

**Feminine Sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's
*The Dark Holds No Terrors***

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Abstract

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 favour of her brother. She is not given any importance - no parental love is shown upon her even on her birthdays. Her brother's birthdays, however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it. Feminine sensibility is an adorable quality in literature. Almost all the writers in India express and expose this quality in their writings. The renowned novelist Sashi Deshpande is no exception in portraying this aspect in her norms. This paper explores the aspect in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

Introduction

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 favour of her brother. She is not given any importance: no parental love is showed upon her even on her birthdays. Her brother's birthdays, however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, 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? (P.173.) Due to her Mother's accusation, Saru begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. It is much later, after rethinking and pondering over the event, after her mother's death, that she realizes the accidental nature of her brother's death.

Saru grows up and acquires education against her Mother's will. As an educated young lady, her sense of reasoning and questioning develops. She can, no more, tolerate inequality between brother and sister. She remembers how her brother was named.

They had named him Dhurva I can remember, even how vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone... (P. 152)

The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one after all, he is made 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 the dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in ferment. The first thought, when saru hears the news of her mother’s death, is “who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhurva had been seven when he died.” (P.17.)

When Dhurva was alive, her mother’s discrimination between the two had been very apparent to Sarita. 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 parent’s 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. (P.87.)

Saru revolts against her parents and runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. As she always feels insecure in her parent’s home, her marriage to Manu is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in life. He is the ideal romantic hero who had come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless existence and she is hungry for love.

Marital life is nothing but a queer combination of several forces acting upon two human beings in different capacities to fulfil the marital ambition and play a vital role in the society. The given roles of these two human beings do undergo a change both at the functional and psychological levels. This is precisely what happens to Saru when with her economic independence, reinforced with the fact that she earns more than Manu, she still feels stripped of her independence by virtue of being assigned to the job of a house wife, i.e., bringing up children and subserving the interest of her husband. Tired of both the duties, indoors and outdoors, she wants to leave the latter one: “Manu, I want to stop working I want to give it all up.... My practice, the hospital, everything”. But Manu does not want her to leave her job as they cannot maintain the same standard with only his income: “on my salary? Come on, Saru, don’t be silly, you know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that? (P.73.)

This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force in balancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relations. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable.

At this juncture of life, Saru hears the News of her mother's death and goes back to her parent's home, though emotionless. She does not feel at home at her parent's place where once she was born and brought up. Everything looks strange to her in spite of the fact that there is no change in the setting: "Inside here, though, there were no changes. The same seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she played hopscotch as a child. The yard was bare as always." (P.11.)

Though she comes back to totally changed women, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. The absence of affability in the house sets her pendulum rolling between the two houses: "As she drinks her tea... too sweet and strong... he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back?" (P.14.)

She cannot say all that she wants to. All this happens due largely to a guilt consciousness that she has developed: "there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood" (The Dark Holds No Terror P. 198.)

The wheel finally comes full circle. Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. The psychology of a woman placed in such a situation is given a physical revelation. She receives a letter from Manu of his arrival. The bitter emotions strengthen further. It is not the scorn for her husband and a sense of vengeance that gathers storm, but her sense of guilt that sweeps her off her feet. She reacts to every situation and becomes sensitive to every sound, all the time conscious of Manu reaching and knocking at the door. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes, perhaps believing that after being tired of knocking.

Manu would depart. At the same time, she waits for someone to come and support her: "if only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another's hands." (P.88.)

Works Cited

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