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**FIXING BROKEN DOLLS: THE THEME OF CHILD
SEXUAL ABUSE IN INDIAN FICTIONAL
NARRATIVES**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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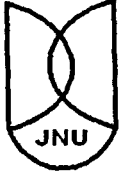
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Certified that this dissertation titled “**FIXING BROKEN DOLLS: THE THEME OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN INDIAN FICTIONAL NARRATIVES**”, submitted by Ms. Swaralipi Nandi, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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DECLARATION

This dissertation titled “**Fixing Broken Dolls: The Theme of Child Sexual Abuse in Indian fictional narratives**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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INTRODUCTION

“To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one’s own”

----- Henry James

How valid is the theme of child sexual abuse as a topic for research? Is there a need to analyse sexual abuse to children and that too as a separate domain of study, distinct from other analyses of sexual abuse under the rubrics of gender, race, colonialism, class that form focal points of oppression? Can we form a separate theoretical base concentrating on the sexual exploitation of the ‘child’ that intersects across all these fissures of domination to a distinct domain of power differential between the adult and the child? These are the questions that first crossed my mind when I considered this as a topic of my dissertation. I have faced questions like what is the need to study child sexual abuse in particular? Are the theories already existing on sexual abuse not sufficient? How is the abused child different from an abused woman? Indeed a lot of work on child sexual abuse sees it as a part of the larger violence patriarchy metes out to the female, on the basis of gender oppression or racial atrocity, class domination or colonial violence. Child sexual abuse is thus received as a form of the multifarious atrocities meted out women in a patriarchal set up. Elizabeth Barnes observes the proliferation of incest and abuse narratives, especially of the fathers violating the daughters, as a topic of study in the 1980s:

It is thus no exaggeration to say that the last decade has shown a fascination with incest—in both popular and scholarly arenas—unknown before. This is in large measure due to the attention feminist scholars have given the subject following the publication of powerful and important novels treating incest by writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou. The sheer number of works treating incest reflects the extent to which incest has become a central subject, and central concern, of the late twentieth century.¹

Barnes locates the emergence of the necessity to address incest as a specific locus of discussion yet her dealing with incest or abuse does not distinguish between ‘adult’ daughters being abused by the father and the ‘child’ daughter being a victim of violence. She places atrocity against daughters of all age under the same rubrics of incest and domination by the fathers. Thus her volume of critical essays includes

themes of child abuse like in the nineteenth century temperance novels and in Virginia Woolf as well as adult incest in the story of Trancedi. No distinct base for reading child sexual abuse has been affected there.

Lousie Armstrong's remarkable *Kiss Daddy Goodnight*² was probably the first mass market publication that dealt with the account of a survivor of child sexual abuse by her father. Four or five years after the publication of *Kiss Daddy Goodnight*, the first anthologies of sexual abuse survivor literature appeared. *Voices in the Night*³ was born out of a lesbian writer's group to which both the editors belonged. Ellen and Bass's anthology⁴ is another seminal text on child sexual abuse anthologising voices of the victims. Other works on this theme follow in and around the same period: Bass and Davis's *The Courage to Heal*,⁵ Alice Miller's *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*⁶, Sandra Butler's *Conspiracy of Silence*⁷, John Crewsdon's *By Silence Betrayed*⁸, Beatrix Cambell's *Unofficial Secrets*⁹, Allan Levy's *Focus on Child Abuse*¹⁰ and many others. But significantly, all these initial texts were either journalistic accounts, or self help books focussing on therapeutic measures to deal with the trauma of child sexual abuse. These are sociological insights into the trauma of abuse, psychiatric studies of the possible healing and mostly autobiographical narratives by the survivors, speaking out through the platform of these books. The theme of child sexual abuse and incest has long been primarily the province of social scientists----psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists----who have sought to make the traumatic event intelligible through their analyses of social and cultural norms, along with psychiatric self-help. Indeed an engagement with the theme of child sexual abuse from the literary point of view in the fictional text is a later development. However, writers, especially the Black Feminist Writers have engaged with the theme of child abuse and later trauma in their fictional narratives: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*¹¹, Maya Angelou's *I know why the caged Bird Sings*¹², Margaret Dickson's *Maddy's Song*¹³, came out as early as the 1980s when these self help books were making their strides. Then of course was the famous *Lolita*¹⁴, though not projected as the victim's resistance through the narrative but nevertheless deals with a middle aged man's erotic desire for an adolescent girl. A lot of aboriginal writing from Australia, New Zealand and Canada also take this theme for the fictional works. Later works of prominence are *A Child Called it* by Dave Pelzer, *Squib*: Nina Bawden, *Cracker*:Betsy Byars, Sidney Sheldon: *Tell me your dreams*, which is a crime thriller.

A critical engagement with the theme of child sexual abuse in fictional texts is perhaps most popular in the readings of Virginia Woolf's work. Her novels have been read in the light of her biographical details which includes experiences of being abused as a child which informs the literariness of her writing. The impact of child sexual abuse on Woolf's life and work has been discussed in as early as 1989 by Lousie De Salvo. Consequent readings by David Eberly, Lisa Tyler, Diana Swanson, Elizabeth Goodenough and others. With an initiation of the discourse on child sexual abuse a lot other writers like Joyce have been re-read in the light of this theme, to find the hidden silences, the secret traumas unheard till date.

Moving on to the Indian scene, things are a little different. The concept of child sexual abuse is a little paradoxical in the Indian context for child marriages and various restrictions on the child, especially the girl child, for being potential sexual objects, informed the Indian cultural context. The concept of child sexual abuse as we understand it today was alien to the pre-independence Indian cultural context as I will be talking about the two contrasting images of the child in the pre-independence India and the post-independence India in the 1st chapter of my dissertation. Yet, child sexual abuse in fictional texts and popular culture were absent in both the types. The pre-independence literature projecting the child being initiated into the circles of marriage, family and childbirth prematurely by today's' standard portray no sexual violation of the child in the terms it is understood today. Even the post-independence women writers focussing on various issues of female oppression hardly gave any space to this theme in particular. Does that ensure there were no instances of child sexual abuse then? Perhaps that is too utopic a thought. In fact there was no discourse about child sexual abuse, instances must have got lost in silence, no one talked about it, and no one was supposed to talk about it.

It was later with the works of various NGOs like RAHI, SAKSHI, SAMVAD and others who came up with frightening statistics and surveys that the concept of child sexual abuse began to gather grain in the 1990s. Let us have a look at the various studies released by these organisations and what they say about the state of affairs in India.

According to a study released in 1997 by the Sakshi Violence Intervention Centre, based on a survey done with 350 school girls in New Delhi, India:

- 63% of the girls had experienced child sexual abuse at the hands of family members.
- 25% of the girls had either been raped, forced to masturbate the perpetrator, or forced to perform oral sex.
- early one-third of the girls said the perpetrator had been a father, grandfather or male friend of the family.

In a 1999 report by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, a study done in 1994 and 1995 with 150 minor-age girls in Bombay, India showed:

- 58 of the girls surveyed had been sexually abused before age 10.
- Of this number, 50 had been abused by a family member or friend of the family.

Another study was done in 1997 by RAHI, a Delhi-based organization. This study focused on 1,000 English-speaking middle and upper class women living in Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Goa. Majority were graduate and under-graduate students. Findings from this study showed:

- 76% of respondents had been sexually abused as children; 31% of these by someone they knew and 40% by a family member. So 71% had been abused either by relatives or someone they knew and trusted.
- While 48% had been abused by a single abuser, 52% had been abused by two or more abusers - meaning the majority of women had multiple perpetrators.
- Abuse for 11% of the survivors occurred once in their lives while 42% were subjected to the abuse many times at different times of their lives either by the same abuser or different abusers at different times.
- 50% of the abuse took place when the survivors were under 12 years of age, 35% had been abused between 12-16 years of age. The significance of this is that victims were almost always in the care or company of some family member, caretaker or known person.
- 68% of those who had been abused were living in nuclear families, 16% in nuclear families that included grandparents, and 15% in extended families that comprised other relatives.

- 60% said their mothers were housewives and 40% said their mothers were employed outside the home.
- 54% of the survivors had told someone about the abuse compared to 36% who did not.
- Most of those who disclosed did so voluntarily. In a few cases, the abuse was discovered by an older person. 30% told a friend, 26% told their mothers, 12% told a sister, 9% told both parents. Only 2% had been to a therapist or counselor.
- The main reasons given for not telling anyone about the abuse were: wanting to forget it happened (23%), fear of what people would think of them (14%), self-blame for the abuse (11%), and not having anyone to trust (11%). Only 3% did not tell because the abuser had threatened them. Only 1% did not tell because they were bribed by the abuser.
- The overwhelming responses to disclosure of abuse by the victims were: anger at the perpetrator, disbelief in the victim, and denial. The actions that followed most often did not involve confrontation of perpetrator.
- According to the study the most often cited long-lasting effects of the sexual abuse were: lack of self-confidence, inability to express feelings, inability to trust people, feeling angry at the world most of the time. Other effects included: avoiding sex or compulsively seeking it out, experiencing chronic aches and pains, use of drugs and alcohol.

A 1996 study done in Bangalore by Samvada with high school students showed:

- 47% of respondents had been sexually abused; 62% of whom had been raped once and 38% of whom had suffered repeated violations.
- Where vaginal and/or oral penetration were involved, 32% of the girls had been under age. Where abuse did not involve penetration, 13% had been under age 10.
- 64% of those whose abuse involved penetration made total disclosure, 20% made partial disclosure.
- Self blame went up as the "seriousness" of the abuse increased; 37% of those who were molested blamed themselves compared to 50% of those whose abuse involved penetration.

- Where families placed great emphasis on virginity and equated it with purity, virtue and family honor (izzat), the victims felt greater sense of shame, self contempt, anger, and felt compelled to keep quiet about the abuse.
- Many of the respondents who feared the person abusing them continued to feel it at the present time. Those who felt anger wished they could retaliate. Those whose desire for revenge (or justice) did not materialize began feeling helpless.
- Asked what they expected as a result of the abuse, 31% called for prevention; 17% said society needed to talk about sex; 13% said women should fight back compared to 3% who said girl children should learn martial arts; 8% said victim assistance should be available; 14% said abusers should be punished; 1% said abusers should be helped.

“Although there are no statistics available I believe childhood sexual abuse is frighteningly prevalent in India,” says Anuja Gupta, founder of RAHI. The centre recently conducted a case study, *Voices from the Silent Zone*, involving 600 English-speaking women from middle and upper-middle classes families in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Calcutta and Goa. The study indicated that of the 76 per cent of women who admitted they were sexually abused as children, 40 per cent were survivors of incest. Incest is, by far, the most common but least talked about oppression that many young girls silently suffer and survive.¹⁵

Indeed, that is frightening and belies all myth about the idealistic value system of the ‘indianness’ of the Indian family. Children are sexually abused, whether it is spoken about or not. The discourse about child sexual abuse might be an influence of the west, but certainly not the reality of the abuse.

However, the discourse is in its initial steps and has a long way to go. The discourse of child sexual abuse is mostly contained within these self-help groups, NGOs and psychiatrists who deal with instances on individual basis and it hardly has the dimension of a social consciousness. Pinky Virani’s book, *Bitter Chocolate*¹⁶ which came out in 2000, was a pathbreaking work, bringing this aspect to the larger public who were shocked and shaken by the revelations. A lot of my acquaintances, initiated to the book have confessed they were unaware of anything of this sort happening in India or that it can be spoken about in public! Pinky Virani’s language is very simplistic, passionate and is almost a direct address to the readers, clearly

attempting to make her voice reach out to an audience non-receptive, unaware, even resistant.

The literay scene, which reaches a larger common public is still very much restrained. A work dealing with the theme of child sex abuse in fictional works in India and the popular medium of the film is still a rarity. One can really count the number of fictional works and movies (I think *Monsoon Wedding* is the only mainstream movie made on CSA, Like *Fire* being the only one known on lesbianism) which has taken this issue as the point of focus. Predictably, a critical approach to the literariness of texts dealing with this theme is virtually absent. A question might be raised regarding the use of Western theories in the study of child sexual abuse in literature in the Indian context. Indeed, I was hardly left with a choice but to take cue from the methods of readings from the Western academia. However, I have tried to apply my own reading from my specific subjective and cultural location wherever possible and not emulated ways of reading. On various occasions I have been asked about the validity of my project under a department of English Literature since this theme enatils the domain of sociological or psychiatric study! Or whether JNU (in order to keep up its progressive masquerade) encourages these topics for dissertation within the framework of literary analysis! Indeed the discourse on child sexual abuse in India is in its intial stages. It needs to enter the popular awareness before more silences are dared to be broken, leaving us literary critics more spaces to exercise our power!

And in this context let me clarify the precise objective of my dissertation. This dissertation is not a sociological study of the aspect of child sexual abuse, nor a psychiatric engagement with the variousa mental complexities of the abuser and the victim. Rather my area of discussion is purely the literary domain, as how the theme of childhood, sexuality and abuse gets **represented** within the domian of Indian popular fiction and film. How is the theme dealt with as a fictional plot? How do the issues, widely considered controversial, get projected? What are the various dialectics that take place within the narrative domain? and finally what is the significance of a fictional exercise dealing with this theme in the actual larger social context? The narrative domain and the intricacies within it thus provides for the discussion about the various issues on the constructs of childhood, sexual agency, a child's language, the protest of the abuse victim and the resolution of abuse. In the selection of the texts I have considered multiple genres of novels, short story, play and film script Though the abuse victims in these are mostly female and the perpetrators male(quite faithful

to the statistics) yet I have taken note of instances of male victims as well as female perpetrators for a different theoretical base other than gender as I have mentioned earlier. But most significantly my selection of texts has both male and female authors, restraining the common categorisation of such a theme to only a specific domain concerning only women, with female victims and female writers considering it worth writing about. While it is true that a theme like this gets more space in an autobiographical/semi autobiographical account of a female writer, my objective as I have mentioned earlier as well, is to look beyond the self contained discourse and locate the theme in the larger social sphere, eluding the boundaries between the abused and the non-abused, the 'abnormal' victim and the 'normal' non-victim. In my reading the author's personal experience latent in the incidents of abuse in the fiction is immaterial. Hence texts hasn't been binarised on the dichotomy of male author and the female author. Instead I have located similar patterns in the way the theme and the characters have been dealt with by the writers, shifting my focus on issues that concern more on the dealing of an absolutely tabooed aspect in the garb of a fiction.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

What is child sexual abuse? What are the specific forms through which a child can be abused by an adult, sexually? Pinky Virani lists the various forms of exploitative actions that can be categorised as Child sexual abuse.

- An adult exposing his, or her, genitals to a child or persuading the child to do the same
- An adult touching a child's genitals or making the child touch the adult's genitalia
- An adult involving a child in pornography which includes showing a child pornographic material
- An adult having oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with a child
- Any verbal or other sexual suggestion made to a child by any adult
- An adult persuading children to engage in sexual activity
- An adult inserting foreign objects into a child's body for his, or her, own sexual gratification¹⁷

A comprehensive, academic, definition of Child Sexual Abuse would be the one provided by Driver and Droisen in 1989:

Any sexual behaviour directed at a person under sixteen years of age without that person's informed consent. Sexual behaviour may involve touching parts of the child or requesting the child touch oneself, itself or others; ogling the child in a sexual manner, taking pornographic photographs, or requiring the child look at parts of the body, sexual acts or other material in a way which is arousing to oneself; verbal comments or suggestions to the child which are intended to threaten the child sexually or otherwise to provide sexual gratification for oneself. It must be defined by every circumstance in which it occurs: in families, in state-run and private institutions, on the street, in classrooms, in pornography, advertising and films.¹⁸

Let us look at this definition carefully. Child sexual abuse entails involving a person 'under sixteen years of age' without 'informed consent'. This clause can raise vital questions regarding the age of sexual consent. Is an under sixteen person capable of sexual consent under any circumstance? Even if the person gives an 'informed consent' can that be taken as a valid license for sexual contact with a child? What is

then the right age for agency in sexuality? Who decides whether the child is capable of sexual agency, the child himself or herself or cultural constructs? What defines the 'child' and 'childhood'?

Indeed we need to address these questions before taking any ethical stand regarding this issue. Childhood and its relation to sexuality are hazy domains where a definite consensus is tough to arrive at. However, let me make my personal stand very clear. Whether a child has access to sexuality or not is not the point of contention for me, the association of the child with sexuality can vary according to the individual persona of the child, the social situations in which s/he is bred and various other factors that shape up a child's personality. Also, the term 'child' is again an all inclusive term categorising all under a certain age, irrespective of the various stages of development within that category that generates differential levels of perception regarding the cognitive world. Not only that, an entry into the stage of puberty does not mark an initiation of the child into the definition of adulthood, though it is a biological initiation into sexuality. Thus, whether the child really has access to sexuality at any stage of its childhood is not the focus of concern. What is important for me is that whether the cultural context which we are dealing with endorses the association of 'childhood' and 'sexuality' and sanctions sexual agency of the child. If a discursive base for the child's sexual agency is not available, the question of 'informed consent' does not arise, any sexual contact between the child and the adult would entail a difference in power between the two parties, one with a sexual agency and one without it. Since there is a lack of a uniform basis of association of childhood with sexuality in a cultural context denying sexual agency of a child, an acceptance of the clause of 'consent' also threatens the spaces of protest against a coercive act by an adult. It is more rational to go with Herman that "Any sexual relationship between the two (an adult and a child or an adolescent) must necessarily take on some of the coercive characteristics of rape".¹⁹ Thus sex between an adult and a child in a context of childhood asexuality always entails a power difference between the two parties—one has cultural sanction to access sexuality while the other lacks it. Indeed, against the grain of post modern thought, diversity in the affair of a child's access to sexuality in a cultural context of childhood asexuality can in fact work as weak fissures in executing resistance against acts of coercion where the child is exploited on the basis of sexual ignorance. Thus, my stand in this issue is to resist any sexual contact

between an adult and a child, inevitably marked by a power difference based on sexual agency.

It is on this basis that I have considered the term 'child' as a universal category for discussion. Without bringing in the gender diversity within the category of the 'child', I have looked at sexual coercion against a child as a singular form of violence. The child as a category has been considered as a homogenous whole in contrast to the other homogenous whole of 'adult', irrespective of the gender of the adult as well. The sole basis of this categorisation, as I said earlier is that with the adult lies the sexual agency of not only sanction to sexual act but also access to sexual knowledge and a control over language pertaining to sexuality, while the cultural construct of a 'child' denies it sanction to sexual act, restrains sexual knowledge and taboos language pertaining to sexuality. However, the texts that I have dealt with mostly showcase the victim as female and the perpetrator invariably male. Though this might be a reflection of the actual situation where the girl child is the most common victim than the male child and the perpetrator is a power yielding male yet, I refuse to approach this theme from solely on the basis of male domination and female oppression. A little diversion in this context, understanding child sex abuse as a gender practice often involves the argument that oppressing the child is a necessary repercussion of men's experiences of powerlessness as a result of their relations with other men in cultural contexts where first "the most virulent repudiators of femininity"²⁰ will experience 'true manhood' and secondly, where, the dominance of certain types of masculinity is sustained through the construction of a Masculine Ideal (that is, a dominant construction of manhood against which other forms are measured and evaluated) and the differentiation of subordinated and marginalised masculinities²¹ Though in my dealing with the texts I have used 'she' or 'daughter' synonymous with the victim at places, especially in chapter 5, it does not entail that the child can be merged in the category of 'women', again on the basis of sexual agency. I am not saying that the woman has enough sexual agency to be in equal terms with a man, but I feel the child's lack of sexual agency, based on the trope of ignorance is different from an adult woman's lack of sexual agency. My reading of child sexual abuse is thus not an essentialist one of patriarchal oppression, in fact rather than making patriarchy the sole culprit for the plight of the child, I have concentrated on the complexities of cultural constructs. My point of contention is not the binaries of male/female, but rather child/adult, access to sexual agency/lack of

sexual agency, the victim/non-victim, the private/public, binaries which need to be critiqued for a conclusive approach to the theme of child sexual abuse. My use of 'she' for the victim is thus for the context I am dealing with and not an all-defining term. However, I have not overlooked the patriarchal discourse surrounding child sex abuse and incest, especially in the context of the cultural constructs like language and silence, pathology and therapy, public sphere and justice.

There needs to be another clarification made regarding the interchangeability of the terms 'incest' and 'child sexual abuse'. Many of the observations I used for my dissertation are contextualised to specific instances of incest, particularly father-daughter, and do not pertain to child sexual abuse in general. Yet I found them relevant in my dealing with child sex abuse because of two reasons:

- a) Incest with a child is just a form of child sexual abuse, and there's not much of a difference if the victim is a child and the perpetrator is an adult, except perhaps the degree of breach of trust if it's a parent.
- b) Incest and child sexual abuse becomes almost synonymous, especially in the cultural context of India where familial structures extend to embrace even the larger society. As Jen Shelton observes:

Society offers men the role of "father" without strict regard for genetic relation, so that even unrelated men can exist in a father like relationship to a child.²²

The Indian society is based on a familial pattern of community bonding. Thus the ways of addressing used for members in the family are also used for persons in the extended society. And not only is it just a matter of addressing, with a particular address the cultural expectations associated with that role sets in as well. Thus a person addressed as a 'grandpa' is expected to play the role that entails the address though he might not be a part of the family at all. This extends the cultural impossibility of child sexual abuse beyond the immediate family into the larger society as well. A child is a community's child and the entire society exists in a relational web with the child. The child's protective status applies not only to the family but beyond it. The notion of child sexual abuse by any adult is thus a ideologically equivalent to incest.

Incest and child sexual abuse are thus not strictly compartmentalised terms but rather intersect each other at various points.

Before I move on to the brief description of the chapters, let me point out an interesting counter literature that is circulated against the whole resistance against child sexual abuse. Various articles in journals of anthropology, psychiatry, social history have dismissed the issue of the atrocity of sexual contact with a child, as generating a negative discourse regarding the intimate relationship between an adult and the child needed for society's healthy development. Taking the basic point of childhood being a social construction rather than a natural category²³ for argument, questions have been raised regarding the dialectics involved in the repressive mechanism of child sexuality. Creation of the non-sexual child was the progressive development of a clash between the biological and sexual maturity of children and the social roles now assigned to them, which included no socially sanctioned outlet for their sexuality. (Bill Paris) When the conflict was eventually noticed, both the secular society and the church were forced by their own bondage to the childhood culture they had created to essentially declare children to be non-sexual. When faced with the biological reality of the "non-sexual child" who could not help feeling and acting sexual, the adult social, educational and religious powers turned into a variety of repressive tactics. This notion of the construction of the non-sexual child and the consequent culture of repression is also exposed by Foucault (*History of Sexuality*) and Freud. The argument that follows from this is to shun the repressive authorities and support the 'natural' sexuality of the child, denying the child its rightful share in sex is thus exploitative.

With the notion of the sexual child as these arguments propose comes the notion of normality of having sex with a child. In this section, I'll be referring to the various biological, anthropological, philosophical, psychological and even religious justifications that appeal against the very premises of child sexual abuse. Interestingly, the South Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault charts out the possible sex plays a child might indulge in with specific periods of his age. The contention is some or probably all children are capable of what appears to be sexual response even in their earliest years—auto-eroticism develops at a very early stage.

The Anthropological justification cites numerous instances of child-adult sexual contact even incest, as was permitted in pre-modern society. From the annals of history, instances of 'boy love' of the Greeks, incest among the Egyptians, Oriental child marriages all support the justification. The logic is: children learn to do everything else, from writing the alphabet to hammering a nail, from older more

experienced people; but when it comes to sex why is it a taboo? In older cultures, as anthropological studies testify, before children began to be regarded as excessively fragile and in need of a kind of care that has reached pampering stages, sex between adults and children was not at all uncommon.(Bill Paris)

Most psychologists hold the opinion, basing their assessment on a paper entitled "The Reaction of Children to Sexual Relations with Adults" published in the 1930s, that there is no clinical evidence that the sexual activity is harmful to children, they showed 'less evidence of fear, guilt or psychic trauma.' The American Psychological Association's Psychological bulletin concludes that the negative effects of child sexual abuse have been overstated. They want to dump judgemental terms like child abuse and molestation in favour of value free terms like adult-child sex. Psychological justification of this also dismisses the narratives of trauma voiced by some stating that the self-reported effects do not support the assumption of wide scale psychological harm which has to be empirically established.

The philosophical reasoning draws a parallel between negative attitudes towards child sex and returns to Greek dualism and the idea of the body as bad, evil, wicked and a prison for the soul. The consequence is the objectification both of sex and the sexual actions as well as partners of evil. Tertullian called women the gate to hell; Augustine saw every act of sex as an act of lust. Children who have taught themselves as distinct from their bodies and to abhor any sexual pleasure as hurt cannot experience the wholeness and unity of their own selfhood nor created by the union of persons who abjure power and embrace mutuality.²⁴ Now let us have a glimpse of the religious justification. Bill Paris asserts:

The advance of civilisation has benefited as a lot but in spite of many positivities the natural, God created sexual development of children has been sacrificed. Both social and religious laws on this issue are culturally conditioned and not God given. Among all the sex laws of the Old Testament there is not even one on the subject on adult-child sex. Is the whole religious, social and legal pattern really an improvement on the patterns of the past? We might wonder in the light of other cultures and the silence of the scriptures."²⁵

Thereby, what proceeds, according to all these arguments, as Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield put it,²⁶ is a severe anti-sexual attitude adversely affecting society. Several factors are also cited as explanations to this repressive sexuality by several

theorists. Mosher describes the concept of the moralistic intolerance of the left and the analysis of 'claim makers' who create new problems and make their career out of manufacturing the answers. He traces the development of the view of children presented in the history of American child saving: "The rebellious child became the deprived child who became the sick child who has now become the victimised child."²⁷

Money sees the anti-sexuality of the child sexual abuse system as a reaction to the sexual revolution of the 60s and a response to the fear generated by AIDS.²⁸ Okami also believes there is a 'covert moral crusade' against the 'sex positive' changes occurring in the era. In addition he believes adds the component of historical social political feminism to the explanation for this phenomenon.²⁹

Victor sees it as a moral crusade as underlying the belief in a Satanic cult conspiracy.³⁰ He believes the satanic cult scare arises from the deep-seated frustrations and anxieties by people about modern society. He views the problems of everyday life. The moral crusade arises out of the need to identify scapegoat deviants to blame. Negative attitudes towards involving the child in sex can be interpreted, in the light of the post-modern sexual liberties as a repressive ploy of the ideological state apparatus— curbing the freedom of the individual in his or her choices. It is a similar argument that homosexuals launch against normative society while crusading for their individual liberties.

The effects of such a negative attitude is also made to appear ominous. Paris equates the treatment meted out to the abuser with witch hunting violence where not only the perpetrator but also his family is hounded by various agencies. It is argued that such is the age of fear that child-parent intimate interaction becomes restrained and the child's experience of intimacy enters a stage of deprivation (this comes coupled with the auxiliary argument that child parent physical intimacy and obvious gestures of affection promotes healthy endomorphines among children and help them grow up as mentally sound. In fact, instances are cited from Nazi Germany where to assure the development of an inhuman, cruel, emotionless Nazi soldier in future children were deprived of any adult affection.) The current culture adds dramatically to the fears of adults in touching children. Underwager and Wakefield angrily observe:

After 20 years of trying to persuade men that they can be soft and gentle, that they can have feelings and cry, and that they can be tender

and intimate, now when they believed it and affectionately touch children, they may go to prison!³¹

Kincaid attempts to expose the ridiculous permissiveness of the society:

Take the following two scenes:...in the first an adult is striking a screaming child...in the second an adult sitting with a child on a bench and they are hugging...which do we judge to be normal? A society which honors hitting and suspects hugging is immoral; one which sees hitting as healthy and hugging as illness is mad and should be locked up.³²

Indeed, these various studies do offer significant insights and makes us critically introspect our unmitigated opposition to any connection made between a child and the notion of sexuality. Yet, the flaws of the arguments can be easily located. These arguments take certain premises as pre-assumptions which can be problematic in evaluating the aspect of child sexual abuse.

Firstly, there is an attempt to equalize of the sexual contact with the non-sexual contact. When it is said ‘much of the emotional and physical sickness of our society traces to the lack of intimacy with the adults in childhood’, there is an obvious blurring of the boundaries between sexual intimacy and non-sexual affectionate intimacy which are not interchangeable concepts.

Secondly, justificatory assertions supporting childhood sexuality as an age long normative practice invariably take recourse to a retrogressive culture, a past practice which is still prevalent in some of the most obscure (and exotic) marginalised primitive societies in some distant Pacific island whose existence can hardly be taken as a model.

Thirdly, a negative attitude towards the involving the child in sex with the adult is equated to inflicting absolute ignorance on the child, and as exemplifying negative attitude towards sex education as well. However, the fact is, the child can be taught about his/her own body without necessarily making him/her learn through an actual performance with an adult.

Fourthly, negative consequences of being in a culture cautious about child sexual abuse are exaggerated to their full. Like the problem mentioned at first, there is a deliberate blurring of boundaries between the non-sexual contact and the sexual contact. The fear that the prohibition of one will necessarily lead to the prohibition of

- b) access to sexual knowledge vs lack of sexual knowledge
- c) participant in the act vs victim

I attempt to chart out the power hierarchy in each representation depending on these six factors.

Taking narrative agency as the point of emancipation, I proceed to the next chapter where I have focussed on the trope of language in first person narratives by the child narrator. The narratives by the child narrators in the texts are marked by certain dynamics in the language of expression. I have sorted out the passages describing the experience of abuse from the first person point of view of the child and attempted a detailed analysis of the presences and absences in language as well as the tropes of possible resistance for the child victim.

Arguing that a child's narrative is incomplete in itself unless the adult interpreter engages in the construction of meaning, I move on the other type of first person narrative by the victim speaking about abuse as an adult which is apparently more empowered in terms of language. The texts considered here project the victim as female, breaking out the silence about an childhood abuse by speaking out, and just not speaking out but spilling out the revelation in the public sphere with a confrontation with the abuser. In this chapter I have analysed the politics of the very act of speaking out within the narrative domain, the portrayal of the victim as an adult survivor in popular culture and the various discourses that surround the image of the victim and the act of speaking out that attempts to threaten the normative order of society.

However, the next chapter reveals that act of speaking out in itself might not have the possibility to emancipate the victim at least within the narrative domain. The resolution attained in each text after the act of revelation has been analysed critically, the ending of the stories revealing a deeper politics working towards defusing the voice of protest of the victim into the normative fold of society, neutralising its threat to the status quo.

The conclusion thus arrived at is the need for the engagement of the larger community beyond the victim's, where binaries between the abused and the non-abused, the diseased and the normal, the narrator and the listener are merged into an interactive space for an all inconclusive and emancipatory discourse on child sexual abuse. The significance of the fictional texts that take up this theme thus cannot be overlooked in spite of the various problematics they entail, envisioning a space for the

the other does not follow logic. No man has ever been sent to jail for just hugging a child with non-sexual motives.

Fifthly, the claim that the child is not adversely affected by sexual contacts with adults is again a fallacious conclusion drawn entirely from the point of view of the adults where the child has no agency.

The common element in most of the justificatory arguments is that the castigation of child-adult sex is actually a repressive apparatus and stands in direct contrariness to the desired goal of individual liberty. However, this central premise is flawed due to the assumptions that it makes----

- (a) It assumes that the child is fully conscious of the workings of his/her body and is ready both physically and mentally for sexual initiation.
- (b) That the child has full agency in the sexual act, i.e. he/she is a sexual partner to the adult sharing the same power status, that it is an exchange between equals and not a relationship of dominance and subordination.

It is this presumption on the part of the pro-child-adult sex arguments that stand most fallacious. Sexual contact between a child and an adult can never be at equal power matrix, especially in a culture where the imbalance of dominance and subordination has its roots in sexual hierarchy. And this precisely is the problem point in child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is defined as any form of coerced sexual interaction between an individual and a person in a position of power over that individual.” Any sexual relationship between the two must necessarily take on some coercive characteristics of rape.

Coming to the chapters in this dissertation, the first chapter traces the construction of the category of the child and its relation to sexuality historically, both in the Western context and in the Indian. The ‘child’ as an asexual and innocent construct is not a natural category, it can be historically charted along with the major material and ideological changes that resulted in the crystallisation of this homogenous category of the ‘child’. The child in the Indian context can be traced back from the ancient laws of Manu to a major shift in the image of the child, especially the girl child in the post-independence period. I introduce the texts for my analysis, all belonging to post-independence period, or even more precisely, post 1980s and categorise the portrait of the abused child in them on the basis of six opposite poles:

- a) narrative agency vs lack of narrative agency

repressed voice to thrive. These texts and critical engagements with this theme as I have attempted in this project will hopefully open up spaces of mutual consensus and solidarity among the binaries, the aspect of child sexual abuse will find an entry point in the public sphere, entailing a more empathetic reception of it which will lead to an democratisation of the existing institutions of family, law , society. Or if that is too far a goal to be reached, a dialogue generated in the larger sphere might establish voices of protest as potent spaces of resistance, though not merged into solidarity with the 'other', yet thriving in a space of their own which is dissoluble in the dominant normative discourse.

I am conscious of the shortcomings of my dissertation. Taking up a theme like this entails a lot of responsibility to address as many aspects of it, generating discussions about them. Yet, due to limitations in time and space, I could only concentrate on certain texts and specific aspects in them. My project focuses on the specificity of child sexual abuse mainly within the domestic space by a member of the family. I have not made any distinction between the various levels of abuse, from molestation, to masturbation to rape, nor the gender of the victim or the abuser which demands a different theorisation altogether, bringing them all down on a common platform. The menace of child prostitution has also not been included in this dissertation, a study of which involves more complex structures rather than just the family. Similarly, the aspects of economic dependence, class, and other factors are also overlooked. I am quite conscious of these gaps and do hope to take them up in a future project on this subject. This is just an initiation of the discourse, all beginnings are limited: indeed there is a long way to go.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHILD REPRESENTED: ISSUES OF CHILDHOOD AND SEXUALITY

The child as a pedagogic category in the Indian socio-cultural context is a complex rendering, especially in the domain of sexuality. The post-independence legal construction of the child under the age of 16 is not necessarily a very faithful reflection of the image of a child in the Indian psyche, which again cannot be generalised as a homogenous whole. The term 'Indian Psyche' is a problematic construct for it requires regional, religious, castist and temporal specification. So does the term 'child' which needs to be clarified broadly on the basis of gender. With all these varied implications of the child in the Indian socio-cultural context, can we distil out an unadulterated category of the 'child' and its relationship with sexuality?

Before we move on to the different categories of childhood, a historical overview of Indian childhood (pre dominantly Hindu) needs to be concentrated on. Sudhir Kakar summarises Indian childhood through the various paradigms like of 'Law' and medicine. From Manu's injunctions in ancient Indian Law he concludes that

Children belong to the second group ----consisting of women, the aged, the sick and the infirm—who deserve society's protection and claim its indulgence.¹

Men are forbidden to speak harshly to the children and children are exempted from punishments and fines. Thus Manu's laws, otherwise condemned as repository of inequity show an attitude of protective nurturance. The child in ancient Indian medicine is again one who's protected.

With compassion and tenderness for the young, Ayurveda strives to develop the adult caretaker's capacity to comprehend the needs and emotions of the child-- needs that are apt to be overlooked since they are articulated in voices that are frail and words that are indistinct.²

Again in the conclusion to the chapter on "The Depiction of Children in *Mahabharata*", Kakar notes two themes in the traditional Indian view of childhood encountered in ancient law and medicine. First, there is an intense paternal longing for children, and their upbringing is characterised by affectionate indulgence. Secondly, the Indian tradition subscribes to an ideology that downgrades the role of the environment and nurture in the development of a child, and instead emphasizes a deterministic conception of mystical heredity.

A concept such as the 'utopia of childhood' emerges most prominently with the Bhakti period. The uniqueness of Bhakti poetry lies in the image of the poet as the mother towards God, who is the child. The celebration of the Divine takes place through the metaphor of the celebration of the child and the attributes of divinity in the child.

Most references to children in the text are positive, full of acceptance and a joyous generativity that is actively solicitous and protectively caring of the next generation. Indeed in a few passages the child is thoroughly idealised as a creature 'without the desires and aversions'--and thus nearer to God.³

What is interesting is that in the Indian child Utopia, as Kakar points out these qualities are not seen as 'childish', to be socialised out of experience, but valuable attributes of human beings—of all ages---since they are but an expression of the Divine. To sum up the concept of this child utopia

In medieval Bhakti literature, then, the child is truly an exalted being. To grow up at the centre of his human world, absorbed in interplay with the mother, admired for his spontaneity and self-delight, seem to be the poet's conception of a child's 'birthright'.⁴

However, this reference to the 'child' in the discussion of the stages of childhood in the Indian tradition conceals two omissions: girls and children belonging to the lower castes have been largely excluded from this tradition.

The child-centeredness is however limited to boys: the Indian tradition is indifferent, if not overtly hostile, to the developmental fate of girls....Indeed, many *sohras* express the mother's relief that her worst fears have proven to be unfounded: 'As the *turiyan* leaf trembles with a gust of wind, my heart trembles at the thought that I may give birth to a daughter.'⁵

This marks a crucial break on the hypothesis of Indian childhood that Kakar builds out which he later specifies as primarily referring to a *boy* belonging to one of the *upper castes*. Indian childhood thus, is no homogenous term and has to be classified according to gender. Along with gender we need to look at the aspect of time as well in the development of the notion of Indian childhood. Not only does the notion of childhood vary for the male child and the female child, we can locate a marked difference between the notion of childhood in pre-Independence India and post-

independence India, the change to be located with the trajectory of the development of the notion of the child in Western thought. However, it needs to be remembered that Kakar's theorisation, as quite obvious, is focussed on the Hindu traditional society and scriptures (that too precisely Brahmanical) and thus it is problematic to consider it as an all comprehensive study of 'childhood and society in India'.

Vinay Kirpal In the 'Introduction' to *The Girl Child in 20th Century Indian literature* points out the crucial differences between the depiction of the girl child in pre-independence period:

As in ancient literature, girl children are not presented as girl children. Their chronological age might place them as children but they appear in these works as miniature women---child brides, child wives, child widows. The portraits are traditional and reflect the characteristic social expectations of the times.⁶

From this, we can assume that with a demi-adult stature, the discursive space of sex was not a taboo to these 'miniature women' especially with the attainment of puberty. The adult-like portrayals of the girl child in e.g Bengali literature in the writings of Saratchandra, Tagore and Bankim project that they were not restrained from knowledge about sex----The concept of a pristine asexual childhood especially for the girl child was not socially endorsed in a culture which was normatively based on child marriage. The concept of child sexual abuse as we understand it today was thus alien in pre-independence literature. What was critiqued were, as Vinay Kirpal locates, the evil social practices of infanticide, dowry, polygamy and the rituals of widowhood which were perpetrated on the entire girl kind by a whole society and not individual acts of violence(based on direct sexual onslaught).

We thus get very contrasting representations of the boy child and the girl child in Pre-Independence Indian tradition. While the boy child was more of a protected, non-role playing, de-sexed child with other-worldly virtues, the girl child was initiated into an adult role and its implications very early. However, she locates an interesting turn in the events in the portrait of the girl child in post-independence literature which exhibits the following peculiarities:

- (i) Girl children appear as girl children and not as girls cast in adult roles.
- (ii) Girls in Indian English literary pieces are progressive and not role-typed. These are girls who have been brought up in the freer atmosphere of Western educated, middle class, nuclear families.

- (iii) However, they do not depict the victimisation and violence upon the girl child in today's India. There is a telling silence about present day cruelties and oppressive practices that mar the life of the growing Indian girl.

What can we possibly derive from these observations? Firstly, that the idea of childhood that had characterised boy hood somewhat extends to the girl child as well. With the democratisation of education, nuclear family system, Westernisation, Indian childhood becomes a homogenous construct at least theoretically and legally, perhaps taking its cue from the Western concept of childhood.

With the notions of childhood changing with ages, it can be derived that childhood is a construction rather than a natural category. The arguments supporting this thesis of the 'innocent, non-sexual child' being a construction locates a historical basis for it. Philippe Aries was the first to point out that modern Western childhood is unique in the way it quarantines children from the world of adults, so that childhood is associated with play and education. Bill Paris locates the construction in concrete historical developments:

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the period of the Enlightenment of the 18th century and the Industrial Revolution produced profound effects in Europe and America on the attitudes of society and church toward children.⁷

Prior to these developments, children had been regarded mostly as potential adults and actual adults in terms of economic structures of families where children were essentially workers. However, with the Reformation, Christians became more concerned for health and social welfare. While with Industrial Revolution there was a growing consciousness that children were not physically suited for hard labour. The churches and other altruistic organisations took notice of their exploitation eventually leading to the development of child labour laws. Their roles as productive, even essential members of society diminished. The development that closed the 'circle of the cult of childhood' was compulsory public education. It lessened the practical usefulness of children. It was also a new force that restructured childhood so that youth would from now on be socially defined as 'children' and 'students', not proto-adults.

The breakdown of joint families into nuclear families too has been cited as one of the reasons for the distancing of children from sex. While earlier education and instruction from different perspectives would infiltrate, with the nuclear family, sex

education began to disappear along with much of the rest of traditional instructions. With these developments, children were now to be completely “protected”, cared for, nurtured in various ways, treated as fragile and really viewed as an entirely different class of beings from adults.

Childhood as a pristine, distilled category as different from adulthood thus crystallised in the Romantic age. In a seminal work Judith Plotz⁸ locates the origin of the discourse of childhood in the Romantic age, taking cue from a number of instances. She mentions that Horace Elisha Scudder, the editor of *Atlantic* monthly who loved both children and large cultural generalisations about them had declared that through the agency of the Romantics, the nineteenth century had discovered childhood as a distinct, individual element of human life. As Scudder declared:

The discovery of this new continent of childhood by such explorers marks the age as distinctly as does the discovery of new lands and explorations in the earlier Renaissance.⁹

By the late nineteenth century, such claims to childhood as a domain for exploration and to Wordsworth and his contemporaries as its explorers had become commonplace. Anthropologist Wilfred Meynell could claim that “the nineteenth century has almost discovered the child”.¹⁰ Plotz comments that the metaphor of discovery produces strangeness and wonder where there had been familiarity. The differences of children and the separateness of the child world come to the fore. But Walter Savage Landor the species difference is no mere metaphor:

Children are not men and women, they are almost as different creatures, in many respects, as if they were never to be one or the other; they are as unlike as birds are unlike to flowers and almost as blossoms are unlike birds.¹¹

For De Quincy, childhood is a world elsewhere:

Infancyis viewed, not only as a part of a larger world that waits for its final complement in old age, also as a separate life in itself, part of a continent, but also a distinct peninsula.¹²

Childhood not only does get sequestered as a separate domain, it exists in contrast to the domain adulthood and thereby “Childhood operates both as an adult imaginary kingdom and as an adult research institute.”¹³ Even as an object of knowledge rather than of worship, the differentness of children, or rather the Child, becomes a major area for nineteenth-century study, both scientific and literary. As the late nineteenth

century idiom of Child Study, Child Life, Child World indicates, Victorian writers assume and produce "a distinct, individual element" in Scudder's words¹⁴, a quintessential child. The Quintessential Child is the product of a Romantic Discourse of Childhood that is drawn from a few Romantic writers, notably Wordsworth, the Coleridges, Lamb and De Quincey. As Plotz expands:

It is from Romantic texts and their epigones that Victorian writers were able to pierce together a new Discourse of Childhood that produced and naturalised "The Child", as both the normative human being and also the fetishized "sublime object" that deploys multiple cultural fantasies. The discourse made it easy, unavoidable almost, to assume the living reality and splendour of such an essential being as The Child, who is unmarked by time, place, class, or gender but is represented in all places and all times the same."¹⁵

This theorisation leads to the thesis of the repressive mechanism of child sexuality. Creation of the non-sexual child was the progressive development of a clash between the biological and sexual maturity of children and the social roles now assigned to them, which included no socially sanctioned outlet for their sexuality. When the conflict was eventually noticed, both the secular society and the church were forced by their own bondage to the childhood culture they had created to essentially declare children to be non-sexual. When faced with the biological reality of the non-sexual child who could not help feeling and acting sexual, the adult social, educational and religious powers turned to a variety of repressive tactics.¹⁶ It is worth noting that the aspect of sexuality in a child was not denied by either Freud or Foucault, in fact what formed the centre of concentration in Freud's oedipal theory and Foucault's categorisation of the masturbating child as a deviance in normative sexuality¹⁷ is the threat posed by a sexualised child in a cultural domain of child asexuality.

With the notion of the present Indian childhood somewhat corresponding to that of the Western non-sexual one, can we say that the Indian child is thus bereft of its sexual agency in this new construction---the association of sexuality with childhood becomes a tabooed, forbidden thing. Yet, such a transition does not necessarily make things emancipatory for the child. This can be realised from the second observation that Kirpal makes---that the social victimisation and violence upon the girl child is not the subject of many delineations 'as if these barbarities existed way back and are realities no more.' The irony of the situation is that a theme

like child sexual abuse never gets thematic significance-----not in pre-independence literature for the absence of such an idea due to the normative early initiation of the girl child to sexual knowledge by society and also not in post-independence literature since it becomes a tabooed topic, a forbidden act. In my selection of texts for this particular project, I have tried to pick those which speak directly or indirectly about child sex abuse in a post-independence literary scenario, making them emphatic voices against a tabooed silence.

In this chapter I will be looking at the representation of the child in the primary texts I am dealing with, based in a post-Independence scenario. Our discussion can be based on the hexagonal model of six main images of the child that I have graphed, mostly female but two male characters have been included as well. The representation of the child can be analysed through six discursive points of contention----

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (i) Narrative Agency | (ii) Lack of Narrative Agency |
| (iii) Access to sexual knowledge | (iv) Lack of sexual knowledge |
| (v) Conscious participant | (vi) Victim |

Moving to the individual texts, Akhil Sharma's *Obedient Father* shows two victims of the abuse, the mother Anita and the daughter Asha, by the same perpetrator, who's the father and grandfather to them respectively. Interestingly, the narrative is spoken from the point of view of the male abuser, making the projection of both the children problematic constructs. Asha as a child is as a vulnerable object of sexual desire of the more powerful abuser. Karan's description of Asha progresses very subtly from the image of a vulnerable, pitiable, object of filial affection to an object of adult sexual desire. She is introduced as a defenceless being in her sleep drained out by misery:

Asha was asleep on my cot with one knee pulled up to her stomach.....Her eyelids were trembling.....misery as intense as terror had drained all the fat from Asha's body, making her teeth appear larger than they were and her fingers impossibly long.¹⁸

But gradually Asha ceases to be just a helpless and sexless child in the eyes of Karan. Rather there is a transition to her adult like appeal where Karan looks for her physical beauty:

As I kept looking at Asha, I noticed it was possible to see her as pretty...there was something both strong and vulnerable about her....she had long eyelashes and a mouth that hinted at an adult personality. ...I put a hand on Asha's knee. It was the size of an egg and its delicacy made me conscious of her lighter-than-air-youth.¹⁹

Gradually, Karan gets her involved in the actual physical act, her innocent and unsuspecting nature spelling out the imbalances in sexual knowledge. She seems totally unaware of Karan's intentions, nor can gauge the implications of Karan's caresses (Such a description of the discrepancy in sexual knowledge on the part of the victim and the perpetrators renders the abuse blatant):

I took Asha's wrist in one hand as she handed me the water....I took a sip and put the glass on the floor and pulled her toward me, I turned her face and made her stand between my legs. I kissed her neck very lightly and placed my erection against the small of her back. Asha's body was relaxed as she didn't sense anything wrong. I brushed my penis lightly against her. I took an ear lobe between my lips.²⁰

The representation of child Asha is thus of a child where the child though involved in sexuality, lacking sexual knowledge, is an innocent victim of desire. However, in spite of being an object of adult desire, she is hardly any close to an adult in her disposition. She has weird fantasies, likes ice-creams and chocolates, enjoys childlike fun etc and is presented as innocent of the implications of the sexual act.

It is this 'ignorance' on the part of the victim and the 'knowledge' of the actual import of the act on the part of the abuser that marks the power imbalance in child sex abuse. The representation of child Asha is thus of a child where the child though involved in sexuality, lacking sexual knowledge, is an innocent victim of an adult's desire.

Anita's representation is a little more complex when narrated from Karan's point of view. Child Anita is a lot like Asha, not very physically attractive and vulnerable. The only difference is that in Karan's narration, Anita, though ignorant in the act, gradually actively participates in the sexual game with Karan and derives pleasure from it. She unconsciously renders herself as an object of desire for Karan who attempts to abuse her through the veneer of games, quite careful of hiding his real intentions to 'innocent' Anita :

I had at one time promised myself that if Anita ever appeared to understand what I was doing, I would stop.²¹

Anita thus appears as a passive participant of abuse, co-operating to the perverse demands of Karan. Karan's subsequent description projects her as one who participates and shows positive responses to her father's act:

In all this, Anita seemed increasingly cheerful and outgoing. She no longer hid when strangers came to the house....I have no doubts that Anita came to the house....I have no doubts that Anita loved me during this time.²²

Anita's projection here is thus of a participating subject whose vulnerability is minimal. I'll come to this point later but let me graph the transition in Anita's portrayal in the novel. Interesting to note that while Anita's image shifts between being a naïve victim devoid of the knowledge of what's happening to her and later being a conscious participant in the act within the domain of Karan's description, she reveals herself as a subject possessing knowledge to interpret the implication of her father's act as soon as she takes over the narrative agency.

I always knew...every time you touched me. Every time you made me touch you, I knew.....I knew all the time.²³

Now does this position affect the power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator based on the access to knowledge about sex? What is our response to the the images of the participating child and the child with access to sexual knowledge, both of which are subversive of the construct of the child? Does the abuse carry the same implications for an ignorant child, a participating child and a perceptive child aware of her exploitation? The significance of this question can be located in the representation of the child prostitutes in *An Obedient Father*. Interestingly, they defy all definitions of the homogenous category of the 'child' and appear more closely as what Jain describes as 'miniature women' in pre-Independence literature. Obviously, on our first reading of the text, the only immediate victims that we can locate are Anita and Asha and not the child prostitutes that Karan has sex with. Let us see how they are represented.

I had not remembered that thirteen was so young. Her legs were no thicker than her arms, and her breasts were just beginning to grow. She looked so young....that I felt the enormity of her helplessness²⁴.

But her image undergoes a startling change as we see her no different from grown up prostitutes, cursing coarsely, performing the sexual antics and expressing disgust with her exploitation. Karan contemplates:

Sex with her was not much different from with an older woman, except the vagina was shallower.²⁵

To look at the point further, let us make a comparative study of the portrayals of other child prostitutes in the Kamala Das's "A doll for Rukmani". Quite in contrast to Chandni, the child prostitute in *An Obedient Father*, both Sita and Rukmani have not lost their primeval childishness in spite of being in the trade.

Only the young children, Rukmani and Sita, laughed normally. But they hardly knew the significance of the sexual act. For them, it came as an occasional punishment meted out for some obscure reason. Perhaps, the mistake they committed was that they got born as girls in a society that regarded the female as a burden, a liability. The two girls resented the frequent interruptions during their games of squares and even while the coarse men, old enough to be their grandfathers, took the pleasure off their young bodies, the children's minds were far away, hopping in the large squares of the chalked diagram on the floor of the porch.²⁶

Their primary pre-occupation in life is to play the hop-scotch game, epitomising the innocence of childhood, to which they return immediately after they are forced to the adult domain of sex. When Sita gets pregnant and gets a leave for three days, her reaction is that of joy for there will be no interruption in the game of hop scotch:

Sita was given three days' leave. She was overjoyed. 'I do not have to attend to any man for three days,' she cried out in a voice thickened with happiness. 'We shall play hopscotch with bits of tiles, Rukmani, for hours and hours.'²⁷

Rukmani's main objection to attending a customer is also primarily because it interrupts the game

'Ayee, not now,' protested the child. 'We are playing a game just now....' All right Ayee, 'said the girl, rising slowly from the floor. 'Wait for me Sita, I shall be back in a short while to complete the wedding ceremony.'²⁸

Quite significantly, Rukmani is restored back to her rightful domain of innocence and protectiveness of childhood for she retains this naïve innocence that suits a child till the end. In spite of Sita's tutorings about sex, her experience of rape by her step father and her encounters with customers in the brothel, her superlative innocence is untouched. She remains ignorant of the implication of the sexual act and interestingly, with the power of her unadulterated greenness, she pulls herself out from being an object of adult sexual desire to an object of childlike affection for the inspector. But Sita meets a sad end with her pre-mature pregnancy, she dies with the burden of adulthood imposed on her and never retrieves the lost domain of childhood like Rukmani. Thus, both Rukmani and Sita have narrative agency to some extent, at least they are not described by the abuser. They are both unmitigated victims and by no chance give us impressions of participating in the act or show any abnormality of behaviour. But while Rukmani is an epitome of pre-lapsarian innocence, Sita is somewhat initiated into the knowledge of sexuality simultaneously with the act. She laughs at Rukmani's innocence:

Sita laughed loudly and held on to her stomach as though it was about to burst. 'You are a baby, she said. 'You are so innocent. Do you think we can sleep at night in this house? We shall all be busy entertaining the visitors.' 'Men come to do things here,' said Sita. 'What things?' asked Rukmani'..... 'You will find out soon enough,' said Sita. '...Do whatever they want you to do. Men are real dogs.'²⁹

Yet, it is this innocence that differentiates Rukmani from Chandni in *Obedient Father*, who's also a child prostitute or from the other girls in Rukmani's brothel like Saraswati who is portrayed as a voluptuous woman by Rukmani but whose age has not been mentioned. Can we locate these child prostitutes initiated to the knowledge of sex still in the same domain of child sex abuse as of Asha, Anita or Rukmani?

Now, what is noticeable is that this act is different from the abuse with Anita, Asha and Rukmani because of the following reasons:

- (i) It is not happening within the closed, apparently secure space of the household
- (ii) There is a latent social sanction in involving a child in sex if she's a prostitute
- (iii) There's less secrecy and guilt associated with the act and hence there's almost no question of silencing
- (iv) It is not an abuse on the individualistic level but rather an atrocity imposed by

the evils of society. This makes it close to what Vinay Kirpal says about the issues related to the portrayals of the Indian girl child in the pre-independence literature where what was critiqued were the evil practices of society which were perpetrated on the entire girl kind by a whole society and not individual acts of violence based on direct sexual onslaught.

- (v) The act also becomes less detestable with the child having access to sexual knowledge and a willing participant than with an ignorant, innocent child.

Can we call Chandni's abuse a case of child sex abuse? Does it affect her victim status? How many Indian readers will locate Chandni as also a victim of child sex abuse as are the 'innocent' child victims? Can we define Indian childhood under one all encompassing term? Chandni's portrayal as a child with control over her body and access to sexual knowledge, consciously participating in a sexual act with an adult is perhaps a demonic image of the abnormal child. A parallel can be drawn with Lolita's portrayal in Nabakov's *Lolita*. The paradox lies in the fact that the abuser wants to distribute out his guilt on to the victim as well, yet an aggressive, eager child partner is a demonic threat. The mantle of innocence is shed from character with her sexualisation. From the innocent nymphet with a girlish immaturity tantalising Humbert, she emerges more and more as a demonic, sexualised child who not only participates in the act but knows the full import of such a relationship. Thus the power equation is seriously hampered here, the victim is no longer in ignorance, the abuser can no longer hide his acts under the facade of harmless affection or unconsciousness as in sleep. But the sexualisation of Lolita does not necessarily envision an equilibrium in the power imbalance between the perpetrator and the child victim. Instead, she gets doubly marginalised as the abuser can now evade all responsibility in the act. The character of Lolita is so projected that she loses the sympathy of the reader (for the reader, too, inhabiting the patriarchal ideology feels threatened by a sexualised child) and consequently her agency in the dominant narrative where the abuse ceases to be an abuse in its strict term, where the very fact that she 'willingly' enters into a relationship with Humbert in spite of knowing what was happening makes her more of a sexual partner at apparent power equilibrium.

A similar image is projected of Mala in Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September* as both her mother and the abuser, her Uncle, Vinay; blame her for being abnormally sexually active to a shocking degree and thus actually seducing the men into the act.

SHANTA. Not just the pain. I remember, much as I was trying to forget, what I saw. Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen. I remember, seeing you with my brother during the summer holidays. You were pushing yourself on him in the bedroom.....

.....
SHANTA. I remember, Mala, You want me to remember? You were telling him to kiss you.

.....
SHANTA. To touch You.

.....
SHANTA. To pinch your----- breasts.

.....
SHANTA. You were forcing him to say things to you.

.....
SHANTA. To do things to you. I went to the kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed. I prayed for you Mala. That is what I was praying to. To our God, so He could send his Sudarshan Chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you.

SHANTA. You were enjoying it. Your cousin told me in private that he was concerned about you.³⁰

Mala is thus an 'abnormal' image of a child threatening the normative construct of a de-sexed child. Foucault in *History of Sexuality* categorises the 'masturbating child' as one of the most potent deviations along with the hysterical woman who needs to be kept under vigil.³¹ The modern construct of the Indian child is also in sync with this western concept. There is a sense of violation of the normal in such a construct of the active child. However, it is noticeable that all these portrayals are devoid of narrative agency. They are described, that too mostly by the abuser, rather than describing themselves which leaves a scope for a critical view to these images. In this context, the siblings in *The Blue-Bedspreed* are more complex delineations. The narrative agency is with the children who engage themselves in a sexual way, conscious of the secrecy and taboo associated with it.

I don't remember how long my sister and I went on with this secret little game. She was fourteen, I was ten and it was on our ninety square feet of fabric sky that we first kissed and later, touched each

other in what then we thought were the wrong places. And it was this daily theatre of pleasure and fear, played out on our blue bedspread, that carried us as if on a wave from one night to the next.....That night , my sister didn't switch on the bedside lamp. And with all the stars locked in the blackness of the bedroom, we held each other tight.....My sister didn't seem to notice as she lay , not speaking a word, her red shirt rolled up to allow my lips to shelter her nipple, my chin to rest on the small pillow of her breast, and my hands pressed, warm and soft, between her legs.³²

But the moment the father enters the picture, both the children become objects and victims of their father's desire and the act becomes one of abuse. Yet what is interesting is that we also get the impression that the boy narrator fails to protest to his father's advances though he realises the import of his act as his relationship with his sister lies exposed.

He told me he knew what Sister and I were up to at night. If I didn't undress, he said, he would tell Sister all about it. Or better still, make us sleep in different rooms.....maybe I should have protested, but that evening, with Father drunk and laughing, with Sister gone and my only secret lying suddenly exposed, I closed my eyes, undressed, and on Father's orders lay on the blue bedspread.³³

The image that we get is of a child, helpless in the act because is conscious of his guilt of stepping into the adult domain of sexuality as a child. Now this portrayal is perhaps more uncomfortable in a matrix of a de-sexed childhood more than the demonic images of the sexually active children mentioned before this, for this child is not described by anyone else, the narrative agency lies with the child himself who speaks about his own thoughts. However, this does not discount the aspect of abuse by the father, two children engaged in sex play is different from an adult coercing a child to a sexual act, the latter remains a case of abuse irrespective of the position of the child. Yet such a sweeping statement of rendering the sexual act between two child apparently harmless than of a child-adult relationship can be problematic again if taken the case of Shanta, Mala's mother in Dattani's *Thirty days in September*. She is abused as a child at the age of six for ten years by her own brother who was also a minor of thirteen years. Such a situation makes us reconsider the entire premise on which we call an act an act of Child sex abuse. Is this an incident of child sex abuse if

perpetrated by another child? However, going back to our initial definition of the abuse, that we can call it an abuse if there's a coercive factor to it, this too becomes a case of child abuse where the perpetrator had more knowledge of the act and coerced it on a child, irrespective of his age.

Images of a child conscious of the sexual act and describing the pain of helplessness also account for a touching portrayal. As mentioned earlier, as Anita in *The Obedient Father* takes over the narrative space, she comes up with an emphatic revelation that she knew what was happening to her.

I knew all the time. When you'd pretend to sleep and put my hand on your penis. When you entered me, it hurt so much I thought I would die, that I had to die. And then I bled. And you made it seem as if you would kill yourself if I tried to stop you.³⁴

The child in Volga's *Ayoni* also describes the pain in her own words, aware yet helpless of what is happening to her.

A huge bull like man fell over me and tore my yoni. I became unconscious. There was a spate of blood. I was ten then. Men would come three days a week.³⁵

The child in *Ayoni* is aware of her existence being focussed down only to a yoni. She is no more a complete individual with other organs and needs to survive but rather her existence centres around the primacy of her as just a sexual object to be exploited. Unlike Rukmani who retains her superlative innocence by not attaining knowledge about the act, the child in *Ayoni* is conscious of her sexuality and the tragic sexualisation of her body before its age for her.

Then I was not a small girl. Not a human being. Perhaps not even a living being. Only a yoni. That's all. That's the only thing. A small hole...who am I? What am I? Am I the hand that mixes the food? Am I the mouth that eats? Am I the stomach that's filled as soon as food reaches there? Or am I only the yoni that feeds me?³⁶

However, again, this child does not project herself as a miniature adult bereft of all the aspects of childhood. Look at this passage replete with the images of a utopic childhood:

On rainy nights, while I heard my grandmother's voice amidst the drip-drop of the drizzle, I used to cover myself warmly with a blanket, and

if that was not enough, I would curl myself almost into my grandmother's stories, all winter nights would quickly pass by.³⁷

Not only that, her 'innocent' questions about childbirth and about the secrets of motherhood expressed to Bhagyam Akka still retain a piece of ignorance that suits the construct of a child. She still lacks complete knowledge in the adult domain of sexuality and thus poses no apparent threat as of the demonically sexualised child. This child, like Anita, is aware of the import of the exploitation meted to her but still grapples with the lack of complete knowledge about sex which adds to her helplessness and vulnerability.

Coming back to the portrayal of the child victim most commonly found in fiction dealing with child sex abuse, of the victim who is unaware of the significance of the sexual act and can hardly fathom what's happening to him/her in his/her superlative innocence. The child is portrayed as lacking knowledge of the real nature of the act as well as the significances it carries apart from the physical pain and discomfort inflicted. The power imbalance is marked, except for one enabling agency of the narrative agency lying with the child. We can cite two more similar portrayals of the child with quintessential innocence, like Rukmani, but intrigued by the abuse meted out on them for they can't quite apprehend the import of the act. The first one is Estha, the boy twin in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* who is abused at a cinema hall at an early age and the trauma of the act leaving an indelible mark on him throughout his life. His abuser, the 'Orangedrink Lemondrink Man' makes him masturbate him while distracting him completely with his small talk and with a free drink. The power imbalance between the Man and Estha is etched out to the full with the Man capable of acting completely normal while exploiting Estha and thus posing no apparent threat to his unsuspecting nature.

'Now if you'll kindly hold this for me,' the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said handing Estha his penis through his muslin dhoti, 'I'll get you your drink.

Orange? Lemon? Lemonorange

'Lemon, please,' Estha said politely.....

The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis hot and hard.

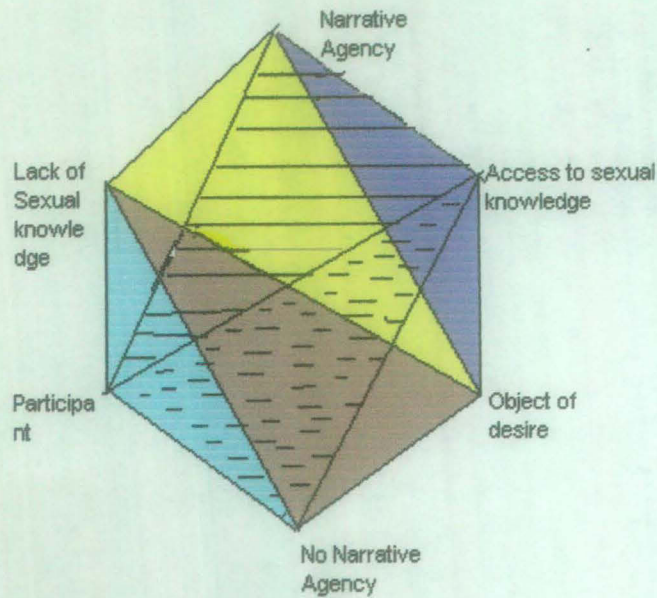
'So your grandmother runs a factory? The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said. 'What kind of factory?''³⁸

As the conversation shows, the boy has no knowledge of the significance of what is he made to do, he is just an object of adult desire in which he has no participatory role to play yet he has narrative agency to describe it as it is which accounts for spaces of revelations. A similar instance is seen Ismat Chughtai's *Quilt* where the child trapped with a lesbian has no knowledge of the implications of the perpetrator's behaviour whom she otherwise loved. The child here is left with a relative of her mother's, Begum Jaan, for sometime and she encounters experiences beyond her knowledge till she is sucked into the vortex of things. She cannot interpret why the quilt under which Begum Jaan and her maid Rabbu sleep assumes weird shapes and emits strange sounds at night. Nor can she see the actual intentions behind the prolonged oil massages that Rabbu gives Begum Jaan. She falls an innocent prey to Begum Jaan's desires when she attempts an oil massage to soothe her, unaware of its implications. Much like the Lemondrink Orangedrink Man in *The God of Small Things* Begum Jaan too makes the girl touch her at places of her body acting completely normal, distracting her with small talk and thus posing no apparent threat to her unsuspecting nature.

I rubbed her back...happy to be of some use to her. Here...a little below the shoulder....that's right...Ah ! What pleasure...She expressed her satisfaction between sensuous breaths....'Here,' she would take my hand and place it where it itched and I, lost in the thought of the babua, kept scratching her listlessly while she talked.³⁹

The portrayals of the child in the texts chosen may be classified according to six divisions in the hexagonal model we adopted in the beginning of the chapter based on six discursive points of :

- (i) Narrative Agency (ii) Lack of Narrative Agency
- (iii) Access to sexual knowledge (iv) Lack of sexual knowledge
- (v) Conscious participant (vi) Victim



In the model we can see six different categories of the portrayal of the child as geometrically shown in the six different triangles within the hexagon with a combination of different points of contention. To explain the colour codes of the triangles standing for different categories:

(i) ■ The child as an **object of desire** with **no narrative agency** and **lacking sexual knowledge**. Asha's portrayal in *An Obedient Father* falls in this category. She is an object of adult desire of her grandfather, not aware of her abuser's intentions and never finds a narrative agency in the novel. Her voice as the abused child is not given a space, not only that, hers is a unique case of the narrator being the abuser himself, thus rendering her portrayal with a lot of scope for reconsideration.

(ii) ▲ The child as an **object of desire** with **narrative agency** but **lack of sexual knowledge**. Estha in *The God of Small Things*, Rukmani, the child in Chughtai's *Quilt* are all images of this kind, of the innocent child exploited while he/she is unable to discern the purport of the act.

(iii) ■ The child as an **object of desire** with access to **sexual knowledge** and **narrative agency**. This is the image projected in Sita, the little girl in *Ayoni*, the brother in *The Blue Bedspread*, and Anita when she reveals she always knew what exactly her father did to her. All these children are projected as conscious of the sexual import of the act, have narrative agency to describe it yet are helpless victims in the hands of their perpetrators, their helplessness spelled out not from

the lack of knowledge but for other factors which we will be discussing in the next chapter.

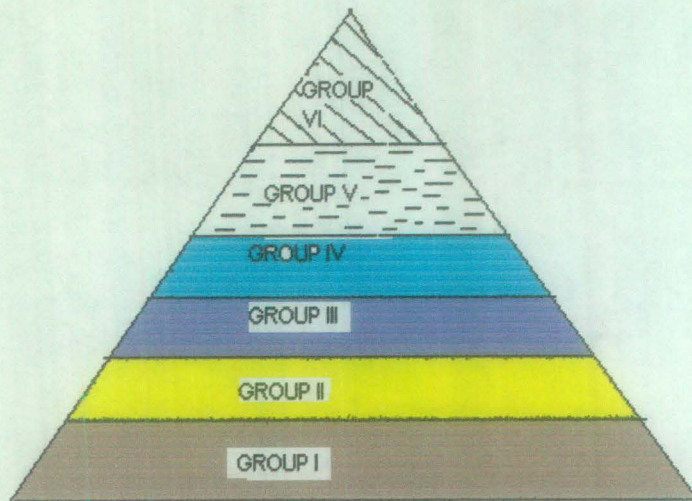
(iv) **A** The child as a **participant with lack of sexual knowledge and no narrative agency**. This pertains to the etching of Anita's character as presented by Karan where he blames Anita for participating in the act though absolves her of doing it intentionally with a knowledge of it.

(v) **A** The child as a **participant with access to sexual knowledge but no narrative agency**. The prostitute Chandni, Mala, Lolita all fall under this category of being portrayed as the demonically sexualised child who participate willingly in the act but all these portrayals are from the point of view of the adult perpetrator, the narrative agency does not lie with the abused child and hence calls for a critical view towards these images.

(vi) **A** The child as a **participant with access of sexual knowledge and narrative agency**. This is the rarest of all the images of the child, one that we find in the brother in *The Blue Bedspread*, pre-maturely sexualised, conscious of the import and the guilt associated with it and describing it with his own narrative agency.

Certainly, access to narrative agency, access to sexual knowledge and subjective position in the sexual act are enabling factors, the lack of which spells the power imbalance between the adult and the child. As we can make out from the categorisation above, the portrayals of the children lacking these factors are certainly disabled in some sense or the other, either in their vulnerability, in their helplessness in the process of getting objectified as objects of adult gaze, or in the inability to voice their version of the experience. This is ironical since the modern definition of childhood does assume an innocence regarding sexual knowledge and lack of a child's narrative.

These six portrayals can thus be arranged in the ascending order of the enablement of the children with reference to access or lack of these three factors, with the first category of the child as an object of desire without narrative agency, or without any sexual knowledge being at the very bottom of the pyramidal structure and sixth category of the child as a participant with access to sexual knowledge and narrative



However, this hierarchy is just an initial assumption, locating the aspect of child abuse within the tropes of narrative agency and sexual knowledge. We begin with the most simplistic assumption that access to narrative agency and sexual knowledge forms a means of enablement for the child in an act of sexual coercion while on the contrary the other end of it, which is the child with no narrative agency and access to sexual knowledge, is the most disabled in the rubric of abuse. Being on the top of the triangle does not necessarily guarantee enablement and control, nor does it discount the aspect of abuse. This is my starting point with the most obvious , in the coming chapters I proceed with an analysis of this assumption, critically looking at the various tropes of language, narrative and emancipation with reference to the victim in particular.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Kakar, Sudhir. *The Inner World: A psychological study of childhood and society in India*. Oxford University Press. Delhi.1990. p-192
- ² *ibid.*p-201
- ³ *ibid.*p-204
- ⁴ *ibid.* p-205
- ⁵ *ibid* p-207
- ⁶ Kirpal, Vinay. *The Girl Child in 20th Century Indian literature*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited. New Delhi. 1992. p-x-xi
- ⁷ Paris, Bill. "The cult of Childhood and repression of childhood Sexuality"
<http://www.liberatedchristians.com>
- ⁸ Plotz, Judith. *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*. Palgrave. New York.2001
- ⁹ Scudder, Horace. *Childhood in English Literature*. *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 56, issue 336 October 1885 477
- ¹⁰ Meynell, Wilfred. *The Child Set in the Midst*. Leadenhall Press, [n.d.] 196p
- ¹¹ Meynell 153
- ¹² De Quincey, Thomas. *Collected Works. Volume 1*..University of Michigan Press. 1989-90. p:121
- ¹³ Plotz, Judith. *ibid* P-3

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- ¹⁴ Scudder, *ibid* 474
- ¹⁵ Plotz, *ibid*, p-5
- ¹⁶ Paris, Bill
- ¹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. trans Robert Hurley. Random House. New York. 1978.
- ¹⁸ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. P-4
- ¹⁹ *ibid*, p-5
- ²⁰ *ibid*, p-37
- ²¹ *ibid*, p-99-100
- ²² *ibid* p-100
- ²³ *ibid* p-141-142
- ²⁴ *ibid*. P-87
- ²⁵ *ibid* p-88
- ²⁶ Das, Kamala. 'A Doll for Rukmani'
- ²⁷ *ibid*
- ²⁸ *ibid*
- ²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Dattani, Mahesh. *Thirty Days in September*. P-34

³¹ Ibid. Foucault locates that the Victorian society operated on the classification of the sexual agencies. While the wedded couple was acknowledged as the model sexual agency, the masturbating child along with the hysterical woman and the homosexual is a definite deviance.

³² Jha , Rajkamal. *The Blue Bedspread*. Random House. New York.1999. P-55.

³³ Ibid.53

³⁴ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. P-114

³⁵ Volga.' Ayoni' in *The Woman Unbound: Selected Short Stories*. Trans. Alladi Uma and M.Sridhar. Hyderabad: Authors & Writers India Ltd. 1997.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. IndiaInk Publishing Co.Pvt.Ltd.1997. p-103

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CHAPTER TWO

LANGUAGE AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE : THE CHILD AS A SPEAKING SUBJECT

In the previous chapter we discussed the various representations of the child within the domain of Indian English literature dealing with child sexual abuse. And at the end of the discussion I located the three tropes of the lack of sexual knowledge, the lack of narrative agency and lack of a subjective position in the sexual act as disabling for the less powerful child. Interesting to note that, all these three aspects that mark a substantial power imbalance between the adult perpetrator and the child work out uniquely in the narrative frame through the paradigm of language which forms an interesting locus of study. In this chapter, I would be looking at the interplay of various facets of language with reference to differential control in power struggle in the context of sexuality. Power imbalance between the adult perpetrator and the child in an act of sex are all associated with the larger trope of language. Not only does language play a crucial role in determining the status of enablement of the subjects involved in a sexual act but this differential control over knowledge in power struggle in the context of sexuality works out uniquely in the narrative frame through the paradigm of language which forms an interesting locus of study. Not only that, the construction of the reality of abuse from the child's point of view provides significant loci of discussion.

Let us first take up the point of narrative agency. Access to the narrative agency in the inclusive framework of the narrative accounts for a deterministic factor in the subjectivity of the personae etched. As Jen Shelton rightly observes in the context of speaking of incest in Woolf's *The Voyage Out*:

Incest has a structure comprising a physical dimension, in which an adult makes sexual advances toward a child, and a narrative dimension, in which child and adult offer competing and mutually exclusive stories. The child's narrative seeks to make known the adult transgression while the adult's story seeks to dismiss or explain away the child's version of events...it is a struggle for control of the erotic, a conflict between adult and childish

configurations of sexuality that inflects the narrative emerging from this contest.¹

The dialectics of narration works with the narrative agency especially when the narrative is being etched through a first person narrative voice than a third person omniscient neutral narrator. The difference of 'describing' and 'being described' can be observed in the portrayals of the children that I categorised in the previous chapter. To recollect it again, Asha's portrayal in *An Obedient Father* is that of an object of desire and one lacking sexual knowledge. She is an object of adult desire of her grandfather; the reader is presented with the image of a girl ignorant of her abuser's intentions and she never finds a voice of her own in the novel. Her voice as the abused child is not given a space, not only that, hers is a unique case of the narrator being the abuser himself, thus controlling the narratorial space of sexuality completely, rendering her a powerless receptacle of adult desire. Denied access to language of her own, Asha can only be received through her abuser's descriptive locus. One striking aspect of this description is the constant reiteration of Asha's frailty in comparison to the power yielded by the perpetrator; clues of desire derived by Karan with subjects of absolute powerlessness are strewn throughout the text. Over and over again Asha's minuteness is stressed:

Her hand was so small in mine that I felt enormous.

Asha wore olive shorts and a white blouse. I saw again how small her kneecaps were.

Her blouse was tucked in and I noticed how tiny her waist was. I put my plate down. I wanted to live a long time.²

Having sex with young prostitutes gave him the same sense of pleasure:

I also found their bodies, so firm that they seemed superhuman, and I liked the unevenness of our strengths.³

Again, he describes:

I put a hand on Asha's knee. It was the size of an egg and its delicacy made me conscious of her lighter-than-air youth and of my enormous body pressing down on my scarred heart.⁴

This disparity of power is extended to a symbolic level as well when even material objects are also infused with it. Even the towels spread out side by side evoke a consciousness of this frailty:

Asha went onto the balcony and hung her towel beside mine on the ledge. In comparison, hers looked little bigger than a washcloth.⁵

Without control over the narrative agency, the child victim cannot choose but be only on the receiving end, and be fraught with powerlessness. Along with this construct of the powerless child comes the associated construct of the child being submissive, who without a voice of her own can hardly challenge the abuser's control over the events and its narration. The abuser's attempt to exploit the child goes without any repercussion with the absolute neutrality of the child:

I caressed her hair and taut neck to let her know that everything was all right, but her face remained pulled in. I kneeled and kissed her cheeks and neck. Her body slowly relaxed.....I drew Asha next to me. "Sit on my lap." I put my arm around her waist. I blew softly on her neck....I kissed her neck.⁶

In another instance too of Karan abusing Asha, Asha is rendered voiceless and ignorant of the impact of the act done:

I took a sip and put the glass on the floor and pulled her toward me. I turned her face and made her stand between my legs. I kissed her neck lightly and placed my erection against the small of her back. Asha's body was relaxed as she didn't sense anything wrong.⁷

Without a voice of her own Asha can hardly contest this. And thereby the possibilities of protest are reduced to the minimal. It needs to be noted that it is specifically in this imbalance of knowledge (on the part of the abuser) and ignorance (on the part of the child) that the whole act becomes a thrilling assertion of power by the adult abuser. As Karen Sanchez -Eppler poignantly points out, speaking in the context of child-adult sex in 19th century American fiction:

...an insistence on the sexual innocence of children...is precisely what enables these erotics to function....the suppression gives these scenes their sexual charge. It is refusal to acknowledge childhood sexuality that makes the children so irresistible, so sexually vulnerable...⁸

Quite interestingly, the lack of narrative agency can also account for the delineation of a reverse image as well, as we saw in the portrayal of the child as a participant with no narrative agency. As we categorised earlier, the prostitute Chandni, Mala, Lolita, and Anita to a certain degree all fall under this category—being portrayed as the pre-

maturely sexualised children who participate willingly in the act. All these characters are etched again through the narrative spectrum of the perpetrator which 'seeks to dismiss or explain away the child's version of events.' With the image of a demonic, sexualised child who not only participates in the act but knows the full import of such a relationship, the power imbalance is apparently neutralised here. The victim is no longer in ignorance and rather becomes a willing partner in the act. The blame thus falls squarely on the abused who seems to be comfortable with it, encouraging the abuser who argues out that nothing has been violated. Similarly, as we have described in the previous chapter the child prostitute Chandni in *An Obedient Father*, Mala in *Thirty days in September* from the uncle's narrative point, Anita again *An Obedient Father* in are all described actively participating in the sexual act or if not participating at least enjoying or, not repelling it. Thus, it can be observed that the lack of narrative agency, that is lack of access to language as a speaking subject, can be disabling for the abused child who is thrown on the extremes of either abnormal sexualisation or superlative innocence, which simultaneously undermines the violence of the act and the scopes of protest.

On the other hand, access to the narrative agency gives the abused child an opportunity to claim its subjective position. The child with narrative agency is thus not bereft of a voice of his/her own which can disrupt the linearity of the abuser's description. It gives the child, as in Jen Shelton's words, an agency in the struggle for control of the erotic within the narrative space. And in the narratives solely projected from the first person point of view of the abused child, the child narrator is apparently invested with the power of protest through the power of description. Yet does access to narrative agency necessarily ensure the power to describe the abuse? What are the complexities that mark the description of sexual abuse narrated from the point of view of the child? We will attempt a theorisation after locating specific passages describing abuse in the selected texts. Let us glance through all the passages dealing with the revelation of abuse through the narrative agency of the abused child. Descriptions by the child narrator in Volga's 'Ayon' reveal the violence of the act and the associated pain quite blatantly:

Two snakes closed around me and *dragged* me inside the car. They spread venom on me.....A huge bull like man fell over me and tore my *yoni*. I became unconscious. There was a *spate of blood*. Then I

was not a small girl. Not a human being. Perhaps not even a living being. Only a *yoni*. A *small hole*.⁹

The violence of the act is stated blatantly and the brutality of rape is described most poignantly with all the details that entail it. The child has access to the vocabulary to denote the parts of her body: “*yoni*” being the Sanskrit equivalent for “the vagina”, lending blatancy to the act. The words ‘dragged’, ‘fell over me’, ‘tore my *yoni*’, ‘spate of blood’ are conspicuous descriptions of the physical brutality of rape with a consciousness of the sexual import involved. The revelation is thus complete, with the readers have to little decoding, for the subject not only has access to the narrative agency, she reveals the act with knowledge of sexuality, lending an immediacy of effect. However, not all child narrators are as blatant in their dealing with the description of the abuse, especially as a first person narrative agency within the domain of the narrative. Before attempting a theorisation on that let us glance through all the narrations of sexual abuse projected through the perception of the abused child. The passage (i) that follows encompasses Estha’s thought process during his experience of the act in *The God of Small Things*:

(i) His *yellow teeth* were magnets. They saw, they smiled, they sang, *they smelled*, they moved. They mesmerised.

Estha went. Drawn by yellow teeth.

Estha held it (penis) because he had to.

He got a cold bottle and a straw. So he held a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. *Hard, hot, veiny*. Not a moonbeam.

The lemondrink was *cold and sweet*. The penis *hot and hard*.

The piano keys were watching.

His hand closed tighter over Estha’s. *Tight and sweaty*.

Then the *grisly-bristly face* contorted, and Estha’s hand was *wet and hot and sticky*. It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarter boiled.

The penis was *soft and shrivelled* like an empty leather change-purse.

The fizz came up his nose. He held his *sticky Other Hand* away from his body.¹⁰

The next passage is from Ismat Chughtai’s *The Quilt*. The child narrator in the story describes the act as following:

(ii) I was chattering, oblivious of where my hands travelled.

Hey girl, watch where your hands are... You hurt my ribs' Begum Jaan smiled mischievously. I was embarrassed.

Come here and lie down beside me....She made me lie down with my head on her arm. How skinny are you...your ribs are showing.' She began counting my ribs. I tried to protest.

Come on, I'm not going to eat you up. How tight this sweater is! And you don't have a warm vest on.' I felt very uncomfortable.

How many ribs does one have? She changed the topic.

'Nine on one side, ten on the other,' I blurted out what I'd learnt in school, rather incoherently.

'Take away your hand....Let's see.....one, two, three.....'

I wanted to run away, but *she held me tightly*. I tried to wriggle away, and Begum Jaan *began to laugh loudly*. To this, whenever I am reminded of her face I feel jittery. *Her eyelids had dropped, her upper lip showed a black shadow and tiny beads of sweat sparkled on her lips and nose despite the cold. Her hands were as cold as ice but clammy as though the skin had been stripped off.* The heavy gold buttons of her kurta were undone.

It was evening, and the room was getting enveloped in darkness. A strange fear overcame me. Begum Jaan's deepest eyes focussed on me and I felt like crying. She was pressing me as though I were a clay doll and the *odour of her warm body* made me want to throw up. But she was like a person possessed.

After some time she stopped and lay back exhausted. She was breathing heavily, and her face looked pale and dull. I thought she was going to die and rushed out of the room.....¹¹

The next passage quoted is from Rajkamal Jha's *The Blue Bedspread* the abused narrator being a male child in this case:

(iii) That Evening when Father came home sister was away. Father smiled and said he wanted to see me naked. "Let's see how grown up you are now, he said. At first I thought it was yet another of his drunken jokes, but then he stood there in the middle of the bedroom, the smile melting away, and told me that he knew what Sister and I were up to at night. If I didn't undress, he said, he would tell Sister all

about it. Or better still, make us sleep in different rooms. I kept listening, the battle had been lost.

Maybe I should have protested, but that evening, with Father drunk and laughing, with Sister gone and my only secret lying exposed, I closed my eyes, undressed, and on Father's orders lay on the blue bedspread.

It was *cold*, the rain from the exercise books had seeped into the fabric. *I could hear the sound of cars splashing the water in the potholes outside. I could hear the sound of cars splashing the water in the potholes outside, I could hear the minibus conductors shout their destinations: Dum Dum, Howrah, Entally, Roxy Cinema.*

Someone laughed from the street outside; I think I shouted, I'm not sure. Even if I had, my scream wouldn't have gone beyond places where buses go.

What happened later is a split, torn, and then welded together, as if in a dream. I fell asleep; I remember that when I woke up, the buses had long gone, the rain had stopped leaving the street gleaming like sister's hair. I stood on the tiny balcony overlooking the street, I can recall crying.....

At the dining table, I tried to hide behind the glass of milk, watching Father and Sister eat silently. *I wanted to shrink, climb up the glass and dive down to its bottom, swim in circles, let the milk's whiteness fill my body, wash the stickiness and some blood away.*¹²

It can be noted that significantly these three descriptions projected from the child's perception do not involve any direct reference to sex, in the form of terminology. The vocabulary used in these does not involve terms pertaining to the sexualised parts of the body of either the abuser or the abused. The first description does have the term 'penis' in it but we can consider it as an explication by the third person omniscient narrator rather than Estha. Terms like 'erection', 'semen', 'orgasm', 'arousal', 'penetration', 'rape' elude the child's vocabulary though the descriptions of all these appear through metaphors and associated details of the act. Let us see how each is presented though never 'named':

- a) erection: Hard , hot, veiny.(passage I)
- b) 'semen': It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarter boiled

c) orgasm and arousal : grisly-bristly face(passage i)

Her eyelids had dropped; her upper lip showed a black shadow and tiny beads of sweat sparkled on her lips and nose despite the cold..... After some time she stopped and lay back exhausted. She was breathing heavily, and her face looked pale and dull. I thought she was going to die (Passage ii)

d) rape: I closed my eyes, undressed, and on Father's orders lay on the blue bedspread.(passage iii)

The child's description thus desists from using a language pertaining directly to the erotic organs or the exact terminology of the aspects of sex. Talking about sex is in itself taboo as to the expression of other pleasures. As Ronald B. de Sousa and Kathryn Pauly Morgan observe:

In both of its primary senses, but for different reasons, sex is hard to think about. Gender sex, though easy to describe, is difficult to focus on as the object of philosophical inquiry because social practice often appears to have a certain obvious naturalness about it, particularly for those in a position of power. Erotic experience is difficult both to think and to talk about. This is, to begin with, because of the embarrassment that many people feel, particularly about their own experience. The elaborate and uninhibited vocabulary available to describe oral pleasures forms an instructive contrast here. In the gastronomical equivalents of orgies, the flavours, aroma, colour, texture, and arrangement of food are celebrated openly around the tables of public restaurants. Starving, feeling hungry, experiencing appetite, and a zest to eat can all be expressed without reserve. The pornography of cookbooks is neither censored nor prosecuted; cookware boutiques exist to enhance our pleasure, and people are not ashamed to be seen fondling the objects displayed in them as they relate their fantasies.¹³

The passages projecting the persona of the child caters to the difference between the child speaking about sexuality and an adult speaking about sexualiy (which we will see in the next chapters) from the tropes of ignorance versus knowledge. However, one important intervention needs to be considered here. Equating the figurative language of the child and lack of knowledge on the part of the child is a deterministic construct. As Raymond W. Gibbs. Jr observes there are two different contexts of the use of the figurative language by a child:

Several studies attempted to distinguish between children's overextensions and their metaphoric renamings (Winner et al 1979; Winner, Mc Carthy, & Gardner, 1980) An utterance was called renaming if the experimenter knew that the child knew the literal name of the item but referred to it metaphorically or if the child indicated that she was in a pretend mode and intended to speak nonliterally.¹⁴

Now this brings us to a crucial point of consideration. Which context of the child using figurative language does the author project through the persona of the child? Does the indirectness of the experience of abuse narrated by the child imply the linguistic incompetence of the child or rather the cultural impossibility of speaking about incest and abuse?

Let us consider another passage from the Thornton and Bass anthology *Voices in The Night* projected from the child's persona:

My father is crying and telling me to be good. He pulls down my pajama bottoms and tries to put something *too big* inside my *vagina*. I think about shitting. The *big thing* won't go in though and I am still crying. I lie still and puts that big thing into my mouth. My mouth fills with *stickiness* and I am throwing up all over¹⁵

Interestingly enough the child narrator has access to the terminology of her own physique (can mention vagina) but describes 'penis' as 'the big thing' and 'semen' as the 'stickiness'. Can we locate any difference between this passage and the passages I have quoted above? Is the way the abuse is described here, it too does not use the exact terminology, project the same impression as the narrations quoted earlier above? Personally, the reading of this passage and the passages above lead to a different effect. As reader, the descriptive gaps in this passage are built more on the linguistic incompetence of the child, who feels the violence of the act yet can't describe it fully for she 'lacks' the means to describe. But the passages quoted above go beyond just the inability to describe the act, the perceptions of the children indicate a certain degree of grasping of the import of the act and an amount of conscious eluding in the narration of the trauma. We will come to that point in a while but let us first look at the aspect of sexual 'innocence' on the part of the child which leaves the text completely accessible to the adult reader yet the import of what the child describes eluding the child. The description comes without an interpretive tone, and conforms to the physicality of the narration. The child thus presents the act as it is externally,

almost like a third person neutral narrator, a sort of disjunction being affected between the persona who speaks and the persona who experiences it. The persona who speaks thus has access to only the exteriority of the act¹⁶, the persona who experiences it registering only the physical aspect of the act bereft of any interpretive agency. We thus get the image of a child who can perceive only the physical aspects of the act, the meaning eluding him/her. The description is replete with a lot of incompetence, leaving it for the adult reader to complete its interpretation. Such a description thus becomes a dialogic construction, the linearity of the narration being replaced by a two way exchange between the narrator and the reader. The reader is inadvertently engaged in the discourse, becoming a part in the 'production' of meaning. With the externality of descriptions, the rewriting through the consumption of the text can be done on a simplistic level of substituting the circumlocutions for actual terms and deriving the meaning.

However, with the liberty of the reader comes the question of responsibility in this context. As Elizabeth Allen asserts:

If a fictional text does not directly endorse the things it discusses, then readers become responsible for discerning what the text advocates, what it repudiates and what lies between.¹⁷

The text is thus ideally addressed to the interpretive community¹⁸ of 'responsible' readers, readers who not only participate in the construction of the meaning of the text but to show in a desired direction. The apparent non-involvement of the child narrator in the interpretation of meaning shifts the onus more on the reader for a 'responsible' decoding of the text. Consider a passage narrating the fantasy babbling of a child in this Bengali novel by Bani Basu, *Astham Garva* (The Eighth of the Womb):

Strong smell of cigar. Strong smell of Jabakusum oil in grey thick hair, the dressing gown hasn't been washed for ages, the stifling smell, Bubu can't take it any more, but is there a language of protest? Really not at all?

Everyone is at dinner. Uncle to Baba to brothers. Ma, Aunty are serving huge tiger prawns on everyone's plates. Bubu holds a prawn with both her hands, unshells the head and says: Here I take off uncle's coat. Holds the whiskers with vengeance and tears them off saying: Here I tear off Uncle's moustache, Uncle's hair. Then holding up the tail of the prawn she says: Now Uncle's tail is out.

Bubu behave yourself, Ma scolds

Bubu, dear you shouldn't speak like this, Baba tries to discipline

Pamper her all the more! Aunty is sarcastic

Bubu is unperturbed. She has already taken out the shell from the tail.

"Here comes Uncle's tail rushing at you Bubu!" Bubu is immersed in her own tale.

This time Ma looks at Bubu with a strange fear in her eyes, Elder sister has stopped eating and stares at Bubu intensely.¹⁹(Translation mine)

This passage embodies a most veiled description of child abuse. There is nothing explicit in the text that pertains to a revelation of this import, not a protest by the child, nor any terminology that refers to the act. Yet it needs a responsible reader, like the sister and the mother in the narrative domain, to decode the child's apparently nonsensical babbling and impute meaning. This passage is an apt case of the exteriority of description, of the inaccessibility of the terminology pertaining directly to sexuality in the vocabulary of the child as well as its semantic import. Rather the processes are narrated much with a descriptive simplicity of a child's perception. The sexual import of the act somewhat remains inaccessible to the narrator herself in a such a case. The child lacks linguistic competence to describe aspects pertaining to sexuality, simply because s/he constructs a world of contextual reality where sexuality is carefully kept away from the category of the child. The cognitive world of the child is desired to be asexual, so as is the vocabulary. It is to be noted that the incompetence of the child in perceiving the import of what it describes marks a power imbalance not only between the adult abuser and the 'innocent' child but also between the speaking subject and the adult reader. The speaking subject though producing the language fails to interpret its import and the meaning eludes in the production of speech until it is read and hence re-created by the adult reader. The text thus becomes a form of closed exchange between the community of adult readers, who make sense of the child's misplaced metaphors and fantastical associations with their access to the knowledge about sexuality. To cite a poignant example, let us consider the internet joke about a child's description of love making in a totally innocent manner and crudely innocent manner. The source of the risible is the 'knowledge' shared by the adult readers of the joke which eludes the child:

Little Johnny was 7 years old, and like other boys his age, rather curious. He had been hearing quite a bit about courting from other

boys and he wondered what it was and how it was done. One day he took his questions to his mother, and she became flustered. Instead of explaining things to Johnny she told him to hide behind the curtains one night and watch his older sister and her boyfriend. This he did, and the following morning Johnny described everything to his mother:

“Sis and her boyfriend sat and talked for a while, then he turned off most of the lights. Then he started to kiss and hug her, I figured sis must have been getting sick because her face started looking funny. He must have thought so too because he put his hand inside her blouse to feel her heart, just like the doctor would. Except he was not as good as the doctor, because he seemed to have trouble finding her heart. He was getting sick too, because pretty soon both of them started panting and getting all out of breath. His other hand must have been getting cold because he put it under her skirt. About this time, sis got toward the end of the couch. This was when the fever started. I know it was a fever because sis told him she was really HOT. Finally, I found out what was making them so sick. A big eel had gotten inside his pants somehow. It just jumped out of his pants and stood there about 9 inches long. Anyway, sis got brave and tried to kill the eel by biting its head off. Then she grabbed it with both hands and held it tight while he took a muzzle out of his pocket and slipped it over the eels head to keep it from biting again. Sis lay back and spread her legs so she could get a scissor lock on it. And he helped by lying on the top of the eel. The eel put up a hell of a fight. Sis started groaning and squealing and her boyfriend almost upset the couch. I guess they wanted to kill the eel by squishing it between them. After a while they both quit moving and gave a great sigh. Her boyfriend sat up and sure enough they had killed the eel I knew it was dead because it just hung there limp. Sis and her boyfriend were a little tired from the battle, but they went on courting anyway.

However, in the passages quoted in the beginning of the chapter, the descriptions are more complex than a simple narration of the factuality of events. It is not that I am asserting that these passages do not encompass the linguistic incompetence of the child. Yet there is something beyond just an inability to narrate the incidents because

the child is not initiated in the discourse. A careful reading of the passages reveals that the child narrator in each is not totally unaware of the import of the abuse. The difference in the descriptive tenor of the child narrators can be attributed to the different ages of the children. However, leaving aside that it can be observed that the passages are replete with the repulsion of the narrators; yet interesting to note, it is not just physical pain that leads to a loathing towards the act. Indeed, in some of the passages the act involves hardly any physical pain as such yet the sense of repulsion comes, perhaps not with the degree of physical pain inflicted on the child but rather with the realisation of the import of the act and the consequent normative reaction. Yet these descriptions too are not explicit, incorporating gaps and indirectness in language in a different way. The very location of the child as a speaking subject spells out a power differentiation in terms of language in comparison to an adult male who has access to a mode of description both as a male and an adult. Let us have a look at the description of the act of sex with a child as described by the first person narrative of the adult involved; Karan in *An Obedient Father* narrates:

One night, I loosened the cords of my pajamas, and while snoring, took Anita's hand and slipped it beneath my pajamas. I remember how Anita's fingers were startled to discover my *pubic hair*....her fingers touched the base of my *penis*, ..I made her *masturbate* me.....

I turned off the light and removed my pajamas. My *penis pointed straight ahead*. I had never before lain naked next to Anita. I got into the cot and immediately bunched up her night dress and put one finger in her *vagina*. She *yelped*. I wriggled my finger in her to let her know she had to be quiet. Then I *sucked* on my finger and tried to see how deeply I could sink it. Half an inch. 'Ohh!' she said in pain...I took my finger out of her and *parted her legs*. Then I rolled on top of her and brought my *penis* to her *vagina*. Putting my hand over her mouth I *stuffed* my penis outside her *vagina* for a moment. But finding my place I *rammed*, once, twice, three times, and *gushed sperm*.²⁰

It can be observed that the access to the language of sexuality imparts a degree of power to the adult abuser. As Smith-Rosenberg writes:

Consideration of power is central to the interaction of the physical body and the body of language. Sexuality produces power at the same time as the discourse of the powerful sexuality.²¹

The male adult assumes a controlling position with the control over language. With the ability to exert control over the descriptive space, the abuser emerges as the uncontested subject controlling the entire act. The child seems not only totally powerless but almost as an inanimate object. Apart from 'she yelped' the child is virtually absent as a whole subject. Rather each part of her body gets focussed as points of erotic desire. The passage, with its use of terms pertaining directly to sexuality is again immediate in its effect. The pornographic details of the passage complete the debasement of the child as a sexual object, complete with the sexual organs and the absolutely submissive status of the child. The male exerts absolute power over the child and in the act where the child is just a passive receptacle. The masculine violence of the language can also be observed in the passage through the use of the words like 'wriggled', 'sucked', 'yelped', 'stubbed', 'rammed', 'gushed' which add emphasis and force to the description. No matter through what subjective location the text is received, which determines the reception of the pornographic elements in the passage or the violence of rape, the passage is direct and assertive in its appeal. Interesting to note that this passage differs from the passages quoted above in a certain way. While the adult male narrator assuming the narrative agency with access to exact sexual vocabulary has the power to assume the position of the 'subject' or the doer of the verb, none the passages mentioned above, in spite of projecting the child's point of view, embody the child as the active subject in the syntactical structure. The abuser assuming the subject position in both locations of the narrators is an obvious marker of the uncontested power the adult abuser exerts in the sexual act. The power imbalance of the child-adult sexual contact is projected through the unchanging position the adult assume. As Barker observes in 1984 that the vocabulary of sex always embodies the power of the male, here we can say the adult in general over the child:

"most common of the unprintable words for erotic-sexual activity-- 'fuck', 'screw', 'bang', and many others--all carry the implication in their very syntax of activity on the part of the male and passivity on the part of the female so that the very language rules governing this descriptive vocabulary entail male dominance.

The same is observed in the passage above and other passages too. Like this description the earlier descriptions also:

(i) Place the abuser in the subject's position, it is the abuser who emerges the doer in the narrative

(ii) Virtually elides the child's presence from the description again.

The point will be clear with the following comparison. For example let us consider the 1st line of the first passage: His *yellow teeth* were magnets. They saw, they smiled, they sang, *they smelled*, they moved. They mesmerised.

The synecdoche of teeth for the abuser is the nominative case of manifold verbs 'saw', 'smiled', 'sang', 'smelled', 'moved', 'mesmerised'. Whereas Estha acts mostly as a subject of verbs in passive voice: "Estha went. *Drawn* by yellow teeth", "He *got* a cold bottle and a straw". Not only that, the presence of the abused child in the passage even from the point of view of the child is minimal. Like in the passage narrated in the first person voice of the male abuser where the abused child is virtually absent in the description apart from the fragmented parts, the child narrator exists in the form of disjointed body parts and the experience of the abuse felt in various sensory perceptions. The same can be seen in the other passages as well. For example the passage from *The Quilt* also describes the abuser Begum Jaan as the central executor of the actions while the girl is a passive object or the subject of passive voice though the narrator of the passage: "She was pressing me" or "She *made me lie down* with my head on her arm". The third passage also sees the virtual erasure of the abused from the description and what stands out are the various direct actions of the abuser, projecting absolute control over the narrator. Note the use of the verbs in the actions performed by the boy: "On Father's orders I lay on the blue bedspread." The narrator is again just a passive executor of a weak verb as effect to a more active verb, meaning 'ordering' and 'lying' respectively. After this description, the abuser is absent in person in the passage, there is an erasure of the narrative persona.

What remains then in the first person narrative of the abused child that account as a revelation of the trauma of the abuse from the point of view of the abused, with the erasure of the totality of the narrative persona and the focus on the abuser as the main subject in the passage? An analysis of the passages will mark that though the child narrator is not present in the form of the subject of the main verbs and assumes the form of a disjoint subject, what stream out in ample measure from the narrator which form as important liminal points in the text is the construction of reality through the basic sensory perceptions of child. This is where the description gains in interpretive import beyond just the externality of the act. The sensory perceptions of

the child project the reception of the act not only within the domain of physicality but it's an extension of the mental landscape as well, thus projecting an interiority of the child as a subject.

The reality of the abuse is expressed though indirectly through the impressions constructed by the sense perceptions of the child. The way phenomenological reality is perceived by the child gives important clues to the reader about the violence of abuse, which is perhaps difficult to express through language of subjectivity or vocabulary of sexuality which is theoretically inaccessible to the construct of the 'innocent' child. In this context we can have a look at Dewey's theory on emotional reactions and knowledge. Dewey said that our "emotional reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and others." He draws a distinction between feelings in its narrow conception as sensory stimulus, such as those that correspond to choking, suffocation, and heart palpitations, and feelings or emotions in their broadest context which have "face-to-face consciousness of worth" and are "conditioned upon the presence of an image."² To have worth means that we place value on feelings:

Comprised of both feeling and intellect, emotions are found where there is a certain tension or conflict between the image and the feeling reaction....Emotion involves disturbance and agitation. Whenever there is emotion, there is a divergence between the sense situation and the image situation....a continual oscillation, a continual alternation between the image and the existing situation....The excitation, then the disturbance which is characteristic of all emotion being stirred up, is due precisely to the fact that the given situation is thrown into relief over against an ideal ²²

Estha's description of the abuse comes in the form of the effect felt by the abused in the form of crude sensory perceptions. The effect extends as transferred epithet on the surrounding materiality as well. The abuse is associated with the most uncomfortable sensory feelings fraught by physical uneasiness on all levels: visual, olfactory, gustatory and tactile. It is a visual torture: "teeth like yellow piano key", "His yellow teeth were magnets. They saw, they smiled, they sang, they smelled, they moved. They mesmerised." The tactile discomfort is the most prominent: "(The penis was) hard, hot, veiny, Not a moon beam", as well as "soft and shrivelled", his hands were "tight and sweaty", Estha's own hand "wet, hot and sticky". The tactile discomfort transfers to gustatory unease: "the lemondrink was too cold. Too sweet",

“the fizz came up his nose.” The narration is thus a revelation of resultant physical unease for the child rather than an explication of a violation on the grounds of sexuality. With the uneasiness of the child in being involved in a sexual act with an adult, the surrounding reality gets received in the form of negative sense perceptions. Thus the teeth of the abuser get received as detestable elements, so does his hands which are ‘tight and sweaty’. Even the lemon orange drink, taken while the masturbation is happening, is received as unpleasant, too sweet and causing a burning sensation in the nose. Thus though the child doesn’t describe the abuse in clear, direct terms of sexual violence by using terminologies that pertain to the description of sex, there are ways in which the child receives the abuse, if not sexually through the various other sensory organs.

This is similar in Ismat Chughtai’s *The Quilt*. Here the child narrator does not use terms with direct sexual connotation, nor does she reveal explicitly all the details of the Begum’s action, a lot is said unsaid about the actual experience. Rather what gains prominence is again the physical uneasiness of the child narrator, expressed through the detestable bodily aspects of the abuser: “her eyelids had dropped”, “tiny beads of sweat sparkled on her lips and nose despite the cold”, “hands clammy as though the skin had been stripped off”, “odour of her warm body”. The surrounding too looks threatening, posing an unease and fear in the child: “It was evening, and the room was getting enveloped in darkness.” It is thus again a violence expressed through the uncomfortability of the sensory perceptions of the child narrator.

The child narration in Rajkamal Jha’s fiction is figurative too. The effect of the abuse again gets permeated in the surrounding material ambience perceived through the physical senses. This passage, as I mentioned earlier, can be perceived as more figurative and carrying implied signification. The physical detestation of the act extends to the melancholic rain swept locale of Calcutta, the chill of the rains, sound of the splashing of dirty water in potholes, as well as the sense of escape created by the naming of distant places by the conductors of the buses. Again there’s a feeling of wanting to hide, to shrink on the part of the child, to wash the tactile repugnance of “stickiness and some blood”. Like in the earlier passages quoted, this description again does not reveal the act with a vocabulary pertaining to terms related blatantly to sexuality rather it is again an exposition of the sensory unease transferred on to the encompassing locale.

One important thing to be noticed here is that the agent of discomfort is not the abuser as a whole but rather disjoint, individual parts of the abuser that appear to the child in the form of abominable elements. The child receives the abuser in parts as well as the abuse through dissociated sense perceptions, hence affecting a splintering of the child as a subject as well who projects herself/himself as the subject of the various separate senses. The dismembering of the child can be well seen in Volga's 'Ayon':

Then I was not a small girl. Not a human being. Perhaps not even a living being. Only a yoni. That's all. That's the only thing. A small hole...who am I? What am I? Am I the *hand* that mixes the food? Am I the *mouth* that eats? Am I the *stomach* that's filled as soon as food reaches there? Or am I only the *yon*?²³

The splintering of the child's subjectivity impairs the persona's ability to project or restrains the persona from projecting a comprehensive picture of the abuse. What results is thus a pastiche of images, of disjoint links. The reader's role here is one of assimilation and interpretation beyond the substitution of circumlocution by more linguistically competent component. A mere substitution of terminology does not decode meaning, the projection of the internal landscape constructs a subjectivity of meaning as well. When the child assigns negative perception to neutral or even positive aspects of the phenomenological world, it asserts individuality to the perception through the subject who has interpreted the act in spite of its normative inaccessibility to the domain of sexuality. To recall again, I have listed the neutral and the positive things that get received in a personalised way with their association with the abuse:

	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE
The God of Small Things	yellow teeth, yellow piano key, empty leather change-purse	Lemon drink
The Quilt	the room, heavy gold buttons	
The Blue Bedspread	blue bedspread, rain, bus	rain

The production of meaning is thus not totally exclusive to the adult. The child narrator is projected to grasp meaning and the description entails a lot of conscious gaps or indirectness, mirroring the complexities and shattering of the inner consciousness which fractures the comprehensibility of the exteriority of the act. Let us look at the specific examples again. The terms carrying judgemental import in the passage (i) can be singled out. The abuse had a hypnotic effect (teeth were magnets, they mesmerised, drawn by yellow teeth). The penis 'was not a moonbeam' and the abuser had a grisly-bristly face that contorted. Similarly, passage (ii) is also replete with the victim's perception of the act with an uneasiness bred not with just the physical unease of the act but also with realisation of the import of the act: Begum Jaan's 'mischievous smile makes the narrator "embarrassed", her counting of her ribs incites an attempt to 'protest', and an apparently neutral statement like "Come on, I'm not going to eat you up. How tight this sweater is! And you don't have a warm vest on." makes her "uncomfortable" and makes her talk "rather incoherently". The darkness of the room unsettles the child as does Begum Jaan's looks: "A strange fear overcame me. Begum Jaan's deepest eyes focussed on me and I felt like crying." There's nothing obvious in Begum Jaan's behaviour that can make the child uncomfortable unless she registers the sexual import of her action. And the most perceptive narrator is of passage (iii) whose description not only entails several deliberate gaps in the description but a consciousness of the act in relativity to the sexual tenor of his relationship with his sister: "Maybe I should have protested, but that evening, with Father drunk and laughing, with Sister gone and my only secret lying exposed, I closed my eyes, undressed, and on Father's orders lay on the blue bedspread."

The experience of abuse and the impenetrable silence that surrounds it, not necessarily the result of linguistic incompetence, is seen in Shashi Deshpande's short story 'It Was Dark'. The girl, rescued from a brothel house, goes into total silence after the incident. Repeated attempts on the part of the parents to make her speak about the experience fails till driven to the edge the only words that she utters are: "It Was Dark".

'Why don't you talk?'

'Say something', I said fiercely.

I clutched her hand tightly in both mine. 'Talk to me. Tell me what happened.

That man.....'

‘Tell me about him. What did he do?’ My voice was shrill.

‘Tell me. Say something. Talk.’

‘It was dark,’ she said.

‘And then....?’

‘It was dark’, she said again.²⁴

The passage conveys a conscious eluding of a description of the abuse by the child, resulting not only from her inability to describe the act. In fact the very import of the act is what renders the child silent, it's not only the linguistic competence that falls short of description but also the restricted agency of the subject as a child. The very subjective location of the child and the cultural expectation of innocence denies a combination of interpretation of the act with the simplicity and directness of description. The directness of description and the interpretation of the act are thus mutually exclusive domains. An access to the knowledge of sexuality restrains the child from stating it. A child talking explicitly about sex with a realisation of its import is a cultural aberration. Thus, unlike the protesting victim, as we would see in the next chapter, whose very location as an adult assigns her some agency in speaking out about sexual abuse in direct terms, the child's narrative agency is limited only to the description of the act, not its resolution.

For the child, the physicality of the act forms the ground of discourse and hence the resistance to the abuse also works out in this ground. The child has access to the knowledge about the exteriority of the act, the associated physical aspects of the abuse which can be narrated by the agency of the child. Hence for the child narrator, resistance to the abuse also works out in this domain, the child repelling the act not through ethical discourse but by loathing it physically. Since the experience of the abuse can be constructed through the external physicality by the child's sense perception, there are specific physical elements that the child detests and distances itself from them----both in the outside reality and within the child herself/himself. Kristeva's notion of the abject through the various extracts from *The powers of Horror* can be used for a poignant critical engagement . Let us have a look at some of the major points in Kristeva's theorisation²⁵:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.

. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to the I. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order.

Let us concentrate on the phrases that I have emphasized with italics and bold fonts. All of them describe the abject which is very similar to the nature of incest/ child sex abuse as it can appeal to the child that we can gather from the passages I have quoted here. It is “*ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable*”, The child has a sense of it being forbidden, It is also something that transgresses the normative, that disturbs order : *It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order.* Most importantly it is almost an other for the subjective self—The abject has only one quality of the object - *that of being opposed to the I.* The normative self can stabilize itself only by rejecting the abject.

Now this being the nature of the abject, of the repulsion of the self from something indefinable either outside it or within it, what are the concrete elements that might constitute of the abject:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck.

The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection., I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that they see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which "I" become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.

The rejection of the abuse through means of vomit, sobs, or repugnance is exactly the way the ‘self’ of the child dissociates itself from the trauma of the abuse, the abject

and at the same time claims to establish her/his subjectivity. To look at the specific instances in the passages again:

- Estha's hand was *wet and hot and sticky*. It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarter boiled.
- He held his *sticky* Other Hand away from his body.
- She (Begum Jaan) was pressing me as though I were a clay doll and the odour of her warm body made me want to throw up.
- At the dining table, I tried to hide behind the glass of milk, watching Father and Sister eat silently. I wanted to shrink, climb up the glass and dive down to its bottom, swim in circles, let the milk's whiteness fill my body, wash the stickiness and some blood away.

It is by repelling and rejecting the act of incest that the child as a subject maintains order and normativity which the adult attempts to transgress. The very locating of the abuser as the violator of norms and perverse and the child as a 'normal' subject conferring to societal laws by detesting incest is reached through the abjection the child constructs out of abuse:

by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder.

The process of repelling the tabooed act acts through the distilling the body and extracting 'the self' by rejecting the 'otherness' in the body which is associated with the violence of the forbidden act. Thus the images of rejecting it through vomit or tears or 'holding the sticky other hand away from the body' or washing away the 'stickiness and blood'. Since the child's agency is limited by the physical domain and the exteriority of the description, the body and the surrounding materiality itself become potent domains of resistance. As Luce Irigaray asserts in 'La Mysterique' in the context of hysterical bodies and purgation:

She is pure at last because she has pushed to extremes the repetition of this abjection, this revulsion, this horror to which she has been condemned, to which, mimetically, she had condemned herself.²⁶

By rejecting a part of itself that associates with the abuse, the child entails a cathartic effect that restores him/her back in the order. With the self being distilled off the abuse through an ablution of the body, the child subject is restored back to its rightful

domain. Since the child is bereft of the agency to initiate discourse of protest, it is the only way the child can handle and thereby reject the abuse. The body thus becomes the site of both violence and resistance, and negotiation with the abuse is thus affected in the domain of the body and its associated physicality.

It can thus be concluded that the first person narrative agency of the child does not necessarily ensure absolute empowerment on the part of the child subject. The narrative is incomplete without the active participation of the adult reader in the making of meaning. Since the child's narration is restricted either in form of linguistic incompetence or the lack of agency to describe sexuality, the adult reader re-writes the text to impute meaning. The text thus becomes a form of exchange between the adult reading community, the child's agency being absent or minimal in the interpretive action of the text. The agency of the abused child is thus never autonomous, an exposition of abuse through the narrative agency of the child can never construct autonomous discourse of resistance, the 'responsible' reader to be engaged for an ethical stand.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Jen Shelton “Don’t Say such Foolish Things Dear”: Speaking Incest in *The Voyage Out*” in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida.2002. 224
- ² Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. p-34
- ³ ibid, p-95
- ⁴ . Ibid P-5
- ⁵ ibid, p-6
- ⁶ ibid, p-37
- ⁷ ibid p-37
- ⁸ Karen Sanchez Eppler, “Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth –Century America.” in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida.2002
- ⁹ Volga. ‘Ayon’ .in *The Woman Unbound: Selected Short Stories*. Trans. Alladi Uma and M.Sridhar. Hyderabad: Authors & Writers India Ltd. 1997.
- ¹⁰ Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*, p-103-104
- ¹¹ Chughtai , Ismat. *The Quilt and Other Stories*. Translated by Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed. New Delhi, Kali for Women, 2004.
- ¹² Jha, Rajkamal. *The Blue Bed Spread*. P-53-55
- ¹³ de Sousa,Ronald B. and Kathryn Pauly Morgan . “Philosophy, Sex and Feminism”. *Atlantis*, Vol 13.2:1-10, (1988)

One striking exception, as Dale Spender has pointed out (Spender 1980), expanding on a point made by Muriel Schultz), is the word for rape: why isn't it, or some synonym for it, obscene? It is a troubling paradox that a sexual word, 'fuck', is used in slang to denote a hateful aggressive act, but that the word for sexual aggression remains emotionally neutral. Spender, Dale. 1980. *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 180

¹⁴ Gibbs. Jr, Raymond W. *The Poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Gibbs makes a distinction between the two contexts of a child using a figurative language. It can be that the child overextends the use of one word in order to refer to an object whose conventional name the child does not know. In that case it is a case of lack of linguistic competence on the part of the child. But there has been also numerous instances of the child knowing the literal name of the item but referring it to metaphorically or renaming it.

¹⁵ R. C. "Remembering Dream". 105-106 in Thornton, Laurie and Ellen Bass. *I Never Told Anyone: Writings By Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. Harper and Row. 1983.

¹⁶ I have used the term exteriority to mean a description that relies only on the external aspects of an incident and does not explore beyond the physical reaction to it. The child narrator is portrayed as being capable of only an external description of events, without any projection of the interior workings of its mind through interpretation of the act.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Allen. "Incest in the story of Tancredi: Christian de Pizan's Poetics of Euphemism" in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida. 2002

¹⁸ The famous concept used by Stanley Fish to refer to communities of readers composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy" or "set of community assumptions" He also proposed that each communal strategy in effect "creates" all the

seemingly objective features of the text itself, as well as the intentions, speakers, and authors" that we may infer from the text; the validity of any reading, however obvious it may seem to a reader, will always depend on the assumptions and strategy of reading that he or she happens to share with other members of a particular interpretative community.

¹⁹ Basu, Bani. *Astham Garva*. Ananda Puynlishers, Kolkata. 2000.

²⁰ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. p-104

²¹ Smith-Rosenberg Caroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. Oxford University Press. 1985

²² Dewey John, "The Emotional Aspect of Volition," in *Lectures in Psychological and Political Ethics: 1898*, ed. Donald F. Koch. New York: Hafner Press, 1976. 111.

²³ Volga. 'Ayoni'. in *The Woman Unbound: Selected Short Stories*. Trans. Alladi Uma and M.Sridhar. Hyderabad: Authors & Writers India Ltd. 1997.

²⁴ Deshpande, Shashi. 'It Was Dark' in *The Legacy and other stories*. Writers Workshop, Calcutta. 1978

²⁵ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982

²⁶ Irigaray, Luce. "La Mysterique" from *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans, Gillian C. Ithaca. Cornell. UP. 1985.

CHAPTER THREE

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE ADULT REVELATION:

After having looked at the dynamics of exposition of the abuse through the first person narrative agency of the child narrator, in this chapter we will be looking at a more complex aspect of the revelation of the 'past' abuse through the present location of narrative agency. This chapter deals with the dynamics of revelation as an adult narrator, the politics that goes into the act of revelation as opposed to silencing, the victim's location from which the revelation is effected, the language of revelation and the discourse that surrounds the victim.

The three fictive characters to be considered for study are Anita in Akhil Sharma's *The Obedient Father*, Mala in Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* and Ria in Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding*. Anita, raped by her father at as a child, is bereft of narrative agency to describe her experiences as a child. The central narrative voice in the fiction is that of Karan, the abuser himself, who even describes the incident of raping his daughter with gruesome details as a confession. But Anita never speaks about the incident directly even when the narrative voice shifts to the first person point of view of hers. The reader only gets to know about the intense hatred crystallised in her and can just assume the cause. Yet in a sudden turn of events, Anita suddenly speaks it out about her experience of the rape as a child . Breaking the silence of many years, Anita's revelation comes only as a mother of a daughter who again is threatened by the same abuser. Anita delves deep in her memory to recount her experiences of the pain of the abuse but as a grown up woman. Let us see how the revelation comes around:

I always *knew*, she began calmly. I never didn't know you were cruel, you were merciless. Every time you touched me, every time you made me touch you, I *knew*. I *knew* all the time! (page 141)

When you'd pretend to sleep and put my hand on your penis. When you entered me, it hurt so much I thought I would die, that I had to die. And then I bled. After the first night, I was just waiting to die. Every night there was blood and I kept thinking, I'm going to die. I won't even have seen the Taj Mahal and I am going to die. I won't have put on perfume and I'm going to die.....

I look at twelve year olds and think, I was like that. Who could do that to a twelve year old? I'd kill myself if anything like that happened to Asha.¹

Anita's revelation comes as a stark contestation to the authoritative narration of Karan, negating it in two major aspects that attempt to dilute the violence of the act. Firstly, Karan projects Anita as unaware of his intentions which gives him absolute control over the entire act. The assumed sexual 'innocence' on the part of Anita marks, as mentioned earlier, is a crucial point that spells out the power imbalance between the abuser and the victim. As Karen Sanchez –Eppler poignantly points out, speaking in the context of child-adult sex in 19th century American fiction:

...an insistence on the sexual innocence of children...is precisely what enables these erotics to function....the suppression gives these scenes their sexual charge. It is refusal to acknowledge childhood sexuality that makes the children so irresistible, so sexually vulnerable...².

Karan's confidence that the actual intension of the act was subtly hidden through the pretence of playing games or sleep and thus actually absolving Karan of any blame is completely shattered when Anita claims knowledge of the act and of the depravity of the father even as a child. The same incident of Karan exploiting Anita sexually is presented by Karan as if the knowledge remains only within the domain of adult discourse, Karan's guilt is discovered and confronted by his wife, but in his version of the story his 'innocence' is maintained at least to the victim child who is supposed to be unaware of the actual import of the act. But Anita's narrative shatters this complacency on the part of the adult abuser (that he controls the knowledge of the act and hence can control the effect of the act on Anita) by claiming an independent share in the knowledge of the act. Karan's complacency absolves him from the guilt of adversely affecting the child.:

My conscience did not bother me. I reasoned that...I was not damaging her emotionally, because the games hid my intensions....the only danger I posed was to her mind. And this was not my responsibility. How could I be held accountable for the way I interpreted what I was doing?³

It was assumed thus that only the perpetrator knew 'what I was doing'. This domain of sexual knowledge assumed to exclude the child is released from the absolute

authority of the adult, with the surfacing of the daughter's narration within the same narrative domain, the authority of the father's narrative falls threatened. As Jen Shelton rightly observes in the context of speaking incest in Woolf's *The Voyage Out*

Incest has a structure comprising a physical dimension, in which an adult makes sexual advances toward a child, and a narrative dimension, in which child and adult offer competing and mutually exclusive stories. The child's narrative seeks to make known the adult transgression while the adult's story seeks to dismiss or explain away the child's version of events...it is a struggle for control of the erotic, a conflict between adult and childish configurations of sexuality that inflects the narrative emerging from this contest.⁴

Let us concentrate on the last part of the quotation; it is a 'conflict between adult and childish configurations of sexuality that inflects the narrative emerging from this contest'. Now how does the victim as a grown up adult narrate her experience of the childhood trauma? In the previous chapter we had located the narration of the experience of the abuse through the language of the child, how similar or different is the narration of the adult recounting the experience perceived as a child? There is certainly a complexity working here. What is the subjective position assumed by the victim within the narrative domain when she recounts the abuse? Is there a distancing between the persona of the victim (as a child) who actually experiences the trauma and the persona who narrates or in a way interprets the act (as an adult)? Does the victim recount the subjective position of the child as well along with the incident?

Anita speaks as an adult who not only can interpret the father's violence in its proper implication; she assumes an authority to even confront the abuser by virtue of belonging to the domain of adulthood which ensures access to sexual knowledge rightful. Unlike the child narrators we had encountered in the previous chapter, Anita's speech is direct and uses a vocabulary pertaining to terms directly relating to sexuality:

you'd pretend to sleep and put my hand on your *penis*. When you *entered* me, it hurt so much...(142).

when I was Asha's age, Pitaji *raped* me. He did this many times.....there used to be *blood* everywhere after he finished with me.(270)

When I first *menstruated*, I thought it was an old wound that had broken .(271)

The adult narrator, though recounting experiences of childhood presents it through the persona of the adult that gives the description a directness of effect. The victim as an adult can delineate the experience with the use of the exact vocabulary. The adult subject interprets the act in its proper implication but so does the abused child as a child (as Anita asserts through her constant reiteration that she always knew what was happening even as a child) yet what attributes weightage to her account and a power to challenge to the perpetrator is her now sanctioned access to sexual knowledge as an adult. So even if the child subject would have correctly perceived the actual import of the act, stating of the act would not have been culturally permissible with the access to sexual knowledge being taboo for a 'child'. Apart from the aspect of the child actually lacking knowledge about sex or the lack of linguistic competence to describe it, what restrains a direct exposition of an act of abuse by a child narrator is this dialectics between the cultural expectation of the child to be 'innocent' and 'unaware' of sexual implications and the actual perception of the child in the experience which leads to a disjoint narrative. As mentioned earlier also, a child in complete control over her sexuality and access to the knowledge of it is a threatening 'abnormality'.

Thus the adult as a speaking subject unfolding sexual violence is here a more composed subject, speaks in more direct terms, focussed in the event rather than the surrounding materiality and takes a moral stand in opposing the act than as a child as a speaking subject exposing sexual abuse.

A confident confrontation of the abuser by the abuse victim is also seen in Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding*. Ria, a victim as a child of the exploitation of the eldest patriarch in the family, Tej, blurts out the unspoken secret in the form of a confrontation, bringing out the exact details of the act with assurance. Suspecting Tej of repeating his exploitation with another child in the family, Alia, Ria finally confronts him. I have summed up the scene in its script form:

Alia: I don't know what's the big deal is about kissing, I know all about kissing

Ria: Really Baby?

Vandana: Achha, everything?

Alia: Ya. It's gross. You open your mouth and he sticks his tongue in.

Pause. Ria looks suspicious.

Alia: Ya don't you know, that's how older people kiss.

Alia walks up to her mother, she wants to sleep. Tej walks up to her to soothe her.

Tej: Come Alia, Don't trouble your mother; I'll take her out for a drive.

Ria keeps staring at them, shocked, and suddenly starts running frantically. Alia and Tej are already in the car. Ria stands right in front of it, stopping it threateningly.

Tej: What's the matter Ria?

Rhia: Just let her go

Tej: Is anything wrong?

Ria: Just let her go.

Tej : Let her go from what?

Ria: You bastard, chalo Alia

Rhia, have you gone mad?

Tej: I don't know, I think she had a bit too much to drink....(laughs)

What happened?

Ria: It wasn't enough that he touched me when I was a girl.....That wasn't enough that you had to teach Alia how older people kiss?!

Tej: Ria will you stop this nonsense?

Ria : What did you get out of it? I didn't even have breasts, you sick man! Seven afternoons, seven afternoons of how older people kiss.....he took my clothes off, open your mouth Ria, Ria open your mouth

Tej: Ria stop it

Ria: don't touch me...now he's doing it all over again to Alia.

Here, too, Ria, delineates the act with focus on the actual event and an exactness of experience. There is no reference to the material surrounding that gets permeated with the implication of the abuse; rather the import of the act is quite simplified in its presentation. The subject too is a unified subject and not projected as perceptive organs of disjoint subjectivity. Both Ria and Anita thus delve deep in their memory to reconstruct a past as an adult subject, in control of the language of narration, recounting the exact details of the act and spelling out the implications of it.

Here we need to look at the aspect of memory and narrative with reference to child sexual abuse. Laurence J Kirmayer makes a crucial observation regarding the narratives of two different kinds of traumatic experience— child sexual abuse and Holocaust. He asserts that the basic difference between Holocaust narrative and child sexual abuse narratives is that while the current literature of child abuse places so much emphasis on amnesia, Holocaust narratives emphasize recollection. While the first reflects post-traumatic stress disorder characterized by intrusions, the latter project dissociative memory characterized by gaps:

Survivors of the Holocaust are usually depicted as overwhelmed by memories and unwilling to recount their tale for fear of the pain it will revoke. Their problem is not the limits of memory but of language----the inadequacy of ordinary words to express all they have witnessed. The Holocaust presents an incomprehensible catastrophe that undermines the very possibility of coherent narrative⁵ (Funkenstein 1993).

In contrast, adults with a history of childhood abuse are often depicted as initially unaware of their traumatic experiences as memories. They suffer from dissociative disorders. They evince their traumatic past through symptoms, including physical and emotional pain, numbing, self injury, lapses of identity⁶

Observing the literature associated with the narratives of child sexual abuse, Kirmayer associates repression and dissociation⁷ as the two most common effects to a childhood abuse experience. The theory of repression claims that when memories are laden with intensely painful feelings, they may be warded off over long periods of time:

It is the fear of looking at traumatic memories that keeps them repressed. It implies a narrowing or splitting of consciousness so that some memories may be put aside.⁸

Dissociation on the other hand 'implies a splitting of consciousness so that some memories may be put aside. Both refer to the overwhelming attempt at forgetting, a landscape of 'gap' or 'absence' in the memory rather than of a torturous presence. Kirmayer locates that while a Holocaust narrative is broken down by an inrush of memory, a childhood sexual narrative is broken by dissociation and fragments, dispersion and gaps. Explicating the possible reasons for this difference Kirmayer

makes a crucial observation. As mentioned earlier, the moment of confrontation marks a transition from the domain of private to public.

Now how is this clinical reality projected in the narratives we are dealing with? Mala in Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* replicates the actual case studies of victims speaking about childhood abuse. Mala recounts her experience of being abused by her uncle when counselled by a therapist. Her speech is disjoint, fraught with ellipses and unfinished syntactic constructions:

Mala: I-I don't know how to begin.....Today is the 30th of September.....2001, and my name is.....I don't think I want to say my name.....I am sorry....I am unsure about this.....and a lot of other things. But this.....This is the first time you see that I.....(After a long pause, where we do hear her breathing.) I know it is all my fault really....It must be. I must have asked for it.....somehow, I just seem to be made for it. Maybe I was born that way, maybe.....This is what I am meant for. It's not anybody's fault, except my own. Sometimes I wish that my mother.....I am sorry but.....⁹

Yet, the play never projects a complete blocking of memory on the part of the victim. Rather, the experience of abuse remains an integral part in the development of the plot of the play.

Unlike the real life instances of repression of the memory or complete fugue on the part of the victims, which makes Kirmayer observe "In contrast, adults with a history of childhood abuse are often depicted as initially unaware of their traumatic experiences as memories",¹⁰ a plot based on the theme of child sexual abuse works around the incident of abuse, making it a 'presence' for the victim rather than an 'absence'. In all the narratives mentioned here, the incident of abuse remains as a constant presence for Mala, Anita and Ria as well as for the structure of the story. The peculiar trait in the victim's character as a consequence of the abuse forms the rising action of the plot while the denouement is achieved with the revelation by the victim. The readers wonder at Anita's hatred for her father, Mala's seduction games with all men around her, and Ria's anxiety and detestation where Tej is concerned as the rising action of the plots. And there are definite purposes for the revelations on the part of the victims for the unfolding of the plots. Let us look at these examples in greater detail. In Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* a mystery is built around Mala,

who for some unknown reason, ditches her suitors in thirty days time. Her suitor Deepak wonders what went wrong between them:

We met at a friend's party a couple of days earlier. She smiled at me and wanted to dance with me. We were seeing each other every day after that. Very soon I wanted to meet you right away But somehow, she didn't want it. She has other plans. God alone knows what they are. Last Monday she told me in no uncertain terms that she....I just don't understand it. What did I do wrong?

Shanta: She bought some magazines that evening. She was very depressed. She....There is something else.

Deepak: (looking at the calendar). There's a cross on last Monday's date! ¹¹

The mystery builds up around Mala's behaviour which is incomprehensible to both her mother and Deepak. They locate the problem but not the cause. Even Mala herself fails to explain till the revelation comes out:

Mala: I don't know why. I just don't understand....Please don't ask me why do I do it. It's just a game....not a game...No...it's....I know it's wrong. What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. That is why I am a bad person.It has to end in a month's time. In fact I like it best when I can time it so that it lasts for thirty days. I even mark it on my calendar. ¹²

The mystery behind Mala's habituated seductive moves or phobia towards serious commitment remains inexplicable till she comes out with the revelation. The same goes for Ria, the victim in *Monsoon Wedding*. Throughout the movie there are multiple scenes where the audience feels the subtle strands of secrecy behind Ria's disgusted looks and anxiety in her interaction with Tej. The first scene where everyone meets Tej, Ria's reaction is blatantly different: she stares back sternly to Tej's apparently affectionate avuncular demeanour. Ria seems unnecessarily rude at the 'simple' instance of Tej feeding samosas to Alia alone in the kitchen. Her glares, her watchful looks in her otherwise normal behaviour all build up an element of suspense which needed to be revealed to answer the questions posed in the plot. The revelation of the abuse within the narrative domain is as the solution to a mystery built in the plot. Memory is to be revived because the narrative structure demands it, without the revelation denouement is impossible. An emphatic example of this can be

found in Sidney Sheldon's crime thriller *Tell me your Dreams*. It is an interesting instance of the theme of child sexual abuse being used in a crime thriller, making the spilling out of the secret of the abuse the solution to the thriller. The protagonist here suffers from multiple personality disorder and is charged for several brutal murders. Though her crime is proved the reason for her disorder and the crimes remain unsolved. There is a constant reference to some traumatic events leading to this abnormality but the plot has motives remain hidden as the thriller builds on suspense. It is only when Ashley comes out with her deep secret that the things fall in place. It is interesting to note how in the story the revelations are arranged chronologically according to the order of events in the plot. First the perpetrator is revealed, and then the reasons for the formation of the two alternate personalities are revealed in the order in which they are introduced in the plot. The plot unfolds as Ashley reveals the incidents of molestation and rape by her father, leading to answering of the mystery surrounding her alter egos. This leads to consequent revelations of the memory flashes she gets during any intercourse which leads to all those murders, a detrimental effect of the childhood trauma. It is till these revelations that the story remains unsolved. And quite predictably thus the revelations come in measured volumes, only that much is recounted or unearthed from memory that offers an explanation to the mysteries, that seals all loose ends in the plot, leading to a complete resolution to the suspense built. Like all crime thrillers, this book too ends with a complete solving of all the puzzles, the revelation bringing a dramatic turn in the events.

The dramatics of the revelation is an important aspect in the texts.

Interestingly, it can be observed that out of the three texts we are dealing with, two of them, Akhil Sharma's *Obedient Father* and Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* already reveal the fact of the abuse before the final confrontation comes. In Sharma, the abuser reveals it himself in a confessional mode, in Dattani, Mala brings it out in her confrontation of her mother. Yet the final confrontation does come about with as an end to a tense building up of events. And in a way the confrontation is a sort of ritualistic predicament to the plot, which comes with an extra-dramatic performance by the victim. We will come to the politics of revelation in the next chapter but let us, for the time being, consider the way the revelation comes about. In all the three texts mentioned, the victims' revelation encapsulates a crucial moment in the text, high in dramatic performativity. The revelation is loud, a frantic spurting out of emotional tension, an uncontrolled blurting out of facts triggered by a moment of crisis. The

revelatory agency appears less of a unified, composed subject in control of herself but rather there is a splitting of subjectivity on the part of the persona, the revelation being brought out at a moment of instability. There is a certain alienation, a certain degree of shift occurring between the persona that conceals the trauma and the persona that reveals it. And in a way, in all the three texts there is a certain pattern of the representation of the victim breaking such an unsettling secret, the unsettling of the speaker conforming to the import of the words spoken. There are abrupt snapping of sentences and repetitions in the syntax, the speech goes round and round a single syntactical phrase which might not be the most significant aspect in the act but a refrain like that repetition of which adds a dramatic effect to it, asserting the high point of instability in the character and a crucial crisis in the plot. The revelatory speech is more of an assertion of the unsettling impact of the act rather than an attempt to divulge the information associated with it. Let us look at the repetitive phrases in the speeches, an attempt at emphasising the enormity of the abuse.

Anita: I always *knew*..... *Every time* you touched me, *every time* you made me touch you, I *knew*. I *knew* all the time!

When you'd pretend to sleep and put my hand on your penis. *When* you entered me, it hurt so much I thought I would *die*, that I had to *die*. And then I bled. After the first night, I was just waiting to *die*. Every night there was blood and I kept thinking, I'm going to *die*. I won't even have seen the Taj Mahal and I am going to *die*. I won't have put on perfume and I'm going to *die*.....

Mala : *Where were you* when he locked the door to your bedroom, while I was napping there? *Where were you* during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? *Fifteen minutes* everyday of my summer holidays, add them up. *Fifteen minutes* multiplied by thirty or thirty one or whatever.

Ria: *It wasn't enough* that he touched me when I was a girl.....*That wasn't enough* that you had to teach Alia how older people kiss?! What did you get out of it? I didn't even have breasts, you sick man! *Seven afternoons, seven afternoons* of how older people kiss.....he took my clothes off, *open your mouth* Ria, Ria *open your mouth*.

And even if we overlook the fact that *Monsoon Wedding* belongs to the genre of film and *Thirty Days in September* a play, and just consider them as literary texts, the performative import of the locution is pronounced. Revelation does accompany a moment of fragility, an instance of losing control of the integrity of the subject. Look at the extreme frenzy which overwhelms Mala's mother Shanta when she blurts out the hidden trauma of her own childhood, a 'shameful history of being abused by her brother:

Silence means shanti. Shanti. But my tongue is cut off. No. No. It just fell off somewhere. I didn't use it, no. I cannot even speak about it. No I can't. IO am dumb. (To the Man, speaking like a mute person making unintelligible sounds.) Uh, eh, oo, oo, aa, aa, aaaaaaaaaa. (Gesturing with her hands to say she will not tell anyone while making the sounds.) Aaaaa, oooo, eee, oooo aaeceeeeee, aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaeceeeeee!

*Shanta jumps to where the pieces of glass from the portrait are and picks up a sharp piece and jabs it in her mouth.*¹³

The revelation of abuse as an adult within a fictional domain is thus associated with a violence of action, an unsettling of order, an extension of unsettling the very words seem to threaten. The histrionics of expression are perhaps the cultural expectation that a revelation like this cannot be associated with a composure and unity of the subject. As Jen Shelton rightly observes:

...our culture insists that to be a victim implies neurosis....we cannot imagine an incest survivor who does not somehow display psychic wounds suffered in the incestuous contact"¹⁴

We will expand on this with more insight in the next chapter. This point of revelation, to repeat again, marks the high dramatic point in the plot, the point of turn of events. The revealing victim threatens order, both structural and linguistic within the narrative domain and marks the crisis point in the narrative, a point from whence the flow of the narrative is jolted, the direction of the plot is changed. The back flap of *An Obedient Father* which summarises the story proves a case in point. It goes:

" Things *change* on the eve of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, when one reckless act *bare the lifetime of violence and sexual shame*"

Indeed the 'baring' of the sexual shame is the point where things change and accounts for the climactic point in the storyline not only in this narrative but also in the others

mentioned. It can be thus safely concluded that at least in these three texts concerned, the revelation or speaking out constitutes the sensational turn in the plot. The tropes of abuse, secrecy and final confrontation all fall in an inevitable circle of consequence in a narrative domain dealing with the theme of adult victim of childhood abuse.

Interestingly enough, the revelation is not an end in itself just for the sake of confronting the abuser for his wrongdoing once the child victim gets the agency to challenge him as an adult. No confrontation happens, no silence breaks till there is a triggering cause in the plot, an emphatic validation of the need for the confrontation. That the abuse has happened and needs to be protested in itself is not strong enough a cause, in all these three fictions and even in Sheldon, the revelation is triggered off with a different motive for the victim within the narratorial scheme, which is beyond the personal motive of settling personal accounts with the abuser. It is to be observed that in all these three narratives, the revelation and confrontation becomes necessary for the victims to fulfil the other female roles beyond that of a daughter. Christine Froula argues that incest victims, so long as they see themselves as daughters, cannot speak because of “the cultural text that dictates to males and females alike the necessity of silencing woman’s speech when it threatens the father’s power” Silencing women this way “insures that the cultural daughter remains a daughter, her power suppressed and muted while the father, his power protected, makes culture and history in his own image”¹⁵ To speak out abuse, the victim must therefore transcend the child’s position as a subject. Indeed in all these three narratives, the persona confronts the abuser not from a daughter’s location but from a location of another role, though not transcending the female domain. Why does Anita, after years of silence and carefully suppressed anger suddenly spill the beans? What makes Ria, an otherwise extremely ‘well behaved’ adorable girl to open the Pandora’s box at an auspicious occasion of wedding in front of the entire family? Why does it become so necessary for Mala’s secret to be out that she needs to be taken to a therapist? Keeping aside the point that the revelation in all these three texts constitute a crucial point in the unravelling of the plots and turn of events, within the narrative domain the revelation is prompted by an immediate cause that justifies the unsettling act of public revelation. The aspect of public revelation carries a different impact than just revealing the secret. It is interesting to note that in both *Thirty Days in September* and *An Obedient Father*, the act of abuse is not concealed for the reader. Mala confronts her mother regarding her inaction regarding the trauma that plagued Mala as a child

and reveals the painful past much before the actual confrontation in the plot. In *Obedient Father*, the confrontation and confession happens in layers of action in the plot. The abuser himself confesses, he recounts his wife confronting him and attempting a reconciliation between Karan, Anita and herself, then Anita speaks in indirect terms about she getting 'caught with Pitaji' in her interior monologue but the final confrontation comes only later in the story and which changes the course of events. Even Ria is hostile to Tej and is anxious whenever Alia is with Tej, so the viewer might guess something. Yet none of these victims go to the extreme level of confrontation in the story till they 'need' to. What is this need? For Anita, it is the need to protect her daughter from the same abuser, for Ria it is the need to protect her sister and for Mala it is the need to save her relationship. It is only when the abuser not only haunts the past but also tries threaten the future that these victims expose him in public for a societal check on him. In a way it can be said that as long as the abuse and the abuser remains contained within just the psychological space of the victims, the abuse remains undisclosed but a diffusion of the personal trauma and the location of the abuser out in a public domain that spins in other people as well leads to a publicisation of the personal space. The abuse needs to be purged out if the victim has to perform other social roles, pertaining to her female identity which has been ascribed to her. In a dialectics between the personal and the public, the victim chooses to publicise the personal space for a mergence into the public domain. Thus Anita's confrontation of her father is based on the trope of Asha's safety, Anita attempting to pose as an ideal mother in a striking contrast to her own mother who she had deemed as a failure in her inaction against her daughter's abuse. It in a way sanctions the revelation in the public domain, projecting the disrupting victim as the image of the 'unselfish' feminine rather than driven by 'selfish' self recovery. Thus Anita needs to justify her action constantly through the aspect of Asha's safety, creating strongly the impression that the abuser needs to be confronted not because what he did in the past but because he continues to remain a threat even for the future. Anita scores in her stand as a protective mother and claims righteousness in the disruption she causes in challenging the 'father'.

The same goes for Ria. To provide a valid enough justification for her disruption in the 'happy' cohesive family picture, there needs to be a pressing cause beyond just the personal. A personal cause, a personal desire for settling accounts is a 'weak' justification and might not gain acceptability in the public domain. For the act

of revelation to gain public acceptability, the victim needs to be provoked beyond her personal motives for the act, the cause should move beyond the personal and embrace the social as well. Thus like Anita, a public exposure of the abuser comes with the justification that the abuser is no longer contained in the personal space of the victim but threatens the social space as well, that he needed to be exposed not because Ria wanted social justice for her own sake but because he did it “all over again to Alia”. Like Anita, Ria’s motive also scores as valid for the ‘selflessness’ it endorses, Ria too succeeds in fulfilling her social responsibility though her act might disrupt order tremendously. Thus the abuse and the abuser need to be perceived as a problem publicly, it should attain the magnitude of a larger threat. There can be public speaking out of the abuse only when there is a collective involvement in the personal trauma. Kirmayer’s observation regarding reason for the difference between the trauma of Holocaust and the trauma of child abuse can be invoked in this context. We had already mentioned the differential landscapes of memory, as observed by Kirmayer, for these two types of traumas. Speculating the reason for that, he concludes that the urge to recount one and suppress the other depends on the public and personal nature of the trauma:

This points toward a social explanation for the difference in prototypical narratives. The situation of the Holocaust survivor differs strikingly from the adult victim of childhood abuse, now prone to dissociative disorder. While Holocaust stories involve bearing witness to what is widely, if not universally, recognised as a human catastrophe, personal stories of abuse are revelatory, shameful, and damaging to the individual and family.....¹⁶

There is a crucial distinction between the social space in which the trauma occurred and the contemporary space in which it is recalled:

In the case of the sexual abuse victim and the Holocaust victim, the difference is between a public space of solidarity and a private space of shame. Trauma shared by the whole community creates a potential public space for retelling.A private space of trauma places the victim in a predicament, since the validation of suffering depends on recovering enough memory to make it real for others....Of course, this experience of reliving is vigorously resisted by the rememberer and audience alike.¹⁷

Thus to render the private virtual space of memory¹⁸ of the victim public, it should be triggered by a cause that involves the community. To be able to find a space for public narration of a personal abuse, there needs to be a larger social cause. The victim finds voice in the public domain for she conforms to another societal role that is assigned to her. Her participation in the normative workings of society validates the space to disrupt societal authority in another form. The politics of exposition is thus clear. The adult victim's speaking out in public just as a way of healing personal trauma weakens the plot, and the character too. The exposition cannot come in isolation. It has to be weaved in the cause and effect circle for the plot to be credible. And the community, which not only constitutes the textual, fictional world but also the readers, participate in the discourse only when there is a social reason for it. Revelation is thus, never an end in itself. It comes as an inevitable evil which needs to be addressed for the larger maintenance of normativity at another level. We will come to this point again. But before that let us look at Mala's case in. She needs to come out with her past not because she has to protect another victim but because Mala herself epitomises social dysfunction and challenges the norms of a steady, heterosexual relationship. Her societal role as a potential wife stands heavily impaired because of the psychiatric disorder she underpins as a result of her childhood trauma. To fulfill the sanctioned role of a 'normal' wife, the abuse needs to be spoken out.

The construction of the victim growing up to be sexually dysfunctional in either passivity or abnormal activity is etched in the fictional narratives as a pattern. Both Mala and Anita are incapable of healthy heterosexual relationships, while Ria's sexuality is not explored in the film but it is to be kept in mind that she is the "older, unmarried girl" for whatever reason who is under question over and over again for her unmarried state from numerous people ranging from her mother, the bride, the aunt or the abuser's wife and even the child Alia.

Mala's sexual dysfunction becomes a public concern. She flirts with every man around, enters into relationships only for a period of thirty days, tries to extract sexual pleasure from men as if it is as a form of revenge and shows obvious symptoms of psychic disorder. As Mala herself confesses:

I have been so bad, I can't tell you where to begin! It's not just the men in the office I told you about, but before...much before! I –Oh God! I seduced my uncle when I was thirteen! I slept with my cousin—and --- anyone who was available...please help me stop this behaviour.¹⁹

When Shanta confronts Mala about her abnormal behaviour she confesses it but traces it back to the experience of abuse.:

“Mala, I have seen it with my own eyes. You enjoyed it. You were an average child but you had my brother and your cousins dancing around you. That is what you wanted....and please don't talk about trying to forget the painTry to forget the pleasure.

That is part of the pain. Ma. The pleasure is part of the pain.²⁰

This is certainly a hindrance in Mala which comes in the way of her entering into a socially sanctioned relationship with Deepak. The trauma of the abuse renders her 'abnormal' in the normative sexual domain.

The other extreme of sexual dysfunction, that is aversion to a healthy sexual relationship as an adverse effect of the abuse is also often portrayed in the fictions. Both Anita and Shanta are unable to have a functioning sexual correspondence with their husbands, a disorder that can be traced back to the trauma of childhood abuse. Shanta's marriage goes to the rocks because of her sexual frigidity. As Mala recounts:

He left you not me. He left because of you . You didn't love him. The only reason you shared my room was because you didn't want to sleep with him. All night long I had to listen to your mumbling saying you didn't want him near you. You didn't want him touching you...I remember daddy's last words to me. He said to me 'I married a frozen woman'The only truth you want to hide is your failure as a wife and a mother.²¹

Shanta's is thus a failure in maintaining a normal sexual relationship with her husband, a disorder which can perhaps be traced back to her childhood traumas. Anita too is averse to sex, the reason being stated here clearly, the experience of abuse inculcating fear about sexual contact. On her first night with her husband she cringes at her husband's advances:

He took both wrists in one hand, No loving tonight, I said, but might not have heard, or I might not have said. *I wondered whether it would hurt as much as it had with Pitaji. My breath quickened from fear.*²²

And for Ashley in Sheldon's novel, the inability to maintain a healthy sexual relationship is portrayed in an exaggerated form, her aversion to sex culminating in murders of all that make sexual advances towards her. There are passages in the texts that depict how the trauma of the abuse juxtaposes with and overwhelms moments of

love and sexual intimacy later in the victim's life, contaminating them. That the haunting memory displaces any later partner with the image of the abuser in the victim's psyche, each instance of intimacy is a fault line through which the traumatic memory seeps out, beleaguering the present. Look at the juxtaposition between Man and Deepak in Mala's subconscious:

Deepak: Hold my hand. Forget everything and just touch me.

Man: Touch me here.

Deepak: It's okay. It's okay. Cry if you want to.

Man: Shhh! Don't cry. You want to come here in your holidays, no?

Deepak: Sit back and relax.

Man : Hold up your frock Up over your face! Shut up!

Deepak: Relax and look into my eyes. I am not going to harm you....

Man : I won't hurt you I promise.

Deepak: Talk to me. Help me to help you.

Man: Help me and I will love you more than your mummy or daddy.²³

The victims are thus never out of the traumas of the past, the painful past intrudes in the victim's present rendering her problematic in the domain of sexuality.

Now a very crucial observation needs to be made here. Paula Reavey & Sam Warner makes a significant observation locating that the Feminist literature associated with the theme of child sexual abuse often fall into the trap of binaries of the image of the abused. The abused women are rendered distinct in relation to non-abused women who are seen to develop normally and naturally. Hence, such theories of child sexual abuse serve to police the boundaries:

between abnormal women and normal women through an unproblematic construction of abused women as essentially different women. Indeed, a paper attempting to address relationship issues in relation to women survivors refers to their sexuality acting like a contagion, a virus that contaminates the relationship and renders it dysfunctional.²⁴ In this portrayal of female sexuality, traumatic experiences are constructed as being virulent and women as malignant. Consequently, focusing on individual women renders the relationship a blank and untheorised site in which victims and survivors then pollute and contaminate the territory of sex and love.²⁵

The psychological literature also frequently refers to the inner damage in the sexuality of the victim caused as a result of sexual abuse. A common construction of

the psychological aftermath of abuse are “clear psychologised examples of faulty cognitions or unconscious compulsions to repeat the abuse or an inability to maintain relationships”²⁶ Women’s stories of abuse thus serve as literal and unifying narratives of female sexual difficulty. This forecloses alternative readings of female disturbances of desire common to many experiences and accounts of women’s sexuality.²⁷

This pathologisation of the abuse stricken woman becomes a problematic construct not only in the context of speaking out about abuse but also in the way child sexual abuse is perceived in general. The act of child sexual abuse assumes an atrocious proportion more for the detrimental effect on the victim rather than for the very act itself. The act as a problem in itself is not given as much focus as it is considered as a cause for problems. The sheer amount of literature on the psychotic disorders post-abuse and the associated methods of healing make a very deterministic assumption about the state of the victim in the abuse; the abuse is presumed to lead to an abnormal personality, carrying the effect of the abuse even in the later life which distinguishes her from a ‘normal’ woman. In fact the revulsion against the aspect of child sexual abuse depends a lot on the amount of ‘damage’ it leads to. Reducing abuse to either personal effect or social problem constrains our ability to understand child sexual abuse and ‘women’ by predetermining what counts as the relevant field of interest.

All these women are thus etched as ‘abnormal’, unable to maintain a ‘healthy’ relationship, perpetually impaired by the abuse. Lousie Armstrong quotes with rage from a paper entitled “The Reaction of Children to Sexual Relations with Adults”²⁸ as a point to locate the apparent insensitivity of the society towards child abuse:

The most remarkable feature presented by these children who have experienced sexual relations with adults was that they showed less evidence of fear, anxiety, guilt or psychic trauma than might be expected.....

What would have suited Armstrong’s crusade against child sexual abuse better? An assertion that child sexual abuse wreaks mental damage and generates fear, anxiety, guilt or psychic trauma? Does only damage account for why child sexual abuse needs to be protested against? What if none of the above mental damages affect the victim? Does the victim status of the abused get affected? Does that make the act in itself less detestable? These are the questions we seriously need to reconsider for a majority of literature, whether be it fictional, or non-fictional is based on the basic assumption

that child sexual abuse is inevitably associated with psychotic damage, especially affecting the victim later as an adult. It is interesting to notice that while the texts considered in this section all etch the image of the woman showing unnatural behaviour as a result of an experience of childhood abuse, none of the texts dealt with in the previous chapter dealing the child experiencing abuse and narrating it from the child's location project an image of victim as showing traits of unnatural behaviour. The construct is thus, which agrees with most non-fictional literature on CSA as well, of a victim displaying abnormality in the long run, the cause being a deep rooted secret of childhood abuse buried in memory. To just give a glimpse of the available discourse, a rapid search in the online library www.questia.com on child sexual abuse lists a huge bulk of available literature but the focus of the discourse is worth noting. To provide a truncated list from the search items:

- Bagley, Christopher and Kathleen King *Child Sexual Abuse: The Search for Healing*
- Brohl, Kathryn and Joyce Case Potter. *When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parents' Guide to Healing and Recovery*
- Hall Liz, Siobhan Lloyd *Surviving Child Sexual Abuse: A Handbook for Helping Women Challenge Their Past*
- Inderbitzen-Pisaruk, Heidi Carita R. Shawchuck, Tamara S. Hoier *Behavioral Characteristics of Child Victims of Sexual Abuse: A Comparison Study, in Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*
- Baker, Robert *A Child Sexual Abuse and False Memory Syndrome*
- Maney Ann and Susan Wells. *Professional Responsibilities in Protecting Children: A Public Health Approach to Child Sexual Abuse*. Praeger Publishers, 1988

- William O'Donohue, James H. Geer, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, *The Sexual Abuse of Children: Clinical Issues - Vol. 2*. 1992
- Itzin, Catherine . *Home Truths about Child Sexual Abuse: A Reader*. Routledge, 2000
- J. Sue Austin; *When a Child Discloses Sexual Abuse: Childhood Education*, Vol. 77, 2000
- Leo M. Orange, Martin G. Brodwin. *Childhood Sexual Abuse: What Rehabilitation Counselors Need to Know*. The Journal of Rehabilitation, Vol. 71, 2005
- Susan G. Painter, Carol C. Howell. *Rage and Women's Sexuality after Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Phenomenological Study* . Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, Vol. 35, 1999
- Mark W. Roosa, Leticia Reyes, Cindy Reinholtz, Patricia Jo Angelini. *Measurement of Women's Child Sexual Abuse Experiences: An Empirical Demonstration of the Impact of Choice of Measure on Estimates of Incidence Rates and of Relationships with Pathology*

From the list it's evident that the focus in the issue of child sexual abuse falls on the problematic victim rather than the act of the abuse or the abuser. What assume to be a locus of discourse is the management of the trauma and the healing of the victim. It is as if the aspect of child abuse is a necessary social evil which can't be prevented but can be treated to prevent further damage in the victim who stands more against the normative society. The entire discourse thus centres on the victim who becomes a more pressing problem than the issue of the abuse itself. Talking about the Thornton and Bass anthology on child sexual abuse survivor narratives Kali Tal observes:

The book's therapeutic structure places abused women within the framework of mental illness. By making it clear that child sexual abuse had dramatic effects upon its victims, and by advocating that women seek counselling advice, and support from professionals and therapy groups, Bass and Thornton emphasize that women need "healing".

The effect of this discourse is the creation of deterministic binaries with relation to the theme of child sexual abuse. The literature advocates distinct categorisation of the abused/non-abused, normal/abnormal subject, the pre-traumatic/ post-traumatic self, and with the essentialisation of the problem, the solution or therapy is also pre-determined.

As Reaves asserts:

In self-help texts, abused women are rendered distinct in relation to non-abused women who are seen to develop normally and naturally. Hence, such theories of child sexual abuse serve to police the boundaries between abnormal women and normal women through an unproblematic construction of abused women as essentially different women. The treatment of abuse by the media, psychologists, self-help texts and therapists, therefore, renders experiences of abuse as other in relation to normative practices and has contributed to an essentialising of the feminine as victim.²⁹

Coming back to the literary texts, with the essentialisation of the devastating effect of the abuse what happens to the act of revelation and confrontation? To recall again, in all the texts that we are dealing with we find a pattern in the way the adult victim is depicted, carrying the trauma of abuse throughout the text, dysfunctional in a certain way and triggered into a moment of frenzy to reveal the long kept secret that has plagued the victim. The plot unfolds with the revelation, the victim speaks out from her subjective location about the extent and the seriousness of the effect of the abuse on her, evident from the unsettling effect the very act of speaking out has on her. The act of speaking out accompanies a frenzied state, a complete loss of control over oneself and projects an uncensored pouring out of one's inner traumas. Yet is the desired effect reached within the narrative scope of the plot? What happens to the story and the narrative context once such an unsettling revelation finally spills out from the character's private domain to the public space? How is the ending in the plot reached? How is the wrongdoing redressed?

A majority of feminist literature on countering child sexual abuse assigns the act of speaking out or breaking the silence as the ultimate form of empowerment and a process of established consequent healing. Thornton in *I Never Told Anyone* points out 'telling' offers a kind of absolution for the survivor:

In this telling she can reclaim her innocence. She is innocent. She has always been innocent. Both the burden of the crime and the crime itself is lifted from her shoulders. She can tell. (234)

One of the main contentions is the silence surrounding the narration of abuse which the victim finds impossible to speak out. First as a child who lacks the agency and the linguistic competence to speak, secondly as an adult but operating within a system which taboos incest and questions the claims of memory. Speaking out in a public sphere is thus a definite political statement made towards involving the subjective into a larger objective context and an attempt to somewhat universalise the trauma of abuse, expanding it beyond the space of 'aberration' or 'stray accidents' and creating a social base for its acknowledgement. As Judith Lewis Herman argues that the willingness of societies to acknowledge trauma, including childhood abuse and incest, depends on the political conditions:

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance...For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered³⁰.

From the domain of individual pain and stray familial dysfunction, the trauma of abuse and incest can be extended to embrace a larger social context with acts of speaking out and with a generation of political awareness, thereby involving the community in its dynamics, making the social domain the space for negotiation. The victim speaks out only with an expectation of generating a discourse that involves both the victim and the larger society in an integrative model rather than dynamics of exclusion. Speaking out thus entails an 'illocutionary act'³¹ of combining the self and the other to open up possibilities for creating recognition and solidarity between the two binary domains. This concept of the emancipatory narrative in the public sphere is dealt with in the final chapter in greater details, but let us first concentrate on the effect of the abuse within the narrative scheme. The next chapter deals with the consequences of the revelation within the narrative domain. How does the narration conclude? How does the narrative context resolve the crisis of revelation?

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. (142-143) Viking. Penguin India. 2000
- ² Karen Sanchez Eppler, "Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America." (pp 169) in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida. 2002
- ³ Sharma, Akhil. 100
- ⁴ Jen Shelton "Don't Say such Foolish Things Dear": Speaking Incest in *The Voyage Out*" in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida. 2002
- ⁵ Funkenstein, A.. "The Incomprehensible Catastrophe." In *The Narrative Study of Lives*. Ed. By R. Josselson and A. Lieblich. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. 1993. The idea is of the inrush of memory breaking down narrative, because narrative is an insufficient container or organiser for traumatic experience.
- ⁶ Kirmayer, Laurence J "Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation" in . Antze, Paul and Michael Lambek . Ed. *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. Routledge. New York, London. 1996
- ⁷ *ibid*. The theory of repression claims that when memories are laden with (or evocative of) intensely painful feelings, they may be warded off over long periods of time. The usual distinction between suppression and repression is that the former involves a conscious effort not to think of something while the latter is "unconscious", which in psychodynamic theory means both automatic and motivated. It is the fear of looking at traumatic memories that keeps them repressed. Repression differs, in turn, from dissociation, which implies a narrowing or splitting of consciousness so that some memories may be put aside. Dissociation refers to a gap in the normal integration of memory. Dissociation is viewed as an adaptive response to overwhelming and inescapable threat or trauma. In effect the victim escapes by walling off distressing experiences and memories or retreating to a corner of his or her mind.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dattani., Mahesh. "Thirty days in September" . *Collected Plays. Volume Two. Screen, Stage and Radio Plays*. Penguin Books. 2005.

¹⁰ Kirmayer. 1996

¹¹ Dattani, Mahesh. 16-17

¹² . Dattani, Mahesh 18

¹³ . Dattani, Mahesh 55

¹⁴ Shelton, 256. Shelton further explicates "the incest hermeneutic insists that we cannot imagine an incest survivor who does not somehow display psychic wounds suffered in the incestuous contact."

¹⁵ Froula, Christine, "The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History,". *Signs*.1986. 623

¹⁶ Kirmayer, 188

¹⁷ Kirmayer, 188

¹⁸ *ibid*. Talking about the difference between the holocaust narrative and the child sexual abuse narrative, Kirmayer further proceeds: "In situations where telling and even thinking are forbidden, where individuals are utterly alone, they still may construct a virtual space where their story can be narrated. When this virtual space is imagined as a social landscape, memory remains accessible" It is thus the question of the private space being rendered public in an instance of speaking out. The memory inhabits the internal recess of the victim's mind, this private space needs to be rendered social to affect the act of speaking out.

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- ¹⁹ Dattani, Mahesh.33
- ²⁰ Dattani, Mahesh.28-29
- ²¹ Dattani, Mahesh.35-36
- ²² Sharma, Akhil.49
- ²³ Dattani, Mahesh.42-43
- ²⁴ Maltas, C. & J. Shay, Trauma Contagion in Partners of Childhood Sexual Abuse. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 65, 1995, 529-539.
- ²⁵ P. Reavey & L. Courtney. "Women, Sexual Health and Sexual Abuse: An Examination of Some Apparent Tensions in Individualist Approaches to Self-help." *Mental Health Care*, vol 2, 1998. 94-98
- ²⁶ R. Hare-Mustin, 'Sex Lies and Headaches: The Problem is Power', *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 3, 1991, pp311-331; S. Lamb (ed), *New Versions of Victims: Feminist Struggle with the Concept*. New York University Press, New York. 1999
- ²⁷ Although we cannot deny that child sexual abuse can give rise to psychological distress, the issue to be disputed is the way abuse is isolated (and rendered ontologically distinct from other forms of sexuality). As Reaves asserts: "What is important (and a point of criticism) is that the body is treated as if it exists outside of discursive constitution, as if it were outside of the definition of the relations of power. When a person is sexually abused, they do not become outsiders to sexuality and subjectivity, because they are always already constituted within the available discourses on sex and subjectivity and the experiences of all sexual actors."

²⁸ Bender, L and A. Blau. "The reaction of children to Sexual Relations with Adults" in Lousie Armstrong. *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: Ten Years Later*. New York Pocket. 1987. 17-38

²⁹ Reaves P. & L. Courtney, "Women, Sexual Health and Sexual Abuse: An Examination of Some Apparent Tensions in Individualist Approaches to Self-help" *MentalHealthCare*, vol2. 1998. 94-98.

³⁰ Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York Books. 1992. Sanchez Epplar poignantly points out that though her discussion is conscious of the import of the social context in the ability to acknowledge trauma, her discussion of the trauma itself effaces discussion. Thus though she speaks about the social angle in the discourse about trauma, she does not admit that incestuous desires are in any way integral to family order.

³¹ The term is used in the Habermasean sense where Habermas, combining Austin's speech act theory with the normative ambition of the critical theory, refers to a speech act in which alter and ego understand one another on the basis of dialogue. This dialogue takes place in the public sphere whereby by entering into the public sphere and struggling for public recognition, emancipatory narratives mediate between particular group identities and universalistic moral claims, providing new frameworks that allow those who are excluded from the group to expand their own self conceptions to the civil societies.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DYNAMICS OF POST-REVELATION

The act of revelation is thus a political action towards social justice, of generating a discourse that will create a base for the recognition of the trauma of abuse, expanding the boundaries of the trauma of abuse from private suffering to an empathetic participation of the larger society. However, to conclude that speaking out itself ensures the empowerment of the victim, that it is a step towards an erasure of her victim status and an enactment of social justice against the perpetrator is an ambitious presumption at least within the narrative context. In this chapter, I will analyse the dynamics that follows the act of revelation, the resolution of the narrative plot after the high point is reached, when the secret stands spilled and threatened order. The most predictable reaction that comes with a revelation of a shattering incident experienced as a child years back is that of denial, a reflection of the real life statistical records. If we can recall RAHI's findings which I quoted in the 'Introduction' regarding the studies about revelation of abuse:

- The main reasons given for not telling anyone about the abuse were: wanting to forget it happened (23%), fear of what people would think of them (14%), self-blame for the abuse (11%), and not having anyone to trust (11%). Only 3% did not tell because the abuser had threatened them. Only 1% did not tell because they were bribed by the abuser.
- The overwhelming responses to disclosure of abuse by the victims were: disbelief in the victim, and denial. The actions that followed most often did not involve confrontation of perpetrator.¹

Quite in sync with the findings, Ria's accusations of Tej as an abuser is promptly denied by Tej with comments of dismissal like:

Tej: I don't know, I think she had a bit too much to drink....(laughs)

Tej: Ria will you stop this nonsense?

Tej: Ria stop it

She's lying Lalit, She's lying.

I thought she was going crazy...(laughs).

There an absolute denial of the accusation on the part of the perpetrator. The victim's narrative thus clashes directly with the abuser's narrative. To recall Jen Shelton quoted in the previous chapter:

Incest has a narrative dimension, in which child and adult offer competing and mutually exclusive stories. The child's narrative seeks to make known the adult transgression while the adult's story seeks to dismiss or explain away the child's version of events.²

The initial reaction to the revelation is thus disbelief and labelling the supposed victim mad or projecting Freud's analysis of abuse narratives among adults in the light of the oedipal theory of the child's repressed sexual desire for the parent³. The abuser's wife Vijaya dismisses Ria's account (with a characteristic slap meted out to disobedient children in Indian households) very much on the grounds of Freud's rejection of accounts of abuse as transformations of repressed desires, calling it a fantasy⁴ cooked up:

Insolent, crazy girl! She's lying. Unmarried girls like Ria, they make up all these fantasies....

Thus, though the victim voices out the secret, she finds no credibility within the narrative context and perhaps also in the larger audience watching the movie. Since the credibility of Ria's account is held dubious, there is no immediate support for Ria, only an attempt to admonish her act and then a silence.

A similar reaction to the revelation happens in *Thirty Days in September*. In the play *Thirty Days in September*, the revelation happens in two stages. First, Mala reveals it to her mother who tries to dismiss the truth value of it:

Shanta: No, no Mala. Just forget all these bad dreams ...

Mala, my daughter. What all have you been thinking all these years?

You have always been so bold and frank. But sometimes, you tell stories...⁵

The abuser's defence and dismissal of Mala's 'story' is more emphatic and vehement:

Man: You have gone mad. You really have a wild imagination. That is all I can say.⁶

In the contexts of both Ria and Mala the abuser not only denies to admit any of the accusations, there is a complete dismissal of the victim's narrative on the grounds again of the victim's mental instability. Interesting to note that the dismissal of the

account is not based on the premise that the victim is playing evil and targeting the 'supposed' abuser consciously for some motive, but rather the premise centres on again on the discourse of madness. The revelation is the supposed projection of the pathology that plagues the very subjectivity of the victim. We will come to the politics of this a little later but let us finish looking at the effect of the revelation in the context of another victim in context, Anita.

Anita confronts her abuser, her father and makes him confess his crimes. Since the plot had already shown Karan recounting the incident of Anita's abuse by himself as a flashback, that truth is uncontested. Unlike the other two abusers, Karan admits his guilt and concedes to accept any punishment Anita gives him, provided it remains a revelation just between two of them. As long as the truth is within the private space of the abuser and the victim and the knowledge of secrecy shared by only both of them, the speaking out is not threatening as such. The real threat of Anita's revelation comes once she decides to unmask her father in front of her relatives. Karan tried in every possible way to reach a deal with Anita that will stop her from doing so. Yet Anita goes ahead to speak to her aunt. Here is an excerpt from the scene. I have italicised the listener's reactions:

Anita glared at me and turned to Shakuntala.. 'Mausiji when I was Asha's age, Pitaji raped me. He did this many times.' Anita said it so steadily I was amazed. Shakuntala's mouth opened....It was done. I wondered where would I sleep in the new world that has just been formed.

'Mausiji, there used to be blood everywhere after he finished with me.'

Put Asha in another room

I've told her everything. Shakuntala looked uncertain..... 'Ma found out, but what could she do?'

'Yes' Shakuntala said.

But Ma had to stay with him

'Of course,' Shakuntala cast brief glances at me.

'Come here daughter.' Anita went and sat by Shakuntala who embraced her. 'Don't worry, I'll take care of you..... what unhappiness God has given you' ⁷

When Anita requests Shakuntala to narrate her revelation to her husband Shakuntala's reaction is worth noting:

Shakuntala gazed at Anita sadly for a moment. 'What's the use of telling him, daughter? It will only make it harder to convince him to let you live with us.'⁸

And to make sure that he does not have an inkling about the revelation, Karan talked the most during lunch time 'trying to keep the conversation off why three of us had suddenly appeared.'

The revelation at Bittu's, that is Anita's maternal uncle's place however started with a different note. The elders of the family were gathered because it was decided some decision needs to be taken. There were spurts of anger at the atrocity of the act:

In the old times we could have killed him, a man said.....

The police would not care if we did

'Look up', shouted Koko Naniji, Radha's aunt.⁹

But after in just a moment the conversation took a different course altogether and the focus of concern shifts from the sheer fact of the revelation:

'Anita needs a home of her own'.

'Homes don't grow on trees.'

'Neither do daughters.'

'She needs protection.'

'We are here.'

'She can't live with us forever.'

'Why not?'

The decision was made by accumulation. Marry Anita. Then people began murmuring about dowry.¹⁰

It is thus to be noted that though the abuser might not contest the story with denial and dismissal, a speaking out of the abuse does not necessarily generate the desired effect. The very nature of the narrative of exposition undermines the social righteousness it attempts to generate. Rather a story of an abuse by a parental authority is itself the biggest threat to the normativity of the society. As anthropologist J.S.La Fontaine asserts:

The basis of paternal authority is the cultural role of altruism but sexual relations with a child are clearly motivated by the self-interest of the instigator. Society taboos speech about incest because the existence of father daughter incest reveals something unsettling about masculine authority.¹¹

The Indian family structure, based on the hierarchy among all the members and an altruistic patriarchal authority, is not only responsible for providing for those lower in the rungs in family hierarchy but also for protecting them, child sexual abuse within the family seriously undermines the very basis of family.¹² In *The Children We Sacrifice* video, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, says:

People don't want to accept the family as a center of power. They want to see the family as equal and natural and caring and loving. And when you posit an opposite image of family as power oriented, hierarchical [and] abusive, people resist. They don't want to see any family like that. They prefer to see incest as an aberration.

The victim's allegation, leave alone the fact whether it is accepted as truth or not, itself is a potential threat to the notion of the family system. Interestingly, what becomes a point of contention and the focus of problem is not the abuser but the victim, with a potential threat to stability, who herself is a departure from the norm and the normal. To quote Paula Reaves again:

Once inaugurated into the abused identity, women's behaviours and feelings may then be defined, and distilled, as different from the norm. When such behaviours and feelings stretch the boundaries of normative femininity too greatly, women may also be theorised as being so special they must be kept separate from the norm. Because the negative effects of child sexual abuse can be extreme: sometimes women display behaviour that is deemed to pose such a danger, either to themselves or the general public, that they may be excluded from community-based care. Because extreme behaviour such as fire-setting, aggression, and self-injury is so compelling, the reasons women act in the way they do can become lost as containment becomes the focus of concern.¹³

As we had mentioned earlier as well, the victim herself becomes a deviation from norm, her behaviour shows traits of uncontrolled frenzy, of the much talked about 'madness'. The aggression that she shows in confronting the abuse, the confidence with which she braves the moment, the apparent overcoming of inhibitions interestingly fails to work towards the desired empowerment of the victim within the narrative. With the pattern of the appendages that essentialise victimisation and make

the victim becoming a deviant element, a potential threat, the concern is not to sort out the truth value of the allegation, not to pathologise and distill the abuser's identity but rather a recuperation of the victim within the existing normative structures. The discourse thus completely centres around 'healing' or the ways of reconciliation of the victim which will lead her to transcend her victim status and the associated deviance or abnormality. The conclusions in all these plots are directed towards this goal. It is as if the disease has been located now and what awaits is just the cure. And the 'cure' of the victim is the conclusion of the plot, the victim being co-opted back to the dominant discourse, the crisis remains solved. As long as the victim remains outside the dominant discourse after threatening it, as long as her abused identity becomes a deviance from the norm, she continues to pose as a threat that has the potential to shatter stability. As Lalit, Ria's uncle and her present guardian appeals to her after the revelation:

If you go away then everything will fall apart.

The texts uphold various ways of recuperation though it may fall into a pattern of the deterministic discourse already available on dealing with rape and child abuse. For Ria, the responsibility of negotiation falls on her. She has challenged the order, now she needs to maintain it as well. The next morning after the confrontation, the 'good' guardian Lalit reaches Ria's house for a reconciliation, asking her to rejoin the family. When Ria refuses and locates this as an attempt towards dismissal and wiping out of the revelation, Lalit asserts the impossibility of incorporating both the aspect of abuse and maintaining the order within the domain of the family. They are mutually exclusive loci, and one has to be chosen at the cost of the other. Let us take a look at the scene of reconciliation in the movie:

Ria, Don't do this child, let's go home. I want you to come home with me just now and I don't want to listen to anything.

Ria: Don't pretend like nothing happened.

Lalit: Ria I am not

Ria: You are, you are.

Lalit: I don't even know how to console you Ria...what you have gone through I can't even imagine...I don't understand...What can I do?

Ria: You can do nothing, Uncle

Lalit: I don't know what to do Ria, my hands are tied. Tej Bhaisaab and our family goes back a very long way. We're so indebted to them. Come home child, I beg of you.

Ria: Uncle please, it's not your fault.

Lalit: Then why are you punishing me, and your sister and your mother?...I cannot break up my family, I cannot...please don't ask me to make that choice. My family means everything to me....Ria, if you go, everything will fall apart.

Look at the politics of negotiation. Since Ria has threatened the order, it's upto Ria to resettle it through her recuperation. It's Ria who is 'punishing her uncle and her mother and her sister' through her location of protest. The family cannot be sacrificed at any cost, so the only viable option left is to contain the victim within the folds of it by asserting the futility of the revelation within the domain of the familial structure. Hence the scene that follows showcases the entire family, along with a fully decked up Ria, cohered for a photo session. Things would have ended here and the film concluded in a happy note with the wedding but Ria's glaring looks connote the recuperation is not complete and the order is still unstable. Hence a more drastic step needs to be taken, interestingly this time the focus shifts to the abuser and the cohesion of the family is achieved at the cost of ousting him from the family. The reconciliation is complete this time, Ria's 'healing' is accomplished and she joins the jubilation with full spirit, ready to take up the future role of Umang's wife. We will come to the point of the more drastic step taken against the injustice of abuse in a moment but before that let us look at the other patterns of recuperation in the other texts. As quoted earlier, the possible solution to Anita's revelation is to remarry her, thus in a way assigning her problem quotient to her status as a widow. With that solution being turned down, Anita is allowed the space to confine her father and ill treat him, thus venting out the pent up hatred she carries for him. For Anita, the only way of redressing the wrongdoing is to make her father confess his guilt:

What did you do? The words wouldn't come. 'I touched you.'

'Touched?'

'Raped you.'

'Is that all you did?'

'I did everything'

‘Yes say more’ ‘I’m a rabid dog that should be beaten by bricks.’...’I did everything bad that is possible.’

‘Yes.’ She again waited for me to speak.¹⁴

It is important to observe that the main objective here, in the process of ‘redressing’ the abuse and attempting to recuperate the victim in the normative order, is to exorcise the feeling of aggressive loathing against the abuser and of hurt at the abuse. The concentration is less on meting out social justice to the abuser and more on the process of ‘healing’ or ‘recovery’ of the victim, purging out the aggression within her which makes her a threat with a potential for damage. The purging of Mala’s hatred against her uncle forms the concluding point in the play, the process being portrayed as a metaphorical physical fight between the victim and the abuser, where finally the victim wins over the abuser, an extension of the psychological purging of all violence and getting over the trauma:

Mala hits out at him with her fist. The man doesn’t flinch.....

Mala continues to hit at him each time with more anger as the man speaks, unaffected by the blows.....

Mala grabs him by the throat and tries to strangle him, heaving with the effort.

One last violent shove...The man slumps in the chair as if dead. Mala heaves a sigh of relief.¹⁵

With a crescendo of psychological violence against the abuser, the victim is finally purged of her trauma and is normalised. As Mala confirms: “it doesn’t matter. I can live with it now. He is a person no longer important to me any more.”

Similarly, Anita’s violence against her father, by locking him up, hiding his medicines and mentally torturing him is a way to vent out her pent up hatred, at the end of which she comes back to normalisation.

The politics of revelation quite interestingly thus works against the victim. The apparent empowerment associated with the act of revelation can be undermined if its politics is located. By creating a discourse about the abuse, by bringing it out within the psychological space of the victim into the discursive space of normative culture there is actually an attempt to control and contain it:

Speaking out about child sexual abuse generally, and participating in therapy specifically, may simply increase the regulation of women’s lives rather than offer them a re-negotiation of their experiences and a

partial liberation from the fixity of abuse and the assumed effects of trauma.¹⁶

This is precisely what Foucault theorised in the *History of Sexuality* about the regulation of sex through discourse rather than silence:

One had to speak of sex, one had to speak publicly and in a manner that was not determined by the division between licit and illicit, one had to speak of it as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged, it was a thing administered. A policing of sex, that is, not the rigour of taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses.¹⁷

Foucault depicts power as a collection of proliferating technologies for normalisation, which have gradually brought disparate and anarchic populations under centralised regimens. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault observes that operating through central institutions like the clinic and the various therapeutic measures, power has spread its tentacles among the population at large by means of welfare programmes, health care monitoring and control and isolation of deviant groups.¹⁸

By creating a discourse on the abuse and its consequent deterministic healing, the victim is controlled and drained of her disruptive potentialities that can threaten major damage if kept inside. Look how the venting out and hence the consequent wearing out of the victim's anger is projected as a therapeutic process in Sheldon's *Tell me Your Dreams*. The persona under question is the victim, confined in the asylum for her dangerous potential to wreak damage to the larger society. She is the dangerous disruptive element, a victim of psychotic disorder, a murderer, who needs to be kept under surveillance and confinement and the therapy consists of purging out the trauma of her abuse from her system and defusing her disruptive drives. She is allowed a surfeit of hatred against her father till it wearies her out and she gets over her aggression. The therapy is complete and she is let out in the larger society only when she is defused of her hatred and ceases to be a dangerous element for the larger society. In a culture where resultant madness or disruptive drive is considered to be of more concern than the cause of it, speaking out too becomes politicised as a method of sterilising the threat of disruption.

The apparent absolute empowerment of the victim through the act of speaking out thus needs to be observed critically. Within the narrative domain, the agency of the victim ends at the point of revelation, the act of redressal or social reception of her trauma is no longer in her purview. It is interesting to note that the victim remains powerless as far as the post effects of the revelations are concerned. The revelation in a public domain is an appeal to the larger society for a judicious solution (and not a dangerously psychotic redressal like murder resulting from repression as in Sheldon's *Tell Me Your Dreams*.) for the exploitation meted out. Yet the victim's control over things in these narratives end with the revelation, she is just left to do the personal coping for getting back to her 'normal', pre-abuse state. And significantly enough, the redressal, if any, attained for the victim is conducted only through a male agency, the other females in the context are rendered as powerless. It is important to note that both in the case of Anita and Mala, the mothers were aware of the abuse, the victim had looked up to the female authority to mete justice yet the high point of revelation and healing never happens at that juncture. In *An Obedient Father*, Karan describes Radha, his wife, in the process of finding out her husband's raping of their daughter. The immediate venom wears out in her reaction to give way to a rational thinking: "Who will marry her?" whereby she proceeds to handle the crisis in a way that assures reconciliation and dismissal of the matter:

Your Pitaji did something very bad. It is a shameful thing that he did and God will punish him one day. You can't tell anyone about what he did. But you have to forget what happened. From now on, you empty your head of everything that has happened. What happened wasn't anything.¹⁹

The authoritative tone in her handling of things ensures family cohesion and averts the impending disruption in order.

A similar rubric works in Mala's case as well. As she blurts out later, her mother has always tried to dismiss her or silence her revelation through means of distraction. Gastronomical surfeit overwhelmed the trauma of abuse:

Mala: You always fed me and--- and you never said it but I knew what you were saying to me without words. That I should eat well and go to sleep and the pain will go away.²⁰

Indeed in both the cases the 'mothers' fail to mete out the justice or the kind of support that the victim is looking for. In both the cases the mothers are more for

silencing, for the rejection of the abuse, which leads both the victims to hate and blame their respective mothers for the compounding of the crisis.

Let us analyse the aspect of the silent mothers. The idea that their silence based on economic powerlessness is only a simplistic and one sided derivation. Indeed there is a dialectics of economics working here. The abuser is the financial provider in both the texts, one the father another the uncle who substitutes the father in providing for the family. As Anita says, "Ma couldn't do anything, she had three children to raise." The economic dependence on the abuser thus renders the mother ineffective of protest. As Mala also accuses Shanta:

He bought your silence with his money.

Yet, the passivity of the mother falls back to something beyond just the economic matrix. With the abuse spinning the essential binaries between the 'normal and the 'abnormal' woman, between the abused and the non-abused, the victim's identity is distilled out in contrast to the other women in the text who inevitably fall on the counter category of the victim. These binaries are fraught with differences making the victim an essential category in itself which is distinct from the other non-victims. Voicing the daughter's victimisation can, instead of creating a coterie of resistance, erase the non-victim identity of the mother. Interesting to note that among these two instances of the passive mother, one is actually revealed as a victim later and there's no probing into the deeper secrets of the other. This creates scope for two crucial observations regarding the silence of the mothers. Firstly, the mother or the other females in the narrative domain like Shakuntala masi of Anita are essentially categorised as non-abused, their identities being defined in necessary contrast to the pathologised victim and their mergence into the victim's side of things might threaten their own 'normal' state. By refusing to acknowledge association with the victim, they choose to maintain their non-victim state which allows them a location in the public domain. The second and the more crucial hypothesis can be that the mother or the other female figures in the narratorial context are all potential victims, like Mala's mother, yet their way of negotiating the daughter's abuse only projects a counter aspect to the dominant discourse about victimisation. In this case, the dialectics is not between the abused and the non-abused but rather between two victims the only difference being one projecting an alternative mode and reaction to the abuse than the available popular one. And it will again be deterministic to label one over the other in terms of powerlessness and empowerment. As we have already argued earlier, as

speaking out essentially does not endorse empowerment, countering the trauma in silence does not necessarily ensure powerlessness. In a culture which neutralises the spoken out voices by channelising them in a therapeutic discourse, silences can be potent sites of alternative resistance. Silences that help the victim to negotiate with the trauma, without the intervention and control of an outside agency, can in fact vouch for a more powerful site of resisting the abuse. Dismissing the abuse at the very onset can itself rob the abuse of its towering potentiality to damage. What Anita's mother and Mala's mother did is not just as the embodiment of powerlessness, a silencing of the voices of protest against authority, but rather can be read as an alternative way of resisting the abuse, checking its damaging potentials by nullifying it as a non-event for the victim. With virtually no agency in the public prosecution of the act of abuse, this is a method of potential subversive appropriation within the power structures that are working.

The public prosecution of the abuser comes only through the agency of another male authority within the narrative domain, a faithful representation of the working power structures of the society. The distinction between the feminine private sphere and the masculine public sphere is reproduced within the narrative domain, leaving the agency for meting out social justice in the hands of the male authority. Thus, Mala could confront her abuser because of the implementing support of the future head of the household, Deepak. It is he who designs a confrontation, openly takes his stand for Mala and against the abuser, and deals with the abuse with the tone of judicial reprobation. Similarly, in *Monsoon Wedding*, the second in command of the family, Lalit, takes on himself the responsibility of meting out social justice to the victim by punishing the abuser. The abuser might have got away with his act, there were efforts to. In both these cases, the abuser faces public probation and the victim's revelation stands with some effect in the public domain, not being dismissed as a fantasy. And with a lack of a law-enforcing agency, Anita's speaking out fails to affect the abuser in the public domain. While the women of the family still treated Karan with reverence due to his social stature, Anita's own brother dismissed her claims calling it lies. Indeed, Anita's narrative falls totally ineffective when it comes to affecting the social space. It might have been a personal ablution for Anita, but in the larger sphere, it adds to an assertion of her powerlessness. Anita's protesting voice thus is turned into an ineffective cacophony within the narrative scene, it grows out of proportion to become one of insane raving and ranting:

Anita's shrieks were jabbing in and out of Rajesh's shouts. Anita was screeching.²¹

Deemed as an insane voice and no authority to endorse her claims, Anita's protest stands questionable in the larger sphere. Questions regarding the validity of her claims surface. As Rajesh comments:

Anita's crazy.... After she told everyone about Pitaji—who knows whether everything she said was true....²²

Thus speaking out, without the support of an enforcing authority, within the context of a culture not receptive of the aspect of child sexual abuse, in turn acts against the victim. Karan, though in his bid to stop Anita, makes valid predictions about the reception of the abuse in the larger culture:

Who will take you in? Your mother-in-law? If she learns what I did, she'll think Rajinder was cheated and married a whore.²³

A more ominous aspect of the fate of the victim speaking about abuse in a non-receptive culture is hinted through Karan's self-defence:

Once your threat of revealing is gone, then what check will you have over me? As long as you have the threat, I'm stopped. Once the threat is gone....²⁴

The victim thus stands all the more vulnerable with the possibility of disrupting the authority of the abuser through the revelation rendered defused by the non-reception of the community. Thus the act of revelation itself does not necessarily ensure empowerment for the victim in the narrative domain concerned. There needs to be an enforcing agency, a sympathetic authority yet whose identity is totally external to the domain of victimisation. The case of the victim attains gravity and the abuser is meted social justice only through this agency. As sociologist Inger Agger and psychiatrist Soren Buus Jensen describes the act of testimony is a ritual with dual purposes. When the survivor testifies, she both purges herself of an 'internal' evil and appeals for political justice:

The word testimony has in itself a double connotation of both something objective, judicial, public, or political and of something subjective, spiritual, cathartic, or private.... Thus the use of the word "testimony" in itself in a psychotherapeutic setting with victims of political repression implies that the subjective pain is to be seen in an objective, political context. The subjective pain to be accepted as an

'objective , political' issue, there needs to be an authoritative, altruistic agency outside the domain of potential victimisation.²⁵

However, what is the justice meted out to the abuser within the scopes of these narratives? In both *Thirty days in September* and *Monsoon Wedding*, the penalty meted out to the abuser is a stripping off his patriarchal authority as the head of the family. The abuser being the most important patriarchal pillar in the family, a debasement of the abuser involves a demotion from that position. In *Thirty Days in September*, the uncle Vinay ceases to be the figure of financial and familial authority. His ousting from that location robs him of the authority held over the victim. In *Monsoon Wedding*, the abuser Tej, is projected throughout the film as the supreme head of the family and the provider of all, the most respectable member in the scenario. With the revelation, he is not only stripped of his authority, he is ousted from playing any role in the family congregation. As we had observed earlier, abusing the child undermines the myth of the altruistic authority in family system, disrupts the order on which family system sustains. That order is not only restored by the ousting of the abuser but also with the emergence of an alternative altruistic authority who metes out social justice to the victim. In the narrative domain, the harmony of the family is maintained by this substitution. Hence, both *Monsoon Wedding* and *Thirty Days in September* with Lalit and Deepak respectively concluding with a reconciliation and harmony in the family. In the absence of an alternative authority, disharmony reigns in Karan's family after his death where reconciliation is reached by the ultimate scattering of the family.

To conclude this chapter on the after effects of revelation, it can be theorised that the simplistic association of power with speaking out and powerlessness with silence might not work in the same dynamics especially in a non-receptive ambience. Speaking out entails a politics of its own and especially in a narrative domain where the plot aims at a degree of conclusiveness, a violent disruption of order is not what a revelation endorses. Reconciliation is reached, the frayed ends of the plot are sorted out and the narrative ends with a tone of finality. A finality that leaves the reader and the audience with the assurance that the crisis is solved, the threat of disruption smoothed. The narratives end with a feel of 'All's well that Ends well'. The victim no longer poses a crisis, she is either 'cured' and 'normalised' (Mala), or soothed with a nominal justice (Ria) or pushed to a state where her voice no longer reaches out beyond a limit (Anita). The story ends with a sense of triumph and contentment.

ENDNOTES

¹ From a study done in 1997 by RAHI, a Delhi-based organization. This study focused on 1,000 English-speaking middle and upper class women living in Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and Goa. Source: *The Children We Sacrifice: A Resource Book*, edited by Grace Poore, Silver Spring, Md: Shakti Productions, 2000

² Jen Shelton "Don't Say such Foolish Things Dear": Speaking Incest in *The Voyage Out*" in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida. 2002

³ Lousie deSalvo, (*Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her life and Work*. Boston Beacon Press. 1989), Florence Rush, Ellen Bass and Laura Davis and others suggest that a principal effect of Freud's shift from the seduction theory to the Oedipal theory has been incest survivors' loss of confidence in their own memories, which are undermined by the weight given to Freud's theory that these memories represent transformation of repressed desires.

⁴ The real vs fantasy debate circulates around whether incest really happens or whether it is merely a projection of unconscious desires too tabooed to be named. It entails the question whether neurosis generates false accusation or the neurosis surely results from abuse that generates a legitimate complaint.

⁵ Dattani, Mahesh. *Thirty Days*. 25-26

⁶ *ibid.* 53

⁷ Sharma Akhil, *Obedient Father*. 270-271

⁸ *ibid* 272

⁹ *ibid* 274

¹⁰ ibid 274

¹¹ Fontaine, J.S. La "The Daughter's seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History" 623.*Signs*11. 1986

¹² This pattern of the hierarchies in the family extends to the society at large as well where people outside the family are also contained in some parallel location of some position within the family. The Indian society based on a familistic pattern of community bonding. Thus the ways of addressing used for members in the family are also used for persons in the extended society. And not only is it just a matter of addressing, with a particular address the cultural expectations associated with that role sets in as well. Thus a person addressed as a 'grandpa' is expected to play the role that entails the address though he might not be a part of the family at all. This extends the cultural impossibility of child sexual abuse beyond the immediate family into the larger society as well. A child is a community's child and the entire society exists in a relational web with the child. The child's asexual status applies not only to the family but beyond it. The notion of child sexual abuse by anyone is thus a tabooed concept.

¹³ Reaves P. & L. Courtney, "Women, Sexual Health and Sexual Abuse: An Examination of Some Apparent Tensions in Individualist Approaches to Self-help" *Mental Health Care*, vol2. 1998. 94-98,

¹⁴ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father* 162

¹⁵ Dattani, Mahesh. *Thirty Days*. 57-58

¹⁶ Warner, S. 'Disrupting Identity Through Visible Therapy: A Feminist Post-structuralist Approach to Working with Women who have Experienced Child Sexual Abuse', *Feminist Review*, (in press)

¹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. trans Robert Hurley. Random House. New York. 1978.

¹⁸ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York. Vintage. 1977.

¹⁹ Sharma, Akhil *An Obedient Father* 110

²⁰ Dattani, Mahesh. *Thirty Days* 26

²¹ Sharma, Akhil. *An Obedient Father*. 305.

²² *ibid* .297

²³ *ibid* p 266

²⁴ *ibid*.p 267

²⁵ Agger, Inger and Soren Buus Jensen, Testimony as Ritual and Evidence in Psychotherapy for Political Refugees," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 3(1), Jan 1990:116

FINAL WORDS

TEXTS ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND THE DIALECTICS OF READING

We have reached the final point of this dissertation. The focus of my argument, if we can recall the progression of thought, has been an interrogation into the patterns of disclosure rather than reading silence. While Elizabeth Allen¹ would excavate the territories of unspoken thoughts and unsaid expressions in her reading of child sex abuse and incest, my engagement has been on the contrary based on the grounds of revelation and speaking out, locating the presences rather than the absences. Moving from the obvious powerlessness of lack of narrative agency, this project takes a critical view of the assumptions of power associated with narrative agency. My project starts where most projects on child sexual abuse end, with the act of speaking out. I had tried to show in this project that the act of speaking out itself does not assert emancipation and redressal of the abuse as it can apparently seem to be. The victims speak out but to what effect? To re-live the incomprehensibility of the abuse, to elude the shame of it as children and as adults? To be deemed as liars, or hysterics or more subtly as pathological patients who need to be 'cured' to be brought back to 'normal' life. Various instances from the text show the failure of the act of speaking out to create a narrative of resistance in itself—either because of the incompetence of meaning or gaps in the narration or because of the lack of a discourse that provides the victim a space to affect protest. As long as there is a lack of this space of the recognition of the victim in a more empathetic form in the larger social context, narratives of resistance will be unheard or received as threats or aberrations rather than an issue to be considered for a better democratisation of the available institutions (like family, law) marking their progress.

My research asserts that speaking is not an autonomous activity, to attain the desired effect, a dialogic interaction² between the cultural binaries of the speaker and the listener, the abused and the non-abused, the individual and the society needs to be effected. Narratives of child abuse cannot work in vacuum; it needs the 'public sphere', the 'other' to the abused self to complete its meaning.

The very act of disclosure according to Bohman works in a dialogically constructed social world. Art works as a feedback between different validity spheres, new way of framing things can attain a disclosive effect that strengthens through the participation of the other validity spheres. Cultural changes occur when a discourse publicly reorders previous assumptions. According to Bohman:

The audience is then re-oriented to the social world, and it can take up a different attitude toward the world of cultural meanings and possibly a new position in its holistic interpretive field.³

Thus be it the child speaking out about abuse in incomplete, obvious gaps or the adult apparently projecting a self-sufficient narrative of protest, unless a dialogic space is created, the appeal remains incomplete. And an ideal space of stability is not one where reconciliation is reached by one force neutralising the other, or one discourse eliminating the other but rather there are two options at hand: let us take up the first option where the contesting forces both transform to an extent where neither remains the same to achieve a consensus based mutual understanding and opening up possibilities for creating different kinds of recognition and solidarity between the two. In a ideal space of equilibrium, in the process of understanding an alter—as opposed to an ego—the hearer comes to see things in a different way. This is the Habermasian model of ideal space. The other alternative model is of the Bakhtinian ‘zone’⁴ where the irreducibility of both the participants that is the recognition and acceptance of difference provide a space for emancipation. Both are models where the victim’s voice may not stand the threat of neutralisation in the existing dominant discourse.

The victim’s voice might have been contained in the texts that we have dealt with mostly in the fashion of recuperation, yet the poignancy of this discussion remains as we move beyond the sphere of the narrative in the text to the very act of the production and circulation of these texts in the public arena. The books and short stories, again do not work in a non-contextual framework. I have indulged in a little digression into the publication politics of texts for public consumption on the theme of child sexual abuse. Let us take the case of the seminal works of Lousie Armstrong and Ellen and Bass and the publication politics associated with their release as discussed by Kali Tal. Tal locates the difference in the presentation of *Voices in the Night* and *I never Told Anyone*. While the former is a passionately silence breaking book useful in feminist therapy, *I never Told anyone* is presented in a mellowed tone. AS Kali Tal observes:

We must recognise that the extensive editorial interpretation surrounding the pieces in the Bass and Thornton anthology reflect both a particular set of institutional constraints upon their use of these incest stories, and a particular political agenda that shapes their interpretation of them.⁵

Tal goes on to assert that mainstream publishing houses will not publish books they cannot successfully market. Thus there is often a need to seek a larger audience than the community of self consciously feminist, woman oriented abuse survivors. To woo a larger public, Thornton and Bass and Harper and Row marketing department must somehow make incest narratives seem both safe and appealing through the soft sell approach. Thornton and Bass emphasize that these women need “healing”, that they are basically weak and sick therefore no real threat to the status quo.

Not only that, Tal points out a very poignant aspect of literature dealing with this theme:

The stories are presented as human stories, “deeply moving”, full of the stuff pathos is made of: fear, anger, pain, drama, struggle. The adjectives used in the back cover are not so different from those used to sell other sad and painful tales. As the large publishing houses have learned, other people’s trauma sells.⁶

Indeed, the use of the theme of child sexual abuse as a sensational theme for fictional texts is not an outlandish misuse. Indeed there is a flip side to generating a discourse on child sexual abuse, as I had pointed out in the previous chapter. Lousie Armstrong believes that while making incest and child sexual abuse a topic of public discourse has not reduced the number of children who are incestuously abused, it has resulted in the “creation of an incest industry”⁷

It is precisely on these lines that I have critiqued the texts for my analysis which cater to stereotypes and might be called a part of the large “incest industry” working at all levels from psychiatrists to self help groups to literature as well. However, what I intend to focus in this final chapter is the emancipation that can be attained even among all these existing problems surrounding the discourse about child sexual abuse and incest. Keeping aside all the debates about the misuse, I would assert that the very act of giving space to this subject, after years of denial and overlooking the reality of incest and abuse, even in the fictional frame, indeed asserts a political act. Mahesh Dattani might have been directly commissioned by the NGO RAHI to

write “Thirty Days in September” but even the other texts dealing with this theme, attempting to show the atrocity of the abuse (in whatever form) is indeed a move towards generating a discourse about abuse and acknowledging the fact of victimisation. The social is being involved in what was solely a private or individual domain, was wrapped in complete taboo and silence. Critiquing all the various problems of representation and plot in these fictional texts, I would still acknowledge them as emancipatory to a certain degree for bringing into the space of discussion issues that were totally not spoken about in India, by generating a discourse around it which might finally lead to a larger emancipatory utopia of redressing the abuse victims. These literary texts, in spite of their problems of representation, do open up a space where the abuse can be talked about as an existing evil. The voice of the fictitious victim can not only generate identificatory patterns among the abused in real life, it reaches the non-abused as well who might not identify with the plight of the characters but who are nevertheless integral tropes in the generation of a larger space of discourse that deals with the victim in a more conclusive and not an exclusionary manner.

We move on to the theoretical explication of the Habermasian model, revised by Maria Pia Lara in *Moral Textures*⁸ which is apt in our discussion of an ideal space for realising, empathising and creating standards of justice for child sexual abuse among the larger society. Talking about the emancipatory space in the public sphere, Habermas focuses his attention on the narratives with ‘illocutionary force’, a speech-act in which the ‘alter’ and the ‘ego’, the self and the other understand each other to achieve a space of consensus, of mutual understanding. To attain such a mutual understanding, there is a need to address the other with powerfully imaginative speech, not only to attract the attention of the alter but also to open up possibilities for creating different kinds of recognition and solidarity between both forces. This viewpoint leads to an understanding of how, with the subjects of the speech acts focussing on newly problematic social issues, it is possible to transform them by creating new narratives in the public sphere. The first moment refers to the capacities of a speech act to disclose new meanings and understandings. The other moment comes after alter and ego have transformed themselves via this act of mutual understanding, and refers to their ability to reorder their values and beliefs in light of it. This reordering implies a public agreement about a new definition of justice and its connections to good life. Habermas shows a clear understanding of how groups

employ fictional narratives to contest and restructure conceptions of subjectivity, notions of morality and expectations about a good life. By entering into the public sphere and struggling for public recognition, emancipatory narratives mediate between particular group identities and universalistic moral claims, providing new frameworks that allow those who are not members of the group to expand their own self conceptions and their definitions of civil society. For Habermas, this is how the institutions of the society have historically evolved, based on 'imaginative' ideals that provide models for the new subjectivities in society. In the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*⁹, Habermas documents how the letters and autobiographies performed and displayed new forms of subjectivity that broadened and transformed the public of readers as a political force.¹⁰ However, Habermas focuses not only on the dimension of the public sphere in its political expression, but on the cultural interaction between the emergence of new literary genres and the interest of society in areas that, until then were perceived as private.¹¹ Maria Pia Lara extends the Habermasian model to include the notion of justice along with a consciousness of the presence of the marginal who needs to be included in the discourse. As she points out:

However the problem with Habermas is that he does not accompany these empirical insights with a philosophical account of justification, neither does he connect an emancipatory theory of the public sphere with a discussion of how the cultural identities of groups and individuals are related to moral claims for justice on an universalistic basis. In order to overcome the limitations of Habermas' resistance to the conceptualising the interconnections of justice and the good I conceptualise the public sphere as a cultural arena where 'public' meanings of justice and the good permeate democratic institutions and where the tensions produced between facts and norms are seen as the dynamics that allow for the possibility of interventions by emancipatory movements. Emancipatory narratives can themselves create new forms of power, configuring new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making institutional transformations possible.¹²

Lara's model departs from Habermas 'conception not only by systematically connecting it to the aesthetic domain in a general way but by relating it specifically to notions elaborated by Arendt about public sphere as a source of story telling. Hannah

Arendt¹³ conceived of storytelling as one of the most important tools for creating a space for a new beginning. It is through story telling that narratives reorder injustices and envision the possibility of a new start through powers of judgement. Arendt's conception of storytelling provides a cultural arena where action and speech intertwine. Language is thus a way to create a community. Arendt claims that the 'political realm' arises from our acting together--- 'in the sharing of words and deeds'---and that action revealed through speech is the most intimately related to the 'public part of the world common to us all'¹⁴

Drawing from Habermas and Arendt, Lara asserts that it is creative writing, especially revealing the innermost domains of a subject like in the genres of biography and autobiography, that provides a potent illocutionary act for the Feminist movement in all in creating public opinion and revisions in larger society that remodelled structures towards a more emancipatory ambience for the oppressed women. The import of self-revealing narratives is historically placed by Lara:

The apparent delay in women's conquering the socio-political sphere compared with the expressive-creative one, is due, in part, to the historical fact that women eventually entered the public sphere through literature. They had to go back and recover the past, retell the stories, in order to recapture the importance of those experiences in the new illocutionary light of performative biographical accounts.¹⁵

Tracing the feminist emancipatory movement historically, Lara asserts that women had first to consider themselves as subjects of interest and their lives as worth writing about for the performative structure of contemporary feminist discourse to discover that the possibility of recognition is in the public's interest, and can succeed, therefore, by using stories recovered from the past to re-narrate the female space of silence and oblivion.

Let us consider the import of this concept in the light of our discussion regarding child sexual abuse. The validity of this observation can assert a hopeful future for an empathetic space of protest against the atrocity of child abuse. The current fictional literature on abuse can be critiqued for its representational flaws and its reconciliatory devise within the narrative, there might be a very contained reading community who consumes and responds to an issue like this without prior inhibitions against it; yet perhaps the only way to create a large scale consciousness in favour of the victim rather than stigmatising him/her is through the fictional narratives in autobiographical

mode that give an insight into the inner self of the victim from the first person narrative agency. The very fact that the issue has been taken as a subject worth considering for a fictional plot is the first step towards a possibility of recognition. These texts open up a space for acceptance and emancipation of the victim, allowing them to speak out about their traumas which will be shared responsibly by the 'alter' or the people beyond the community of the victims who engage into the narratives with a solidarity emerging from the sense of identification. Moreover, these fictional narratives, like the early feminist narratives, not only envision a more emancipatory future for the marginalised section of victims essentialised as dangerous, psychiatrically diseased beings, they also form the base through which past exploitations can be restored from the spaces of oblivion and silence. Lara's observation contextualises the past as well, asserting how fictional narratives can not only project an ameliorated future and mark a new beginning but also how they go back to the past, reconsider it and redress it. Similarly, once the space for discourse is set about child sex abuse in the cultural context of India, more narratives from the past, which were till now locked in silence and concealment, can be read and retold in this light, releasing more tales of oppression from the depths of silence. This has been the case with all marginalised discourses as they have evolved claiming a space in the public sphere. Be feminism, or subaltern studies, or queer theories—the supposedly unproblematic past wrapped in silence has been excavated in the light of these discourses not only to give it a historical validity but to release the past from the burden of unspeakability. Things like this were not spoken about in the past, not because they never existed, but because language did not have its community of hearers. This is the taboo of speech, it's not that the speaker couldn't speak, but that the speaker couldn't be heard.

The possible contribution of these fictional narratives is thus undeniable. The voice of the victim might be muffled within the narrative context of the text, but the significance of the narrative lies in being able to take the repressed voice beyond the story to the larger reading public. And it is through the tool of language alone that a space of resistance can be affected, inadvertently drawing and making the social involved into the inner life of the individual, merging the private and the public to evolve new meanings of solidarity. As Jodi Dean asserts:

Solidarity toward present generations is expressed in our willingness to recognise and strengthen the ties connecting all of us, to let others know that they are neither forgotten nor alone.¹⁶

According to Lara, this solidarity does not stop with the creation of a discourse and social consensus but affects a restructuring of the institutions as well that engage in meting out justice to the wronged along with a sense of solidarity.

However, there is an alternative model that can be envisioned by these texts as well. The construction of a social consensus and solidarity might seem to be a utopic ideal (based on the Enlightenment ideals of consensual opinion), which might be a long and tough struggle to remould the existing ideas and institutions, especially in the context of institutional rigidity of India. The tenor of the text from the victim's point of view might not move the larger 'other' to an empathetic participation. In fact most of the texts in question are received as dealing with other issues, in which the theme of child sexual abuse forms a subsidiary concern or a minor diversion. Thus *An Obedient Father* is revolves around the frightening political web of corruption in which Karan is a part and his sexual depravity still a part of the all round depravity that engulfs the state of affairs in India. A summary of *Monsoon Wedding* reads:

Vasundhara is about to get married to Parvin and move with him to USA. All the relatives, family and Parvin arrives at Vasundhara's house in Delhi. But are not aware of her relationship with her married lover until Vasundhara sneaks out with him one night!¹⁷

And though *Thirty Days in September* and Sheldon's *Tell me your dreams* take child sexual abuse as their central theme yet as mentioned earlier, the concentration is more on pathological aspect of it, the abnormality it breeds and the consequent therapeutic cure. Sheldon also provides a list of institutions that treat multiple personality disorder, undoubtedly making it an issue of social concern. The theme of abuse forms just a cause for the ailment, not the main burning issue. In that case the texts appealing to the larger reading public, affecting a universal reading for a consensus can be illusory. Perhaps the alternative model possibly envisioned for a space where the voice of protest is not dissolved within the dominant normative discourse can be the Bakhtinian zone. M. Folch-Serra locates the difference between Habermas and Bakhtin:

The emphasis on otherness, on the recognition and acceptance of difference, is what separates Bakhtin from the kind of modernism

postmodernists are reacting against. Habermas' will to vindicate the Enlightenment project embraces the idea that consensual and normative statements do arise....For Bakhtin, on the other hand, understanding is to be reached by being close, contiguous to your subject, yet not fusing it. It occurs even if no two horizons of understanding ever converge perfectly.¹⁸

Reading a text on child sexual abuse might not necessarily generate an ideal consensus but it can definitely create a space where both the contesting forces can co-exist without overwhelming each other. While the reading community which does not identify and join in a sense of solidarity with the victim's plight might continue without any remoulding, there emerges a parallel community who do identify and find their unspoken traumas voiced through these narratives forming an independent coterie of readers who might entail diversity within themselves. Bringing these issues to the forefront will split the dominant discourse of silencing or marginalising these voices, into a space where diverse voices exist, not necessarily in unison by coming to a compromise but even in conflict. If a solidarity is a far-reaching goal, an awareness of the 'other'/ 'different' is at least aimed. The truth of this can be felt in the Indian context of the discourse of child sexual abuse. From a state of being a non-issue, especially in a culture which endorsed child marriage and the definitions of childhood being ambiguous, child sexual abuse has found a place as a problem worth considering. Fictional narratives on this theme might not find a large reading public, there might a lack of 'responsible' readers, or even more there can be a feeling of detachment and even hostility towards the character of the victim (we cannot really claim universal standards of reading) yet, these narratives assert the presence of the problem and an awareness of a different subjectivity that can exist in tension with the 'self' in the actual public sphere. A dismantling of dominant narratives about the social ideas of family, childhood, sexuality is what is needed for the marginalised voices to be heard.

Endnotes:

¹ Elizabeth Allen "Incest in the story of Tancredi: Christian de Pizan's Poetics of Euphemism." P-191 in Barnes, Elizabeth. ed. *Incest and Literary Imagination*. University Press of Florida.2002

² The term dialogism is used in its obvious Bakhtinian sense of constant interaction between meanings, all of which are in constant tension with each other. As Bakhtin says: "texts continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation...they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth" (Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed Michael Holquist and trans. Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press Slavic Series.1981.

The term dialogic also means that the use of language in any context assumes the existence of a listener or addressee along with the speaker. Meaning can be produced only through the engagement of both the parties.

³ Bohman, James. *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy*.p-225 Cambridge. MA.MIT Press.1996.

⁴The 'zone', according to Bakhtin, is both a territory and a sphere of influence. A zone is the locus for hearing a voice, it is brought about by the voice

⁵ Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt*. P-182Cambridge University Press. 1996.

⁶ *ibid.* 182

⁷ Armstrong Lousie. *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: Ten Years Later*. P-266 New York. Pocket.1987.

⁸ Lara, Maria Pia. *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*. Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers. 1998.

⁹ Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge. Polity Press 1989.

¹⁰ Habermas conceived of the bourgeois public sphere as emerging from the creation of new literary genres, new habits on the part of readers which had a definite political impact in the emergence of ideas in the political sphere

¹¹ Habermas, Jurgen. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. P-457 Cambridge. MA, MIT Press. 1996

¹² *ibid* p-4

¹³ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago. The University of Chicago Press. 1958.

¹⁴ *ibid* 187

¹⁵ Lara. *Moral Textures*. p-46

¹⁶ Dean, Jodi. *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*. Berkely. Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. 1987

¹⁷ *Times of India*. 16.06.06 issue

¹⁸ M. Folch-Serra. "Place, Voice, Space: Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogic Landscape" in Michael Gardiner (eds) *Working With Bakhtin: Applications and Extensions*. (The *Masters of Sociological Theory Series -Part Six*). Western Ontario, Canada. 1990.

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