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**Milkmen Offering Bitter Chocolates:
Contemplation upon the Precariousness of
Children in the Postcolonial Age**

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“About one in ten children are victims of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday”, claims the organization Darkness to Light, USA. The child abuse is global in character and it leads to many forms of dysfunction in the sufferers’ adulthood, from anxiety to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, to the abuse of others and many more. It is as vicious as the other forms of violence, which generates suffering because eventually, it fabricates the same. ‘The Narratives of Everyday Precarity’ would be the right connotation for the subject of concern and ‘vulnerable precariat’ is the right metaphor for the lives of children. However, the 21st century society and the government have not adequately addressed this grave issue, they are still in the utopian society with the filter bubble where protectors cannot turn predators. The present paper attempts to look into the root of the same through select works from distinctive genres and diverse regions of the globe based on the similar themes of child molestation and child abuse. Moreover, the study undertaken shows how desperately a comprehensive book on child sexual abuse is required all over the globe, and like the Me Too movement, it should get consideration. The research paper therefore aims to suggest some of the solutions to the grave issue of CSA and discuss the nature of precariousness of CSA.

Keywords: child molestation, *Everyday Precarity*, PTSD, #MeToo, violence, mourning, Freud’s seduction theory

“Mockingbirds don’t do one thing except make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up peoples gardens, they don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” (To Kill a Mocking Bird Ch.10)

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A mockingbird epitomizes the lives, which lack a sense of security, and therefore it can be stated as precarious lives and precarious living. In this postcolonial era, the age of 'sick hurry and divided aims', children and adolescent are emerging as the most 'vulnerable precariat'. Their precarious state is an outcome of their persistent molestation, pedophilic activities and sexual abuse. Children and their childhood are like the mockingbirds, which are innocent and harmless but easily taken advantage of by other people who are elder or socially or physically stronger to them. In addition, the society and community ask them not to raise a voice, because it comes with a tag of taboo and the outcome is their own ostracizing or degradation. It is said that Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies but still in this precarious age, that kingdom is lost or on the verge of extinction. The victimized children were children no longer and never would be again. They are not fortunate enough to smile when they think of their childhood. Revisiting the past is a trauma for them, the haunting memories and their suffering because of molestation, abuse, and harassment.

The present paper attempts to reconcile the paradoxes of victimized children's everyday life; on the one hand they suffer from molestation, abuse, and on the other they are asked to respect those perpetrators. Children are at the peripheral end and marginalized in this binary system of society, where everything is in terms of binary oppositions. The hierarchical society put things with higher importance at the centre and the things with least importance at the periphery. And children because of their age are pushed back to the periphery with minimal voice. Their duties get more emphasized than their rights. And this paradox leads to multiple circumstances of precarity from a sense of disgust to a sense of hopelessness, futureless tomorrow to intense individualism, from PTSD to loss of faith in humanity and sometimes they themselves turn perpetrators. And their suffering falls under the category of "The Narratives of Everyday Precarity".

"about one in ten children are victims of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday", claims the organization Darkness to Light, USA. In India, one out of every ten children is being sexually abused at any given point of time says the WHO. According to the report on crimes in India for 2016, 106,958 cases of crimes against children were recorded. Out of these, 36,022 cases recorded under Pocsso (protection of children from sexual offenses) act. Now the question comes, what sexual abuse is, and how to define it. The United Nations has defined child sexual abuse as contacts or interactions between a child and an older or more knowledgeable child or adult (a child, sibling, or person in position of authority, a parent or a caretaker when the child is being abused as an object of gratification for the older child's or adult's sexual needs. These contacts or interactions are carried out against the child using force, trickery, bribes, threats or pressure (UNICEF 2003). 'Any child below the age of consent may be deemed to have been sexually abused when a sexually mature person has by design or by neglect of their usual societal or specific responsibility in relation to the child engaged or permitted engagement of that child in any activity of a sexual nature which is intended to lead to the sexual gratification of the sexually mature person is defined as CSA' by the standing committee on sexually abused children (Bajpai 2003). All the definitions has the inherent concept of violation of

trust, abuse of the power, the child's inability to consent, the age difference between the abuser and the child, the cognitive, emotional, psycho- sexual development level of the child and the sexual intent of gratification. The sexually abusive acts against children encompass a range of behaviors, some of them are- stalking a child using sexually suggestive language, lewd comments , sexual overtone songs or stories, showing the child pornographic material, masturbating in front of him/her, or make him/her masturbate, 'unsafe touch', having the child touch, forced sexual intercourse or rape . The proposed study seeks to analyze the works based on the heinous crime of CSA and child molestation worldwide and the myths associated with them. The select works are Anna Burn's *Milkman* (2018), Man Booker Prize winning novel , Mahesh Dattanis' *Thirty Days in September* (2013), Siddhartha's Chowdhury's *Day Scholar* (2009) and *Diksha at St.Martin's* (2002), Pinki Virani's *Bitter chocolate: Child Sexual Abuse in India* (2000), and Jessie's *Please tell: a Childs story about sexual abuse*(2009), the films selected are *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *Highway* (2014), *Kahaani 2* (2016), and *Kanika* (2018). Apart from this, some of the cases of USA Gymnastic sex abuse scandal and Me Too movement , murder of Zainab Ansari based on the similar theme have been referred to. The works has been categorized on the prevalent myths, the first being only strangers abuse children sexually, home is the safest place and CSA perpetrators are found only in lower classes or illiterate and the perpetrators are sick or perverted. The symptoms that proved Virgina Woolf's identity as mad and ill and led to her suicide that alleged madness may be diagnosed as PTSD, acknowledging the psychological traumas of the sexual abuse she endured. The book *Virginia Woolf: the impact of childhood sexual abuse on her life and work* (Louise Desalvo 1990), traces the impact of early sexual abuse on her personality and writing; she was sexually abused by her half brother in their own home. Pinki Virani, has been honored with a National Award, for her book, *Bitter Chocolate* by the Government of India. The magnum opus, opens with an account of her own traumatized experience at her home and further, divides the book into three notebooks dealing with different aspects of the issue. It is a path breaking book based on the studies, reports, investigation and real life incidents of the sexually abused children, and it reveals that a minimum of 20 percent of girls and boys under the age of sixteen are regularly being sexually abused; half of them in their own homes by adults who have the child's trust. The first notebook starts with the very term CSA, what constitutes it, why and how this happens, its devastating after effects which haunt the victims as they grow into adulthood. The second notebook deals with the two real life incidents of women who were betrayed as children by men of their family, the third provides practical solution on how to counter CSA, including a framework involving the law, the parents and the child. Moreover, it also suggests how this law can be implemented, and her persistent and consistent effort since 2000 has helped the lawmakers to pass a law against sexual abuse of children; the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences, Act 2012. The law implemented includes four of her suggestions to the Parliamentary Standing Committee. Apart from this, a chapter is devoted to national helpline (1098), how to avail the help, who can help the victims and how.

Please tell, is a child's first person narrative of sexual abuse (pre-teen survivor of sexual abuse), the young girl helps kids, by sharing her own story and find hope. The narrator's uncle (close family member) molested her, threatened that bad things would happen if she told, and later is arrested. Story is a story of trauma and triumph and ultimately encourages other kids to raise their voice for help because ultimately they will be helped out. She reassures them that abuse was not their fault and its okay to tell another adult, and getting help is the best way to go.

In *Monsoon Wedding* and *Thirty Days in September*, the same uncle who had abused the victim's in their childhood is now abusing other children of the new generation; sometimes offering them chocolates and the other time toys. In *Thirty Days*, the same man, Vinaya, Mala's maternal uncle and Shanta's own brother, abused both the daughter and the mother. Mala's mind was preoccupied with the sexual abuses done to her by the uncle and therefore she lost her inclination for marriage. Mala says to Deepak (her lover) - "I cannot love you... I see this man everywhere. I can never be free of him..." and the misery in Mala's life grew because of Shanta's silence where she too was a victim of her brother's incestuousness. And that broke her married life, she was not able to feel anything in the company of her husband, but still she never spoke about it to her daughter and never tried to protect her because that would have created scandal in the family. *Highway* also portrays the same agony of the protagonist (Alia Bhatt), she always want to be away with the family, her own house haunted her as she was abused by her uncle in her childhood. Her uncle used to give her chocolates but in the bathroom and there he sexually molests her for hours. She tells her mother about it but she asks her to remain silent so that family ties do not break. It is the first generation guilt that leads to the suffering of second generation, but in the film *Monsoon Wedding, kahaani 2* its vice versa. In *Monsoon Wedding*, the character when she realizes that her uncle who is a respectable businessperson is trying to molest her niece after her, she raises voice for her and then reveals about her past and traumatic experience and failed love affairs. *Kahaani 2* is also the story of Durga (herself a victim of CSA, a failed marriage), a school teacher, when finds a little girl different from others, shy, introvert and with marks on her body. She vows to find out the reality and it is then revealed that her uncle used to molest the little kid, she saves that girl from the clutches of devil uncle. The shocking element was that the grand mother of the girl was also aware of the ill activities of his son, still encourages him to do so. And in short film, *Kanika*, when the child is asked about the perpetrator (with whom she is in love with), 'how he looks', she answers "sabke jaisa". *Milkman*, a darkly comic novel, on the surface level it deals with the particular sins and political landscape of Northern Ireland but on the universal level is the story of everywhere. And the most interesting part is nothing is named in the novel, not even the narrator. The middle sister talks about the milkman who stalked her though she was eighteen and he forty-one. However, before that she states how her brother in law used to pass lewd and sexual comments on her in the absence of her sister, "he made lewd remarks about me and he used words, words sexual" Through the character of milkman, a paramilitary man, she talks about all those who are in the disguise of good, whose duty is to offer milk, which is connoted with

sweet, but in turn, they offer chocolates, the chocolates, which are bitter in taste (trauma, pain, and suffering). She also talks about the gossips as the roots of evil in any society, it is because of the rumor and gossip she never shared anything about his brother in law or the milkman to anyone, and in any way people would have believed the other way. The horrific murder of little Zainab, Pakistan, exposes once again how vulnerable children are in our society. The Footage showed she was walking with a stranger holding his hands when she was abducted. The culprit was a frequent visitor, and when he was first taken into custody, her family pleaded to let him go saying he could not be the culprit. The man has also raped and murdered 12 other underage girls apart from Zainab, and was a serial killer. In Lahore, in 2017, 4139 incidents of child abuse took place where 43 percent of them were acquainted with perpetrators.

The USA Gymnastics Sex Abuse Scandal is one of the biggest sexual abuse scandals in sports history. It involves the sexual abuses of female athletes- primarily minors-over the past two decades, in which over 368 individuals have been sexually assaulted by gym owners, coaches, and staff working for gymnastic programs across the country. Larry Nassar, a former USA Gymnastics national team osteopathic physician, has been named in hundreds of lawsuits filed by athletes who said that Nassar sexually abuse them under the pretense of providing medical treatment.

In all these stories fictional or non fictional, the perpetrators of CSA ,class no bar, they cut across all categories of class, caste, religion and educational background. They use their own home, or that of the little child's. Home is undoubtedly, where the most harm is. In addition, all of them except few have their own business or are working, and hails from elite middle class or high-class family. In all cases, the abuser was a part of the victim's everyday life, in the form of father, uncle, teacher, coach, male relative and male neighbor. All the studies clearly dissect the myth that home is the safest place, for the victims it turns out be hell. Moreover, it gives the message that sexual abusers are multiple abusers, the same children often, other children at the similar time or subsequently. If family exists in heterosexual relationship in the society, it is the family, which gives rise to victims of incest. And when the abusers are not the elderly neighborhood uncle or male relative they are single mother's manfreinds or subsequent husbands as in the case of Maya Angelou and the novel *Day Scholar*. "Mr freeman lived with us, or we lived with him..." (I know why the caged bird sings) this line truly depicts the pain of Maya Angelou who was sexually abused by her mother's partner in her own home. In *Day Scholar*, the abuser is again the paramour of the mother, the mother and daughter belongs to a middle class family, and hence mother is not able to afford daily pizzas and pocket money for her child. Thus the fourteen years daughter falls for the pizzas, maruti van, ice-cream and perfumes given by the forty plus uncle and moreover writes a love letter to him.

The other common myth is it does not happen with the boys. As an aspect of gender violence, it has been constantly under reported and under-recognized. This only goes on to add to the belief that male children cannot be survivors of sexual abuse, while it does happen with them. According to the 2007 report on child abuse in India by the ministry of women and child welfare, the data related to boys

who have survived sexual abuse, states that total 53.22% children faced one or more forms of sexual abuse, among them the number of boys abused was 52.94%. This clearly reflects that in almost all forms of sexual abuse, the number of boys who have faced abuse was equal to the number of girls who have faced exploitation, if not more. Hundreds of teenage boys had been molested and filmed by a gang in Husain Khanwala, a neighborhood of 10 kilometers north of Zainab's village, Pakistan in 2015, hence mitigating the fact, boys as the victim of CSA. The gang created 280 videos, sent to families of the victims to blackmail them. The short story, *Seraphim and Cherubim*, also talks about a boy and his molestation by his teacher. Seraphim, the monitor of sixth class, "didn't know what was happening to him anymore...he thought about telling his parents but the shame..."(SC 19). Cherubim, the moral science teacher 'loved cute, well-groomed young boys from clean-cut families definitely below the age of thirteen...' (SC 17-18). The teacher intentionally fails him in the major subjects, so that he could even tutor him in the summer vacation and surprisingly his parents got convinced for the same.

Sigmund Freud in his famous essay *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) defines these traits as 'pedophiles'. However the book, *The assault on truth: Freud's suppression of the seduction theory* (1992) suggests that Freud has find out the cause of hysteria among his female patients, he found that all of them were victims of child sexual abuse in their childhood. However, because of the societal pressure, and in order to save Viennese society and one of his friends, he resorted to Greek theory of Oedipus complex. The theory suggests that children sexual abuse by their parents were only fantasies embedded in an unconscious desire for the opposite sex parent. Thus, he turned the victims into perpetrators, who falsely accused adults of sexual abuse. To quote Stefan Moleneux, "Had it been properly addressed in the early 1900s, it might have changed the course of history radically, including the possible invasion of two world wars and totalitarian collectivist regimes that killed hundreds of millions" (a night for freedom, 24th feb 2018). In addition, this assaulting of truth is very similar to false memory syndrome cases in America; former Miss America 1958, in 1989, publicly announced that her millionaire and socialite father from the time she was five, and until the age of eighteen, had sexually abused her (BC xvii-xviii). This led to literally thousands of adults who had been sexually abused in their childhood peaking out too, what is today trending as #METOO. Nevertheless, the therapist called it as false memory syndrome, the adults actively plants the idea of them being sexually abused in their childhood by their parents.

All the studies undertaken Shows how children are emerging as the most vulnerable 'precariat' in the 21st century, and it tries to break the silence around CSA, and give children a voice of their own, or encourages other to be their voice when they need support, especially their family. CSA has existed in all societies for centuries, but in the post colonial age, the 21st century, there is a continuous increase in the number of crimes committed against children. And many of the families because of the status quo, to be at the top in the rat race, to avoid gossip, rumors etc never lodge a complaint and ask their children to suppress their pain, especially when the perpetrator is from a high class. Its globally exist

everywhere in the present, if not controlled then it would be in the future also, and might be more grotesque and heart wrenching. Such acts can have devastating and often irreversible impact on young children, and recent trends have revealed an urgent need to improve and strengthen the response (at societal, government, and legal and judicial levels) to check such crime and other effective support for survivors. And the societies which cannot protect its children are eternally condemned.

The sociologist, Swift, says that by learning kung fu and other defense form or by avoiding to walk out alone or in the night is not going to prevent the sexual assault because ‘the attackers continues to victimize the young, the weak, the vulnerable or the uninformed. Sexual assault is not prevented by this approach, but rather displaced’. Another sociologist, Leventhal, pointed out, ‘the ultimate goal of any program to prevent sexual abuse is to teach behaviors so that when an adult makes a sexual advance towards a child, the child will act in an appropriate manner by saying no and telling a responsible adult what happened’ (BC xxviii). There is a dire need for widespread awareness of child related laws among the police, the judiciary, people and most importantly, the children. The best prevention for a child is to be aware of what can happen to them and how to keep themselves safe. Therefore, it’s high time to make a judicious use of media, the fourth pillar of democracy; since this fourth pillar ensures that all people living in far-flung areas of country are conscious of what’s happening in the rest of the country. It is expected of them to act as a mirror to society, and with their strength try to change both social and government attitude towards child sexual abuse. Moreover print media should report more and more such petty issues , television should have some child centered programmes on how to behave with strangers, films with similar themes can be presented with a special screening on the occasion like Childrens’ Day and literature should also serve its part by exposing these evils either in a fictional way or non fictional. Youth and children focused media channels are one of the important tools to educate on the subject matter. Moreover, the social organizations, NGOs, social activists, communities’ resident welfare organizations, panchayats need to be actively involved. Workshop, lectures, street plays is needed to be organized at school level and college level to make children learn more and in addition sex education needs to be taught with a broader perspective . Adding these topics in the school curriculum would create awareness of how to protect oneself from sexual abuse, and since, prevention is always better than cure, so it is better if they become aware of the ill intention of the perpetrator before hand and act accordingly. The parents should be taught about CSA and what steps should they follow if their child encounters abuse and how to keep their children safe. The amalgamation of all these can be utilized in minimizing violence by putting social pressure on the perpetrators of the heinous crime and thus a better scenario of the society would come into existence.

The paper can be concluded with the quote of Jo Knowles, “ I am lying in my room listening to the birds outside. I used to think they sang because they were happy. But then I learned on a nature show they are really showing off. trying to lure in some other bird so that they can mate with it. Or let the other birds know not to get too close to their turf. I wish I never watched that show, because now all I

think about is what those pretty sounds mean. And now they are not pretty at all.” (Jumping off Swings 2011) This truly depicts the precarious nature of the post colonial age. The meaning of relationship has been subverted, it has given a vulnerable approach to the relationships, even if it is pious or true love in some cases it will be seen with a precarious eye as if it dangerous. It is all right to make them know of the real world rather than hyper real, it’s better to face the bitter truth rather to be a victim of it. It is better to stay away from the ‘milkmen’ (Perpetrators in form of relatives or any disguise), and their chocolates (bribes) which is actually bitter (suffering) in taste. Since all fathers are not their daughters’ best friends and role models. Therefore, it is needs to make children aware of these harsh and ugly truths perpetuating in the society. Moreover, It is the right time to reconsider and include these topics in the syllabi of schools and colleges to spread awareness and teach children about the ‘right touch’ and their ‘right to raise voice’ before the situation gets alarming. In addition, the sexually abused child should get a powerful voice of their own, because ultimately outcome would be pleasurable, they will definitely come out as a ‘boy trained for music and medicine, and unleashed for murder’ rather a tormented soul. This ‘kalyug’ demands a ‘Krishna’ not a ‘Rama’, a ‘Durga’ and not a ‘Sita’. Their ‘second coming’ is more welcomed than their first which is bound to follow the rules of this hypocrite society, the coming with a proper knowledge of what is wrong and what is right for him or her. In addition, the conventional dogmas ‘respect your elders’ needs to be questioned, rather the new and revised maxim should be ‘respect everyone, regardless of the age’ , even a child has the full right to get respected and live with dignity with their head held high. Therefore, the maxim of the 21st century should be like -‘respect the nature/ intention and not the age or the relationship one is put up with’.

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