Role of Mothers in Shaping their Daughters’ Lives in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows*

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**Introduction to the Author:**

Aparna Mukherjee is a Research Scholar in English, pursuing her Ph.D. in English from Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur under the able guidance of Dr. Rajeev Tiwary who is the co-author of this research paper. Dr. Rajeev Tiwary is a renowned academician and Professor of English at Sanskrit College, Raipur.
Shashi Deshpande is a known name in the world of Literature today. She writes about the Indian soil, spreading its fragrance all over the world. Writing on Indian womanhood, she does not personalize incidents or situations. Her aim is to enlighten women folk to stand for their own rights.

It is noteworthy that the women are sufferers and then, they are oppressors also. Works have been done on the poor plight of women but it has been a tedious task to mark out the traces of women dominion. The artistic beauty of Shashi Deshpande lies in being able to project both sides of the coin. She has never been defensive about womanhood, although a male writer is acclaimed as a writer even if he writes about men because what is male, is considered humane whereas if a woman attempts to write about women, she is tagged as a feminist, “When a man writes of the particular problems a man is facing he is writing male propaganda. Nobody says that, why is it said only about women writers?” (The Literary Criterion 33)

Shashi Deshpande has presented suffering women as Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Indu in Roots and Shadows but she has not forgotten Saru’s mother or Akka from The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows respectively. Dominated women and dominating women both, form the plots of her novels. Her novels are interwoven with the intrinsic beauty of the saga of humankind without specifically being male-oriented or female-oriented. Most of her works are masterpieces in the sense that the capacity of absorbing the readers into the text is so intense that one starts feeling it to be one’s own story- if not my tale then yours.

It may be true that she being a woman herself and observing the plight of women in the Indian backdrop might have developed sensitivity for her kind (women). Shashi Deshpande is hailed because she has an infinite aptitude to sketch the other side of womanhood too- the darker, the oppressor, the matriarch woman.
Saru’s mother in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* keeps dominating her from the onset of the plot but when her brother Dhruva is drowned she becomes furious. At that time, Saru has only been a child. Her fault is that she is a girl child. Saru’s mother goes to the extent of telling her, “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 191)

Beyond imagination, a mother can be such impudent with her own child just because she is a female child. A mother wishing her daughter ‘dead’ can be the crudest form of patriarchy supported by women. These words get carved so deep inside her mind that Saru becomes a rebel against her mother. Not only this, she could not develop the rationale of judgement and decision-making being suppressed always. Moreover, the guidance of her mother could have helped her but her mother never bothers for the same.

This drags her straight towards her doom. In college days, she falls in love with Manu. Lacking maturity, she could not make out the consequences of such a marriage. The marriages held in other caste (in India) have adjustment issues, though that is very well managed by the two. Then, there is the difference in their financial status. That develops to be a big problem later and their final catastrophe is the success of the wife over her husband in the professional front. All these, together, destroy their well-knit household.

Whosoever is at fault for all these, but the ignorance and lack of concern of the mother play a dominant role in the ruin of Saru’s household. Saru’s mother had all rights to take care of household affairs as her father did not have much concern for the same. She could have built a harmonious home. After the sad event of her son’s demise, she could have collected herself together to give the best to her daughter. On the contrary, she troubles Saru to the extent that it becomes more of a mother-daughter confrontation which ultimately results into the end of all happiness for herself, and her daughter.
Saru seeks refuge in her marriage. It is a way to escape from her mother’s dominion but she does not know that it is only another trap of caging women. In Shashi Deshpande’s own words, “Marriage invariably takes you to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain yourself intact- is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?” (Indian Women Novelists 35) The refuge that Saru seeks is no refuge. In a marriage, a woman is always in ‘fear’- ‘fear of not pleasing’ her male counterpart. Her primal role is to be secondary- next to her husband. It is equally true that it is not possible to ‘escape domination and not to dominate’, that is why, the women who are either not dominated or over-dominated, tend to dominate.

Saru becomes emotionally weak and unstable because she is not properly nurtured to take firm decisions. She feels alone and always seeks for company. Dependence syndrome develops in her. She does not like her womanhood because she has the image of her mother as ‘a woman’ and that image is horrendous for her. “If you’re a woman, I don’t want to be one.” (The Dark Holds No Terrors 63)

Roots and Shadows also gives a sensitive portrayal of Indian womanhood. This research paper does not aim to discuss the plethora of Indu’s misery. It is an attempt to study the character of Akka- the mother figure or the matriarch.

Akka is a domineering woman. She holds everything under her control. Her decisions are final and binding to all in the family. Indu develops distaste for this kind of domination. She, while growing up, like every fresh bud, seeks freedom in blooming. In immaturity and lack of experience she disapproves Akka’s ways and leaves home. She also promises ‘never’ to return because of Akka. “I would never go back.” (Roots and Shadows 20)

Hatred of mother or mother figure is a constant trend in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. The female protagonists cannot approve the ways of their mothers and deny acceptance to the
same. In quest of liberty, they take their own decisions. Sometimes these decisions prove to be successful and sometimes failure. Success or failure is not important here. Being able to take the best decision and then having the courage to stand by that are imperative to shape a person’s character.

In a feat of anger and defiance, Indu marries Jayant like Saru married Manu. Exactly like Saru, she expects her marriage to be a dream. She gets comforted by the thought that all her woes would come to an end with her marriage with Jayant.

The fact is that it is not always men who oppress; sometimes women suffer because of their own mental set-up also. At a moment of introspection, Indu realizes, “Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can’t blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be.” (Roots and Shadows 54) It is Indu who is worried about ‘what he wants, what he would like, what would please him’ whereas Jayant has not ‘pressurized’ her into that. Patriarchy has penetrated so deep in the heart of every Indian woman that she is not able to give it up. Thus, she draws boundaries for herself as to what she should do and what not.

Women have become so weak emotionally that they cannot come out of the framework of do’s and don’ts assigned to them by the society. “Despite her hatred of Manu’s sexual sadism Saru refuses to take any action and loathes admitting failure. Like Indu of Roots and Shadows, Saru also refrains from announcing it to the world that her marriage has been a failure.” (Literary Voice 39) Indu and Saru both suffer unhappy marriages primarily because of their own faults. At the same time, they are not ready to accept ‘a failure’ merely because that would prove their mothers right.

Comparing the characters of Saru’s mother and Akka, one can find out that both are dominating women and they are dominating especially towards their daughters. The difference is that Saru’s mother hates her daughter and her behavior towards Saru instigates her to be a
rebel which in turn spoils her life. In a hurry to prove her mother wrong, she marries Manu without giving a rational thought to their relationship and its future. Then, in the fear of being proven wrong, she holds the tarnished relation tight without speaking of it even to Manu. On the other hand, Indu frees herself from the clutches of Akka. But on her death, owning her property (transferred to her by Akka), she realizes that Akka loved her. This affection generates an optimistic approach towards life in her. She learns to take her own decisions like writing literary pieces of her own choice, “That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing.” (*Roots and Shadows* 205)

Saru also attains self actualization but that is through introspection in her parental house and also with guidance of her father. She realizes her true self in the absence of her mother (after her mother’s death).

The female protagonists of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows* grow up into weak personalities because of the dominating nature of their mothers. This makes them weak, incapable of taking decisions and standing by them. They suffer and surrender. When they go through a phase of self analysis, they realize their actual selves. This is how they become new women of contemporary India.

The mindset of women is pre-occupied with the age-old practice of patriarchy. That has to be wiped away first, then only, a woman can develop into a complete being. The present generation should be given proper conditioning about woman’s rights and duties. She should not be handed a list of do’s and don’ts, instead she should be made competent to make her own list of do’s and don’ts.

Woman can be a creator and she can cause immense destruction as well. It is just the right approach that she needs. Just advocating or snatching away rights for her is not enough. She has to first be competent and confident in handling her responsibilities towards herself. Then only, a woman can attain individuation.
Works Consulted


