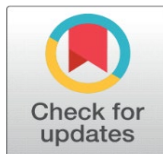


# GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR

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## ABSTRACT

The Dark Holds No Terror by Shashi Deshpande this novel entitled Gender Discrimination and how it evolves it in the novel 'Dark Holds No Terror'. Gender discrimination is when someone is treated unequally or disadvantageously based on their gender but not necessarily in a sexual nature. The female character too finds it difficult to adjust with modern society. The patriarchy changed modern life style and empowerment of women made the men character feel inferior to women characters. Sarita, the female protagonist of the novel, is seen as strong compared to her husband Manu. Her economic independence and her position as a well-established doctor made her husband feel inferior. Being the head of the family, Manu wants to have control over his wife Sarita, unconsciously develops a strange behaviour which leads to sexual sadism. Deshpande 's men characters are weak compared to her female protagonists. The Dark Holds No Terror depicts the women's world in an authentic, realistic and credible manner. This research paper highlights the fact that it is not the circumstances that contribute to the negation of women 's rights; but the fact is that it is their women folk who polarise their dig at the emancipation of women.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Patriarchy, Empowerment, Gender Discrimination, Self-Actualization



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights Gender Discrimination and how it evolves it in the novel Dark Holds No Terror. Gender discrimination is when someone is treated unequally or disadvantageously based on their gender but not necessarily in a sexual nature. This includes discrimination based on sex, gender identity, or gender expression. Gender discrimination is often rooted in preconceived, false societal and personal notions about what gender is, how gender should look, or how gender is performed. Sexism does harm by limiting the way people express and identify themselves. It also isolates members of our community who do not conform to historical, limited and traditional gender perspectives.

In ancient scriptures, a woman was made from a man's rib. It is known that women are born of men. With it came the miserable situation of women. Women should be ideal wives, mothers and excellent housewives, playing different roles in the family. As wife and mother, a woman renders her service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance. A woman should always discharge an excessive patience and series of adjustments in her life devotedly and obediently. Her individual self-has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life.

In "The Dark Holds No Terror"(1980) the protagonist Sarita's sense of reasoning and questioning develops; Sarita feels she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her brother Dhruva. She feels jealous when her brother Dhruva gets all the care and attention from his parents. Sarita's mother instilled a sense of insecurity in her daughter, who sees girls as a burden and boys as assets. Shashi Deshpande exposes traditional patriarchal ways. Even the mother

was disheartened when she gave birth to a girl. Even mothers get frustrated when they give birth to girls. Parents believe that boys will take care of their children when their parents are old, while girls expect to get a dowry and leave their parents when they marry. Likewise, Sarita was rejected by her parents at every opportunity.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as an eminent writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Deshpande's novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being part of them. Shashi Deshpande uses this point of view of the current social reality experienced by women. To present the world of mothers, daughters, and wives is to indirectly present the relationship between men and women among fathers, sons, and husbands, as well as the relationship between women themselves. The word which is associated with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman is self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering.

Shashi Deshpande represents Sarita as an embryonic woman of the present industrial age, who yearns to achieve individuality and the real self-identity without changing the cultural and traditional conventions of the society. Sarita, the central character of *The Dark Hold No Terror* Sarita is humble and modest, very sensitive but lacks self-confidence. As a middle-class woman, she aspires to break free from rigid traditional norms and become an anti-matriarch, yearning for a new environment in which her mother cannot impose her. She hates her parents' home, and her quests lead her to discover the hidden powers of humanity that make life enjoyable and possible. Sarita goes through, faces reality, and finally realizes that the dark no longer has any fear for her. She survives in a male-dominated world with no easy way out for women. She neither surrenders nor escapes from the problems but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own dependence. Sarita as a child on the odd occasion speaks to her father and to Dhruva, her brother. Her father used to take Dhruva out for a ride. He used to sit on the small seat specially fixed on the bar of the cycle giving rise to the impression that "daughters are their mother's business" (105).

Sarita has always been considered a burden to be relieved, or a problem to be solved, or a responsibility to be dispensed with. As a typical Indian mother, she instilled the roots of depression in her daughter. Giving birth to a girl is considered a bad omen. Sarita's mother doesn't think Sarita is her daughter and explains that Sarita was born in a heavy rain. Sarita recalls her depression: Birthdays were not such a big day as they are now; birthdays are now. But having one, the excitement of being the center of attraction never faded away. Although "I was born" is always fascinating. But of my birth, my mother had said to me once... It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible. And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains. (169)

Rain is considered an auspicious omen. People have always believed that rain will bring new hope, new life and new future. Here, when the mother says that it's raining terribly it suggests that her fixed attitude toward the girl is an ominous sign, and she's ready to equate it with the rain. Her mother's distaste for Sarita and preference for her brother Dhruva is clearly expressed in her actions. This created a gap between mother and daughter, forcing Sarita down a path of rebellion. This discrimination is so deeply imprinted in the mind of Sarita and all her future actions end up stained. Her brother Dhruva's birthday was celebrated with a puja. Birthdays and other religious rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp while her birthdays are scarcely acknowledged. This inequality of treatment makes her think that her birthday was just something to upset her mother. Many of these scenes were imprinted in her mind, and the Indian view of girls as burdens and boys as assets was firmly planted in Sarita's mind.

However, Ragini Ramachandra feels that this aspect of the story is not true. Ragini Ramachandra in *Rev. of The Dark Holds No Terrors*. *The Literary Criterion*, (1986) asserts, The portrayal of Sarita's mother adoring her son while ignoring her daughter seems like a weak point in the story. It seems rather inconceivable that a person who accepts a mother's preference for her child should live and die with a curse for her daughter, especially in the Indian context, the mother monster seems to serve as a rallying point for the novelist to hold her ideas together. Hence the nagging feeling that the book has an axe to grind (120) the reason for this preference is not hard to understand. They are inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. It would be simplistic to say that boys were more popular than girls because of the dowries they brought with them when they married. The reason is rooted in our tradition-bound society that requires the mandatory presence of boys to be important in rituals. Our patriarchal society also believes that only male offspring are eligible to carry on the family line.

As Sarabjit Sandhu in *The Dark Holds No Terrors Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (1991) observes, the mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one, 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 dead parents would otherwise wander in ferment (20). Sarita finds her mother's partiality towards her brother Dhruva and her indifferent attitude towards her a disgrace because

they were invalidating her survival as a human being in the family. She also remembers the sense of enthusiasm which pervaded their house on the occasion of his naming ceremony.

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 that I held in my hands ... these are the only tangible memories that remain. (168)

Mother, the embodiment of love and affection only makes the girl darker. Sarita found no comfort from her mother, who was always tortured and ill- treatment. For any girl, a mother-child relationship should be enjoyable. For Sarita, it was brutal. Fear, panic, and helplessness were rife in her life, and the idea of self-denying her own mother was the problem. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the mother-daughter relationship is based on gender-bias and lovelessness. Sarita's mother was the dominating character. Sarita is a girl and she is dark. Her mother doesn't like Sarita first because she's a girl and second because she's dark. In Indian tradition, dark-skinned girls are not valued in marriage. If a girl is dark the parents should give more dowries. Sarita's mother restricts her not to be exposed to the sun.

Sarita was disturbed and alienated by her mother's strong preference for her brother. The partiality of her parents had an overwhelming effect on Sarita. She has become rebellious. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother thinks she's guilty. She points out, "You killed your brother" (146). Premila Paul in "*The Dark Holds No Terror*" a Women's Search for Refuge Indian Women Novelists 1997 asserts, "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment" (67).

Further, she believes Sarita is their responsibility and they can never escape it. Later, when her mother lost her argument with Sarita, she becomes Hysterical and starts accusing her of her brother's death. '.... She lets him drown'.... 'She killed him'. This allegation hurts the tender heart of Sarita who keeps on saying, "I didn't truly I didn't. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn't. And I ran. Yes, I ran way, I admit that. But I didn't kill him (46).

At every given opportunity Sarita's mother snubs her. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Sarita's mind with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. Shashi Deshpande clearly highlights the gender discrimination by parents towards their own daughters. Deshpande effectively conveys the patriarchal system in our society and parents' desire for boys. Denying her parents love makes Sarita a victim of her indifference. Sarita betrayed her mother's education. Sarita goes to Mumbai to study medicine, against her mother's objections. Fortunately, her father encouraged her. Sarita's mother doesn't understand the importance of girl's education. She hesitantly utters, "But she's a girl... And don't forget medicine or no medicine, Doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both?" (144).

Next, she rebelled and married a man who was not of her caste. When Sarita decides to marry Manu, her antagonism with her mother comes to a head. Her selection of boys from lower castes shows her rejection of the traditional ways and values upheld by orthodox mothers. She recalls a conversation with her mother when she confronted her plans to marry Manu.

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? (96)

Her mother disapproved of the marriage as Manu belongs to a lower caste, bringing Sarita's life back to the barriers created by tradition. After her marriage, Sarita is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, "Let her know more sorrow that she has given me" (197). At one point Sarita thought her married life was "unhappy and ruined" because her mother cursed her. Problems between Sarita and Manu start to arise when she is admitted as a doctor. Her financial independence makes Manu feel very insecure and it casts a shadow over their married life. Her success hurt his self-esteem, he felt inferior, and this inferiority made his behaviour cruel. While he is normal by day, by night he turns into a treacherous rapist and tries to assert his manliness by sexually assaulting Sarita. She is ready to sacrifice her lucrative career. Sarita gathers up all her courage to tell Manu "I want to stop working. I want to give it all up.... My practice, the hospital, everything" (79). Manu disagrees with the idea of Sarita leaving. When Manu asked her to continue her duties, Sarita felt it was "absolutely necessary" to keep them together. The situation of an Indian woman

is to satisfy a man, her husband both physically and financially. She felt that this woman should not be economically superior, and at the same time, he also needed money to spend.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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