

Familial Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's

The Dark Holds No Terrors

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Family plays a big role in the Indian society. Traditionally in all societies marriage and family are considered to be its most sacred institutions. They are the source of comfort and nurture the members living within it. As a wonderful bridge between nature and civilization, biology and culture, sex and virtue or righteousness, private rivalry and public order, the institution of marriage marks a unique development in the evolutionary history of humanity. Social roles and social constructs influence family relationships in multiple ways. Deshpande in her works exposed the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male-centred Indian society at large. According to them feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include social and psychological factors such as, woman's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. The author seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society. This paper stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfilment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children.

The male domination in woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. This paper stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children.

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande, basically express the frustration and disappointments of women who experience in the social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. It highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition bound society. They bring out the absurdity of rituals and customs, which, help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This clearly points out, how a woman grows from self-surrender to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity.

Father and daughter Relationship (patriarchal family):

Father plays an essential role in their daughter's lives. A daughter relationship with her father is usually her first male- female relationship. But here, in this novel "The Dark

Holds No Terrors”, from the beginning, we find there is no proper communication between the protagonist, Sarita and her father. She actually, returns being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. But, she couldn’t express her feelings or pains to her father.

The father is indifferent and not supporting enough, “like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest”. Like a tradition Indian father, he enjoys the privilege of being the Master and head of the family. As we know from Sarita, he is not concerned with the problems of his own family members.

“He had always been so much a man, the Master of the house, not to be bothered by any of the trivial of daily routine”. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 20)

In Indian society, married women are not supposed to return to her parental house without her husband or having any quarrels or divorce. They supposed to stay in the house of her husband till death. So, when Sarita’s father finds her standing alone with the suitcase, he frown and knits his eyebrows like any other typical Indian father. Also, when Sarita, tells her father about her husband, who tortures her sexually, but it is something beyond the understanding of her father, who always maintained distance and reserve with his wife. Thus, the root of these problems also seems to lie in the social attitude.

Mother and daughter Relationship

When a girl is born in a household, it is considered that she is a debt, a liability; while when a boy is born, he is believed to be an asset, who would earn and take care of his parents later on. Thus any expenditure for a boy does not seem much, but when it comes to girls, there is always the thought at the back of their mind that they have to pay a huge sum of money as dowry for the girl. They are considered as a burden, to be married off at great expense—even now many parents start saving money for their daughter’s marriage from the time she is born. This novel basically discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child. Hindu tradition plays a major role in Sarita’s unhappiness. It is a well-known fact, that a Hindu values a son over a daughter.

At large mothers share a very strange and complex relationship with their daughters. Normally, mothers want their daughters to follow the traditions and codes. Because, they think it’s a traditional bound life, which would keep her daughter safe. But, sometimes, the mother can also be found cruel and hostile towards her own daughter, and treats her with a sense of rivalry. The hostile chauvinistic societal environments, has moulded the psyche of a mother as a woman, and also make the young uninitiated girl child a special object of the mother’s persecution. This novel exhibits the trauma of a girl-child who has suffered the bullying and curtailment of activity by her mother. The girl- child Saru grows up as a victim of her mother’s sexist and gender—based bias; which further reduces her later life into a desperate struggle.

For instance, we find, the mother expressed her anguish and the gender-bias through the natural element, sunlight which she feels as a barrier for women’s beauty or for their fair complexion. Right from the beginning Sarita is made to understand that she is a girl and she is inferior to her brother, in every way. The sole purpose of a woman’s existence is to please her man. She has just remained a ‘thing’ to be passed on from parents to husband.

As for her behavior she always kept two different measuring yards, one for the son and other for the daughter.

Here is one example to prove it-

“Don’t go out in the sun you’ll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don’t; we have to get you married,

I don’t want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can’t

And Dhruva?

He’s different. He’s a boy”. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* , 45) (7)

In this way a traditional woman thinks that it is their duty to remind their daughter that she is a girl and she should behave accordingly. The socio-cultural conditioning of a girl is still a part of Indian culture. Hence Saru’s lively, full of life, is gradually suffocated by her mother’s constant criticism and fault finding. Saru is always made to feel ugly, unwanted and undesirable. “*I was an ugly girl, At least, my mother told’ me so*”. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 61). (38)

Winnie Cott in his paper ‘Mirror Role of mother and Family in child development’- writes about the importune of mother’s role in reflecting back to her child, the child’s own self. When the child looks at its mother, it sees itself. The child has to be seen in a way that makes it feel that it exists. Poor Sarita gets back from her mother a picture of ugliness.

If a mother cannot empathise with her own child then who would the child turn to? Was it her fault that she was dark and ugly? These are the questions this novel arises. Saru’s defiance towards her mother awakens her carreristic ambitions. At the initial stage, her mother had moulded her psyche to accept drudgery and self—negation as a norm of routine existence for a married woman and to treat herself as an undesirable person in a subconscious manner.

The mother and daughter relationship in this novel is based on gender-bias and lovelessness. Usually, mothers serve as a role model for their daughters. They provide examples of how to be an individual, a mother and a wife. In this novel, Sarita is deprived of the motherly love, care and affection. She is just treated as a playmate and governess for her brother Dhurva. She is always ignored and neglected, in favour of her brother. She is not given much importance.

We also find, mother praying for her daughter’s unhappiness and the daughter saying,

“*If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one...*”

Her mother shows inveterate hatred and enmity towards her daughter, after the death of her son.

She says, “... Daughter? I don’t have any daughter. I had son and he died. Now, I am childless”. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 196)

Later, we find Sarita rejects her mother and also the meaningless rituals, like circumambulating the tulsi plant.

“The tulsi had been the only spot of green. But that had gone as well...” (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 1)

In Indian context, circumambulating the tulsi plant by a woman is meant to increase the life span of their husbands. Here, Sarita rejects these rituals. This rejection indicates her freedom or individuality and her capability to see her life independent of her mother/ past.

Sarita The Protagonist, as a Mother:

Sarita wishes not to be like her mother. She is not only a wife and a mother of two children, but also a successful Lady Doctor. In reality the working housewife is doubly burdened with duties and conjugal relations both at home front and work place. By chance the balance is not maintained well, and then the feelings of disenchantment and imbalance leads to separation and all the relations are uprooted making it a psychological problem.

Sarita's life has turned out to be problematic one. As a doctor she is successful and becomes quite busy which ultimately upsets her family life. The aspect of doctor in her is more often seen than that of the wife, and the mother in her. So, as a wife and a mother she is unable to devote her time to her husband and children's needs. Hence, she fails first as a wife and secondly as a mother. She finds herself placed at, her personal level, she feels gradual disappearance of love and family attachment.

Renu, her daughter in this novel, is often portrayed as cold, silent, a woman despite of her age and so on. As a mother she fails to understand her daughter's odd behaviour sometimes. We also see Renu does not talk much even to her mother, as the children of her age do.

“Renu what is the matter?

Nothing.

Why don't you talk?

I don't feel like it.”(The Dark Holds No Terrors , 21)

Though she is fond of doing household duties, her profession makes her weary and tired. So she couldn't spend time with her family.

“They are used to being without me. I'm out most of the day, anyway. And I told you about my Janaki Bai. As long as she's with them, I didn't have to worry”.
(The Dark Holds No Terrors, 71)

She appointed Janaki bai to look after her children. But, still they long for motherly love and care. This also shows the city life, where most of the parents appoint a maid to look after their children. But it is a well known fact, that nobody can replace the place of mother in the family. There are many instances which clearly show their longings for motherly love and care.

Once, Sarita finds her daughter, Renu draw a picture with black crayons. It is like a dark deep forest trees are almost tall and straight. On looking at her drawing Sarita feels, that unlike other children Renu draws not a colourful picture, but a dark one. Thus, child's

psychology is shown or expressed through the picture. The children of Renu's age usually draw only colourful pictures, but Renu draws a frightful one.

We can infer this picture in different ways. On the one hand, the child in the picture may be considered as Renu. Through her drawing she reflected her loneliness or uncaring child's attitude, longing for Mother's love. So this picture clearly shows her mind or sense of loneliness. This kind of utter loneliness a human being faces in life stands as the core of 'The Dark Holds No Terrors.'

On the other hand, we can infer the girl in the picture as Sarita. Because, Sarita often doubts whether her children are aware of her sufferings and tortures that she has experienced every night. She says,

"... but they knew nothing. That was her only comfort. That the children knew nothing.

(what about that guarded watchful look in Renu's eyes as she looks at us? What about Abhi's hostility to me recently?)" (The Dark Holds No Terrors,151).

Renu's picture creates a sense of brooding darkness in her mind. Sarita also feels lonely because she has not received any love all through her life. As a child, as a young girl, she felt rejected by her mother, who preferred Dhruva, her younger brother. She felt miserable when her mother had blamed her for the death of Dhruva, who died by drowning when he was just seven. Everyone has failed her. She lived her life with the guilt, which was inflicted on her, but her mother. Later when she begins to think that she has found someone in Manu, who would cherish her forever; she goes through traumatic experience when he rapes her. Suddenly, she is alone again. Thus, Saru is the symbol of many a woman, who live their lives in loneliness, in one form or the other. Thus, the author clearly shows the conditions of Renu and Sarita through the picture and the deep, dark forest reflects that they are encompassed by the lonely feelings.

Husband and wife Relationship (male ego – social status, a root cause of the familial destruction):

A union of two souls, marriage is an honest recognition of the native equality between man and woman. As an agreement to share between themselves the joys and the responsibilities of the joint venture, marriage is an equal necessity for both partners. No other human relationship is as intensely bilateral and mutually enjoyable as the partnership between a man and a woman. The key to marriage is the ability to endure and go on. But there are many marriages where women are dominated by their husbands and do not find freedom and "space" in their marital life. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* states:

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been or plan to be suffering from not being. They celebrate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious or even indifferent in regard to the institution.

Sarita marries Manohar, against the will of her parents. She is a wife, who is more successful than her husband. This is the main cause of her sufferings and physical tortures. This change or reversal of social status shatters Sarita's life into pieces. She is independent

and a woman in the outside world, but inside she doesn't know how to deal with her husband's sexual tortures. Thus, it clearly shows that, the family institution begins to disintegrate when a woman achieve greater economic or social status than man. The problem faced by Sarita is the problem of many learned and professional women of our society. We know, Indian society is still bound by tradition and superstitions. No one dares challenge the existing male-dominant order.

Extramarital Relationship:

After marriage Saru becomes a successful and recognized lady doctor. She begins to enjoy superior financial and social status with the help of an outsider, Boozie. This creates an inferiority complex in Manohar and becomes a sadist, who gets pleasure by insulting his wife, harassing and, hurting her sexually. At the initial stage Saru cannot oppose, because, her mother had moulded her psyche to accept the pains and sufferings to lead her marriage life a successful one. She decides to keep her marriage in favor of her husband. But, Manohar's disgusting behavior in the night frightened and trapped her like an animal. In all these acts, she finds herself lonely and a dissatisfied person. The isolation and fragmentation in her marital life make Saru look for other possibilities. Boozie, her mentor, takes personal interest in her, not reading in any physical relationship. Never, she has looked love beyond marriage.

Her affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. She is not ready to live in dingy two- rooms flat in a suburb area all her life. She wishes to have a house of her own. She also wants to life a comfortable life. So she uses Boozie as a support to elevate her career. According to Saru, Boozie is a handsome masterful man. Everything about him right from his language, his skill appears to Saru, in perfect management. She tells:

When I saw him, I knew I would never pray any more for a patient. I would learn this instead, this skill, this proficiency, this perfection. I knew he was a good teacher. Well, I would learn from him. Everything that he could teach me, I would learn. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 90)

It takes Saru a long time to realize that Mr. Boozie's interest in her is not that of master and student but that of a woman and a man. It looks strange to her, but she responds to his flirtatious manner. Boozie's interst in Saru remains a mystery to her. Boozie teaches her to dress with elegance and to speak good English. He teaches her to improve her accent, how to enjoy good food and how to read. He also helps her with enough money to set up consulting room of her own in a well- known and decent locality. For Saru, Boozie is a god father, who helps for her betterment. She manages to fulfill all her desires through him, Saru says:-

I would not bring up any child to a life of deprivations. I wanted it soon... that finale of a middle- class dream... a house of our own. Furnished with all the gee- gaws that are an indispensable part of the dream. And here he was, the fairy godfather, who could, with a wave off his magic wand, make things easier, miraculously, wonderfully, easier for me... if only I could please him. I knew I could if I tried. I did. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 92)

Saru becomes bitter towards Manu who had closed his eyes to Boozie, who display his affection towards her in public, at the inauguration of her consulting room. This gesture puzzles everyone except Manu. She says,

I told myself my relationship with this man couldn't, wouldn't hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relation-ship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me... that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with Manu and me. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 91)

Later Saru seeks Boozie's help in divorcing her sadist husband. Boozie says, "Saru, by all that's wonderful! How long is it since you came to see me my girl? And I think of you every day. Every single day, come in, come in". (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 97). He pulls her and gives her a hug. She feels, "behind the façade of aggressive, virile masculinity there was nothing at all". (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 94) She also realizes that Manu uses Boozie to live a comfortable life. Because he knows that they cannot live the same standard of life and supports for her education with his small income. So he does not object Saru getting money from Boozie.

He says,

Can you bear to send the children to a third- rate school? To buy them the cheapest clothes, the cheapest of everything? To save and scrape and still have nothing after the first few days of the month? No, Saru, there can be no going back. We have to go on. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 81)

Her other extra marital relationship is with Padmakar, often called as Padma, her classmate in medical college, whom she meets years later as a medical practitioner. Padmakar forces to have a deeper relationship with Saru, but after a few incidents, she advises against him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing her comforting to her. She becomes clear about love or romance, she says -

And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequence I feared and hated, but also the thing itself. When had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well were illusions, and not Relevant to my life any way. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and happiness came, not through love Alone but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 133).

In a way, these two men in the life of Saru prove that their relation gives no solace; it is only the disillusioned relationships. Disgusted with the behavior of her husband and as a dissatisfied person, she deserts her husband and children and goes to her parental home under the pretext of her mother's death.

These relationships in Sarita's life help her to tackle her problems. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband, children and everybody else. She takes this opportunity to examine, to begin and to reinforce her indispensability. She is also able to think sensibly and logically. She realizes that she has to accept all these selves- daughter, sister and wife as they are. She understands that escaping is not a permanent solution to the problems but it has to come from within.

At the end of the novel, when she receives a letter about Manu's arrival, although initially she is not ready to face her husband, she tells her father, "Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can". (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 221). These words show that she passes from the state of illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and ultimately attempts to reconcile herself to face the hard realities of life. This is true not only of Sarita but of all middle class working women in modern India.

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