

**GENDER MATTERS – A STUDY IN DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE  
DAUGHTERS AT THE HANDS OF THE MOTHER AND THE  
GRANDMOTHER IN *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR* AND  
*DAUGHTER’S DAUGHTER***

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The available paper talks about the discrimination done to the child on the bases of their sex/gender. It seems in our society that sons are more desired and appreciated than daughters. However, the opposition from the same sexuality remarks the complicated and complex relationships. The feminist theory on mother-daughter relationships suggests, that why daughters are much devalued and why they suffer at the hands of their mothers. It has been a long decade; women are still discriminated and rejected or prejudiced in any of the fields. Women have been considered as an ‘object’ and as the ‘others’ in the men centric society. Simone De Beauvoir carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees that sex is the biological element, but the gender is associated with a social function. “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in a society, it is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine” (Beauvoir). Most of the Indian mothers are greatly influenced by this system, and they also support patriarchal values in one or the other way and do injustice to their own replicas, their daughters. This study presents the representation of the two popular fictions, *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) and *Daughter’s Daughter* (1993) by the phenomenal writers respectively, Shashi Deshpande and Mrinal Pande. Both the fictions have different time span to present, but the mentalities over sexism remain the same till now.

Shashi Deshpande brings out the pathetic version of prejudice against a daughter in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, through the agony of the protagonist Sarita. With a bleak marital status, she returns to her maternal home where she has the worst memories of her childhood. She

remembers how she was an unwanted child for her dead mother and how her identity was suppressed by her mother's unacceptable behavior. She recalls: "I can only remember that she cursed me as no mother should" (Deshpande 25). Sarbjit Sandhu rightly observes:

The mother is much attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one-after all he is a male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In another sense also, the male child is considered more important than a girl because he is qualified to give "Agni" to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in ferment (19-20).

Sarita stands for a miserable and depressed child, as she is victimized of her own mother's cruelty because she is a daughter of her mother and not a son. In this society, a woman is always highly praised if she gives birth to a son. Man finds his own extension through the male child and that's why many celebrations and rituals are performed if a woman is blessed with a male child. Sarita, is the example of direct persecution of the men-centric society, where the sons are highly valued and the daughters are discriminated. From the very beginning, Sarita pines for love and affection, but her mother neglects her yearning to be loved, rather cursing her birth as a bad omen. Sarita recalls, "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" (Deshpande 169). Like other traditional mothers, Sarita's mother is also concerned about her looks and she keeps an eye on her, as she thinks that one day, a daughter should get married off. For her mother, Sarita is a burden.

"Don't go out in the sun".

"You'll get even darker".

"We have to get you married".

"Will you live with us all your life? He [Dhruva] is different".

"He is a boy." (Deshpande 45)

Sarita is always reminded by her mother, that she is a woman; mainly when she starts getting menstruation. Her mother considers that the marriage is the final destination for her daughter, until she wants her daughter to assure certain limitations; she wants Sarita to carry herself in certain manners which the society has set as the standard of the good woman. Her mother has no importance for Sarita's further study; even her dominating nature hurdles when Sarita chooses a groom in her own ways. In this context, Rashmi Sahi remarks, "When a mother differentiates between her own children the boy and the girl for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains, there is no other torch bearer than for the girl child" (Sahi 20-21). While plaiting her daughter's hair, she often jerks Sarita's head, which shows the extreme level of cruelty from her mother's side. It seems, she has no feeling for a her daughter and she passes hatred all the time. Hence, Sarita's mother stands for rude, strict and insensitive mother.

Her mother is seen throughout to be blaming, abusing and scolding Sarita for what she has not done. Sarita is accused of her brother's accidental death. Her mother wishes Sarita's death instead of son's . Her mother's tormenting words haunt Sarita, making her guilty that she is a murderer of her brother: "You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" (Deshpande 191) This pervades Sarita into gloominess and her heart is broken completely. Saru's feeling of being unwanted and rejected is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence, both as a wife and mother. "She was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat" (Deshpande 182). There is no one to soothe her soul and comfort her. Her mental traumas lead her to become a schizophrenic. Rashmi Gaur very aptly summarizes Saru's dilemma:

The girl-child Saru grows up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender-based bias; which reduces her later life into a desperate struggle to overcome the initial victimization, to justify her decisions to her mother who no longer acknowledges her as a daughter, and to find out a new meaning to her life which could enable her to develop and nurture a balanced perspective towards her diversified roles as a mother, as a wife, and as a career woman (Gaur 88).

The element of gender discrimination is once again brought out in an autobiographical novel *Daughter's Daughter* by a renowned feminist writer Mrinal Pande. She is a keen observer, even small elements are portrayed to differentiate, how a girl child is made to feel inferior in our society. The protagonist, Tinu confronts with the reminiscences of early and growing childhood days; spent at Almora, at her grandmother's house with her mother and an elder step-sister Dinu. Tinu undergoes both emotional and psychological development and becomes aware of the layers of the relationships between the same gender belonging, and especially the attitude of middle and upper class people towards the girl child. Tinu enumerates quite a few instances where by she and Dinu suffer the gender discrimination at the hands of their grandmother and others simply because they are daughter's daughters.

Both sisters Tinu and Dinu feel partiality when more love, care and favor are showered upon their Mama's son Anu, who is treated to a slice of mango or a toffee where as, Tinu and Dinu are ignored because they are girls (Pande *Daughter's Daughter* 26). Anu enjoys more prerogatives being son of a son and is given special treats cooked for the fasting members of the family; even though he has not observed a fast, on the other hand the daughter's daughters are denied (Pande DD 46). In *Fasting, Feasting* (2008) Anita's Desai depicts the same character of Uma's mother who is quite partial to her daughter and once retorts by agreeing that, "good things are for boys and not for the girls. Sweets or nuts are given to the boys in her family" (Desai *Fasting, Feasting* 5).

Tinu's grandmother is so much partial that she wants Dinu and Tinu to hand over the toy of peacock to son's children (Pande DD 33). Her mother also joins others in giving her daughters long disapproving glances and emphatically tells her children to give the toy to their cousins (Pande DD 36). As Tinu and Dinu are the daughters, they are paid less attention and neglected by her mother. They feel that their mother is lost to them, as she is more interested in gossiping with her sisters and reading books and magazines (Pande DD 22). Tinu says she loves her mother, but, "disown her when she is being crotchety" (Pande DD 49). When the sisters laugh

too much, mother gets angry and says now they will weep. As she thinks: “Girls should not laugh too much” (Pande DD 49).

When their tutor Harish complains about Anu’s lack of focus in studies and appreciates younger girls’ considerable capacity for concentration, the aunts smile and comment that after all boys are boys and girls are girls, she means that girls need the skills only to roll out chapattis and boiling dal and rice. The aunts also give partial and step-motherly treatment to the daughter’s daughters. Tinu and Dinu are denied the holy ‘Prasad of the Ishta’- the family deity. Anu and Shubha are both given a portion each, but when Tinu and Dinu edge closer, the aunts have smiled and said ‘No’ (Pande DD 71). They say, “It is not to be for daughter’s daughters. It can only be given son’s children and unmarried daughters” (Pande DD 71-72).

Sometimes when there is a hot argument between the parents, and the mother is in a bad mood, she slaps Tinu for no fault of her own. She pays off being a girl child. Tinu recalls with anguish that “again and again she has snapped me” (Pande DD 60). This novel also briefly discusses a relationship between step mothers and their stepchildren through the characters of Abdulla and Dinu. Dinu’s mother has also died at young and her father had married to Tinu’s mother. Tinu has often questioned regarding her mother’s treatment to Dinu. She looks to her mother for answers, but she has no time. Tinu often wonders – why must step mothers have stepdaughters?

In India, the patriarchal set up expects women to be submissive and sacrificial. Tinu realizes that her Grandmother is also not free from this speculation. When Hira- a widow maid is harsh to her own giggly unmarried daughter and slaps her hard, at this, Grandmother pretends to be angry and says, “Shame on you Hira for hitting a marriageable girl,” but her tone says she agrees that giggly and frisky marriageable daughters need to be tamed (Pande DD 72). Both Hira and Grandmother refer to husbands as Malik- the Master. She is taming Sita for her masters. It depicts that traditional women accept their suppressed roles and they expect the same from the next generation. As other traditional women, Tinu’s grandmother also yearns for a male child when her mother is expecting one more time. To confirm the gender of a growing embryo inside her mother’s womb, she summons her deaf and mute cousin Prakash. Who eventually makes a

sign of money bag which he means a baby boy is coming to this world. The old widows also join grandmother's wish for a boy by uttering "O Devi, give these poor girls a brother this time!" (Pande DD 83). Tinu's Grandmother believes that their brother will protect them now and carry on their father's name (Pande DD 85). Tinu also acknowledges at the end that her Grandmother is also biased with her daughters when she says while departing, "married daughters appear best if they spend as much time in their own houses as they do in others" (Pande DD 112).

To sum up, these fictions reveal the most depressive relationships among the same masculinity group. The mother-daughter relationship is not from the root of tenderness, love and care, but on the bases of the gender, it becomes more complicated. What daughters observe from the traditions they pass it to their next generation. Indian women writers have remarkably given a different dimension of this flaming issue to change the perspectives and liberate the women as a whole. Studies on the inequal treatment given to the children within family and kinship groups suggest that discrimination against the girl child goes much deeper than the earlier assumption about female education and empowerment. It is felt that women's education would be able to overcome the problem of gender bias (Ramanamma and Bambawale).

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