



## Saru: A Marginalised Lady in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terrors.'

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### Abstract:

*Shashi Deshpande being a feminist writer is well aware of the woman's predicament in a male-dominated Indian society. Through her novels she raises her voice to the ill treatment given to the womanfolk. Sarita – the protagonist of the novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' is the subordinated, marginalised character in her own parental home by her mother. She is subordinated not even by her mother but also by her husband.*

*The present research paper is an attempt to find out how Saru feels marginalisation in her parental house as well as in her married life, the reasons behind her subjugation.*

**Key Words:** woman's predicament, ill treatment, marginalised, reasons for the subjugation. etc.

### Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the leading woman novelists of the Indian English literature. Her novels are mainly concerned with a woman's quest for identity; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and protagonist's place in it. 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' is a very powerful novel depicting the life of Sarita. Shashi Deshpande focuses on the world of the Indian women in the context of modern Indian Society. The novel is divided into four parts.

Saru- the heroine- feels marginalised by her own mother. She is the victim of gender inequality. Kamalatai had two children- a son named Dhruva and a daughter named Sarita. A healthy mother-daughter relationship is missing in this novel. Saru is given less importance in comparison to her brother. Kamalatai considers Saru as inferior and she bestows her motherly love on her only son. Her mother is always in an authority figure and posed a threat to her individuality and self-will. The so-called powerful mother sees Saru only as a burden to be eased. For her, Saru is only a problem which should be solved. She is Kamalatai's responsibility and that should be dispensed with and a person who has no right to any choice in life. The hatred between a mother and a daughter is deeply rooted.

This novel deals with the Saru's convulsions and conflicts. The novel unfolds the life of Saru who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her younger brother- Dhruva. She is not given any importance; no parental love is showered upon her not even on her birthdays also. However, her brother's birthdays are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. There was always a puja on his birthday but none on her birthday. After his tragic death her birthday was not celebrated. Saru recalls: "After Dhruva's death, there were no more celebrations. My birthday was passed over in silence, both at home and at school. (TDHNT169). It was only on her fifteen birthday that she got a gold ear-ring from her mother as her birthday present. Saru is subjugated by her own mother only because she is a daughter and she is unwanted burden of the parents which one day has to transfer to others i.e. through marriage. Sarita remembers the naming ceremony of her brother. "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..... (TDHNT168). In relation to her brother, Saru's status is belittled in her own house. Saru considers her mother as a rival in the game of power. In Indian familial setup psychologically a mother has very close attachment with a son. A kind of detachment can be seen in her relation with her own daughter even though they both belong to the same gender. Saru is subordinated by her own mother. A woman is subordinated by a woman. A mother has typical attitude because a son will propagate the family lineage. A son is given more importance than a daughter because he has the right to give the 'agnidag' to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in forment. When Saru hears the news of her mother's death, a sudden thought emerges in her mind "who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died." (TDHNT21).

When Dhruva was alive, Kamalatai's discrimination between her own two kids had been very apparent to Sarita. He is the mother's cinesure and Saru is neglected. Because of her mother's favouritism Saru hates Dhruva and the struggle for importance goes on. Kamalatai always kept two different measuring yards, one for the son and the other for the daughter.

"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." (TDHNT45)

This incidence shows how her mother discriminates between two children. Traditional Hindu woman always considers



her duty to remind her daughter that she is grown up and she should behave accordingly. In other incidence, Saru feels subjugated. The first experience of menstruation cycle is horrible for Saru. Her mother herself who was once upon a time in her adolescence age for the first time had experienced the same situation, frightens her with the fact that she would bleed for years and years. She does not allow Saru to enter in the kitchen and puja room. She is compels to sleep on the Straw mat. A separate plate is provided to her to make her exclusion complete. The same thing still is in daily practice in the rural, remote area of our nation even in the second decade of the 21st century. A girl is not considered holy during these four days of menstruation period. Poor Saru always bears the opposition of her mother, be it the question of choosing a husband or a profession. When Saru tells her decision to get married with Manohar, her traditional, orthodox mother remarks as "I know all these love marriages. It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then." (TDHNT69). She even opposes Saru to get admission in the medical college. She tries to persuade her husband not to end Saru to the medical college. "You don't belong to that moneyed class. And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding... Let her go for a B.Sc... you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over." (TDHNT144). There are number of incidence showing disparity towards a woman. Kamalatai shows inveterate hatred and enmity towards her daughter after the death of her son when she comments ".....Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless." (TDHNT196). This shows that how and what kind of bitterness was in the mother-daughter relationship. It also shows that how Saru is marginalised by her own mother.

The first half of the novel deals with the vicious, prejudiced and cruel attitude of a mother, a strong product of patriarchal society who considers her daughter responsible for her son's tragic death. When Saru's brother is drowned in a pond while playing, she is blamed for it. Her mother particularly 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?" (TDHNT191). Due to her mother's accusation, Saru begins to wander 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. In fact, male-oriented societies constitute females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender. Through this and other examples in the novel, Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship only, but it exists between a female-female relationship also.

Apart from her subordination at her parental house, Saru is even subordinated by her husband whom she has chosen against her mother's wish. Saru is a 'two-in-one woman' who in the daytime is a successful doctor and at night 'a terrified trapped animal' in the hands of her husband-Manohar. Saru being a successful medical practitioner becomes popular day by day in the society and her growing popularity is the root cause of inferiority complex for Manu-her husband. To expose his superiority, only bed is the option left for him. He sexually harassed her. Saru is the victim of marital rape. Saru fails to get the solace which she has missed in her parental house, and the same is continued even after her marriage also. Manu fails to prove as a perfect husband, companion for her. Saru is tortured, subordinated by her husband only because of the feeling of the insecurity. He could not digest Saru's growing popularity. Saru faces subordination both at her own parental house as well as at her in-law's house also.

#### Conclusion:

The overall treatment given to Saru by her mother and her husband in both-the pre-married and post married life respectively show that how she is subordinated, marginalised and most importantly that is by her own mother particularly. The treatment given to Saru by her mother shows the tense relations of a daughter and a mother. The way Kamalatai behaves with Saru develops a kind of hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. It is a conflict between the old and the young; the traditional and the modern. A kind of hatred towards the mother is shown as it is the mother who puts all the restrictions on her daughter without considering the fact that the time has changed and the next generation is passing through a transitional period where a daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. The problem faced by Saru is the problem of hundreds of such learned and professional woman who become the victim of the double stand of society.

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