

# Dearth of Right Understanding Prompts Disharmony in Relationships: A Critical Analyses from the Context of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds no Terrors*

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

It is generally acknowledged that, human kind makes every effort for continuous happiness and prosperity. But, 'are we happy?', it is a million-dollar question. Most of the time, we fail in maintaining our relationships, thus paving way to disharmony. This disharmony leads to unhappiness and hinders the professional as well as personal growth and treacherous of all, creates inner conflict. The disharmony in relationships of mother and daughter, father and daughter, husband and wife are studied in the context of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds no Terrors* in this paper and also highlights how right understanding and natural acceptance of an individual could bring harmony in the life which in turn reflects mutual happiness.

*Keywords:* Disharmony; natural acceptance; relationship; prosperity; right understanding.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the existence of mankind, man is guided by certain values and ethics. As the time

moved on, there is a visible advancement in the living standards of human kind. Eventually, the fields of medicine, technology, science and education progressed. This advancement has

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created massive boundaries among humans. Man, who was able to experience peace, solace and happiness in the relationships, started to crumple in maintaining the relationships. Man has many times failed to balance the materialistic pleasures and emotional fulfillments.

It is an acknowledged fact that the conduct of the human being is based on his/her education. However, the society gives many glimpses of awful conduct of the individuals which are terrible, despite the fact of being well educated. So, is education the only factor of the right behavior of the individual? In fact, there are many parameters on which the human behavior depends on home environment, surroundings, situations, circumstances, physical facilities, prosperity, right understanding, natural acceptance etc.

Every individual craves for happiness, happiness from within. If one has to experience this inner happiness, he or she should start self-exploration. In the process of self-exploration, one should start with right understanding. Man should not fall a prey to desire, thought, jealousy, ego, money, expectation which lead to the disharmony. If man is led by these, co-existence of self and body cannot be achieved. When there is no harmony at the individual level, harmony in relationship fails. Eventually this disharmony of the individual affects the harmony of the family, society and the world.

This paper discusses how the lack of right understanding and natural acceptance has created a dearth in relationships in the context of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Each character in the novel, the mother, the father, the husband and the protagonist Saru are affected because of their preconditioning. One has the responsibility and commitment towards mutual fulfillment in the relationships, and this is rarely found in the novel. A detailed study on the relationship between mother and daughter, daughter and father, wife and husband has been made in this paper.

## 2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, a novel by Shashi Deshpande, is the story of Sarita who is well-educated and economically independent. It is the story of Sarita's relationship with her parents, her husband and her excruciating search for herself.

The novel presents Saru's childhood and her trauma of being an unloved child. Anandlakshmi [1] in *The Female Child in a Family Setting* states that a woman's status is elevated when she gives birth to a son and establishes an intense symbiotic bond. Saru's earliest memories are those which highlighted the discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother. Saru has a chance to appraise her relationship with her dead mother, her dead brother, her husband and her children during her stay at her parents' house.

The novel discusses the unconcealed gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters. Bhatnagar [2] opines that a girl child is naturally trained to admit the submission and silence in this male dominated society and that gender discrimination unfortunately exists in the society. Deshpande also effectively conveys the longing by parents for a male child, emphasizing on the Indian view of the girl as a liability and the boy an asset. Saru often wonders if her birth was a cause of displeasure to her mother. In her reminiscence, she recalls the sense of joyous excitement that pervaded the house on the occasion of his naming ceremony. She also recalls that her brother's birthdays were celebrated with great joy and pomp, by performing a Puja in the evenings.

Saru's mother's marked preference for her brother creates a sense of alienation, rootlessness and insecurity. She does not demonstrate any interest in Saru's education and personal advancement is taken by her mother and she constantly throws a cold shoulder at Saru in every context. She continuously reminds Saru of her dark complexion and suggests her not to step into the sun lest it should worsen her colour, which in turn would be difficult for them to get Saru married. When Saru responds that she doesn't want to get married, her mother makes severe remarks that she cannot stay with them all her life unlike Dhruva, 'who is a boy', such remarks as these, are firmly implanted in Saru's mind which resulted in her rebellious attitude later in life.

One of Saru's most important and recurrent memories is Dhruva's drowning in the pond. She is persistently haunted by the thought that she is responsible for her brother's death as she has remained as a silent spectator to the incident. She does not deny the charge when her mother accuses her of murdering her brother. Premila Paul observes that Saru's mother points out

Saru's intentions while accusing her of murdering Dhruva. Premila Paul [3] articulates that Saru always had a subconscious desire of the demise of Dhruva and a slight differentiation is there between her wish and fulfillment. The height of the provoked sibling jealousy, the death of Dhruva being the subconscious desire of Saru, is the upshot of her mother's blatant favoritism and preference for the boy child.

Things become infinitely worse after the death of Dhruva. Saru's mother interest in living after her son's death and her constant yearning for her dead son and rejection of her daughter cause deep and indelible scars in Saru's mind. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the mind of the adolescent Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. Lack of support and understanding from her mother, makes Saru develop an aversion for traditional practices in the crucial years of puberty and adolescence. Usha Bande [4] notifies that Saru is enraged by the treacherous words uttered by her mother and the feelings of disgust and distress are implanted in the young mind of Sarita. Her psychological insecurity finds release in two ways – one through constant and recurrent dreams and the other through acts of defiance.

Saru rebels against her mother by going to Bombay to study medicine and then by marrying a man outside her caste. In fact, she takes a vicious pleasure in purposely going against her mother's rigid conservatism. This is evident in her conversation with her mother, when she confronts her mother with the intention of marrying Manu.

Saru, thus, reminiscent her childhood days of trauma and her relationship with her mother as an unloved child.

### **3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER AND DAUGHTER**

While Saru's relationship with her mother resulted in the psychological insecurity, her relationship with her father, especially during her childhood, is equally unsatisfactory. As aforementioned, Dhruva's birthdays and other religious rituals related to him are celebrated with much pomp and are given top priority. On the other hand, Saru's birthdays are barely acknowledged by her parents. Dhruva used to have long conversations with his father and gets all the attention and father's care. Saru's father would take Dhruva out for rides and Dhruva

would sit on the small seat specially fixed on the bar of the bike. Saru tries to get the attention of her father and is successful only to some extent.

Saru's father is a silent spectator in the family drama particularly towards the disharmony between his wife and daughter. He has never uttered even a single word against the preference shown by his wife towards Dhruva. He has neither showed his concern nor given any attention towards his daughter as he thought a daughter is her mother's business. However, with his support Saru could study medicine in Bombay despite the defiance of her mother.

After fifteen years Saru comes to her father's home, and does not feel at home. At times, she regrets her visit as she gets a cold reception. Aswathi [5] rightly observes that Saru returned to her home with agonizing self and she has always been a baffled prisoner of her own fears and self-virtue. Even though she was born and brought up there, everything looks strange despite the fact that nothing has been changed. Her father sounds strange as 'an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest'. Saru wanted to share everything with her father regarding the disharmony in her marriage life and expects sympathy from him. Nevertheless, she could not do so due to the guilt consciousness that she has developed.

Tiwari [6] is right when he articulates that Saru is in name a liberated woman, but if observed one can find that she is a humiliated wife and a person who cannot break up her marriage. Initially Saru wanted to seek advice from her father about what to do with her unhappy marriage but realizes it is impossible because of the unchanging bleakness of their relationship. After knowing from Saru what happened, her father pleads with her to confront the reality and advises her to face the situation, talk to her husband, say what is wrong and give him a chance. Sharma [7] expresses that the postmodern Indian woman needs to redefine herself so as to escape from torment, injustice and ignominy.

Saru's father has always played a pivotal role in Saru's life especially when she is left in an undecided state. This is apparent in two different contexts – one his encouragement to take up the study of medicine and the other advising her to confront the reality and to talk to Manu so as to smoothen out their married life. In hindsight, after reading the novel one comprehends that

Saru did not receive the actual required parental love and affection during her childhood and adolescent age, the impressionable years of any individual.

#### **4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE**

The novel narrates the tormenting experience of Saru, who enjoys a greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar. It discusses the male ego which refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage.

Saru gets a seat in a medical college and undergoes a great transformation after moving to the hostel. She experiences a sense of freedom for the first time in her life after her rigid atmosphere and conservative upbringing at home. She acquires sophistication in her cosmopolitan company and Manu's interest in her makes her feel wanted and loved. According to G D Barche [8] Saru's marriage to a lower caste man clearly indicates her objection to the traditional ways and values. Saru attained self-autonomy and could secure the love that was lost in her parental home through this marriage. This feeling makes her rush into marriage with Manu as her longing for attention is fulfilled.

C. P. Swain [9] rightly observes that Saru marries Manu in order to attain autonomy of the self and also to get back the lost love at her parental home. The early days of her marriage are mere bliss as she thinks she is the luckiest person in the world. Manu and Saru had a pleasant time in their early days of marriage and the dingy one room apartment filled by filth and stench appears to be a heaven.

Both Saru and Manu share a peaceful and happy life as long as Saru is a medical student and Manu is the bread-winner. When Saru gains recognition as a doctor, the problems arise. Gradually the news that Saru is a doctor spreads in the neighbourhood and people start coming to her with sundry complaints and pay her more attention than previous times. This thrilled young Saru who is unused to her profession. The smiles, nods, namastes and greetings are only to the young doctor when both are out for a walk. Earlier Manu had been the young man and Saru his bride, but now Saru is the lady doctor and Manu her husband. In her dignified status as a doctor, Saru could not observe the change in her husband. It is very hard for Manu to accept the reversal of roles with Saru's solid rise in status.

Saru has witnessed the terrible straits of her grandmother who was deserted by her husband and also is considered a burden by her own people. This determined her focus towards economic independence against subordination and suppression. As a career woman, she is not happy in their shabby apartment and prefers to move to a more descent place. She eventually begins to miss the small things that one can buy and resents Manu's acceptance.

Saru aims higher and wants to specialize in order to fulfill her dreams. Deloris Jordan [10] in her article "I hope to help women find a voice" published in Times of India expresses her opinion that all women should be confident of who they are and should make the choices of their own which help them to grow stronger. She makes use of Boozie to further her career, and he helps her financially to set up her practice in a posh area. Though her profession satisfies her ego, it brings unhappiness at home. Deshpande proves that an economically independent woman is still bound in the shackles of hurting the ego of her husband.

Manu is deeply hurt when a girl who comes to interview Saru innocently asks Manu of how it feels when his wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well. Manu gives vent to his feelings later that night by physically abusing her in the privacy of their room. He behaves like a wild animal whenever his male pride is wounded. Saru is confused with his wild behavior and sexual sadism; and reached to a stage where she is ready to quit everything unable to bear it any longer. Reddy [11] points out that Saru was wrong in her prediction that economic independence brings fulfillment to a woman.

Manu disapproves Saru's proposal of quitting the job and asks her to continue with her duties as he knows that he earns a little and it will be difficult for them to live on his salary. Saru feels that it is the 'sheer necessity' that holds them together. It is very difficult to Saru to put together the two men – the fearful stranger of the night and the pathetic Manu of other times. Unable to bear the torture any longer, she returns to her parent's home.

#### **5. LACK OF RIGHT UNDERSTANDING AND NATURAL ACCEPTANCE**

It is a known fact that parents are the first teachers to any child. In fact, parents play a

momentous role in building the right values and in nurturing the child. They up bring the children by talking about the importance of co-existence, right understanding and natural acceptance of the situations and people for a peaceful and happy life.

However, in the context of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, unfortunately, Saru's parents failed in providing the right upbringing of their daughter. Their preference for the boy child and constant negligence of towards the girl child had made her to feel that her birth itself brought unhappiness to her parents and various such differences; and lack of love and affection from parents, eventually lead towards disharmony and internal conflicts.

The cold shoulder thrown by Saru's mother during her childhood and adolescent years has created an indelible mark in her heart and mind that she developed the attitude of defiance and always wanted to show power over others. On the other hand, her father played the role of a silent spectator at every instance of her life and Saru craved for the attention of her father since childhood. This created a wide gap between the father and daughter and is clearly obvious when Saru struggles to speak and share with his father about the troubles she has been facing in her life during her visit to father's home after fifteen years.

Longing for care, attention and love, Saru could find some solace when Manu showed interest in her. For the first time in life, she experienced the attention, love and care of Manu and in due course, she rushed to marry Manu. Nonetheless, her new role as a career woman, reputation as a lady doctor in the locality, and advancement in her career tainted Manu, wounded his male ego and lead to insecurity. At once the blissful life has changed to be a nightmare to Saru as she has to suffer a series of marital rapes, and comes to a conclusion that a woman should always be a step behind her husband.

Today, in the contemporary world, the world which we boost of advancement, we still find many relationships failing because of the lack of right understanding and natural acceptance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Had Saru's parents naturally accepted the girl child and treated both the boy and girl equally by

showering their love and affection; their home could have been encompassed with peaceful co-existence. It is clearly evident that the stereotyped misconception that a girl is a liability and a boy an asset has brought the disharmony in their relationships. Had the mother and the father rightly understood Saru, her childhood might have been filled with joy exchanging mutual happiness. If Manu, once a romantic hero turned to be a wild animal later, rightly understood that Saru, just like him, aspires to be successful in her career and naturally accepted her reputation, Saru might not have lost her hope in 'love' and come to a conclusion that it is mere necessity that people maintain relationship.

We witness widely in society the struggle in relationships of son and father, son and mother, daughter and father, daughter and mother, wife and husband, brother and sister, sister and sister, brother and brother, and the list goes on. If everyone can relate to the inner self, everyone understands the other in the right way, everyone accepts the other as himself/herself, the utopian world is no farther to experience. The present digital world has already created a wide gap among individuals and the value system has been incredibly affected. It's time to go back to our roots, establish right understanding and natural acceptance without any preconditioning. It's time to contribute towards the peaceful co-existence and share mutual happiness through right understanding and natural acceptance.

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Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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