
A FEMINIST DILEMMA PRESENTED IN ‘THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR’

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ABSTRACT

Indian writers have made the most significant contribution in the field of fiction. Among Indian-English women novelists, Shashi Deshpande occupied a prominent position. She has sensitively treated typical Indian themes and has portrayed contemporary middle-class women with rare competence. In a wider sense, her subject matter explores the human predicament. She is undoubtedly the most significant of the contemporary Indian women novelists, so are her novels. She takes up the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women for the themes of her novels.

KEY WORDS: Themes, novelists

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a truthful expression of life through the medium of language. Its success lies in blending both art and morality in such a beautiful way that art, in the long run, becomes the thought. Novel is a product of post colonialism in India. It has come through English language and western education. Its progress in India is due to the liberal thought from the west, which again is a product of post colonialism. The image of woman in Indo- English novel is based on the traditional ancient literature of India, which showed woman as a devoted wife or a devoted mother. The post colonial writers of Indo-English novels equipped with a new education and sociability have different perspective of the images of woman. In the post colonial period liberal thought was brought in to our country and it was also propagated by western education. The woman novelists were responsible for the new image of woman struggling against the oppressive social norms of the male dominated society. The image of the woman in the postcolonial fiction is a crystallized form of the two different cultures. The image of woman as a custodian of extraordinary moral virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice has become an archetype. The image of woman in quest of her identity has emerged from the archetype.

In this respect there occurred changes in theme, emphasis and design in the literature of the twentieth century. The imaginative and creative responses of the writers are related to the changing world view and the questioning attitude thereby developed by it. Let us restrict our view to the section of novels alone with the list of great novelists like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandeya, Anitha Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kushwant Singh, Nayanthara Sahgal, Anitha Kumar and Shashi Deshpande besides the unmentioned numerous others.

These Indian novelists deal with the society in its rich and varied customs and view the predicament of women in different dimensions. The attitude to women has changed in recent times. Their writings are based not only on observations of external behaviour but also on the internal journey in the psychological realm of the feminine sensibilities. A few women novelists like Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande make straight journey into the psyche of their women characters that are torn on account of the tensions generated by the discord between the individual and the surroundings. They have started trying to understand Indian women and portray her in their novels.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the living dynamic women writers in Indian English literature and she published many novels and collections of short stories. Some of them are, **That long Silence(1988)**, **If I Die Today(1982)**, **Come up and Be Dead(1983)**, **Roots and Shadows(1983)**, **The Dark Holds No Terror(1981)**, **The Binding Vine(1992)**, **The Intrusion and Other Stories(1993)**, **A Matter of Time and The Narayanpur Incident(1982)**. The Project is a brief study of the selected

novel **The Dark Holds No Terror**. It deals with the problems of a career woman and her martial constraints.

This chapter deals with **The Dark Holds No Terror** which is reflective of the feminist aspirations. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound 'Indian Society' is the theme of the novel. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a prolonged mental dilemma and a long drawn introspection. Women's quest for self exploration is the principal theme of this novel. In an interview, the author reveals that all her characters are concerned with their 'selves' and they learn to be honest to themselves. The novels of Shashi Deshpande are about women's self quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature. It is a story about a doctor who is disappointed as a daughter as the rapport between her and her mother is little bit strained. She is unable to identify herself as a beloved daughter to her mother and when she grows up she is unable to be attractive enough to be a beautiful young maiden having rapturous power. And so she realizes that what she is as a girl is not what that makes her. She understands that what she is to become is going to give her the identity that she is searching for. She realizes that becoming is productivity which means making life feasible and pleasant, and comfortable for others, and so she selects the avenue of medicine. She is a child with a lot of curiosity which is reflected in her playfulness, visiting friends and out door games. This is very obvious when she roams around the mango grove.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. She not merely describes the pathetic life styles of Indian women but also trying to understand and suggests some acceptable solutions. Her women wish to shape of their own fate. Hers is the authentic, poignant tale of the middle-class educated women and their exploitation in a conventional male dominated society. She writes about the Herculean obstacles in their path.

She portrays modern, educated and the most important financially-independent middle-class women who are sensitive to the changing time as well as situations. They are quite aware of the social and cultural disabilities and want to rebel but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Shashi Deshpande present woman who is standing at the cross-roads of her life. As **Maria Mies** observes: **'Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity'** (130).

Her novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. As this chapter is based on her three novels: The Dark-Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, and That Long Silence. These novels mark the beginning of the quest of a woman for one word. Her women like Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors; succeeds in overcoming social stigmas asserting their potential in the professional arena. Her career women: **'... are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives'** (Mies: 130).

Deshpande presents authentic picture of life in India. Her focus is inward. Her writing is clearly part of Indian culture and literature as well as emerges from her rootedness in middle-class Indian society. In most of her novels she presents the strengthen quality of her protagonists. Her 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', She accepts in an interview with Vanamala Vishwanatha, 'The most satisfactory has been The Dark Holds No Terrors'. It has a simple theme and fewer characters. It gripped me so much that I whipped through the writing.

The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), Studies how Sarita, the protagonist seeks freedom without meaning on her obligations and responsibilities. She achieves harmony. This novel rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and identity.

Sarita known as Saru undergoes a trauma when her professional success casts a shadow on her marital life, but she confronts realities and, at the end, realizes that the required potential is in her own self. She survives in a male-dominated world, which offers no easy way to women. She neither gives in nor shows her back to the problems but accepts challenges with full enthusiasm and great strength.

The novel is commenced by Sarita's standing at the gate of her father's house where once she sworn, never to return. The story of Krishna and Sudama suddenly comes into her mind but she does not admit it. Here, novelist shows the inner self of a woman who does not have dare to face her father after a long gap.

Saru is meek, unpretentious, very sensitive but lacking in self-confidence. As a middle-class woman, she is aware of her own limitations. She yearns for breaking the taut traditional norms. She adopts to be an anti-matriarch and abhors her parental home. Her pursuit leads her to discover the hidden strength in human being.

She is 'two-in-one woman' during day time, a successful gynaecologist and at night 'a terrified animal.' She aspires to become a free individual and wants to achieve an identity of her own self. She comes forth as an individual and as a female. The novel traces that what does she feel as an individual and as a female? On hearing her mother's death, she wants to visit her father but there is topsy-turvy in her mind. Finally, she decides to go there. She appears to be confused, hopeless, dull almost thoughtless and a recluse. When she reaches her father's house: **'She was not apprehensive, though not eager either, for the moment of confrontation. She glanced back at the rickshaw in which she had come. She hadn't paid the man as yet, as if keeping a route open for retreat' (15).**

When Saru stays at her parental house, she gets a chance to review her relationship with her dead mother, her husband, her children, her dead younger brother as well as father. Her earliest memories speak out the gender discrimination shown by her mother. As her mother is very attached to her son. She has got a typical attitude. She believes that a male child will enhance her family lineage. In her musings the sole purpose of her life is to marry her daughter. Saru has had an insecure childhood. She is always tortured by her mother's statement after her brother's death: **'You killed him, why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?'**(191) her mother makes Saru responsible for her son's death. Due to her mother's accusation, she begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. She feels jealous of her brother when he gets all the parental attention. She remembers how her brother was named: **'THEY HAD NAMED him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone . . .'** (168).

She tries her best to attract her father's attention and succeeds in only to some extent. Life becomes more nightmarish for Saru after her brother's death. There are no celebrations at home, even on her birthdays, This sense of rejection fills hatred towards her parents, especially towards her mother in Saru's mind as Adesh Pal finds out: **'For Saru the very word 'mother' stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being . . . thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others'**(74-75).

On hearing through professor Kulkarni, about her mother's death, she feels like seeing her father but at the same time she remembers her mother's sharp words: **'What daughter? I have no daughter' (109).** But she decides to visit her father. This desire is aggravated by Manu's behaviour and hence she goes to her father after a gap of 15 years. Nevertheless, she returns to seek refuge, unable to tolerate barbarism of her husband. She expects a lot of sympathy from her father after having become a helpless victim of her senseless choice of love marriage, she bemoans: 'It's my fault again. If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?'(218). Though she comes back a totally changed woman, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. All these changes sets her like a pendulum rolling between the two houses:

She expects as well as yearns for security, sympathy and support from her father. She wants her father to help her and support her hatred, raised against Manu's brutality. She cannot say all those things which she wants to. All this happens due to a guilt consciousness that she has developed: **'there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. 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).

She even rehearses these thoughts and recites them, but when the real moment comes she blurts loudly. **'My husband is a sadist'** (199). Her father is unable to understand her meaning that what does she want to say? He tries to talk to her like two matured person so that he may understand his daughter. He enquires her about the events that have happened and gradually his unnatural composure and indifference have disappeared. Saru briefs him about Manu's brutality and expresses her helplessness. She says. **'I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry . . . I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure'** (201).

She tries her best to get her father's attention, support and assistance. She reminds her father that how did he help her earlier when she wanted to get an admission in a medical college. But all her efforts could not persuade her father and he leaves her. She lives an isolated and lonely life. She wants her father to listen to her. But his unchanging attitude saddens her. She ruminates that they are like people that **'are fated to be strangers'** (105).

Her visit to her father's house is a kind of escape from her sadist husband and her love marriage. It's a kind of solace from her frantic daily routine too. Her stay at her parent's house is completely dedicated to her own desires and comforts. She also reminiscences her childhood days. She sees her neighbours as well as her friends. When Smita, one of her two friends, Smita says. **'You don't know how lucky you are not to have to ask anyone for money'** (119). Fills her bit confidence but the next moment she realizes her old desperation.

Saru, like her in this line, neighborhood women could never voice her feelings until the real day had arrived. The stay at her father's house gives Sarita an opportunity to review her relation with her husband and all the family members. Though she remains unchanged till the end she has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her a new courage and enthusiasm to handle the reality. To her, the idea of men going to work, children going to school, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrub, look after their family members appealed as she finds a kind of harmony in these tasks performed by women who stay at home. This kind of feeling gives her a new life. She feels that she has a totally new life. At her father's place, slowly she understands the real meaning of her femininity. She stops thinking about herself as a woman. She is reminded of what Betty Friedan said: **'it was easier for her to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life'** (107).

CONCLUSION

Thus Shashi Deshpande has penned an excellent work that shows true reality and power of a woman. Her approach is different from other novelists. She shows how women revolt and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male-chauvinism. She feels that security is also an important requirement of women. So, if a home is there in a position to provide her safety, a woman can never revolt against the home. She is not for revolt, for the sake of revolt. Shashi Deshpande does not believe in violating social-family norms, so does Sarita. Saru, at the end returns to her house. Because she knows that it is her own house. Her children are hers and of course Manu is made only for her. That's why she realizes and determines not to leave them but to live with them. The novelist shows the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from 'self-surrender to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity.

A review by a critic studies the character of Saru and confirms that Saru in the novel undergoes the arduous journey into herself and learns to free herself from guilt, shame, humiliation and she is also

initiated into the mystery of human existence. The epigraph of the novel gains its total significance when she realizes that the parental home cannot be a shelter place. She understands that neither her father nor her husband 'Manohar' can be her refuge. She is her own refuge. She has to overcome herself; she has to kill the ghost that haunt her; she has to find her own way to salvation. The parental home initiates her into an understanding of the meaning of human life.

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