

**FROM ENTRAPMENT TO ENHANCEMENT: JOURNEY OF SARU
IN SHASHI DESPANDE’S *THAT DARK HOLDS NO TERROR***

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*“Being mother, daughter, and wife is important for a woman
but that is not the be all and end all of her existence”.*

- From a personal Interview of Shashi Deshpande with Rashmi Sahi.

Shashi Deshpande’s *That Dark holds No Terror* represents the crux of a very crucial and closer of the relationship that of between mother and daughter. The fear, the panic, the suffocation and the helplessness is all therein this novel and the thought of one’s own self disowning one’s own mother is the most peculiar theme which initiates the central plot of the novel *That Dark holds No Terror*. The mother – daughter relationship has always occupied an important place in Deshpande’s novels, and she has rendered more human qualities to her instead of valorizing the image of mother as goddess.

Shashi Deshpande has delved into the problem of every woman in this hypocritical society where she is rendered a second grade position but is expected to be the lynch pin of the family. This double edgedness plays havoc on her psyche. She has portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the surrounding especially the mother in *That Dark holds No Terror*.

In this Novel, the mother –daughter relationship is based on gender – bias and lovelessness. *That Dark holds No Terror* exhibits the trauma of a girl – child who has suffered bullying and curtailment of activity by her mother, but whom, nonetheless, wants to assert her identity as an autonomous individual in life. This girl- child Saru grows up as a victim of her mother’s sexist and gender – based bias; which reduces her later life into a desperate struggle to overcome the initial victimization, to justify her decisions to her mother who no longer acknowledges her as a daughter, and to find out a new meaning to her life which could enable her to develop and nurture a balanced perspective towards her diversified roles as a mother, as a wife, and as a career woman.

Deshpande has taken up the strange mother - daughter relationship as a significant theme in the novel, *That Dark holds No Terror*: the mother, who has inculcated the norms of a closed – minded conservative society in which a woman is morally bound to prefer a son; and the

daughter, who is yet to come to terms to her mother's diktats about her secondary status in the family.

Mothers share a very strange and complex relationship with their daughters. The mother can be over affectionate towards her daughter. But she can also be hostile towards her daughter and treat her with a sense of Freudian rivalry. The societal environment, which has molded the psyche of the mother as a woman, also makes the young uninitiated girl – child a special object of the mother's persecution. Society treats the male inspiring as an ultimate panacea to all problems, but the girl – child as an unwanted burden in the family. The plentitude, warmth and value given to a male child are denied to the girl, which makes her either depressed or rebellious. If this negative and destructive social is not countered by the affection and loving care of her mother, the daughter is condemned to a life, bitterness and she is made to lose right of the implacable grandeur of life.

That Dark holds No Terror presents the emotional undulations of the complicated mother – daughter relationship, the balance beauty of which is so vital for the development of a healthy woman. Even as a child, the protagonist of the novel Saru is aware of her mother's preference for her brother Dhruva. Reminiscent of her adolescence, in order to understand her present, Saru recollects that there was “always a Pooja on Dhruva's birthday, a festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same – but there was no Pooja” (Deshpande, 168-169). Her mother's non-chalant attitude makes Saru believe that her birth was a terrible experience for her mother. After Dhruva's death the family takes up a perpetual morning and there are no celebrations. Saru particularly remembers her fifteenth birthday, as on this occasion she had received her first gift – a pair of earrings, from her friend Smita. She wears these earrings secretly, only when she was away from home (169), as she knew that this secrete gift would not be approved of. By making a secrete of this most insignificant event she contrives to give herself some importance. However she spurns the gift given to her on the same occasion by her mother, because she thinks that it was given under obligations and her feelings were not important to her mother.

Saru's experiences at home have made her discover inferiority in herself as a fixed and preordained essence. Her relationship with her mother has enclosed and dominated her. In her adolescence she is treated by her mother as an adult rival. Her mother means to show that she still has the upper hand and the daughter's vivacity or curiosity, outside her domain, shall not be tolerated.

Simone de Beauvoir had made this basic contradiction between mother and daughter further clear, when she remarks, “the mother likes to rule alone over her feminine Universe; she wants to be unique, irreplaceable – she remarks, “the mother likes to rule alone over her feminine universe; she scolds her daughter severely if, after two days' absence, she finds the house in disorder; but she is filled with anger and fear is she finds that the family goes on perfectly well without her. She cannot bear to have her daughter become really her double, a substitute for herself (Beuviar, 229 -30).

Saru's mother never forgives her daughter for Dhruva's dean. In her grief she is not able to comprehend her daughter's bewilderment and sense of being lost. Saru had also lost her kid brother and needed emotional support. Yet all blame is put on her and she is not allowed to have any escape from this sense of guilt, which makes her two venerate and insecure in her relationships with others consequently this guilt over powers her psyche and does not allow her to breathe freely. The guilt suffocates her, while organizing her children's birthdays, while deliberating over her admission to a medical college, while taking to Madhav, and it near allows

her to mourn for her dead brother and try to overcome her loss. She is made to live with the guilt that she was the murderer. (114)

Even outside the context of this experience, Saru has to put up with gender – based discrimination so typically common to the Indian – middle class. The Society, which has imposed unjust gender moves, is not questioned by her at any step. She has been taught to rear a girl in a particular fashion and she does in with implicit faith in that teaching. Being herself a victim of social conditioning she is unable to perceive the cruelty which she is perpetuating. Saru is made to realize that being a girl she is inferior to her brother, Dhruva in every way.

In the Collective Indian Psyche, the girl – Child is unchangeable slotted. In *That Dark Holds no Terror* Saru's buoyancy and gregariousness is gradually suffocated by her mother's constant criticism and fault finding. She is made to feel ugly and undesirable. Saru's mother thinks that physical beauty is a precondition of worldly success for a girl and is constantly critical of her daughter's appearance, "I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying – you will never be good looking. You are too dark, for that (61). As a girl grows up, she is made to feel different and conscious about revealing her femininity is slowly and deliberately encouraged in the child, till she cries out in horror. "If you're woman, I don't want to be one" (63).

Saru's defiance towards her mother is a strange mingling of her careerist ambitions and traditional options which she often cherishes in her dreams. She wants to be a self reliant person, but at the same time, she dreams of superior conquering male who will give her the meaning of her life. In her imagination Saru seeks pleasure in total subordination to the man of her dreams. "Sometimes I worked with him, for him, subordinating myself so completely to him, that I was nothing without him". (53).

Even though in her psyche Saru has not been to free herself from the sullyng tradition of which her mother is a symbol, in her real life, her longing for emancipation in a more contemporary sense makes her a realist. Her mother's attitude has given rise not only to a remove but also to a revolt. The mere presence of her mother under the same roof makes her a culprit and she realizes that in order not to be like her, she has to acquire a medical degree. "To get married and end up doing just what your mother did seemed to me not only terrible but demandable" (140). The image of a lady, doctor, seen in her childhood becomes a source of inspiration for her and she aspires for the similar detachment and superiority. However, she is forced to seek her father's support for her admission to the medical college. Her father, for the first time, is decisively on her side. Although Saru is not able to make out whether his was the fight for her or against her and feels that she has been used as a weapon, yet for the first time in her life, she is close to fulfill her ambition. Her total refusal to talk to her mother projects the hatred for her mother. "... there was a pain in my chest, my throat ached intolerably, there was a buzzing in my ears, a blur in front of my eyes. I hated her. I wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer". (142) for her mother she remains to be a responsibility which cannot be evaded as she is a girl and hence dowry to get married.

Saru emerges as a sad yet Vivacious girl on account of the thinly intricate web of her inner landscape. She is a baffled child, desperately seeking the assurance of her parents, particularly of her mother. Lost in the labyrinthine complexity of her emotions she feels shattered and humiliated when the parents fail to show any sympathy towards her. Reticent and flabbergasted, bit by bit she enacts a barrier of hostile silence around her. The shadows of her unhappy relationship with her mother darken her adolescence her early youth and even her first love.

Saru is not defiant, Beneath the façade of her wanton defiance lies a lonely, trembling and insecure girl, who wants to be accepted, loved and cherished by someone, a lonely trembling and insecure girl who had always been spurned and refused by her mother. Saru's love for Manohar is also tinged with this feeling of insecurity like her mother's Saru marries Manohar against her parents' wish. She does not feel any remorse at this separation, as mentally she had withdrawn into her own shell.

Saru ultimately realizes that marriage is not a guarantee of happy fulfillment. Marriage also idealizes female martyrdom. She realizes it in her own relationship with her husband, Manohar. Manohar cannot tolerate that his wife enjoys better social prestige and this attitude gradually destroys their marriage. The male dominated Indian Society does not allow tolerance for a better woman even within a marriage. It is of course duplicated at work place and in other societal relationships without fail.

Manu's sense of inferiority changes him into a sadist who gets pleasure by insulting his wife with sheer physical violence. He attacks his wife like an animal, hurting her with brutal cruelty. Saru does not, and infact, cannot oppose it initially. Her early relationship with her mother had molded her psyche to accept drudgery and self negation as norms of routine existence and to threat herself as an undesirable person in a sub-conscious manner. Even when the protests against it, it results in an escape to her father. She derives out her dissatisfaction and her preference for futile sufferings and internationalizes the truth that the struggle itself towards the heights towards a more constructive hold on life is enough to fill a person's heart. She also realizes that she has to fight out the darkness herself and that the parental home cannot be a refuge. Nobody else can help her out in order to live without fear she will have to look into the face of reality and grapple with it alone.

In Saru we find a spontaneous surge life at this stage. She wanted to escape from the narrow and stifling domestic life as a child, by repudiating her mother's authority, which had been made uglier and more violent as she had lost prestige. Saru wishes not to be like her mother, while adoring women who have escaped from feminine servitude. Her dreams are realized, for a brief span, in her marriage, but the social expectations and the traditional male psyche husband shatter them again to overcome her fears and to regain a sensible life she has to travel through the dark and horrifying bylances of her memory, she has to relive her life with her mother, face and dissect not only the pain and suffering which she must have unknowingly create for her mother by excluding her from her own life. After distancing herself from her family, Saru realizes that one has to grow up to know that the dark holds no terror, that the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us, and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul" (85) Saru finally accepts her loneliness and tries to transcend it.

The denouncement of *That Dark Holds no Terror* tells us that the women should not only be independent, but they should also believe in their strength. It is only when her husband begins to stifle her personality, that Saru realizes that the freedom from her own mother, her own childhood is not a guarantee to an emancipated existence. A woman has to put these varied experience into a proper perspective and maintain her individuality, only then she can realize a true selfhood.

"My life is my own – somehow, she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been puppet, it is because I made myself one. I have been

clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of providing my mother right” (220)

That Dark Holds no Terror presents the deeply complex and emotional relationship of a daughter with her mother. The flash-back technique of the novel enables Saru to rummage through those past incidents which define the mode of the sensitive mother-daughter in an ordinary middle class family. The novel has taken up other issues too, but the bold and sensitive illustrations of the mother – daughter relationship is still new in the Indian English fiction. Saru’s reassessment of her own relationship with her mother enables her to reidentify her own self and come to terms with the fact that a woman should not necessarily be a paragon of all virtues – this awareness equips her with a better confidence to face the rest of the problems of her life boldly.

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(Page numbers to this novel are incorporated in the text of the essay without repeating the title)

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