

Voice of Women in Mrinal Pande's Short Story 'Girls'

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ABSTRACT-Women despite their prominent social role are given a secondary position everywhere. In a democratic country like India girls are worshipped as Goddesses on one hand and humiliated as unwanted beings on the other hand. In the short story 'Girls' written by Mrinal Pande, the author highlights how Indian society takes women for granted and conditions them to accept a secondary role in the family. The story is narrated from the point of view of an 8 year old young girl. We can find three main points of view in the story - first, the point of view of the older generation of women, second the point of view of a young girl - our narrator and third, the author's point of view. The story puts forward the issue of gender-bias towards girl child. There are three daughters in the story of representing three different victims of gender discrimination in the society. The eldest daughter is silent and plays the role of a girl in the male dominated society, the younger daughter(the narrator of the story) is rebellious, even at a young age she is very much conscious of the discrimination against the girl children. The youngest one is too young to understand what is going on in and around her. The narrator's mother is expecting a fourth child and this time she hopes that she would give birth to a boy. The mother is always irritated by these daughters, especially the honest and assertive middle child, the narrator. This paper discusses how girls are treated in Indian society as told in the short story 'Girls' by Mrinal Pande.

Keywords - Feminism, Male domination, Patriarchal society

INTRODUCTION-A girl can be described as a young human being, usually a child or an adolescent. When this girl becomes an adult, she is known as a woman. The status and treatment of girls anywhere in the world is closely related to the status of women in their culture. Culture plays an important role in women's life. When a woman enjoys more equal status to men, then the girls in their family is benefited.

Mrinal Pande is a journalist who is employed by the Indian express, New Delhi. She is an Indian television personality and acclaimed author who started her work in daily

Hindustan as chief editor. She left the daily Hindustan on 31st August 2009 and was appointed as the chairperson of Prasar Bharati, which is also known as the official apex body of Indian broadcast media. She is well known for her short stories from an early age. Her first short story was published in Hindi weekly Dharmyug when she was 21. Since then she has been writing essays and short stories. She started her education initially at Nainital and then obtained her Master's degree from Allahabad University. She later on joined the Corcoran university in Washington DC, to study English and Sanskrit literature, ancient Indian history, archaeology, classical music and visual arts.

Mrinal Pande was the first women editor of the multi edition daily newspaper issued by Hindustan Times. She has also served as the president of the Indian Women Press Corps, the Secretary General of editor Guild of India and the chairperson of Prasar Bharati.

EXAMINATION- The story illustrates the scenario of male dominating world and how female gender is subjugated. The story portrays the exact patriarchal society of India. A social system in which the men hold the primary power and the key role in the society is known as patriarchy. India since ancient times has been a patriarchal society i.e. male dominated society where women are often subordinated and considered as inferior to men. It is a system associated with a set of rules and ideas. Even today India is predominantly patriarchal. At its simplest form, the term patriarchy means, 'the absolute role of the father or the eldest male member in the family'. It is a social construction which can be overcome by both men and women if they think. The story is said from the viewpoint of an eight-year-old girl Mili. This young girl Mili, the narrator of the story is a very mischievous kid who feels very insecure, worried and nervous all the time, but she is a fighter who does not give up easily. She is rebellious at a very young age, conscious about the discrimination against female children. There are many instances in the story through which we understand that Indian society takes women for granted and conditions them to accept a secondary role in the society.

The characters are introduced in the opening of the story itself. The narrator, her two sisters, mother, father and grandmother whom she addresses as "Nani" are the main characters in the story. The narrator's mother who she calls "Ma" herself is a woman who thinks that girls have no identity and always comes after boys. Being herself a female she is

unsympathetic and insensitive. She is expecting a fourth child and at least this time she hopes that she would give birth to a boy or else she should have to go through this pregnancy process again. On various instances the protagonist also remembers about her father "Babu". He is shown as a kind man and he wanted his daughters to be educated and become something in their lives. It also introduces another character "Saru's mother" who is a maid.

One of the greatest significance of the patriarchal society is that all the women are either addressed as their son's mother or given a 'temporary' identity of the original name. The women's does not have their own identity. This is clearly evident from the story as the maid is introduced as "Saru's mother". Another main feature of patriarchal society that is portrayed in the short story is that always a male child is given more importance than a female child. The narrator's mother being a female herself and the mother of three daughters thinks that always a boy child is necessary in the home, so she hopes that her fourth child is a boy. She does not give much importance to her female children's. A boy child is essential in every family because they believe that only boys are capable of looking after the family and taking care of their parents at their old age. Daughters are of no use to them. This is one such blind belief of the patriarchal society and patriarchal India. The mother in the story ill-treats them in many situations, especially the middle one because she is the main fighter among the three daughters. In many instances the mother used to slap Mili if she tells, her kind of opinion or suggestion to her. Whether the opinion is good or bad she slaps her without considering whether it is a public or private area. If it was a boy in place of Mili this kind of behaviour won't be shown by her mother to him. This is how a patriarchal society differentiate a man and a woman. It is clearly evident through these situations that a patriarchal society is not giving equal importance to men and women.

The number of females to the number of males in India is very low. This is known as sex ratio. According to UN, it is defined as the number of females to hundred males. In the earlier times the sex ratio was very low in India i.e. the number of females was very less to the number of males. The main reason for this problem is female foeticide. It is the practice of aborting a foetus when they find out that the foetus is female after the sex determination test. This test is known as Parental Diagnostic test. Female foeticide happens because

everyone thinks that the girls are a burden to their families because of their education, marriage, etc.

The other area where the females, mainly the grown-up girls and the women are discriminated is when it comes to the process of menstruation. Medically, menstruation or periods, is the regular discharge of blood and other materials from the lining of the uterus through the vagina. Those women who are experiencing their periods are often barred from participating in social activities. They are considered as 'impure' or 'unclean'. There are many taboos related to menstruation in the patriarchal society. The taboos about menstruation, which is present in many societies, exercise a negative impact on girls and women's mentality, lifestyle, emotional state and health. In many less economically developed countries a large number of girls drop out of school when they begin menstruating. This includes almost 23% of the girls in India. Therefore, because of a natural process there comes a denial of education for girls. There is a considerable gap between female and male literacy rates in India. Thus, through all these ways the patriarchal society dominates women.

The concept of feminism comes here through the viewpoint of the author. The author's viewpoints are presented through a young girl. Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements and ideologies sharing a common aim of identifying, creating and achieving the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. Here through the young girl the author questions the elders of the society that why they see boys and girls in different eyes? Why is that one category given primary position and the other category given a secondary position both publicly in society and privately in their homes? At the end of the story on the day of Kanya kumar is Pooja, the narrator burst into tears and angrily shouts to everyone that, 'women's need respect, not worshipping'.

Mrinal Pande's work speaks about the condition of being a woman in India. The author through the short story suggest that being a woman in modern Indian society is seen as a second-class citizen of the country. The story clearly tells us that the women's themselves are the one who consider that they are inferior. Mrinal Pande is making the point that women are treated by social perception of culture as being inferior to men. Through the narrator she raises her voice against the norms of patriarchal society in India. However, the condition of women has changed a lot in the 21st century. Women are now highly competitive and

ambitious and prove their metal not only on their homefront but also in their respective professions. In all spheres of life, Indian women are coming up.

“It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.” — Swami Vivekananda

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