

**The Depiction Of Women In Shashi Deshpande`S The Dark
Holds To Terrors**

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande is one of the major writers of contemporary India who trace woman's journey from self-effacement to self actualization¹. As an Indian novelist writing in English Shashi Deshpande's reputation has been on the rise. Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*² has also received major awards. She has domestic and international readers. The presentation of women in her writing is realistic. She presents a realistic image of woman in her writings. Social fabric of India forms the bases of her novel. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*² is an extension of her short story.

In Sagar-aswathi Thandakamalla's³ words the novel displays the trauma of a girl child who has suffered the bullying and curtailment of activity by her mother. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*² is a tremendously powerful depiction of a single women's fight for survival in a world that has no easy options.

Sarita still remembers her mother's caustic words uttered when as a little girl she was unable to save her younger brother from drowning. Now when mother is dead and Sarita returns to the family home ostensibly to take care of her father.

Sarita has suffered the scathing remarks of her mother. She is always in a pain though she has not committed any mistake. She is an unwanted child and her brother's death makes her more unwanted.

Saru the heroine of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*² was not happy in her childhood. She had only bitter memories of it. Her mother makes her feel guilty of her brother's death. She says

You killed him.

Why did not you die!

Why are you alive ,when he's dead! (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*² page No 191) Growing in unfavorable environments', she grows up as a rebel.

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The novel lands itself to other media also as Jasbir Jain⁴ in his editorial comments rightly observes. For Feminism itself, the written text and social activism are no longer enough in themselves. It needs to interact with all forms of media: newspapers, Journalism Theater and film. In Indian society Gender Discrimination can be seen even today. Male members in the family are given importance. Females feel it and sense of insecurity grows within themselves. Though they are biologically different they are not able to feel the independence in all walks of life. In some families girls are unwanted even today.

The novel delineates the patriarchy internalized by mother. The bias in mothers towards sons is in fact their political unconscious formed in and through a male dominated society. This novel reflects the gender biasing by mothers. Saru could feel as a child that her mother is more fascinated towards her brother. She builds differences with her mother. She cannot tolerate the preferences given to her brother because he is a boy.....

Dhuva and I Dhruva and I did I push him!.

The question sprang at her out of nothing again and again.....did I !
did I ! (The Dark Holds No Terrors² page 72)

The sunlight fell full on his face, making the fair skin almost transparent.
She could not avoid the pang of envy that shot through her.

Don't go out in sun you will get even darker. Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

Will you live with us all your life!

Why not!

You Cannot.

And Dhruv!

He is different. He is a boy. (The Dark Holds No Terrors² Page No 45)

The political unconscious in Indian society is also reflected in the belief that the girl has to leave the parents' house and go to her husband's house. Boy has the right to stay with his parents. This feeling of gender discrimination is seen in the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors².

The novel clearly shows that the mother is biased even in her unconscious. She gives more importance to her son. This deep rooted feeling of inferiority complex developed in Saru.

She cannot get rid of this feeling even when she grows up. She became a rebel. Saru recalls that there was always a puja on Dhruv's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an arti in the evening my birthdays were almost the same----but there was no puja." The Dark Holds No Terrors²page 169/170

Life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruv's death. There are no celebrations at home, her much awaited birthday passes off in silence both at school and at home. Right from the beginning

saru is made to understand that she is inferior to her brother. Saru feels that men enjoy more liberty and freedom in Indian society. When a mother differentiates between her own children for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains. This feeling of insecurity makes a life of a girl more miserable.

The rigidity of do's and don't prescribed by the patriarchal mother makes her grow more wild and defiant later. As a sign of rebellion, Saru takes up medicine as her career. Her mother is not in favour of it. She just wanted to get her married and go to her marital home. The same scenario is seen in many of the Indian homes even today. In the 21st century also parents are not interested to spend money on girl education. They feel if they will give education to a girl it will be a waste because she has to go to another house. But they must know that education is an investment .Dr James Emmanuel Kwegyir Aggrey said "If you educate a boy , you educate an individual but if you educate a girl you educate the whole nation".

Saru seeks her father's support for her admission to the medical college, and her father for the first time is on her side. Saru hates her mother and she is not in talking term with her mother. It shows that she has deep rooted hatred for her mother.

"But she is a girl"

Yes, I' am a girl. But it's more than that I'm not Dhruva.

Is that all I am, a responsibility!.

I can pay either for her marriage or her studies. She chooses to be educated.

(The Dark Holds No Terrors² pg No 144)

Saru marries Manohar. She feels that she has the right to choose her partner. She does not feel it necessary to take her parents' consent. She becomes a successful doctor and she has patients in her own office independent of her father and husband. She does not take any help from the male members related to her in her professional life.

As Sarita observes bitterly! $a+b$ they told us in the mathematics is equal to $b+a$. But here $a+b$ was not definitely equal to $b+a$. It becomes an unbalanced equation. (The Dark Holds No Terror² page No 42).

Her choice for a boy from a lower cast is a sign of her rejecting ways and values her orthodox mother. Saru's mother asks her!

What caste is he!

I do not know.

A Brahmin!

Of course not

Then cruelly.....his father keeps a cycle shop. Oh! So they are low cast people, are they!(The Dark Holds No Terrors² page No96)

After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother had prophesied about her unhappy marital life. Let her know more sorrow that she has given me. She even thinks at one point that she is unhappy and destroyed in her marital life because her mother has cursed her.

In Indian society patriarchal values have long –standing tradition . It has taken generation to form a male dominated political unconscious and it is reflected in religion as well as culture. Certain religious groups embrace gender discrimination as part of then dogma. Attitudes toward gender discrimination can normally be traced back to the roots of certain segments of society. Although gender discrimination is traditionally viewed as a problem normally encountered by females.

Now the question arises! Is it the mindset of the people or the biological differences between Male and Female that females have to face this!

All this moment Saru makes us feel that a gender equal society would be one where the word “gender” does not exist. Where everyone can be themselves without fear and favour.

In this world of globalization even in modern society gender discrimination is a reality seen and felt by women. It is a deep rooted disease which cannot be cured by simple measures. There is a need to change the mindset/political unconscious of the society and women should be brought at par in the society. Female should not have any inferiority complex. A simple complex should be understood if we want to live in a society then both the genders are of equal importance without any one they are not able to extend the family. Then where is the need of gender discrimination as the poet James Kirkup’s⁵ puts it aptly in the poem No Men are Foreign :-

Remember ,we, who take up arms against each other

It is the human earth that we defile

Remember, no men are foreign

And no countries strange

No country can progress if its women are not given their participation or are devalued in any way. There’s absolutely no reason why a girl should be treated as inferior. It has to start right from birth. Urgent steps need to be taken to make parents and society aware of equal importance of girls everywhere.

As per Manu Smrti :- YATRA NARYASTU PUJYANTE, RAMANTE TATRA DEVATA

This also depicts the importance of a woman in the society. Our ancient sages rightly came to the conclusion that God’s dwell in that place where women are worshiped. The high pedestal on which the women are put by the sages shows the awareness in the society in those times about the women being the key factor to turn earth in to heaven in terms of progress and social development.

However there are not simple solutions for problems of unconscious patriarchy takes us to our childhood perhaps all societies where gender discrimination exist need to visit to their childhood to detect the formation and treatment of patriarchal unconsciousness

Notes and References

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