

A PEEP INTO THE TORMENTED SELF: A STUDY OF PANDEY'S THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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ABSTRACT

Indian women living in an orthodox and conservative family feel inhibited to raise their voice against the aggressive dominance of the male persons of the society owing to their inferiority complex and rigid code of conduct imposed on them. Their ambitions, desires sense and sensibility are faithfully expressed in the novels of the women novelist of the late nineteenth and twentieth century's. They depict the image of the new women waiting for emancipation and liberation in a fast changing world. Since India being a tradition bound nation, its women are also shackled by numerous social and religious customs and conventions that render them incarcerated behind curtains. In view of their miseries, the women novelists of feminist perspective committed themselves in fictionalizing womens' cause in order to ameliorate their position and release them from the state of traditional servitude.

KEYWORDS: Novels, Feminist, Shashi Deshpande

INTRODUCTION

The post- Independence Indian English women novelists in their heroic struggle tried to break the pattern of sexuality and sensuality and discover themselves as human beings capable of playing a positive role in the development of society. Shashi Deshpande, one among the leading women novelist in the Indian literary scenario could be included in such a list. She has reached such a high pedestal as she mirrors realistically the miserable plight of the contemporary middle class, educated urban Indian women who play multiple roles in their life. She also analyses as to how such traditionally characterized , ideally warm, gentle and submissive souls remain the same through the centuries. Deshpande, one of the most accomplished women novelists of the post modern era, holds great worth as she had made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women. She herself reveals that she being a human being has written about other human beings who happen to be women. As Y.S. Sunita Reddy has commented "She gives a peep into the state and condition of the present day women who is intelligent and articulate , aware of her capabilities , but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism".(146)The novelist highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. She gives a peep into the state and condition of the present-day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of the so called social and cultural norms. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* taken for study abounds in the above said concepts .

A close study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande reveals that she is deeply concerned with the traumas undergone by women in a middle class family in India. The Indian sage, Manu reveals the fate of woman as

No act is to be done according to (her) own will by a young girl, a young woman, or even by an old woman,

though in (their own) houses. (130)

He went on to declare

In her childhood (a girl) should be under the will of her father; In (her) youth, of (her) husband: her husband being dead, of her sons: a woman should never enjoy her own will.

Manu's edicts have formed an essential part of the Indian male psyche from the beginning of the Indian civilization. She is expected to be cheerful and clever in household business, with the furniture well cleaned and with not a free hand in expenditure. According to Subhash Chandra, furniture signifies "the meanest jobs which are the bounden duties of the house-wife and which she must do with complete dedication and diligence, to the entire satisfaction of the lord and master of the house" (148). Apart from this she has to please the master as long as he is alive and even after his death she cannot disregard and re-marry. The only option open for her is to look ugly and starve her to death.

Patriarchal society considers women physically weak to venture into the world outside the four walls of their houses and deficient to make important decisions. Hence women are relegated to the domestic sphere where they have to accept the hegemony of a male counterpart. Since ages it is considered that it is a woman's duty to house, raise children and give comfort to her family. Still they are subjected to drudgery and lead the life of a captive.

According to Simone de Beauvoir's, "a woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her" (19) is true of the Indian woman despite different laws and constitutional safeguards pronounced favouring her. She still continues to be defined with respect to man and to be regarded as subordinate to him. The novel taken for study namely *The Dark Holds No Terrors* highlights the socio cultural taboos that prevent the protagonist to be on par with the other sex. The novelist projects as to how the patriarchal society plays a predominant role in suppressing the women. The protagonist Sarita, right from her childhood faces lot of problem. She is always reminded by her mother, of her destiny, that she has to get married and leave her home and so her mother keeps telling "Don't go out into the sun . You'll get even darker"(45). When Saru asks "Who cares?" to this her mother replies "We have to care even if you don't?, We have to get you married' (45). The prime duty of the parents lie in getting their daughters married and for this the society expects them to maintain their appearance and complexion. When Saru reveals that she does not want to get married, her mother questions "Will you live with us all your life?" (45). The ideological concept is that a girl child is a temporary resident in her natal home, a burden, a liability and a responsibility to be passed on to the inlaws (Kakar in Ghadially 47). It has become the way of the Indian society that when a girl gets married she has to surrender her natal identity.

The patriarchal concept that, after marriage, a girl must break all ties with her parents and siblings is rooted in shrewd economic considerations. The family property is kept within the family by designating only the sons as the rightful heirs. Such concepts are ingrained in the girl child through socialization .The social set up in India is such that the women is not privileged to enjoy the family property.

The controlling or the management of the girl child's sexuality is an essential aspect of her socialization. Deshpande's protagonists are made to feel different from their male counterpart and warned against revealing their femininity to the male members of the family. On the one hand, she is "acknowledged as a concrete sexual being" (Veena Das 3), on the other, she must only appear "hidden and bound by clothes before the male members of the family (3). Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is told "You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat

like that. Not even if it's only your father who's around" (55). And ultimately she starts hating her womanhood: "I can remember closing my eyes and praying Oh God, let it not happen to me. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn't happen" (55). The agonizing feelings bred by such growth are monstrous. The barriers of society spread their frightening tentacles over her. She feels abhorrent, but helpless, and so she reveals "a kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother" (55).

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita, the protagonist due to her mother's neglect leaves home and obsessively seeks success in medical college. There she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents' wishes. Her mother being a traditional, orthodox woman does not want her daughter to get married to a person who hails from a lower class. The traditional society does not allow a woman to marry of her choice. Moreover the man belongs to a lower class and the woman to a Brahmin society and so it remains a great hindrance for them. The socio cultural constraint is such that it is impossible for a woman belonging to the Brahmanic family to marry a lower class boy. Caste plays a prominent role in the Indian set up. According to C.J George "Casteism is a hydra-headed evil contagious like small pox. It is a heinous crime. It poisons and destroys the dignity of man" (19). As she feels insecure in her parents' home, her marriage to Manu is a means of love and security which she had always lacked in life. She was against her mother who was of the opinion "I know all these love marriages. It's love for a few days, and then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then. To you? God, that's the one thing I'll never do. Never!" (69). The society is such and its view is reflected by the novelist through the protagonist. So she runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. For her, he was the ideal romantic hero who has come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless existence. She succeeds and emerges as a successful, popular and reputed doctor. At the same time, her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. But the situation changes: "he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (37).

Her inability to devote time for herself and her family distorts her family life. She is unable to balance between her duty at home and in her profession. Manu, her husband, is unable to digest people ignoring him and greeting her. As he cannot express it, he gets irritated and indirectly says "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon" (37). From this it is evident that no man in the socio-cultural background can digest when his wife is given preference and he being neglected. At a personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment which she had once developed. It is now replaced by a psychological conflict which is uncalled for but inevitable, given the situation in which both of them have been placed. Most of the solemn duties towards her husband and children are unattended to. The children do not get proper love and care from their mother as she gets late in returning home. The husband sits waiting: Saru reveals, "I came home late that night... When I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face that made my heart give painful, quivering little jumps" (71). The complication starts and she realizes that her happiness is only an illusion. Gradually she becomes a successful doctor and the financial status grows far beyond that of her husband's and the result is that the gulf between her and her husband widens. No man in this socio-cultural world can digest his wife earning more than him and Manu, is not an exception. Being an Indian woman, and in order to have a better understanding between her and her husband she wishes to resign but due to financial compulsions is prevented in doing so. Their relation further widens when a girl comes to interview Saru and asks Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well? (200). Manu feels humiliated and gives vent to his feelings by physically abusing Saru. This act is repeated again and again by Manu whenever he is emotionally hurt. Saru relates to her father

I never knew till then he had so much strength in him... I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry, I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure. (201).

Sarabjit K. Sandhu is of the view that

The financial ascendance of Sarita, at the same time, renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity, is through sexual assault upon Sarita, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood leading to a sort of abnormality at night, as he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, turning into a rapist at night. (22)

Manu's physical assault has such a terrifying and humiliating effect on her that she does not even speak about them, even to Manu. She says. And each time it happens and I don't speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death (96) Day by day this physical onslaught becomes frequent. Unable to ensure it any further she takes shelter in her parental home.

Thus, the novelist has portrayed the social structure of a typical Indian family where women are badly treated by men. This is a male-dominated conservative framework of society where woman have to face a marathon struggle. Right from the beginning of creation, woman have been the subject to many insults and abuses. The physical, sexual and psychological violence against women is normative punishment for every woman who rebels against the defined codes of society. According to the socio cultural concept, a woman does never deserve freedom but as a wife she should advise like a minister, be a slave, have the appearance of Laxmi, pardon like mother earth, and in bed be like the celestial being Rambha. Paul has aptly commented "*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is certainly a protest novel especially in the Indian context in the sense that it reacts against the traditional concept that everything in a girl's life is shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male" (71). Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* confronts reality and survives in a male dominated society which offers no easy way to overcome the problems. She neither surrenders to nor escape from the problems but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protégé. She longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms and adopts to be an anti- matriarch who yearns for a new environment where the mother cannot thrust her will on her. She hates her parental home and her quest leads her to discover the hidden strength in human being which shapes life to a pleasurable and possible one.

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