

THE PASSIONATE PARAGON ‘SARU’ IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S ‘THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS’

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. Shashi Deshpande at heart is a realist. She has created authentic female characters-fresh-and-blood characters with recognizable credentials. She presents a plausible story of authentic characters and not shadowy abstractions. She believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be. She writes about the situation of women and their failures in the fast-changing socio-economic milieu of India. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity concerning women in middle-class society. Women are the centre of her fictional world. Her desires, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society are the main points in her novel. This paper analysis Shashi Deshpande's woman protagonist Saru in the novel 'The Dark Holds no Terrors' and her struggle to prove her identity in society. Her passionate wish to prove herself a Brave female is mirrored here.

Keywords: Feminism, struggle, identity, tradition, recognizable, domestic relationship, social injustice, gender discrimination, artistic sensibility and so on.

INTRODUCTION

Indian society belongs to the man since time immemorial. The woman has been given a secondary and inferior position in her family and society. She has been facing injustice, suppression, oppression, subjugation and exploitation in a male-dominated Indian society. In spite of being educated, she has been looked down upon with contempt. She has been reduced to the status of a plaything and a machine, a lifeless object used to fulfil men's sexual desire. She has been treated as a commodity to be used, controlled and disposed of by the male members of society. She, a meek and obedient member of a male-dominated society, a puppet that follows five paces behind her man, an inanimate object suffering on account of prejudice, orthodox conventions and traditions, is expected to be silent, tolerant and patient, and yet gentle and gracious, caring and loving, kind and considerate right from the ancient days. Though like a man, she is born free, she is caught in chains in one way or the other. She is miles away from freedom from male-domination deeply rooted in a male-centric and patriarchal society with its conventional beliefs,

superstitions, values and norms. The place and status equal to man need to be given to her in various fields of life. She is stronger and bolder than a man in many respects. The woman occupies an important position as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, and most importantly, as a human being in all human relationships. However, the man-woman relationship is marred by the evils such as male-ego, male-domination and gender-discrimination which seek to marginalize the role of a woman in Indian patriarchy. The present article is an attempt to review the place, position and status of an Indian woman in her family and society. Melinda Gates rightly says, "A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult." Here it is 'Saru' the Passionate Paragon who exhibits her strength by overcoming all her struggles.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The present paper aims to evaluate the novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' of Shashi Deshpande from a feminist perspective. Deshpande has gained a reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. Most of Deshpande's Protagonists are women who are educated and exposed to western ideas. The emotional upheaval in the minds of these women and their reactions to various issues related to women, caught between tradition and modernity are susceptible to treatment from a feminist angle.

The woman of today stands poised as the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago; she does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive. This awakening of the woman's consciousness as a delineated by Shashi Deshpande in her novels deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of a woman's point of view. Hence the need for a close study of Shashi Deshpande's novel as a product of feminism which offers a fresh perspective of critical analysis linking literature with real-life situations.

Shashi Deshpande feels embarrassed to be called a woman writer and she is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist. She considers herself as a feminist in personal life but not a feminist writer. "I write as a writer but am identified as a woman writer. I am nothing more than a novelist and a short-story writer but people seek more glorified titles to elevate you to stardom." "If critics and reviewers insist on calling me a woman writer, then 'man' should be prefixed to male writers as well" "Women writers are expected to write for women's magazines and be read by women readers only. Males generally do not want to read women writers." Here am reminded of the sayings by Edna Gardner who rightly quotes, "Just watch, all of you men. I'll show you what a woman can do...I'll go across the country; I'll race to the Moon... I'll never look back." Also, Madame Marie du Deffand opines, "Women are never stronger than when they arm themselves with their weaknesses."

Shashi Deshpande's novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' unveils the fragility of the male ego which refuses to accept on inferior in marriage. Through the life of the female protagonist Saru, Deshpande highlights the trauma of a woman who is made the victim of her husband's frustrations because economically and socially she has achieved a superior status. The paper also seeks to discuss gender discrimination practised by parents towards their children.

The female protagonists of the novels of Shashi Deshpande make all sorts of efforts to create their identity in this society which is governed by males. The quest for identity 'who I am' becomes a hard nut to crack for a woman in a male-dominated society. She is moulded, reshaped and reoriented by

man and for man. Patriarchal social set-up always has denied existence to women. This setup assigns the status of a woman that she should be somebody's daughter, a sister, a wife and as a mother. Thus she is always defined by her relation to someone else invariably a male of the family. Patriarchal social setup has denied a woman the possibility of being a 'She', a person of achieving individualism, an identity of her own. Change is the rule of nature. Woman began to kick out the imposed identity and cherished the dream of having an identity of her own. Shashi Deshpande's novel "The Dark Hold No Terrors" is about highly educated, economically independent woman's search for her identity which leads to uncovering the dormant strength in human beings. It is the story of problems faced by a career woman. The novel deals with the story of Sarita (called Saru) and her relationship with her parents and husband and her agonizing search for herself. The novel reflects the bitter truth that even successful, modern, educated and working woman in India is suffering from her marginalized position in society. In the patriarchal society, women seem to struggle at the clutches of men though at their higher status in society. Lady Gaya's sayings remind us of the plight of women thus:

“Some women choose to follow men and some women
choose to follow their dreams. If you're wondering
which way to go, remember that your career will never
wake up and tell you that it doesn't love you anymore.”

Deshpande's novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors" brings out the struggle of a woman in a family where a male child is preferred to a female child and the novel reveals how the insensitive attitude of the family towards a female can drive her into a schizophrenic state of mind. The central character of the novel Sru (Sarita) experiences the indifference of her mother towards her. Saru was blamed for her brother Dhruva's death. She is always neglected. Years on her mother's words still bothered her, "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" Not only this, even for her dark complexion mother used to hurt her through her harsh words and comments. This novel throughs light on the gender discrimination of serious natured exercised mother towards her daughter. She remains denied parental love and becomes a victim of her husband's ill-treatment. In the end, Saru, at her father's house objectively mulls over the reasons for her disastrous marriage. She blames herself for it. In guilt consciousness, she ruminates, 'My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood.'(217). Saru is dissatisfied with her marriage but in her quest for the wholeness of her identity, she does not advocate separation from Manohar (her husband) but a tactful assertion of identity with marriage. In the end, she leaves her father's house and goes back to Manu with a determination to assert her identity. What Shashi Deshpande suggests is gender discrimination by parents towards their children prevailing in our society and the compulsion to perpetuate male dominance if the marriage is to be kept going. Deshpande brings to light the female protagonist Saru's Perseverance and confidence in believing that she would reform her married life. This concept is well expressed in the words of Marie Curie, "Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained. "

ANALYSIS OF THE THEME

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a leading woman novelist on the Indian literary horizon and won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel 'That Long Silence'. The present paper seeks to evaluate her novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' from a feminist perspective. Her she depicts the woman protagonist Saru in myriad roles-wife, mother, daughter and individual in her own right. A closer study of her work reveals that Deshpande is a highly sensitive writer who is aware of the male-female imbalance in society. Though not a rabid feminist, she has carved a niche for herself in voicing the feelings of the educated, urban middle-class woman. Women's power is highlighted in the following lines:

"Why has the word [feminism] become such an uncomfortable one? It is not the word that is important; it's the idea and the ambition behind it," says Emerson

"A strong woman understands that gifts such as an intuition and emotional connection she values and uses all of her gifts." – Nancy Rathburn

Shashi Deshpande's novels are a realistic depiction of the anguish and conflict of the modern educated middle-class women. Caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality and independence on the other, her protagonists feel as human beings. Deshpande's concern and sympathy are essentially for the woman. She has given an honest portrayal of her fears and self-identity, the author lays bare the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression. Hence, Deshpande's primary concern for the woman makes her a feminist writer.

THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS: SARU'S INNER STRENGTH

Several Indian novels deal with woman's problems. But the treatment is often peripheral and the novels end up glorifying the stereotypical virtues of the Indian woman like patience, devotion and abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to her. Whereas the heroines of Shashi Deshpande are entirely different in the sense that they explode the myth of man's superiority and the myth of woman being the paragon of all virtues. Every novel starts with people, their sufferings and their potential to overcome the hardships in their lives. Female characters occupy a pivotal position in her novels. She creates live characters out of day-to-day life and very carefully avoided creating wooden characters to fulfil her dream of envisaging the power of female equal to male as a human being. Shashi Deshpande excels in the portrayal of women characters but she is against the character of superwoman or idealizing them. To an interview, she told, "My characters take their ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are."(11) Deshpande's women characters have the strength of their own, and in spite of the challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed. Every heroine of her novels rejects rituals that are vestiges of the past. In their rejection, they discard the meaningless rituals like circumambulating the tulsi plant. Both Indu (Roots and Shadows) and Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors) refuse to undertake such rituals which are meant to increase the life span of their husbands. The rejection is an indication of their autonomy and their capacity to see their lives independently. She advocates that woman is not merely a conglomerate of such functions. She has to be judge at par with her male counterpart based on her potential.

To Saru, the idea of men going to work, children going to school, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrub and sweep appealed as she finds a kind of harmony in these tasks performed by women who stay at home. This kind of contentment as Saru discovers in her new routine life makes her feel that she has a new life and now as Saru calls herself changed persons and nothing of the old Saru is left. At her father's place, slowly she loses the awareness of her feminine. She stops thinking about herself as a woman. The doctor in her is more often seen than the wife or mother in her. Neighbourhood women visit her to talk about their ailments. Mostly these women keep everything as a secret. This makes Saru to think that "Their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them and she calls them stupid, silly, martyrs, idiotic heroines, Going on with their task and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty". Saru like her neighbourhood women can never voice her feelings until the real day had arrived. Her heart explodes and she becomes so restless. She objectively analyses her share in her marriage turning out to be a disaster. Her ruminations make her think. "My brother died because I heartlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because she deserted her. I husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood". After reliving memories of her brother's death, Saru can confront deeper problems. She at last receives confront from her father who advises her to forget about her role in the death incidents her brother and her mother. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter adversities as they come along in one's life, and she must be prepared to meet the present problems of facing her husband Manu. Earlier the disillusionment in her marital life makes her look for other avenues. Even affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Roa one temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life.

Again, Deshpande excels in her impressive portrayal of women's fight for survival and revival in a world that offers no easy way outs. Saru proves to be a woman of strong human-will making a conscious decision of her own life: medical education, choice of life mate from a low caste to defy social codes of society. Saru, a strong-willed girl, against all odds and in adverse circumstances of her childhood, realizes her potential by taking up a challenge of becoming a doctor, "That had seemed impossible. But she had done it." ('The Dark Holds No Terrors' 139) Saru, after achieving her goal owes it, humbly to her father. It shows her strong will, moral courage and maturity of her soul which are essential traits of humanism in the novel. Saru's mother gives preferential treatment to her son, Dhruva over Saru. Saru being ill-treated by her mother does not like her and believe in defying her always. Seema Suneel points out non-feministic stance of a novel, "The thrust here is not on man's cruelty to woman but woman's cruelty to a woman." (113). A moment comes in the life of Saru after the death of Dhruva, when she accepted the cruelty in her behaviour, somewhere in her subconscious mind, towards her brother, Dhruva and her mother. As the novel says, "Sibling jealousy. And it always frightened her." (The Dark Holds No Terrors 72). As G. Dominic Savio writes, "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire." (31) The acceptance of ill-will is reflection of humanistic trait. In the novel the attempt of Saru for freedom, to escape from the terror, marries Manu, a teacher, but it proves to be another trapping of dark holding deeper terrors as, "Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male." (The Dark Holds No Terrors 163). Her married life becomes bad to worse in the want of love, compassion and companionship and she begins to suffer silently, as she tries to live her life at her terms by resisting what went against it. Saru's life reflects a deep feeling of alienation as she has been deprived of love and compassion throughout her life and a deep cry can be heard from stony silence of her life. Deshpande arouses deep human sympathy at her struggle to survive, "The urge to confide in someone to talk to someone, was growing in her....I am alone. That no one could comfort her." (43) Saru, throughout her life, shows unsatiated craves for belongingness, "The childish grief of being unwanted swamped her unreasonably again and again.Nobody likes me, nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me." (83) Saru,

even being a realist, finds loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She realizes that the sufferings of multitudes do not lessen one's suffering in any way. She comes to know that dependence on another is misery and independence is happiness. She realizes the truth of human life and learns to cope up with it with fortitude. The alienated soul cries out in despair, 'Would it always be a failure, any attempt out to another human being? Had she been Chimera all her life, hoping for someone? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone.'(219) This is the realization on the part of Saru, which reflects the traits of humanism.

Saru, with an emerging new self, the turmoil and distaste which has filled her, slowly begins to seep out of her. She refuses to be a victim. Here, Deshpande makes Saru integrate the conflicting view as of life and strive for wholeness of things. Saru utilizes her enlightened self-awareness to derive personal meaning and purpose from all physical and mental experiences of life to master a life purpose. Saru realizes: "All those selves she rejected so resolutely at first, so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife...Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She has to accept these selves to become again."(220)

The circles of pain that surrounds Saru may not possibly redeem her. But pain ultimately becomes a means of self- discovery that enables her to take the decisive step of leaving her house, children and husband. Although at the end of the novel she awaits Manohar's arrival, her return to her home, if at all it takes place, will not be the same again. For sure, Saru would lead an independent life with confidence and courage after all the purgation she underwent.

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that the male supremacy over women is deeply rooted in the Indian customs. Somewhere women are also responsible for their suppression in the society. Our society is practising patriarchy from the era of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The study of selected characters from these two epics has shown that women being victims of male dominance didn't raise their voice against it. By not raising their voice against such kind of dominance they also become the agents of it. The study of female characters of selected novels shows how patriarchal system affects the personality and psyche of women. The patriarchal society has set the male hierarchy in this Indian society. Even the condition of women is the same; they are being suppressed by male domination. The works of Indian writers in English have projected the male dominance in their novels and most of them have written about it after observing the Indian patriarchal system. Through their works, these women writers have tried to project the real condition of women in society.

The female protagonist Sarita in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* by Shashi Deshpande also struggles for her identity in the patriarchal family. She faced the partial behaviour of mother and father since her childhood. Shashi Deshpande has presented male dominance through various incidents in her novel as the way Sarita felt inferior inequality to her brother and later to her husband. She longs for somebody who would care for her. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande brings out the struggle of women in a male-dominated society. Though the character of Sarita is very strong, she has a prestigious job of a doctor but still, she is dominated by her husband in different ways. Her husband Manohar tries to abuse her physically and mentally. Being a rebel she escapes from him but at the end, she surrenders herself in front

of the patriarchal society because she knows the bitter reality that it's very difficult to survive in a patriarchal society without the support of her husband. Shashi Deshpande has also presented the psychological problem of woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. Shashi Deshpande's success lies in her representation of real-life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflict of Sarita and her quest for the self-identity. Shashi Deshpande's novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors" gives a vivid picture of a well-educated, economically independent woman Sarita who revives and regains her dormant power. She proves to be a passionate winner of her conscience that she would return to her family and lead a happy life. Though initially, she happens to be a sufferer from all corners of life, later she tackles all the atrocities levied on her and takes an optimistic view of leading a happy life with her family. Here shines the point of the Passionate Protagonist Saru who revives her subdued strength thus conveying a positive note to all those female sufferers that 'every end has a new beginning'. Thus Shashi Deshpande extends a note of positivity through her passionate protagonist Saru to all those females who still undergo predicaments in the society. Saru becomes a model of 'The Power of the Powerless' proving herself as passionate paragon.

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