

# HARASSMENT AGAINST FEMALES: A STUDY OF KISHWAR DESAI'S *WITNESS THE NIGHT*

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## ABSTRACT:

The paper aims to analyze critically social evils of Infanticide and child abuse in India where many young females are deliberately killed by parents and society. The paper explores how these social evils prevail in different parts of India Desai's novels deal with current social conditions in which women have been shown as the scapegoat of male hegemony. In her novel *Witness the Night* she reflects the harassment of females which prevails in present era. The concept of infanticide and child abuse which is pictured through the lives of Sharda and Durga who escape from the clutches of infanticide but have a terrible life in the world.

Keywords: Harassment, Infanticide Violence, Child abuse.

"*Witness the Night*" is considered as the debut novel of Kishwar Desai. It was published in 2010 and it won Costa first award. It was also short listed for Man Asian Prize among other works. In this novel she brings out the hidden realities of infanticide which happens in society. Desai is mirrored as Simran in all her novels as a crime investigate and social worker. Desai in this novel brings out the theme of infanticide and child abuse by her own experiences while working as a social worker and crime investigator. Amarjit, friend of Simran inspector of police invites her to investigator about the murder in Atwal family while investigate she finds out the infanticide which curtails the growth of females in Northern India. Infanticide is a deliberate killing of new born children. In countries like India female infanticide is more common than the killing of male offspring due to sex detective infanticide. The dowry system and low status of women in the patriarchal society are cited as the major reasons for female infanticide. This paper highlights the infanticide and child abuse which happens widely in North India. It attempts to study the suffering of infant girl babies

in Atwal Family *Witness the Night* portrays the realities of truth about society. It also says about the different kinds of infanticide and Child Abuse undergone in society.

This present paper highlights the sufferings and torment of a girl child who belongs to the reputed Atwal family. In this novel Kishwar Desai brings different incidents to highlight the atrocities created by the society and also by the family members. It reveals the extent of harassment and child abuse which happens in Punjab. The parents kill their female infants without hesitation. Thus in Punjab the female sex ratio is very less when compared with males. It is 850 girls for 1000 men. This is because of the female infanticide. Female children are considered as inauspicious ones. The new born girls are taken away by the midwives from their parents and they give opium and bury them in a pot to death. In the words of the novelist,

The midwives used to take away new born girls from their mothers, seal them in earthen pots and roll the pots around till the baby stopped crying. Or they would simply suffocate them or give them opium and bury them. For a largely farming community girls were a burden to a family. (55)

Infanticide is also reflected in the novel through the Boot Bangla. In Boot Bangla everything is kept secret. Daughters of Atwal family are put in a pot of milk, fed opium and twisted around. But, miraculously the milk turns to butter and crying child still lives. In Atwal's family, the grandmothers consider girl children as a burden and they bury them in the field around the house. Binny, daughter-in-law of Atwal family suffers more in the Bootbangla. After her marriage with Jitu, Binny's mother thinks that the Atwal family will treat her daughter as a princess but everything changes after marriage. When she is pregnant they try to abort the baby. The reason behind it is that they think the baby as a female gender. A critic Vibhuti Patel in his *Girl Child: An Endangered Species?* Says:

In cities like Surat, Valsad, Panaj and Delhi newspapers carry advertisements with titles such as know the sex of unborn child with the aid of latest imported equipment and scientific techniques. By chromosomal and bio-chemical studies by qualified and experienced team. (7)

Atwal's family shows regret towards the female children. Great grandmother humiliates Durga and Sharda's mother as she gives birth to daughter and they survive. Simran, the social worker gives an example to present the incident of killing the children. A woman from Tamil Nadu tries to kill her daughter without feeding it. But when the child cries suddenly, she takes some poisonous juice from an oleander flower and mixes it with castor oil and forces it down the child's throat.

I could have told my mother of other equally simple methods. For instance pushing paddy husk down a baby's throat would rupture the wind pipe. Or there was suffocation. Other women who witnessed the birth or the killing were invariably on the side of the mother: they knew the taunts and trouble that would follow the birth of a daughter. And now, in the twenty-first century, female children were also being killed as part of a package deal, while within the womb, during the pre-natal check-up. This way no one would ever find out. (128)

Child abuse is also reflected broadly in the novel *Witness the Night*. Child abuses which are mirrored in this novel are physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. In this novel Durga and Sharda are abused physically and mentally by her own parents as well as by the public.

Simran, the social worker goes to meet Manubhai, the old servant of the family who has worked for more than forty years in the house of Atwal family. Simran asks about Durga in order to continue her investigation about her. Also she expresses Durga's need for books. On hearing the name of Durga he starts abusing her in words and he says that "When will she do with these books that foolish girl. Books have ruined her life and she still thinks that she needs" (50). Manubhai verbally abuses her as a foolish girl and when Simran asks about Durga, he racts saying.

I will not talk about the snake child. We should have killed her. When she was born she ate her parents.... They were... he stopped to wipe this tears. They never knew what those snake children were doing. She was a snake too who knows who knows I have to go. She has a terrible temper and when she gets angry, it's the end of the world. She was always fighting with them. Let me go now. I have work to do. (51)

Durga is not only abused by words but she is also abused sexually, which is reflected in this novel. She was naked but alive and non of her hand is also tied loosely. Ramnath Singh says, “There was blood everywhere. They found her the next morning with one of her hands tied to the bed. She was naked but alive... Circumstantial evidence” (21).The parents of Durga abuses her physical appearance. Durga is dark and her mother condescend to look at her and she says that “She is horrified to see the dark ugly bristly little creature” (5). Durga’s mother abuses her own child addressing her as a creature :

According to Simon de Beavouir “All oppression creates a state of war. And there is no exception” (3). In this novel also it is reflected at the end. Durga, a young teenage girl of fourteen expects love and care from her parents but she was deprived of this. So she believes in the words of tutor who is close to her. She accepts his words to murder her family at the end.

Even in the present period there is a falling of sex ratio in the society. In Virudhunagar district sex ratio at birth in 2017 has drastically dropped to 937 females for 1000 males.TheDefense Minister Nirmala expressing her concern towards them is drastically pictured in the Hindu newspaper.

There are different kinds of infanticide which prevails in the society. Infants are killed by pushing paddy husk down into the babies’ throat that ruptures the windpipe or suffocates the baby to breathe. Infanticide is sometimes done by strangling, or crushing the skull, and by poisoning the child. Some other common methods of infanticide are exposure, abandonment and overlaying. Exposure relieves parents and midwives of the responsibility of killing infants. India is growing dynamically in every field. The country has witnessed the advancements in all fields but bias against girl child is a serious matter to be looked into urgently. A chance to grow in safe and secured environment, opportunity to develop full potential is some of the major issues concerning the girl children in India. There are many problems that the girl children undergo in their life. There are several institutions that attempt to bring changes in practices related to discrimination against girl children in India. Discrimination against girl children begins even from the mother’s womb. Girl child is deprived of all rights to live. Simple techniques allow easy determination of sex of foetus. And use privileges to encourage good behaviour and time outputs to keep the children in a control. Home visitation is also considered as a powerful tool in preventing child abuse. Home visits can alert professionals to provide information needed to safeguard and to protect the children. If women are

harassed continuously they will raise against the society at any form. If proper love and care is given to females we can overcome this problem.

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