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## Resuscitation of the Family Spirit: An Analysis through the Dark Holds No Terrors

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### **Abstract:**

*The family unit, principally a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace forms the basic social organization. But the family in India, during the last few decades has been constantly under attack, affecting the various relationships in a family unit. The traditional patriarchal culture, that was supported to support the family, is now really hard on women and impedes the development of deep love between man and woman forgetting that this love, the true and loving relationship alone can bring stability and equilibrium to a family and to a society. The rate of divorce cases in India in the last few decades is quite alarming and some criticize this is because of the fact that women have finally realized their values and feel they deserve equal rights and equal respect. The impact of the western education has paved way for women empowerment but unfortunately, the male society finds it hard to accept and digest this fact. This leads to lack of trust, faith, respect and mutual understanding between the spouses. The marital bond is very easily broken and the family gets shattered leaving the members in distress. The growing challenge we face now is to realize the importance of the family and restore it legally, culturally and socially. This paper entitled “Resuscitation of the Family Spirit – An Analysis Through ‘The Dark Holds No Terrors’ establishes the need for strengthening the families in today’s society, since Deshpande herself views that ‘Disintegration of the family leads to disintegration of the society’.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchal Society, Women Subordination, Conjugal Relationship, Understanding the Familial Duties, Family Spirit

### **1. Introduction**

The family unit, principally a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace forms the basic social organization. But the family in India, during the last few decades has been constantly under attack, affecting the various relationships in a family unit. The traditional patriarchal culture, that was supported to support the family, is now really hard on women and impedes the development of deep love between man and woman forgetting that this love, the true and loving relationship alone can bring stability and equilibrium to a family and to a society. The rate of divorce cases in India in the last few decades is quite alarming and some criticize this is because of the fact that women have finally realized their values and feel they deserve equal rights and equal respect. The impact of the western education has paved way for women empowerment but unfortunately, the male society finds it hard to accept and digest this fact. This leads to lack of trust, faith, respect and mutual understanding between the spouses. The marital bond is very easily broken and the family gets shattered leaving the members in distress. The growing challenge we face now is to realize the importance of the family and restore it legally, culturally and socially.

Shashi Deshpande is an outstanding and remarkable woman genius, who has contributed immensely to the growth, strength and relevance of woman literature. Her literary products gain lasting value mainly because she is not constricted by the problems and issues of only life which are universally experienced by all women in all ages in the past but also in the years to come. Women in India have been subjected to humiliations, trials and tribulations. Deshpande gives expression to this saddest tale in various forms of her writings. She is conscious of the assumption that persists that is women are fundamentally different from men and this has been the cause of the subordination of women. This status of women worldwide is very dissatisfactory. Richard Schaefer Observes: “Regarding of culture, however, women everywhere suffer from second class status. It is estimated that women grow half the world’s food, but they rarely own land”. (283)

The male domination over women is discernible in all societies and this domination is one of the major causes for the uprooting of the family unit. Shashi Deshpande highlights on the suppression and oppression of women, gender bias and male domination that are

operating within the families. Her take on women's issues does not seize the women from her grounding or deviate her from the familial duties. Her women struggle, protest and finally introspect and achieve self realization, only to emerge out as more confident women. Deshpande strikes a positive note at the end of the novels that women can achieve anything, by being in the family, and not by breaking away from it. This is the confidence she wants to spread to the women. She uses this tool of literature effectively and tries to bring out a positive consciousness amongst the modern women, who are shuttling between modernity and tradition. Austin Warren Says: "The writer is not only influenced by society: he influences it; art, not merely reproduces life but also shapes it". As a writer of this kind, Deshpande dexterously brings out a new awakening in the minds of women, that family; the basic social unit should never be disrupted but protected. Women have greater role in this task. For example *The Dark holds no terrors* is the story of a woman who is gripped and engulfed in her own mental agonies and conflicts, not able to tackle her familial duties but rises to an awareness finally, that she has to cope up to the reality with much confidence.

During her childhood Sarita, the protagonist, has always been ignored and neglected by her mother, because, of the traditional whim, that favoured a boy child to a girl. She develops an aversion towards her mother and her brother Dhuruva, and this leads to the untimely death of her brother. She is accused to be the sole reason for the demise of her brother. Saru grows up and educates herself, and becomes a doctor, against the wish of her mother. The bitter and distasteful childhood experiences make her revolt against her parents and she ends up marrying her classmate 'Manohar' without their consent. To her, Manu is a saviour, who has come to redeem her from the hellish life at her own house. She succeeds in her profession and turns out to be a reputed doctor. Manu's male ego is unable to digest her growing success and this leads him to turn violent. He dictates terms and tries to control Saru. Simon De Beauvoir states about this mentality of a man.

*Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being ... she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. (121)*

Saru, not able to cope up family and profession at the same time, goes to the extent of giving up her job. This is the agonizing situation of many a women in the present scenario. But Manu resists it, as he will be unable to maintain the family expenditure. Her inability to do justice, both to her profession and her family nudges her to an extreme confusion. The stress burdens her inner self, and so she goes back to her parent's home after so many years, with a faint hope of finding solace. Talking to her father about her husband's insanity, she breaks down and waits for her father to guide her and show her the way. But her father says:

*Give him a chance, Saru stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong. Tell him all that you told me... Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him. (216)*

Saru introspects, realizes herself and envisages what she has to do. There is no point in grieving but to act constructively to better herself and her family. She says:

*There can be never any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I needlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood. (198)*

Women have to analyze and understand their own flaws first before they lose hopes. Here Prasanna Sree, rightly observes:

*Saru understands that it is she, who is self assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhuruva, to her mother and her husband Manu. She feels that till her last breath she will not be able to get rid of the thought that she was cruel to them. (65)*

This new awakening strengthens her and she decides to meet her husband when he comes to her parent's house. The story ends with this positive decision. The decline in any conjugal relationship is ego and lack of understanding. Sarabjit K. Sandhu observes, "Marital life is nothing but a queer combination of several forces acting upon two human beings in different capacities to fulfill the marital ambition and play a vital role in the society." (22) If a man and woman can perform the familial duties without ego, family can be preserved. The women's job in this aspect becomes pivotal, as they are the center of a quality family. A family without a woman staggers a lot and hence we see a need for the awakening of women's strength and potential to uphold the spirit of togetherness. If women yield and succumb to the atrociousness of the male dominance the essence of the family is spoilt and subjected to disintegration.

According to Functionalistic theory, women have an expressive role, dealing with emotion and feeling of the family members. Men's roles are that of instrumental and they are the breadwinners of the family. In any case, if the spouses fail in their duties, the family becomes dysfunctional and stops the continuity of the society. In *The Dark holds no Terrors*, Saru acknowledges this fact and tries to change herself, not compromising with the situation. Deshpande highlights on the idea, that marriage is an institution where mutual acceptance is essential. Ego centered spouses can never keep the family together. Deshpande does not want her female protagonists to 'compromise' with the existing situation but to change. She seems to look positively at the younger generation to restore partnership with more equality. In an interview with Prasanna Shree, Deshpande opines, "Saru realizes that her problem has been herself. She had been blaming her mother, her brother, her father and her husband and she realizes that the problem has been herself. She is going to change herself now. So where is the compromise?" (145)

As per Deshpande's words, Saru doesn't compromise but understands what she has to fulfill to preserve her family life and she is ready to confront her husband. Deshpande's novels conspicuously stresses on the need for improving the human relationships, family space and marriage. She believes that family is an essential unit in the society. When there is compatibility between a man and a women living together in a family with their children, there is a kind of healing in the family, such as less stress, more happiness and more understanding.

Nijole .V Benokraitis in his *Marriages and Families* quotes the Boston Quarterly Review that said, family in its old sense, is disappearing from our own land, and not only our institutions are threatened, but the very existence of our society is endangered. Nijole also states that, in the 1920s, E.R. Groves, a well known Social Scientist, warned, that the marriages were in a state of 'extreme collapse.' Some of the critics, who were little optimistic about the family unit, a decade ago, have now changed their mind, due to the recent data on family changes. Nijole says:

*High rates of divorce, millions of latchkey children, an increase in the number of people deciding not to get married, unprecedented numbers of simple – parent families are the conditions in the present society due to changing families. (216)*

## 2. Conclusion

Since the families are deteriorating, there is a need for the reconstruction and resuscitation of the family unit. The writers have a greater role to play and induce the moral aspect of life in their readers. Deshpande, the leading woman writer says. "I write because I want to change the world; I would like to change it, certainly in some areas, especially where I see grievous wrong" ( 2001: 31)She thus unconsciously promulgates the lofty idea of proving woman's own identity without compromising with irrational male atrocity but be sensible to the issues she faces in daily life. If every woman succeeds in doing this the fragrance of the family can ever be kept fresh, positive and fruitful.

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