



Human Bonds and Family Relationships in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Full Text

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most popular female writer of Indian English literature. She wrote many famous and award winning novels. Her works mainly concern with the problems of Indian educated women of middle class. Human bonds and family relationship between the members of the families is beautifully depicted by her. Deshpande has given the actual picture of the family. She has not glorified the mother – daughter relationship in her novels but she has put before us the bitter relationship between mother and daughter. Husband-wife relation is also depicted effectively by Deshpande. She believes that it is conditioned patriarchal mindset which makes husband-wife's relation miserable. I have selected two famous works of Shashi Deshpande *The Binding Vine* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to know her views on human bonds and family relationships. She has explored every kind of relation in the family. I.e. mother daughter relation, son-mother relation, husband-wife relation, etc. I have to mention her mother daughter and son – mother relation separately because Deshpande has presented both of these relation in different ways. Mother's attitude towards her son is totally different than her relation with her daughter.

The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian middle-class families, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. The Indian society steeped in tradition and superstitions considers the birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. In another sense also, the male child is considered more important than a girl child because he is qualified to give “agni” to his dead parents. It is considered that the soul of the dead parents would wander otherwise in ferment. Besides these, dowry could be one reason for the preference of a male child.

Our society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here a female is considered a marginal member of the family, both in her parent's house as well as husbands. Gender discrimination in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* can be seen clearly. There are many incidents in the novel that reflect the prejudiced outlook of the Saru's parents (particularly her mother's) towards Saru in relation to her brother Dhruva.

Shashi Deshpande in her novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine* presents the active struggle between mother and daughter. In these novels mothers are victim of socio-cultural constructions. Mothers are traditional in their outlook and often themselves share the patriarchal value system; for that reason, they even support the subjugation of their female child. For that they impose some restrictions on their daughter which are not accepted by modern educated daughter and it creates the clash between them. Gradually the gap between them increases and they become rivals of each other.

At large mothers share a very strange and complex relationship with their daughters. Normally, mothers want their daughters to follow the traditions and codes which are inflicted upon them by patriarchal society. Because, they believe that this type of life will protect the life of their daughters. But, sometimes, the mother also found cruel and hostile towards her own daughter, and treats her with a sense of rivalry. The hostile prejudiced societal milieu, has shaped the mindset of a mother as a woman, and also makes the young girl child a special object of the mother's persecution.

The mother and daughter relationship in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is based on gender-biased and lovelessness. Usually, mothers serve as a role model for their daughters. They provide examples of how to be an individual, a mother and a wife. In this novel, Sarita is deprived of the motherly love, care and affection. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru faces the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhruva. As her sense of reasoning and questioning develops, she feels she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her brother. She feels jealous of her brother when he gets all the motherly care and attention. Saru's mother believes a girl is a liability and a boy an asset. Saru is always considered a burden to be eased, or a problem to be solved or a responsibility to be

dispensed with which instills a sense of insecurity in Saru's mind. Dhruva's birthday is celebrated with much pomp while Saru's birthday was hardly noticed in the family and this disparity of treatment makes her to think that her birthday is only a matter of displeasure for her mother. In this context Saru says:

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.¹

Saru's mother's discriminative behavior creates a sense of restlessness in Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. Saru's mother kept two different measuring yards, one for the son and other for the daughter. In the following example her discriminative nature is shown clearly.

Don't go out in the sun you'll get even 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.²

When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, her mother finds her guilty. She accused, "You killed your brother".³ Her mother shows extreme hatred and hostility towards her daughter, after the death of her son. She says, "... Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had son and he died. Now, I am childless".⁴ Saru's mother constantly pins for her dead son and rejects the presence of her daughter. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru's mind with feelings of hatred towards her mother.

Thus, unloved and unwanted, she develops hatred towards her mother. Her hatred towards her mother is so acute that she becomes rebellious just to hurt her, "I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer".⁵ For this hatred she leaves home for Bombay to have medicine as a career. In the medical college she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents' wishes and particularly to hurt her mother.

Saru's war of words with her mother reaches to extreme when she decides to marry Manu. She chooses a boy from a lower caste to reject the traditional ways and values of her traditional mother. After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, "let her know more sorrow that she has

given me".⁶ Saru thinks that she is 'unhappy and destroyed' in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. She recalls:

If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps, I would never have married him. And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of his hand—writing, hating him and yet pitying him too.⁷

As Saru returns to its parental home and stays there she gets a chance to review her relationship with her mother and gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as the creative essence of the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identify herself with her mother.

The novel, "*The Binding Vine*" has aptly described the mother – daughter relations of different classes of society. There are four pair of mother-daughter, namely Inni-Urmi, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai - Kalpana and Vanna - Mandira. Their relationships are also bitter like other mother – daughter relations of Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Urmi's anger with her mother is rooted in her separation from her parents at an early age. She was sent to her paternal grandmother by her parents. So she was deprived of parental affection and love in her childhood. Urmi thinks that it was her mother who sent her to her mother – in-law's house for her own convenience. But, Urmi had never tried to find out the cause of her displacement or her mother's predicament. Inni's early marriage leads her to become mother at early age but she was unable to take care of her child properly. Inni explains to Urmi:

I was frightened of you Urmi. I was too young. I was not prepared to have a child. And you were not easy, you used to cry all the time, I didn't know how to soothe you.... Then he decided he would take you to his mother. He didn't say anything to me, he just took you away...I begged him, Urmi, I cried. Nothing could make him change his mind.⁸

Urmi's father is a domineering husband. He had decided to send Urmi to his mother's home. But, Inni, Urmi's mother had to face the anger and blame of her daughter. But, Inni's revelations dispel the darkness of Urmi's misinterpretation. When she come to know about the predicament of her mother and her father's domineering nature over her mother, her perception toward her mother is changed. She feels extremely sorry to her mother who was deprived of the right to decide what would be the best for her baby. Urmi, in the end, understands her mother.

Mira and Mira's mother's relations in this novel is also bitter but it does not changed like that of Urmi and Inni's relations at the end. Mira holds her mother responsible for her unhappy married life. Mira's mother being dead at last, many

of her questions remains unanswered. As a college-going girl, she was forced into a marriage. She was scared from the beginning because of her nurturing. None in the family ever bothered about her emotions and her refusal was taken as mere childlike resistance. She believes that her mother would support her, who could have suggested delay, thereby intervening and forestalling the marriage.

Her mother is like a caretaker than the decision maker of her family with little stand on important issues. She is an unassertive woman and always says, "Nothing is in my hands". Her mother's silence and passivity pushed Mira to her marriage to a man whom she could not love and who hardly understood her feelings. Mira led an unhappy married life—in a way, a repetition of her mother life.

Mira's mother remains a mute spectator of her daughter's dreary survival and did nothing for Mira's life. As a traditional woman, Mira's mother had her own world of imaginings about her daughter in which she remains content with seeing Mira married and pregnant.

Shakutai and Kalpana are from the lower class of the society and they represent the working-class women. But there is no difference in mother – daughter relation compare to middle class families. They are facing same patriarchal oppression and insecurity. Shakutai is a very caring mother who is always worried about the security and future of her daughter since she grew up physically. She want to protect her from the evils of society for that she refuses Kalpana to be fashionable which attracts the attention of people towards her. She used to tell her "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you Alone?"⁹

But, Kalpana's ideas of life are different from those of her mother. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She likes to dress well and move freely. She does not want to be submissive to anyone as her mother always used to tell her to be. Shakutai imposes some restrictions on her which are not acceptable for Kalpana. Thus, both of them have opposite mentality which creates bitterness in their relation.

At some extent, the mother, Shakutai, is not happy with Kalpana because of her stubbornness and unfeeling towards her. She admits:

She never tells anything. Didn't even tell me how much her pay was, can you imagine that? Me, her own mother, as is I was going to take her money away from her! I don't want anything ...can you believe it, she gives her father money more easily, than she gives me. She doesn't grumble at that, even though she knows he will use it for gambling"¹⁰

Shakutai believes that Kalpana is a "self-willed" girl; she refuses to be guided by her mother's dictates. When she is struggling between life and death, she holds her mother responsible for what has happened to her. Shakutai cannot understand her

daughter's sense of freedom, who wishes to live an independent life of her own. She does not want to live the life of her mother and aunt which is oppressive and suffocating to her. She even resented becoming their shadow she never wanted any of her mother's dreams.

Vanna and Mandira's relations are also bitter like other mothers and daughters of Deshpande's novels. Vanna is a medical social worker, who stays out of home quite often for her duty. Her frequent absence in the house made her daughter Mandira feel ignored. She hates being left to the care of the maid servant. Mandira often misinterprets her mother and she keeps on saying "you are always making fun of me. You are cruel. I'll never talk to you again..."¹¹ Similarly, Vanna too finds faults with her daughter and resents her daughter's feeling of hostility towards her: "... that little chit, she does it deliberately, and she knows she can hurt me".¹²

A child Mandira tells Urmi that she will never leave her children when she becomes a mother because she cannot understand her mother's position to handle family and profession. At the same time, Vanna is also unable to diagnose the mind of her daughter, who really needs her mother's presence, affection, attention and love.

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant feminist like western feminist writers who believes that man is the cause of all the problems in women's life. Shashi Deshpande has depicted the husband wife relationship in Indian socio-economical background which is totally different from the western world. In Indian society not only woman but man also suffers due to patriarchy. Man-ego does not tolerate the superiority of woman He wants his dominion; Sarita's intelligence, earnings and status is indigestible to her husband Manohar. As a result, he sexually assaults her. It makes her realize that she is nothing only an article that can be deformed, crushed and broken. He does not ask her what she wants, what's her wish. They had a strained relationship, she realizes that a wife must be few feet behind her husband in height, she should be less educated than her husband and her salary should also be less than him, only then, it can be a happy marriage. Saru bitterly reacts against norms of society and this anguish is expressed by her in a satirical tone to the girls in Nalu's college:

A wife must always be wife a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be BA. If he's 5'4" tall you should not become than 5'3" tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred ninety nine rupees. That is only rule to follow if you want happy marriage. Don't even try to reverse the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, Principal – Teacher role... woman's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish no partnership can even be equal. It will always be unequal but take care that it is unequal

in favour of your husband. If the scales till in your favor, God help you, both of you.¹³

Manohar is also a victim of the social structure that has made the concept that women are always men's responsibilities and the man who is not capable of taking responsibilities of his family, is considered to be a eunuch by his fellow men. Manohar's grudge is not against his wife Sarita, but it is a grudge against his economic impotence. When he is not able to dominate his wife economically, he unconsciously tries to dominate her physically. It is the only way through which he can show his power. Deshpande provides the 'space' for Manohar and treats his psychological disorder with a very sensitive mind. It is not that, always women suffer, men's sufferings are not discussed because a man cannot express them as he has a more prominent and dominant ego.

Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law and Kishore's mother had died in child birth after four years of marriage and she was a woman stick to tradition. She was a traditional Indian wife. She looked after her husband. She never disobeys him. But Mira disliked him strongly. She was like a slave to him. Mira lived as an instrument for his sexual gratification. Rape is violence and it becomes worse when it occurs within the sanctity of wedlock. Mira's poems are all about this cruelty. Mira wrote poems in secrecy. She never published but kept in her box. Her poems are her suppressed feelings and agonies.

But tell me friend,
Did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels?
Round her finger and tremble,
Fearing the coming of dark-clouded engulfing night.¹⁴

She wishes to free from the rules of tradition or the clutches of unfair marriage. Mira never received any understanding or empathy from her husband. Society considers marriage as a means of security as it provides them safety from other men. But in Mira's case her own husband gave a feeling of insecurity. Mira has no right over her body. She is considered as an emotionless person.

Urmi, the person who identified the agonies of Mira was not yet born when Mira passed away. Urmila realizes that what has happened to Kalpana happened to her mother-in-law Mira. Sakunthala's sister, Sulu was a sweet natured person. But after her marriage she is full of fears. From her experience is a clear picture how marriage can shatter the self-confidence of a person and transform a smart girl into a fearful and nervous woman. Out of her fear she asks Kalpana to marry her own husband. Wife is a slave to Prabhakar. Sulu's husband Prabhakar was a father figure for Kalpana. But he rapes her brutally. Prabhakar is a male who consider women as a slave to man. It's the duty of a women writer to disclose the problems of females facing in society.

Urmi is not against the system of marriage but she feel a lack of confidence when she thinking of the lives of Vanna, Mira and Sulu. Shashi Deshpande is critical about the marriage system and it's depicted through the lives of the characters. According to Urmi those marriages are really cold-blooded affairs. They took place without the consent of the girl. Those experiences of women shows girl become the slave to not only the husband's but also his families.

Shashi Deshpande has beautifully depicted the conflicting relation of mother and daughter. Though Deshpande has shown the bitterness in mother and daughter's relation, she gives an optimistic end to it. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru hates her mother for different reasons but when she come back to her parental home after many year at that time she is quiet mature and now she can understand her mother's behavior and repented about their past. Same thing happens in *The Binding Vine* also, here Urmi and Inni's relations were very bitter due to misunderstanding of Urmi. But when Urmi comes to know about the reality about sending her to her grandmother at very early age, her remorse a lot for blaming her innocent mother. Thus, Deshpande has portrayed the real life pictures of Indian mothers and daughters in her novels.

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