of sexually abused girl child in contemporary society with reference to Dina Mehta's play "Getting Away with Murder" as an 'agency' into it.

WHY! A girl child is considered vulnerable?

WHY! "To be born a girl is to be subject to violence and servitude"?

WHY! A girl child is always underestimated?

WHY! A woman is considered as Inessential Other?

WHY! Some issues are still under the carpet?

In contemporary times, especially women face the venomous and traumatizing experiences of life, with 'failure' and 'defeat' because of social conditioning and the confusion over whom to trust. The play portrays the suffering of women and also explores how they try to survive in the patriarchal society with wonderful portrayal of characters named Sonali, Mallika, Anil and Gopal. In the play one finds that Sonali was sexually abused from the time she was eight year old. She becomes a victim, a silent sufferer of her uncle Narottam. In the play, uncle Narottam is a representative of an apparent image of a pious and sustenance providing figure, who takes the responsibility to look after Sonali's family, after her father's death. Here lies the system of silence; the social conditioning. The incidence of parents or other care-givers committing acts that harm the very children they are supposed to be nurturing is a sad fact of human society.

Abuse is blatant distortion of child's sense of power. It is an unwelcomed intimate relationship which is encouraged, forced, tricked and pressurized. Driver and Droisen (1989) says; "I believe the sexual use of a child's body/being is the same as the phenomenon of adult rape...To be raped, as a woman or a girl child, is to experience..... An act of aggression in which the survivor is denied her self-determination." The Federal Legislation of U.S. defines child abuse and neglect as "any recent act or failure, to act on the part of parent or care taker, which results in death, serious physical and emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." Thus one can say from the above description that the psychological result for each abused child is deep emotional scars, feeling of worthlessness and they assess themselves as inadequate, deficient and unworthy.

Especially a girl child is psychologically unable to handle sexual stimulation. Abusers warn their victims not to tell anybody, threatening the child with violence. Also shame associated with the sexual activity makes her reluctant to tell. The situation becomes graver when the sexual abuse occurs within the family. The helpless girl child may worry that the other family members won't believe them and will be

angry with them if they reveal the bitter truth. A girl child victimized by abuse and who need to express her pains is put in double blind : if she choose to survive by acting out her anger in various delinquent activities, she is 'discounted' and 'discredited' and if she attempts to her pain due to fear and shame, she is seen as not having suffered any 'real' harm.

We find Sonali too in such miserable and helpless state. She suffers from headaches, hurts; she paints the image of uncle Narrotam as red monster; to give vent to her pent-up emotions. She wants to abort her child too because she is scared. She foresees a future of her girl child, which will tarnish and dent her life because she herself has experienced that inner compulsion and pain. And thus she does not want her baby to bear ancient tyranny of such patriarchal life.

Sonali says:

“My Mother used to exhaust herself over her household tasks-may be because she was grateful to uncle for taking us in after father died. She drove herself and turned me into her satellite. I had to run her errands, mouth her opinions, feel her feelings” (58).

But for people like Sonali there is a ray of hope in people like Sonali herself, Mallika, Anil and Gopal. Sonali with the help of her brother Gopal liberates herself from the torture forever. She herself becomes the agency and takes off the bandages from her face with the brother-sister's implicit, subtle and unsaid understanding and with act of 'toy-cart' (wheelbarrow) accident. She remembers “Uncle *had slipped on the topmost step and fallen down the staircase, landing on his head.*” In this way, Sonali with her brother prepares her own defense mechanism. Her husband too proves a 'healing and recovery agency' by understanding her pain and misery. He does not discard Sonali after the disclosure of her painful experiences but provides her comfort and love, where from we find Sonali in the positive hope being ready to give birth to her child. She emerges as 'SHAKTI', the vital thrust of creation, to be worshipped.”

Thus one can conclude that this play succeeds in providing a healing-recovery to the victims of sexual abuse. It suggests 'hope and change' for better. The ending asserts a new beginning for Sonali. Just like Jaya of Shashi Despande's *That Long Silence*; woman will have to recognize her real identity and importance in the society. Very appropriately Sumitra Kukreti remarks thus: “The realization that she can have her own way- yathecchasi tatha kuru- gives a new confidence to Jaya. This is her emancipation”. (Kukreti : 197). Therefore a woman should stop assessing herself through the male eyes. A patriarchal order can be

subverted if only women take their ranks in the order of intelligence and individuality. An attitudinal shift and a changed mindset of people are awaited. The male members of the contemporary society should develop positive thinking just like Anil in the play.

‘Self-disclosure is the manifestation’ because woman will have to build her own defense mechanism. Erasing the silence symbolizes the assertion of her feminine voice, a voice with hope and promise and a voice that articulates her thoughts. The following lines by Waman Kardak suggest clearly the journey of women from vulnerability to valiance:

“Chase away the army of darkness

Search the sky, the moon, the stars

the light is in you

the light is in you

Be tomorrow’s sun.”

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