

Suggestive Implementations and Analysis on Gender Discrimination in the Works of Shashi Deshpande

Paramjeet Kaur, Research Scholar, Department of English MRIIRS

Dr. Jayashree Hazarika, Assistant Professor, Department of English MRIIRS

Abstract

A good society is built with people's positive perspectives, modern, advance and high thinking. There should be not any presence of evils like gender discrimination, ignorance, ill treatment, negligence and inequality in family and society. In this paper I wish to raise an issue as gender discrimination which is highly prevailed in most of the families, through the context of Shashi Deshpande's novel named *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Girl should be allotted equal place, treatment, behavior and facility in household. As girl is capable, responsible and dexterous to do any thing in every domain of life more brilliantly. Only need to abandon small and narrow thinking between us and attain positive and prosperous milieu.

Key words- Positive Perspective, Society, Family, Gender Discrimination, Ignorance, Inequality, Ill Treatment, Narrow Thinking, Responsible, Capable

Every being on this earth should be considered as equal or treated with same kind of behavior whether there is a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, every person is a creation of God and so be responsible of having equal place in home as well as in society. But unfortunately when we talk about a girl or a woman, we find that her reputation and existence is nothing. She has been just become a thing whenever you need, use her otherwise ignore her. Some times even after her birth she gets abandon by her own parents. And on a birth of boy child, parents get ready to pour every thing on him what they have. An author and psychologist John Money clarifies the term gender as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy and man, girl or woman". Although a woman is portrayed as Goddess of a human being's birth. And woman have to face suppression, humiliation and brutality by the same humanity. Gender discrimination is prevailed in most of the societies. This is a type of ignorance and illiteracy, we do not understand that without a girl or a woman, a home is not to be called a home. This is an extremely a narrow and small thinking regarding the position and status of woman. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indian woman has been represented as a spineless, wooden creature, who has no feelings or wishes of her own and all of her feelings depend upon the wishes of the parents, husband and others. Shashi Deshpande has explored this evil as gender discrimination with the uniqueness of her writing skill in such a manner that the heroines or the female protagonists of her novels are not become as rebels but they learn to generate in themselves the power to cope with the male – orientation by facing the harsh realities of life. This novel also, like most other novels of Shashi Deshpande, is preoccupied with the sufferings of a woman like inequality, ill treatment, and gender discrimination. The novel represents the various shades of womanhood through that protagonist.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in the novel, and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and

ignored in favor of her brother. She is not given any importance; no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthdays. When her brother drowns, she is blamed for it. Her mother, in particular, always scolds her for being responsible for her son's death: *You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?* (191) Due to her mother's accusation, Saru begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. Dhruva's (Saru's brother) accidental death is the humiliation of Saru. She never has a life of her own after that. The whole family lives in the shadow of sorrow and Saru is never forgiven for her negligence that results in Dhruva's death. Even when her mother has cancer and is about to die, her attitude towards Saru does not change. My objectives are to highlight Saru's depression, her agony, her worries which are thrust upon her by her own family. I analyze from the reading of this saga that in spite of all sufferings and miseries exist in life of Saru, she never gives up and positively handles her life's hurdles. She is bold, confident and courageous. A writer Simone de Beauvoir claims in her ground breaking work *The Second Sex* "One is not born, but rather becomes woman and the social discrimination produces in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature". One thing that hurts Saru the most that her mother's reaction for her. Saru's mother continues to say that she has no daughter. She had only one son and he is dead. Her mother never speaks to her and even the father is totally indifferent. Rejected by her mother, she looks at her father for emotional support, but he does not stand by her. The intense hatred in Saru for the liking shown to her brother by parents makes her think of blotting Dhruva out of the family. The struggle for importance is seen when she thinks: *I must show Baba something, 'anything' to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting in his lap. I must make him ignore Dhruva.* (32)

Saru sees the jubilation over the arrival of her brother Dhruva at the family as a reinforcement of her discrimination. She remembers how her brother was named: *They had named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone.* (152) The son is named after the mythological 'North Star'. An author Madeleine Biardeau comments in her book *The Anthropology of a Civilization* "when the 'North Star' Dhruva appears in the family horizon, Saru becomes an 'asteroid' as a prefigure of women who are treated as the eternal minor". Because of her mother's continuous resentful behavior, Saru puts herself in the dock. The guilt clings to her and haunts her like a ghost. Saru never boldly refutes or denies the charge of murder except in the confession to her father. Dhruva's demise has always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment. Saru has always felt an inner desire to make him the mythological Dhruva, and Dhruva in death, becomes a tantalizing North Star controlling her happiness from afar. Further, her parents never bother about her education, casting in her a desperate feeling of unwantedness. She is totally alienated from the family. *I just didn't exist for her (the mother)... I died long before I left home.* (32) Saru gets completely depressed and disappointed at her parents' irritating behavior. Saru remembers the sense of joyous excitement, which pervaded their house on the occasion of his naming ceremony. Many such scenes are etched in her mind and the Indian view of the girl as a liability and the boy an asset are firmly implanted in her mind. In one of her recapitulations, Saru records her conversation with her mother:

Don't go out in the sun, you'll get 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. (45)

This statement is firmly implanted in Saru's mind paving way for her rebellious attitude in future. In this connection, Saru's mother's attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context.

Through this story Deshpande clarifies that the preference for boys is blatantly acknowledged in most Indian homes. The reasons for such preferences are not difficult to understand. They are inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. It would be too simplistic to say that boys are preferred over girls because of the dowry they bring in at the time of marriage. I think that the reasons are rooted in our tradition-bound society, which demands the mandatory presence of the male child in important rituals. Our patriarchal society also considers only the male offspring as worthy enough to carry on the family line. An author Sarabjit Sandhu observes: "The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one, after all, he is a male child and, therefore, one who will propagate the family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give 'agni' to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in ferment". Mrinal Pande, the noted Hindi writer, presents this side of the story to some extent in her first work in English titled *Daughter's Daughter*, published quite appropriately in the International Year of the Girl Child. It is a loosely woven single narrative starting from when the author/narrator Tinu is about two, and proceeds to document her life through adolescence. There are several incidents mainly related to her annual trips to her maternal grandmother's home, where she realized what it is to be a daughter's daughter, in contrast to the son's offspring. She also describes the great rejoicing at the birth of her brother, unlike the occasion of the arrival of her sister. These experiences are not restricted to any particular caste, region or period but these are the experiences of any Indian girl irrespective of geographical or chronological space.

Saru's mother constant rejection for her daughter cause deep and indelible scars in Saru's mind. Her mother takes no particular interest in her education and personal advancement and snubs her at every given opportunity. I observe that this sense of rejection makes Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. Kate Millet quotes in *Sexual Politics* "Many women do not recognize themselves as discriminated against; no better proof could be found of the totality of their conditioning". The feeling is so intense that on attaining puberty she resentfully thinks, *If you are a woman, I don't want to be one*, (62) detesting the fact that her body functioned in a similar manner as that of her mother's. Saru is also filled with a sense of shame at her monthly ordeal, praying desperately for a miracle to put an end to it. She resents the traditional practice in her orthodox home where she is treated like a pariah during those three days when she is made to sleep on a straw mat with a special cup and plate by her side in which she is served from a distance as her touch would mean pollution. According to my interpretation, the novel highlights an idea that the new generation is passing through a transitional period where the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Herein lies the conflict between the culture of the

colonizer, the western and that of the colonized, the eastern; the conflict between Saru and her mother thus represents the clash between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. As Kate Millet writes “We are women. We are a subject people who have inherited an alien culture”.

Saru grows up and acquires education against her mother’s will. As an educated young lady, her sense of reasoning and questioning develops. As she grows up, resentment and hatred drive her to leave home and obsessively seek success in medical college. There she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents’ wishes. Her mother being an old, traditional, orthodox woman, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste.

What caste is he?

I don’t know.

A Brahmin?

Of course not.

Then, cruelly ... his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they? (96)

Saru revolts against her parents and runs away to get married to a person of her choice. As she always feels insecure in her parents’ home, her marriage to Manu is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in her life. She succeeds and emerges as a successful, well-known and reputed doctor. At the same time, her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. Now the situation undergoes a change. According to her husband, the lawmaker of the Indian orthodox culture, a woman can never be a decision maker. An American translator Wendy Doniger expresses in *The Laws of Manu* “A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her house”. When Saru expresses her desire to study medicine, her mother cannot sanction her desire to go to Mumbai and stay in a hostel. Her argument is that *Saru is a girl*(144) Saru resolves to be a doctor, hoping that a particular career could be *the key that would unlock the door out of this life.* (126)

In the next phase of Saru’s life, one finds her a successful career woman enjoying the recognition of her individual ‘identity’. This is the woman’s heritage of the colonizer’s culture. Shashi Deshpande meanwhile elaborates how emancipation and success for a woman in the patriarchal Indian society can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness. The social acceptance and recognition she gains as a doctor and the demands on her time leave a wedge in her relationship with Manu. Saru feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment, which she had once developed. As for Manu, his inflated ego bursts as he is forced to accept his wife as his equal. He does not come up to the societal expectations that a male should have a job and high income. A traditional woman walks a few feet behind her husband. The male is her superior in educational qualification as well.

If he is an M.A., she should be a B.A. Her stature should be less than that of her husband and her salary must not exceed his... They will tell you about economic independence and an independent identity. Forget the words. If Draupadi had been economically independent, if Sita had independent identity, you think their stories would have been different? No, there are things that have been voluntarily surrendered, consciously abandoned because that is the only way to survive. (137)

Even when Boozie, who is mentioned as an extraordinary handsome, debonair and efficient doctor, deliberately displays his affection for her in public before the staring eyes of all the invitees to the inauguration of her consulting room, Saru feels more resentful towards her husband than to him.

Saru wants to live a contented and peaceful life. I find that throughout from her childhood to her married life, she bears a lot, suffers a lot. Sometimes she repents on herself of being a girl. She aspires nothing in life except love and affection from her parents. An editor Kamini Dinesh comments: "In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* there are other men but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to Saru the disillusioning realization that there can be no happiness or fulfillment in these relationships. There cannot be and 'escape route' from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself". The last phase of Sarita's life brings her face to face with her own self. As Shashi Deshpande always tries her heroines to meet with self realization, self confidence and respect. They do not need to be depressed or repented over being a woman herself. In feminist terms, Saru's return to her parental home could be interpreted as what Kristeva calls "the refusal of the temporal order and the speech for a landscape that would accommodate their need". At this juncture of life, Saru hears the news of her mother's death and goes back to her parents' home, though emotionless. Though she comes back a totally changed woman, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. Under such circumstances, Saru feels that if it had been an arranged marriage, she would have got support from her parents. But now she suffers from both: suffering as well as guilt consciousness. These feelings remind her of the fate of one of her friends:

If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of the girl, the sisters of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despair nor shame. For the failure had not been hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl. (199)

Acute confusion prevails upon her. She feels that she has done injustice to mother, husband, children and everybody else. The wheel finally comes full circle. Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with the tiny hope of resettlement. The psychology of a woman placed in such a situation is given a physical revelation. In the quiet atmosphere of her old father's company Sarita reflects on the events of her life. She recalls her stultifying small town childhood, her domineering mother, her marriage to the charismatic young poet Manohar (Manu). She thinks how Manu had turned vicious when he realized his career was going nowhere and that his wife had overtaken him professionally. She also ponders over her children's attitude towards her. As she struggles with her emotions and anxieties, Sarita gradually realizes that there is more to life than dependence on marriage, parents and other such institutions- and she resolves to use her new found truths to make a better life for herself. I can say *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a tremendously powerful portrayal of one woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs.

The theme of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is not constructed for highlighting only the feminist's point of view but it consists of the comprehensive, intensive and wide range of opinion and idea of today's society where evils as gender discrimination, inequality, male dominance, and ill treatment with a girl and above all to suppress and destroy the woman's power and aspirations, have mostly prevailed. We often spread the words and advise to others, as Beti Bachao but our selves not follow that slogan, that thinking. I would like to emphasize that gender discrimination should be controlled and this type of inferior perspective should be abandoned. Only need to adapt a new and prospers thinking. A good society and its culture can be evolved only after to bring a progressive change in our thinking patterns and by despising the rigidity of old and futile rules and traditions. Simone De Beauvoir asserts in *Second Sex* "No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between male and the eunuch that is called feminine". In this story the psychological approaches that Sarita achieves, is considered to be a psychoanalytic search on gender rather than sociological ones. Shashi Deshpande has elaborated the feminist's point of view and expressed the suffering, melancholy, alienation, and disintegration, turbulence which woman as a daughter and mother endures. Saru herself has succeeded to overpower all problems and difficulties that come in her life and learn to live a peaceful and happy life in spite of having her conflicting identities of 'neglected' daughter, 'abandoned' wife, and 'grieving' mother. A girl can do anything, which a boy perhaps cannot do. Some illiterate people opine that what we will do of a daughter, she will go next home one day and have to done great expenses on dowry so she should be neglected or ignored. But today, time has been changed. This is very immature thinking and by following this we cannot develop a prosperous and ideal family structure as well as society. Instead we should encourage a girl to get success and fame in life so that gender discrimination can be entirely ended. For prosperity and growth of whole humanity the two important pillars, one is boy and second is girl, should be given equal rights, facilities, opportunities, respect and regard in every sphere of life.

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