Child Abuse and Prevention in India

Critical Responses

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Edited by

Dr. Dipak Giri



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Dedicated

To

My Father

Late Sri Dinkar Giri

(1 January, 1950-25 June, 2025)

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Introduction

Today child abuse continues to be one of the glaring issues in India. Even after so many rights for children granted by the Constitution of India and legislative changes and public awareness efforts, it is an undeniable fact that there are still millions of children who suffer from physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse in India. In recent times, this problem has become more acute owing to increased cases reported under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), child exploitation through the Internet, and public debates regarding child rights and protections. Disregarding Articles 14 to 24 of the Indian Constitution that guarantee the fundamental rights of children, a section of people is continually involving with child abuse. Though the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act) and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) that repeals the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) safeguard these fundamental rights, child abuse and neglect has hardly taken a halt in India. Contrarily, child abuse has rather grown at an alarming rate in recent times. Forget society, even children are not safe in their own families. While family elders often guide children with care, strict customs, gender roles, and unspoken fears often negatively influence a child's confidence, memory, and self-understanding. Whether children are with their families or away from them, they often absorb fear, desire, loss, silence, and cultural pressure from the world around them.

Contrary to the general perspective that childhood is a time of innocence, security, and emotional development, it has increasingly become a period of fear, violence, neglect, and trauma driven by various forms of abuse, including child marriage, child labour, child trafficking, child sexual abuse, and child suicide. Out of these, child marriage seems

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more serious problem in India despite improvements in education, economic development, and legal reforms. It continues to affect millions of children, especially girls from poor and rural communities. Girls who are married off early are more likely to experience early pregnancies, dangerous complications during pregnancy and childbirth, long-term health issues, and domestic violence. Today child trafficking is also increasing. It is an illegal business activity in which children are subjected to forced actions such as forced labour, prostitution, or begging. In spite of constitutional provisions and several national laws—such as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA)—it remains a severe and complicated human rights problem in India due to extensive economic inequality, caste and gender discrimination, and a lack of effective government institutions. The problem becomes more acute because of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, sex discrimination, and inefficiencies in law enforcement. Similarly, child labour remains a persistent challenge despite extensive legal frameworks and policy interventions aimed at its elimination. While existing literature often attributes child labour to poverty and limited educational access, these explanations overlook how children's work is socially embedded and institutionally mediated.

The protection of children from sexual exploitation and other abuses has become a pressing legal and social priority in India. In response to increased cases of child abuse and the inadequacy of previous laws, the Government of India has passed the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act) and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS). Despite ongoing legal protections and increasing mental health programs, all indicators point to a rise in child and adolescent suicides, showing that current prevention efforts have failed to address the complexity of children's lives in India. Since child abuse is one of the most severe violations of childhood, affecting physical safety, emotional development, identity formation, psychological well-being, and social dignity, the aim of this book is to conjunct upon child abuse, violence and prevention in India and the provisions being envisaged therein, keeping the child as the central theme of all the rights, policy and legislative provisions and decisions.

The first chapter of this book "Family Structures, Childhood Experience, and Emotional Formation in Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind*: A Psychoanalytic Study" is written by Dr. *S. Mahalakshmi.* In this chapter, Dr. *Mahalakshmi* examines how family relationships shape the emotional development of characters in the novel. The study applies psychoanalytic ideas such as repression, memory, unconscious fear, attachment, and emotional conflict. It explores how childhood experiences continue to influence later behaviour, relationships, and identity. The chapter argues that Gokhale presents family not only as a social unit but as a powerful emotional space where the mind receives its earliest impressions. Through a psychoanalytic reading, the chapter highlights the deep connection between childhood, memory, and emotional formation in Indian life.

In the next chapter, Dr. Manjeet Kumar Rai explores Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September,* one of the most unflinching dramatic engagements with the trauma of child sexual abuse in contemporary Indian English theatre. Written at the invitation of RAHI (Recovery and Healing from Incest), an NGO dedicated to survivors of incest, the play traces the devastating psychological consequences of childhood molestation upon its protagonist and her mother - themselves linked across generations by the same abuser, the protagonist's maternal uncle. Drawing upon trauma theory, particularly the work of Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, and Bessel van der Kolk, as well as feminist psychoanalytic frameworks informed by Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Adrienne Rich, this chapter analyses the play as a complex map of trauma's effects: the compulsive repetition of victimhood, the politics of maternal silence, the complicity of institutional neglect, and the tentative, painful possibility of recovery. The chapter further examines how Dattani employs the techniques of Brechtian epic theatre to prevent emotional complacency in the audience and to transform theatrical experience into a call for social action. The study concludes that *Thirty Days in September* is not simply a play about individual suffering but a systemic critique of a culture that conspires, through shame, silence, and social taboo, to sustain the conditions of child sexual abuse.

Next Dr. Sana Farooqui explores how Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents a deeply disturbing picture of childhood through the lives of twins Estha and Rahel. Their childhood is affected by family

conflict, social restrictions, caste discrimination, separation and sexual abuse. This chapter examines Estha's experience of sexual abuse and the lasting effect of that experience on his personality, relationships and communication. It argues that Estha's silence is not simply a personal choice but a result of fear, confusion, emotional pain and the absence of a safe space in which he can speak. The chapter also examines the role of family, gender and caste in shaping the world in which Estha and Rahel grow up. The novel shows that child abuse cannot be understood as an isolated incident because the vulnerability of the child is also connected with the larger social and family environment. Through Estha, Roy presents the long-term consequences of childhood trauma and raises important questions about adult responsibility, children's voices and the need for protection. The chapter concludes that literature can help society recognise forms of childhood suffering that often remain hidden and unheard.

Dr. Payal Mehta and Dr. Dhara Chavda's chapter "Silenced and Unseen: Child Abuse among Differently-Abled Children in India: Perspectives, Realities, and Preventive Pathways" looks at the vulnerabilities and methods of silencing that make differently-abled children invisible as victims by examining barriers to disclosing abuses. It also examines why systems fail to enforce laws or even make them known. The chapter focuses on specific disability types and the patterns of abuse associated with each type. There are many physical and attitudinal barriers that increase vulnerability by having a layered effect on the individual, depending on what type of disability they may have and the reason they were abused. Gender inequity further stratifies risk; while differently-abled girls are disproportionately trafficked for false promises of marriage/employment, boys are generally unreported victims of child labour exploitation/forced begging. This highlights the resiliency within the community. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) models, support networks, and trauma-informed approaches demonstrate that communities can disrupt the cycle of abuse by taking ownership of protective services, ensuring accountability among caregivers, and empowering parents through improved access to resources and legal support. According to this chapter, the needs of differently-abled children demand more than just changes in laws; they also require ongoing efforts to implement these changes, changing society's attitudes about these children, and providing

ways for them to report abuse. These changes will create a system where differently-abled children can see themselves as visible and have a voice that leads to justice.

Dr. Aparajita Dutta's chapter on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) examines the effectiveness of the concerned law in providing necessary protection to children and ensuring accountability of offenders. Specifically, the research investigates the legal framework and measures established by the POCSO Act to protect children from sexual exploitation, as well as the performance of the key actors of law enforcement including judiciary, organizations protecting children, and services supporting victims. Significant attention in this study is paid to the compulsory reporting obligation, child-friendly investigative procedures including recording of statements, protection of the child's privacy, and compensation and rehabilitation of child. The study also observes that underreporting remains a significant issue due to fear, lack of awareness, and societal pressure. In addition, the absence of effective coordination among institutions such as Child Welfare Committees, Special Juvenile Police Units, and medical authorities often undermines the effectiveness of the law.

Dr. Sunita Tripathi's chapter on child marriage examines the causes, effects, and legal dimensions of child marriage in India. It also discusses the impact of early marriage on education, health, emotional well-being, and economic development. The chapter further explores the role of the government, non-governmental organizations, and society in addressing this issue. While laws and policies exist to prevent child marriage, social awareness and community participation are equally important for meaningful change. The study concludes that ending child marriage requires long-term efforts focused on education, empowerment of girls, poverty reduction, and strict implementation of laws.

Dr. Dinesh Kumar and Vishal Chaudhary critically analyse child suicide in India by adopting an interdisciplinary approach, viewing the suicidal behaviour not as a single psychological outcome, but as an outcome of the cumulative effect of the various forms and manifestation of visible and invisible child abuse, which comes from psychological, familial, educational, digital, social, economic and institutional settings in their chapter "Silent Cries behind Young Minds: Child Suicide as an

Invisible Form of Child Abuse in India—A Critical Review". The chapter gives a synthesis of the existing knowledge on the epidemiological trends, multi-dimensional risk factors, vulnerable groups, strength and weaknesses of current legal and policy frameworks, which have been gathered from the latest evidence from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and Government of India policy documents and the recent peer-reviewed literature. Emotional neglect, overemphasis of student learning, cyberbullying, coaching culture, family dysfunction, poverty, discrimination and lack of child mental health services are specific areas of concern that are explored as a set of interrelated factors that increase the likelihood of suicide. The chapter suggests an integrated child-centred approach to child mental health prevention that encompasses recognition and identification of mental health issues in the first place, the provision of emotionally supportive educational systems, the engagement of families, the promotion of responsible digital governance, the inclusion of community, and the use of evidence-informed public policy. This chapter redefines child suicide as a child protection issue and not just a psychiatric problem to present a roadmap towards strengthening suicide prevention and creating emotionally safe, resilient and inclusive childhoods in India.

Dr. Jaydeep Mondal and Nikita Ghosh synthesize existing literature on child marriage and education in India, focusing on anthropological interpretations of educational access, cultural reproduction, gender relations, and social change in their chapter "Child Marriage and Educational Anthropology in India: A Review of Socio-Cultural Determinants, Educational Consequences, and Policy Responses". The literature indicates that poverty, patriarchy, caste dynamics, social norms, and educational exclusion are major determinants of child marriage. Simultaneously, education emerges as one of the strongest protective factors against early marriage. The review argues that educational anthropology offers critical insights into understanding how cultural beliefs shape educational opportunities and marriage decisions. It concludes that culturally informed educational interventions are essential for reducing child marriage and promoting gender equity in India.

Next Jaspreet Kaur investigates the representation of emotional neglect and child vulnerability in select works of Ruskin Bond and

Sudha Murty, two of the most widely read authors in contemporary Indian writing in English. Drawing on Bond's "The Woman on Platform 8" from *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories* (1988), and *The Blue Umbrella* (1974), and "Rahman's Avva," and "The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk" from Murty's *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* (2012), the study examines how these authors render visible the silent sufferings of children whose emotional needs remain unrecognised within familial and social structures. The chapter deploys a range of theoretical frameworks, including John Bowlby's attachment theory, Judith Herman's trauma studies, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, Rob Nixon's slow violence, and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, to interrogate the literary representation of loneliness, poverty, parental absence, and social indifference as forms of harm. While Bond's narratives are characterised by psychological subtlety, lyrical restraint, and the symbolic resonance of ordinary objects, Murty's prose foregrounds systemic social realities and a humanitarian ethical concern. Together, both authors challenge the idealisation of childhood in Indian society and insist upon the child's fundamental claim to dignity, affection, and emotional security. The chapter argues that literature functions as a critical ethical instrument in making legible those forms of suffering that official discourse and social convention routinely elide.

Mandava Hemalatha and Dr. C. Vara Prasad discuss issues, causes and consequences of discrimination against the girl child in India. Children are the valuable assets of our society as they represent the foundation for future social and economic development of the country. The right to a childhood free from discrimination is crucial to child well-being. Discrimination refers to unequal treatment or unfair distinctions made based on characteristics such as race, skin colour, gender, religion, political beliefs, nationality and social background etc. Gender-based discrimination in India remains a persistent social issue that affects girls from early childhood through various stages of life. They often face restrictions imposed by patriarchal norms that limit their freedom, opportunities and ability to participate in decision-making. Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by girls, including female foeticide, child marriage, malnutrition, school dropout, unequal treatment in employment, honour killing, devadasi system, dowry-related issues and unfair practices within families and communities. Experiencing discrimination can create

significant psychological and physiological stress among girl children. Addressing gender discrimination requires social change, transformation of traditional attitudes, and continued efforts toward improving education, economic opportunities, and legal protection for girls across communities.

The rapid democratisation of generative artificial intelligence between 2023 and 2026 has produced a distinct and escalating category of harm: photorealistic, AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and sexual deepfakes that target identifiable children. Naveen Talawar in his chapter "Synthetic Children, Real Harm: Reassessing India's Legal Framework for AI-Generated Deepfake Child Sexual Abuse Material: A Doctrinal and Comparative Study" adopts a doctrinal legal-research methodology to assess whether India's existing legal architecture adequately responds to this threat. Examining constitutional guarantees, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the Information Technology Act, 2000 and its recent deepfake amendments, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, it finds that India possesses an unusually broad statutory definition of "child pornography" that arguably already reaches photorealistic synthetic imagery, yet the framework remains reactive, fragmented and largely silent on the upstream actors who design and deploy generative models. Through comparison with the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, each of which has moved between 2024 and 2026 to criminalise synthetic CSAM and impose obligations on developers and platforms, the chapter demonstrates that India lags in regulating the production layer of the harm. It advances the normative argument that India requires dedicated legislation that unambiguously criminalises AI-generated child sexual abuse content irrespective of whether a real child is depicted, mandates safety-by-design and duty-of-care obligations on AI developers and online platforms, and creates a lawful pathway for authorised safety testing.

S. Ramaraju, Dr. C. Vairavan and Dr. P. Kamalesh Kumar examines representations of child abuse in selected Indian literary texts through an interdisciplinary framework informed by trauma studies, feminist criticism, Dalit discourse, and structural violence theory in their chapter "Silenced Childhoods and Traumatic Testimonies: Abuse, Memory, and Resistance in Indian and South Indian Literary Narratives" which

argues that Indian literature portrays child abuse not merely as isolated interpersonal cruelty but as a multidimensional social reality shaped by caste hierarchy, patriarchy, poverty, labour exploitation, emotional neglect, and institutional silence. The study further explores how Indian writers employ narrative strategies such as silence, fragmented memory, child-centered focalization, symbolic imagery, and nonlinear narration to represent trauma that often resists direct articulation. Through selected literary analyses, the chapter demonstrates that abused childhood in Indian literature emerges as a critical site for examining trauma, power, inequality, and social injustice. The study concludes that Indian literary narratives transform childhood suffering into testimony, ethical witness, and cultural critique, while foregrounding the urgent necessity of protecting childhood dignity, voice, and human rights.

Ismail Sarkar's chapter "The Manufacturing of Trauma: Academic Pressure, Institutional Child Humiliation, and Student Suicide in *Kota Factory*" on highly acclaimed Indian web series *Kota Factory* (Season 2-3) aims at critically analysing and highlighting that competitive exam coaching-industry is a form of institutional and systematic child abuse. Using literary and media exploration and child rights, this study aims at highlighting the harsh pedagogical teaching methods, class segregation, and poisonous ranking system which are glorified in some private institutions. All these forms of exploitation are institutional harassment and mental torture of little flower like children in their educational platform. This chapter argues that the series *Kota Factory* or similar institutions actually burden the child's mind and against this burden the article makes a critical commentary against such profit based institutions that seek only their profit disregarding children and their future.

Dr. Vaishali B Katke's chapter on child marriage explores the cultural phenomenon behind the existence of such practice in the global south, and understands the social issues from the lens of cultural habitation among its population in progressing such practices despite its stature as legally abiding act as cognizable and non-bailable, and possibility of facing two years of imprisonment and fine of one lakh rupees, when found guilty of practice and in supporting for such practices as third person. The methodology that the paper utilized is case studies and in-depth observation in the hamlets of rural India. The conclusion derived from

the study is unfavorable socio-economic conditions, and cultural ethos of considering female child as a burden on family life.

Child trafficking remains one of the most pressing yet underreported human rights concerns in Jharkhand, a state marked by rich cultural heritage alongside persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities. Hare Krishna Kuiry's *"Child Trafficking in Jharkhand: Between Poverty, Migration, and Exploitation,"* examines the complex interplay of structural poverty, seasonal and distress migration, and systemic exploitation that facilitates the trafficking of children from rural and tribal regions of the state. Situating the issue within the broader framework of marginalization, the study highlights how factors such as land alienation, lack of livelihood opportunities, limited access to education, and environmental degradation contribute to heightened vulnerability among children. The chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from field observations, secondary data, and narratives from affected communities. It explores how trafficking networks operate through informal labour contractors, placement agencies, and deceptive recruitment practices that often promise employment or education opportunities in urban centers. Particular attention is given to the gendered dimensions of trafficking, where young girls are disproportionately targeted for domestic labour and sexual exploitation, while boys are often pushed into hazardous labour sectors. A key focus of this study is the role of migration as both a survival strategy and a risk factor. In many cases, migration is not merely an economic choice but a compulsion shaped by agrarian distress and socio-political neglect. The transition from village spaces, traditionally characterized by community bonds and cultural continuity, to urban anonymity exposes children to exploitative systems where regulation is weak and accountability is minimal. This rupture also signifies a deeper cultural loss, as trafficking disrupts not only individual lives but also the social fabric of indigenous communities. Furthermore, the chapter critically evaluates existing legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms aimed at combating child trafficking in India, with specific reference to their implementation in Jharkhand. While policies and rescue operations exist, gaps remain in prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration processes. The study underscores the need for community-based interventions, awareness programs, and culturally sensitive approaches that engage local knowledge systems and strengthen grassroots resilience. By foregrounding both

structural analysis and human narratives, this chapter seeks to move beyond statistics to understand child trafficking as a lived reality shaped by inequality, aspiration, and coercion. It calls for a more holistic and context-specific response that addresses root causes rather than symptoms, emphasizing the urgency of safeguarding childhoods in regions where vulnerability is deeply entrenched.

Rajani in her chapter "The Growing Crisis of Child Trafficking in India: Causes, Exploitation and Prevention Laws" explores the underlying causes, trends, and consequences of child trafficking with special regard to the conditions in India. Emphasis is laid on the importance of better enforcement, rehabilitation of victims, and international collaboration. The study also stresses the need for adopting a comprehensive strategy that effectively addresses the problem of child trafficking. The study finds that victims, which are usually women, children, Dalits, and migrants, are often made to indulge in such activities due to deceit or coercion, as well as through the manipulation of vulnerability on their part. The clandestine manner in which human trafficking takes place, along with corruption and lack of cooperation among agencies, makes it difficult for authorities to conduct rescue operations. Though there has been a shift from victimless trials to victim-focused rights in the judicial processes in India, there are still many challenges in the way to ensuring justice, such as stigma, non-reporting, and delays. Despite the global and Indian laws that protect victims, like the Palermo Protocol and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, child trafficking continues.

Sahil Rapriya and Dr. Gautam Chatterjee focus on the study of child abuse in India from the point of views of law, sociology, and psychology in their chapter "Child Abuse in India: Legal, Social, and Psychological Perspectives". Firstly, it analyses the history of legislation for child protection in India. Further, it describes the socio-cultural factors associated with child abuse as well as the psychological effects experienced by its victims. Moreover, the effectiveness of legal instruments such as POCSO, Juvenile Justice Act, and the Indian Constitution is evaluated in addition to highlighting any weaknesses or gaps therein. The relevance of using an interdisciplinary approach to the issue is emphasized, among others, such aspects as the relevance of policy integration, trauma-informed interventions, mental health delivery services, and prevention.

Savita and Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole in "Children in Need of Care and Protection: A Juvenile Justice Perspective from India" explore the nature of children in need of care and protection in India in the context of the juvenile justice system including the institutional support mechanisms or problems in implementation. The study maintains the view that such children are among the most deprived children in the society and they are deprived in many ways, including through neglect, abuse, abandonment, trafficking to outsiders, homelessness, and exploitation and family disintegration. The chapter is based on analysis of the constitutional provisions, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Juvenile Justice Model Rules, 2016 and the policy and institutional mechanisms. The Indian law system is moving from a welfare oriented or rescue approach to a rights based approach, with a focus on dignity, best interest, rehabilitation, restoration and social reintegration, as illustrated in the discussion. The chapter also examines the definition of children covered by the Act, such as orphaned and abandoned children, those who have suffered abuse and neglect, and disaster-affected children, as well as the functions of various institutions such as the Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, District Child Protection Units, child care institutions, foster care systems, child sponsoring and child adoption agencies. A key strength of this report is also to identify key gaps in implementation, such as weak coordination, poor infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, timely intervention and post rehabilitation follow up. Hence, it is necessary to strengthen institutions, ensure better coordination of all stakeholders with children at the centre and have an approach based on children's rights in order to enable vulnerable children to enjoy life in a safe and dignified manner in India with opportunities for holistic development.

Sentsuthung Odyuo's ""Helping" or working? The Hidden Dynamics of Child Labour in Nagaland" examines the nature and determinants of child labour in Nagaland, India, using an integrated framework that combines structural, socio-cultural, and institutional perspectives. Drawing on interview data and secondary evidence, the study finds that child labour is sustained not only by economic vulnerability but also through processes of social legitimisation and institutional accommodation. Children's work, particularly in domestic settings, is frequently framed as "help" or care, obscuring its exploitative dimensions. The findings further

reveal a paradoxical role of education, which often coexists with, and at times legitimises, children's participation in labour. The study highlights the limitations of policy approaches centred on enforcement and school enrolment, and calls for more context-sensitive interventions that address informal labour arrangements, social norms, and meaningful educational engagement.

Kamathipura, a district recognized not only as one of the oldest but also most infamous red-light areas in India, continues to witness the alarming violation of child rights through child prostitution. The perpetuation of child sexual exploitation due to poverty, family violence, migration, and lack of education is a matter of deep concern. While some of these children are lured away from their villages or even across borders under false promises of jobs, a few are born to mothers in the red-light areas and exposed to a life of exploitation and neglect right from their childhood. Tanay V's study "Child Prostitution in Kamathipura and the Struggle for Rescue, Rehabilitation and Social Justice" focuses on child prostitution in Kamathipura and discusses the different aspects of rescue, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of child victims. The chapter attempts to discover the influence of the legal system, police, social stigma, and economic conditions on the lives of the children who are rescued. The method opted for the research is qualitative and the information is obtained from secondary sources such as case studies, reports, journal, articles, legal documents, and writings by social workers and child rights organizations. The findings show that simply rescuing children would not be enough to address the problem thoroughly. Actually, after being removed from the place of exploitation, many children are traumatized, afraid of being deserted by their families, and suffer from the stigma of society. Insufficient rehabilitation programs, no options for education, and regular exposure to dangerous situations are the main causes of children's return to unsafe environments. Therefore, the study points out that protecting children is a case of more than just rescuing and should include ongoing psychological support, schooling, income-generating activities, and respect for survivors.

The last chapter "Traumatic Childhood Leading to Strange and Unusual Behaviour: Reading Characters of Raka in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and Minx in Shobhaa De's *Strange Obsession*" by Dr.