

Family Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Abstract

Indian English literature is a fast growing discipline at the levels of creativity and criticism. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experience in their writings which affected the culture and language patterns of Indian literature. In the middle of nineteenth century, more women writers began to write in the English language. Women's novels encompass the latest burning issues related with women. Typical male writers depict women as stereotyped one. After the arrival of women writers, women are portrayed as strong and active. They feel that women are an equal competent just like men. Shashi Deshpande tries to break the long silence of women in our country. Her novels are about women, who are trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their places in this society and above all their relationship with others. Her female characters have their inner conflict and quest for identity.

The aim of the paper is to explore the various aspects of husband-wife relationship, parent-children relationship and other relationship of Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She feels that these relationships bring sufferings to her at first so she decides to escape from these relationships. She, at the end of the novel, realized that she had 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 were.

Key Words:inner conflict, quest for identity, extramarital, isolation, family institution, trauma

Introduction

Family plays a vital role in Indian society. Traditionally in all societies, marriage is considered the most sacred institutions in a family where the source of comfort nurtures the members living in it. Social roles constructed the influence of family relationships in multiple ways. Deshpande's works exposed the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male - centred Indian society.

The male domination in woman's life was a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande, basically expressed the frustration and disappointments of women who experienced the social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. It highlighted the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition bound society. They brought out the absurdity of rituals and customs, which helped to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This clearly pointed out how a woman grew from self-surrender to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. Family relationship could be divided such as Father - Daughter relationship, Mother – daughter relationship, Husband – Wife relationship, Extramarital relationship and so on.

Concept of Relationship

In this novel, there was no intimate relationship between father and daughter unlike Indian society. Father played an essential role in their daughter's lives. A daughter relationship with her father was usually her first male-female relationship. Here, the very first scene of the novel which unfolded the strange relationship between the father and daughter - Sarita. She returned to her parental home after fifteen years, but Baba, her father was not ready to welcome her and also he was not interested to enquire about her life & family. This directly throws a light on lack of love between the father and the daughter. He didn't show any eagerness to know about her, her family and children at all. He had never showered her with love or shown his anger. But now she experienced tenderness of his hot and a kind attitude towards his daughter for the first time in her life. Her father asked her to clean up

after the meal and he called her by her name for the first time. It gave her the impression that she had been accepted. Her father was shown very much proud of his daughter as she was a doctor.

Sarita, the protagonist of the novel could not bear the sexual sadism of her husband so she returned to her parental home. But, she couldn't express her feelings or pains to her father. The father was indifferent and not supported enough, "Like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 18). Like a traditional Indian father, he enjoyed the privilege of being the master and head of the family. As we knew from Sarita, he was not concerned with the problems of his own family members.

"He had always been so much a man, The master of the house, not be bothered by any of the trivial of daily routine".(20).

In Indian society, married woman are not supposed to return to her parental house without her husband. They are supposed to stay in the house of her husband till the last day of judgement. Baba frowned his eyebrows when he found his daughter standing alone with her suitcase. Later he showed eagerness to solve the problems of his daughter when she revealed her husband's sexual torture to her. He almost requested her to live her life and forget her past. In this way, the Indian father used to advise their daughters. Sarita was ready to leave her house when she came to know that her husband would arrive to her parental house. Baba asked her to face the problem instead of running away from it. "*Don't turn your back on things again. Turn around and look at them. Meet him*" (215).

The author successfully portrayed the plight, problems, trials, tribulations of the relationship between father and daughter. Father – Daughter relationship played a minor role in this novel and there was not much intimate relationship between Sarita and her father, Baba. The strange mother- daughter relationship was centrally significant to understand this novel, *The Dark Hold No Terrors* which normally portrayed the antagonism mainly from two Persons - Sarita's mother and her husband, Manohar.

A Mother who is always godly figure for her children was shown as an enemy of her daughter in this novel. The novel was full of hatred, antagonism, revenge and sorrow. There was not a single moment where mother and daughter had laughed or enjoyed together. This novel exhibited the trauma of a girl child who had suffered bullying and curtailment of activity by her mother. Saru grew up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender-based bias; which reduced her later life into a desperate struggle to overcome the initial victimization. Saru's mother who no longer acknowledged her as a daughter and Saru tried to find out a

new meaning to her life which could enable her to develop a balanced perspective towards her diversified roles as a mother, as a wife and as a career woman.

The Dark Holds No Terrors presented the emotional undulations of the complicated mother-daughter relationship, the balanced beauty of which is so vital for the development of a healthy woman. Even as a child, the protagonist of the novel, Saru was aware of her mother's preference for her brother, Dhruva. Saru recollected her adolescence in order to understand her present, she recalled that there was, *Always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an Party in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same but there was no puja*" (168).

Sarita's experience at home had made her to discover inferiority in herself as a fixed and preordained essence. Her relationship with her mother has enclosed and dominated her. In her adolescence, she was treated by her mother as an adult rival. She was unable to find any sympathy in her father whom she described as "*Pusillanimous*" (143). Consequently this guilt overpowered her psyche and did not allow her to breathe freely. The guilt suffocated her, while viewing PatherPanchali, while organizing her children's birthday. She was made to live with the guilt that she was the murderer. Even outside the context of this experience, Sarita had to put up with gender-based discrimination which was so typically common to the Indian middle class. She had been taught to rear a girl in a particular fashion and she had implicit faith in that teaching. She was a victim of social conditioning and she was made to realize that being a girl she was inferior to her brother in every way:

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.

Why you live with us all your life?

Why not? You can't.

And Dhruva? He's different. He's a boy (45).

This above dialogue clearly brought forth the manner in which the whole, "boy-girl child syndrome" was rationalized even by the educated and liberal Indian middle-class people. In this way, a traditional woman thought that it was their duty to remind their daughter that she was a girl and she should behave accordingly. A girl is always made to feel like a bird of passage in her parental home. In the collective Indian psyche, the girl-child is

unchangeable slotted. As Saru was illtreated by her mother, she decided to wound her mother. The following words will reveal her hatred feeling towards her mother.

“My voice was high and shrill, there was a pain in my chest, my throat ached intolerably, and there was a buzzing in my ears, a blur in front of my eyes. I hated her. I wanted to hurt her, wound her, made her suffer” (42).

Usually, mother serves as a role model for their daughters. They provide examples of how to be an individual, as a mother and a wife. In this novel, Saru was deprived of her mother's love, care and affection. She was just treated as playmate and governess for her brother Dhruva. She was always ignored and neglected, in favour of her brother. She was not given much importance. One could not find any mother praying for her daughter's unhappiness but it is evidently found in this novel. Her mother showed her enmity towards her after she eloped with Manu. She said, *“...Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had son and he died. Now, I am childless” (196).*

Saru was a baffled child who sought the love of her parents, particularly of her mother. She felt shattered and humiliated when her parents failed to show any sympathy towards her. The shadows of her unhappy relationship with her mother darkened her adolescence, her early youth and even her first love. Saru didn't feel for her mother when she heard about her death. She would be infuriated by recalling the memory of her mother. There was no smooth relationship lies between Saru and her mother in this novel.

In reality, the working women are doubly burdened with duties and conjugal relations at home and work place. If the balance is not maintained well, it will spoil the relations. Saru's life became problematic one, because of her busy schedule. The aspect of doctor in her, was more often seen than that of the wife and the mother in her. As a wife and mother, she was unable to devote her time for her husband and children. She detached from her children and husband through her profession. This novel presented the complex and emotional relationship of Saru with her mother and it had significance for today's Indian society, in which the girls had to put up not only with the social discrimination, but also with the victimization by their mother.

Marital relationship played a predominant role in this novel. Marriage is an honest recognition of the native equality between man and woman. Man and woman have to share between themselves the joys and the responsibilities of the joint venture. Marriage is an equal necessity for both partners. No other relationship is as intensely bilateral and mutually enjoyable as the partnership between a man and woman. The key to marriage is the ability to

endure and go on but in many marriages women were dominated by their husbands. They also didn't find freedom and space in their marital life. Saru, in this novel belonged to this category.

Saru wanted to be a self-reliant, but at the same time, she dreamt of a superior conquering male who would give her the meaning of life. She was fascinated by Manohar's features and faculties in the first two meetings but she was not deviated from her path. She thought that it was like having a crush on a movie star and it was not part of her real life. Her determination to become a doctor eroded the impulses of love. She saw the man of Manu, a great writer, a poet, a crowd thronging personality. Manohar continued to be her hero for years though she didn't have a chance to talk to him. Once she introduced herself to Manu as Smita's friend and Manu remembered his meetings with Saru. Thereafter they met frequently and loved each other tenderly. Saru was naturally hungry for love, which she began to feel from Manu. She married Manu because her parents opposed her marriage. She had a craving for man's love. She desired nothing but a love. Marriage provided a channel for expression of her passion. She was so thirsty for love that she desired to love and be loved continually. She would incite Manu to prove his love for her.

Manu's inferiority complex burst out when a girl raised the question against Manu, "*How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?*"(200). All these things combined together and hit his ego. Manu started to attack his wife every night with sexual brutality and his sexual sadism was attributed to his inability to rise to the level of his wife professionally.

He had begun his nightly sexual assaults because of his sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. He was unable to match her professionally so he used sexual brutality as his weapon to hurt his wife. Baba was the first person whom Saru revealed her husband's sexual brutality. She told her father,

He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this. ...The man hurting me. ...I could do nothing against him. I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry. I was so afraid that children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure (201).

It became usual for all the nights and he became a normal man, a loving husband in all the morning. He wouldn't even remember what he had done in the night because it was done in an unconscious state. He would be in his usual self in the morning. Like a caring

husband, he would ask the maid to wake her up if she was in the bed and gave her a cup of tea. Manu was a complete failure due to the idea of Indian masculinity. In order to restore his manhood and to assert his power, he sexually assaulted his wife. Saru left her husband and children in order to escape from her husband's sexual brutality. She used to recall her past and her marriage life when she was in her parent's home.

Saru had a chance to review her past, her own psychology, her own place in relation to others in the family and in the society. She decided to confront the problems when she realized her own self. She planned to leave her parental home when she came to know about Manu's arrival. She was not even ready to face her husband. Her father suggested her to face her problems but not to run away from it. Saru decided to divorce her husband because it was impossible for her to live with a distraught husband. But in the end, she thought that instead of leaving her husband, she should get him treated for his disease. She realized that she was, "*the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife*" (216).

This novel clearly showed that family institution began to disintegrate when a woman achieved greater economic or social status than her husband. The problem faced by Saru was the problem of many learned and professional women of our society. Indian society was still bound by tradition and superstitions. No one is ready to change the male – dominant society. Saru's marital was not a happy one even her marriage was a loved one. This was only because of Saru's professional status.

Extramarital relationship played a minor role in this novel, which would give emotional relief to Saru. She became a successful and recognized lady doctor after her marriage. She began to enjoy superior financial and social status with the help of another character called Boozie. This created an inferiority complex in Manu and became a sadist, who got pleasure by insulting his wife and hurting her sexually. At the initial stage, Saru could not oppose her husband because her mother had moulded her psyche to accept pains and suffering which helped her to lead her marriage life as a successful one. She decided to keep her marriage in favor of her husband but Manu's disgusting behavior in the night frightened and trapped her like an animal. In all these acts, she found herself lonely and a dissatisfied person.

The isolation and fragmentation in her marital life made Saru look for other possibilities. Boozie, her mentor took personal interest in her but not reading in any physical relationship. She had never looked love beyond marriage. Her affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao were temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. She was not ready

to live in dingy two rooms flats in suburb area all her life. She wished to have a house of her own and also desired to live a comfortable life. So she used Boozie as a supporting tool to elevate her career. According to Saru, Boozie was a handsome Masterful man. He seemed to be good and perfect in her view. She told:

When I saw him, I know I would never pray any more 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 (90).

It took Saru long time to realize that Mr. Boozie's interest in her was not that of master and student but that of a woman and man. It looked strange to her, but she responded to his furious manner. Boozie's interest in Saru remained a mystery to her. Boozie taught her how to dress with elegance and to speak good English. He taught her to improve her accent, how to enjoy good food and how to read. He also helped her with enough money to set up consulting room of her own in a well- known and decent locality. For Saru, Boozie was a god father, who helped for her betterment. She managed to fulfill her desires through him.

Saru's other extra marital relationship was with Padmaker, often called as Padma her classmate in medical college. She met him years later as a medical practitioner. Padmaker wanted to have a deeper relationship with Saru but Saru disliked his motives after few incidents. She wanted to bring an end to their relationship. Their relationship was neither soothing her nor comforting her. She became clear about love or romance, she said:

And now, I knew it was not just the consequence I feared and hated, but Also the thing itself. When had imagined. Love. Romance...Fulfillment and happiness Came, not through love alone but sex, and for me sex was new a dirty word (133).

The relationship of Boozie and Padmaker became temporary and proved that their relation gave no solace in her life; it was only the disillusioned relationship. Disgusted with the behavior of her husband and as a dissatisfied person, she deserted her husband and children. She went to parental home under the pretext of her mother's death. These relationships in Saru's life helped her to tackle her problems. She felt that she had done injustice to her mother, husband, children and everybody else. She took this opportunity to examine, to begin and to reinforce her indispensability. She was also able to think sensibly and logically. She realized that she had to accept all these selves- daughter, sister and wife as

they were. She understood that escaping was not a permanent solution to all the problems but it had to come from within.

At the end of the novel, when she received a letter about Manu's arrival, although initially she was not ready to face her husband, she told her father, "*Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. It will be back as soon as I can*" (221). These words explained that she passed from state of illusion to reality, from frustration to submission. She ultimately attempted to reconcile herself to face the hard realities of life. This was not only of Saru but of all middle class working women in modern India.

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