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**HUMAN BEHAVIOURAL ECOLOGY: A STUDY OF TELLIE OLSEN'S SHORT STORY  
*I STAND HERE IRONING***

**V.VISALI**

M.Phil, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore.

visalivenkatachalam@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Women play a prominent role in looking after the family members and play a major role in bringing up the children. Therefore the children reflect the behavioral characteristics of the parents. The short story *I Stand Here Ironing* written by the American writer, Tellie Olsen, explains about the problem of a mother in bringing her elder daughter, Emily. The mother, being a single parent faces the difficulties of raising her daughter. This paper aims at explaining the human behavioral ecological study of the characters Emily and her mother.

American literature is a literature produced or written in America and its preceding colonies. The American literary tradition began as part of the broader tradition of English Literature.

A short story is a prose fiction which can be read in one sitting and it focuses on a self-contained incident or a series of incidents which evokes a "single effect". The short story and jazz music have taken the similar journey through the cultural consciousness of American society. The American short stories are mainly based on the great culture of the average American reader rather than some kind of artistic dictum. Therefore at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, short stories all grown in America as the necessity rather than luxury.

Tillie Lerner Olsen (January 14, 1912- January 1, 2007) was an American writer and one of the first generation American feminist writers. Olsen has written two novels and published her first book *Tell Me a Riddle* in the year 1961. This book has the collection of four short stories which are featured in the Best American Short stories and was awarded with O.Henry Award. She has also published a non-fiction volume titled as *Silences* in the year 1978. Though Olsen has published little, she was very influential for her treatment of the lives of women and the poor.

Human behavioral ecology or human evolutionary ecology is one of the most prominent disciplines in anthropology and psychology where human evolution is considered relevant for the holistic development of human behaviour. Human behavioral ecology applies the principles of evolutionary theory to the study of human behavioral and cultural diversity. This human behavioral ecology examines the traits, behaviors and life histories of humans in ecological context. The aim of the modern human behavioral ecology is to determine the influent ecological, social factors and shape behavioral flexibility within and between human populations. Among other things it also helps in explaining the variations in human behaviour as adaptive solutions to the competing life-history demands of growth, development, parental care and reproduction.

The short story *I Stand Here Ironing* is the first short story among the four short stories in the collection *Tell Me a Riddle* which was published in the year 1961. The first sentence of the story starts with the title sentence 'I stand here ironing' explains the readers that the entire story is about the narrators' reminiscence while she was ironing the clothes in her house. The narrator was the mother of five children, who received a letter from the elder daughter Emily's school that she needs special help and they request the mother to give the special attention towards her. The mother then recalls the birth of Emily that she herself was nineteen years old when she gave birth to her. She is in her teen that is unaware of providing the parental

care and affection to the child. Emily's father left the house when she was just eight months old and it was the burden of the mother to rear her. She leaves her daughter under the care of her husband's family to attain a job and when she brings Emily back after two years she feels her daughter isolated from her. Meanwhile she becomes the mother of one more daughter after her second marriage. Again she could not look back to her elder daughter who was suffering from asthma. So Emily was sent to convalescent home for poor children where her health got worsened even more and she was sent back to the house.

The mothers automatically influence the mental character of their daughter either knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes the characterisation may be genital. The characters mother and Emily in the short story *I Stand Here Ironing* also explain many human behavioral ecology aspects. The mother herself explains the story of self-denial, deprivation and loss. Emily, the oldest of five children but the last one to get the mother's care and affection had grown without anyone's love. This does not allow her to show the love and affection to her younger ones, only when the child is loved and shown affection, the child knows to show it off to others. This makes Emily to have very few friends and show as very poor performance in school. Although her mother encourages her by saying that, "but without money or knowing how, what does one do? We have left it all to her, and the fight has often ended inside, clogged and clotted, as been used and growing." (Olsen 296) Emily does not care for her life.

Emily was deprived of getting the attention of her parents. Her mother escaped by saying that she was the young mother of nineteen who does not know to bring up the child when Emily was born and the father ran away from the house when she was just eight months old. She was sent to the relatives' house when her mother was searching for a job and she is taken back to the house when she was two years old. She was again sent back to the convalescent home by her mother saying that she was very weak and the mother had got the younger daughter with her. So she could not concentrate on the elder one. Becoming very weak and feeble Emily was sent back home from the convalescent home where she starts growing carefree believing that the entire nation was going to be destroyed because of the second World War.

The entire story is the interior monologue explaining that the mother herself was nineteen years old when Emily was born and the mother needs the daughter to take care of her own consequences which is evident through her reminiscences, "let her be. So all that is in her will not bloom—but in how many does it? There is still enough let to live by."(Olsen 298)

When Emily was taken back from the convalescent home, once the mother suggested that she might do some comic routine which Emily takes it serious to and her talent won first place in her school show. The mother became happy on seeing her achievements and she trusts that Emily was going to be normal but she could not believe that from where Emily has acquired the skill.

The narrator could sense her own reflections in the growth of her daughter and this makes the readers to have the behavioral study of the characters. This story further explains the poverty stricken country where the divorced mother struggles to make the ends meet by rearing the child and having a job. This story is in the first person narration and the narrative technique used is the interior monologue. Thus, this paper focuses on the behavioral study of the characters: Emily and her mother.

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