

PARENTS IN THE MIRRORS OF CHILDREN IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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One of the distinguished features of the novels of Shashi Deshpande is that they highlight the attitude of children towards their parents in the changing social, cultural and educational scenario of the country. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the novelist exposes the unpleasant and bitter attitude of a mother towards her daughter on account of her gender bias and vice versa. In traditional patriarchal families, the birth of a son as a first child is preferred to that of a daughter. Sarita was born in a traditional Brahmin family and she was the first child of her parents. Dhruva, her brother, was born three years after her. Sarita's mother, Kamala, did not feel happy when she was born as her first child. This is what Sarita tells us:

*But of my birth, the 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 rain.'*¹

Dhruva's birthday was always celebrated with *Puja* followed by the festive lunch in the afternoon and arti in the evening. Sarita's birthday were almost the same but there was no *Puja*. Dhruva was made to sleep all alone in the dark room so that he could be brave and bold like Shivaji, whereas Sarita was made to sleep with her mother. Her father used to take out Dhruva on his bike perched in front of him on a small seat, whereas Sarita was left to the charge of her mother. When Dhruva

drowned into a pond and died, his mother held Sarita guilty of her son's death. She thought that her daughter watched her son drowned. She could have risked her life for her brother's sake. She cursed her daughter saying: "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he died?" She did not allow Sarita to enter her house after Dhurva's death. It was Sarita's Mavshi who took her to her own house where she was kept for a few days.

When Sarits was selected for medical profession and she was getting admission to his hostel, her mother vehemently opposed it. When her father told her mother that he was prepared to mete her expenses, Kamla began to cry saying, "She killed her brother. She killed her brother."³ The words of Sarita's mother were like a dagger to her. She felt hurt. She hated her mother; she wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer. She wished her mother dead.

When Sarita went for a love marriage with a boy of lower caste against the wishes of her parents, she was dead for her parents for ever. Her mother never uttered the name of her husbands; she rather called him "that man". When her mother was suffering from cancer and dying in the hospital, somebody advised her to go to her daughter. She refused to reconcile with her daughter and said in anger, "Which daughter? I have no daughter."⁴ Saru hated her mother because she held her responsible for her family unhappiness:

I hate her, sapping me of. She's always done it to me... taken happiness from me. She does it even now when she's dead.⁵

There was a long silence between her and her parents for fifteen years. When she heard about the death of her mother, she returned to her parental home to restore her lost bonds with her father. The complex relationship between Sarita and her mother cannot be simplified as hatred nor can it be claimed that Sarita is anti-matriarchal. In

order to achieve her freedom, she seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by her mother. Her mother almost forced her to stay within the four walls of her house and opposed her admission to the medical college.

When Sarita returned to her father after fifteen years of her marriage, she was not welcomed by him because he thought that it amounted to a sort of treachery to his dead wife. He, too, held his daughter responsible for the death of his son. The fact is that there was no good relationship between Sarita's father and mother. Her father used her as weapon against his wife. That was why her mother dislike her. When Sarita's mother passed away, her father had a sign of relief. In order to seek revenge on his dead wife, he did not put up her photograph. Sarita admitted that it was because of her father's fight against her mother that she could receive her medical education. Now on her return to her parental home, she wondered whether that fight was for her or against her mother, and whether or not her father used her as weapon against her mother.

In *Root and Shadows*, Indu, the protagonist of the novel was motherless. Her father was a free lance photographer. He was non-interfering and a man of independent views. He set her daughter apart from others and sent her to a convent school. Indu lived like a modern girl under the patronage of her orthodox and tyrannical Akka who called her "an ippy". Indu, in retaliation, called her "an old witch." She was often heckled and rebuked by Akka for her hobnobbing with her boy friends. She hated her grandmother so much that she had sworn not to return to her ancestral home after her marriage with Jayant till her grandmother's death. When Akka passed away bequeathing her money to Indu, the latter decided in hate to give the money to strangers instead of spending it on her ancestral family. With the demolition of Indu's ancestral house, the old barriers crumbled down and Indu was free to live an independent life with Jayant.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya had no confrontation with her parents. She was born on the 3rd September, 1939. To any other parents, a child born on that day would have seemed an ill-omened child but not to her parents and Akka. It was her Appa who named her ‘Jaya’ because he had joined Gandhi’s freedom movement and was certain of his ultimate victory. Her parents were educated and lived a very happy and good life in Saptagiri. Her mother was very fond of classical music whereas Jaya liked film songs sung by Rafi and Lata. Her parents sent her to a convent school where she learnt to speak English fluently and could impress any one with her eloquence. Her father passed away when she was fifteen years of age. The whole family moved to Ambegaon where her maternal uncles and aunts lived. Jaya was married to Mohan. Her marriage was arranged by her maternal uncles and her own brother.

Urmila, the protagonist of *The Binding Vine*, was fatherless. She lived with her grand parents and parents in a splendid Ranidurg House gifted to her grandfather by a king. She had seen her father and grandfather diving. After the death of her father, she lived with her grand parents in a big room, on one of the doors of which a paper was stuck which said “Baijii’s and Urmils Room”. She married Kishore against the wishes of her family knowing fully well that he was without father and mother. Since Kishore was a sailor in Navy and posted in a place far away from her house, Urmila had no option but to stay with her mother with her two children. Like Indu and Jaya, she too, had normal relations with her mother. However, in this novel, the novelist exposes Urmila’s feelings of profound grief after the sudden and untimely death of her girl child. Though it was the girl child, Urmila had deep love for her. She mourned her death as intensely and feelingly as any mother over the death of her son. She haunted by hallucinations. Her lost child visited her in day dreams but somehow she tried to get back to normal knowing that nothing could undo what had happened and she had to go back to living.

In *A Matter of Time*, the novelist deals with the relationship of Sumitra with her parents on the one hand, and Sumitra's relationship with her children on the other hand. Sumitra's Parents Sharipati and Kalyani lived in a big house. They were not on speaking terms. They had not spoken to each other for the last thirty-five years since the day their son was lost and Shripati had held his wife responsible for the loss of their son. Sumitra married Gopal defying the wishes of the parents and stayed with her husband and three grown up children in a rented house. The life of Sumitra's parents and Sumitra's own life with her husband and children went on normally till she was deserted by her husband. When Gopal did not return home after the expected time, Sumitra's family moved to the house of her parents in its evil days. Both father and mother supported their daughter in her bad days. There was a great division in her family. On the one hand, there was Gopal. Sumitra, being educated, intelligent and forward, wanted her independence and the recognition of her identity. She moulded her daughters in her favour and turned them indifferent to their father. One day Gopal resigned his university job in frustration and disappeared from his house, leaving his daughters and his wife. When Sumitra died in an accident, Gopal's Daughters did not return to him. They rather preferred to live with their grandmother, Kalyani. Aru was so angry with her father that she even hired a lawyer to get justice for her wronged mother. The novel comes to an end with the bitter and uncompromising relationship between the father and her daughters because her daughters felt that their father was wrong and her was responsible for their mother's miseries and death.

Like Urmila in *The Binding Vine*, Madhu in *Small Remedies* is presented grieving over the sudden death of her seventeen year old son in a bomb blast while travelling in a city bus, and trying to come to terms with her life. The novelist tries to highlight the plight of a mother after the sudden loss of her son and her efforts to rehabilitate herself in the wake of utter emptiness and blankness before her. Side by side, the relationship between Savitribai and her daughter, Munni, is also highlighted. In order

to get name and fame as a musician, Savitribai not only deserted her husband but also denied to accept Munni as her daughter for the sake of her social respectability. Munni was her daughter by her lover, Gulam Saheb. After getting name and fame in society, Bai struggled hard for her social acceptance which was not possible without deserting her lover and discarding her daughter. Both Bai and Munni were never reconciled with each other. While Bai showed her album to Madhu, it was Munni's photograph that was found missing in it. The author wondered what kind of a woman Bai was, denying her own child: "Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such a thing."⁶ Madhu herself was motherless. Being the first child of her parents, she was a pampered child. By the time she was two, she was weighed in gold ornaments. Her mother was a sweet singer. She mostly sang devotional Songs. She got time to teach songs to her daughter but her life was cut short untimely and Madhu, being the daughter of a doctor, passed her childhood silently with her. Later, she became childless. She knew the pains of being motherless and childless as well.

In *Moving On*, Badri Narayan, a bone doctor, had two daughters. Both Badri Narayan and his wife, Vasu Narayan, had good relationship with their daughters. Manjari was the first-born. She was followed by Malu. With Malu's entrance, Manjari became a foil to Malu. Manjari was strong, while Malu was delicate. The former was practical, whereas the latter was dreamy and absentminded. Manjari's father wanted her to get into medicine, but she, being ugly in looks, wanted to be loved and get married at the earliest. When a boy fell in love with her, she decided to be his wife in spite of her father's opposition. She left her medical career and went for her love marriage with Shyam Ahuja. When Shyam died by drowning into the sea three years after his marriage, Manjari was widowed but she had a son by him. She returned to her parents and passed the rest of her life with them. When Malu and Mai died, only Manjari and her father were left in the family. They had sympathy for each other as Manjari was husbandless, while her father was wifeless.

Thus, it is only in two novels, i.e. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *A Matter of Time*, that we find parents and their children interacting with and reacting against one another. In the first novel there has been complete silence between Sarita and her parents for fifteen years since her marriage. Even when she is with her parents, she has an endless war with her mother. In *A Matter of Time*, Gopal deserts not only his wife but also his three daughters for reasons best known to him only. In other novels, such problems do not arise because the protagonist is either motherless or fatherless or without both of them. Indu is motherless, while Jaya and Urmi are fatherless. Madhu is without both her parents. So is the case with Manjari. The main cause of trouble and disquiet in the lives of protagonists is either the failure of their love marriages or their desire to dominate their families and seek independent identities for themselves.

REFERENCES

- “Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990). p. 169.
- ‘Ibid, pp. 34-35.
- ‘Ibid, p. 145.
- ‘Ibid, p. 109
- ‘Ibid,
- “Shashi Deshpande, *Small Remedies* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000). p. 78.