

Psycho-Socio Analysis of Shashi Deshpande's the Dark Holds No Terrors

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Abstract – Marriage is the destiny of the woman; to remain unmarried is suggestive of unnaturalness. It brings shame to the woman's family. It is the parents' social obligation and moral responsibility to get their daughter married before she passes the marriageable age. For the sake of social approval and her parent's happiness, the girl has to go through the humiliating 'inspection' where she is examined by the boy's relatives as if she is a saleable commodity. Denied the freedom to choose or express herself, she is forced into marriage rituals. Neither her parents nor the man ask what she wants. Deshpande's concern with the patriarchal concept that a woman must exist only in terms of her relationship with a man where he will be able to control all stages of her life.

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The Dark Holds No Terrors is the story of Sarita, often she is called by her nickname Saru in this novel. Very often she is ill-treated by her mother, Kamala; an old, traditional, orthodox woman wants her daughter to get married to a person who is from lower caste, as her daughter is not beautiful. She is always neglected and ignored in favor of her brother Dhruva. At the beginning, she is an angry young lady, with lots of question in her mind, protesting and defying any form of domination. Her desire towards selfhood and passion for meaningful and independent in life makes her a doctor.

In her novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors, Shashi Deshpande reviews the fractured psyche of the protagonist, Sarita. The novel reveals the quest of an ambitious, anxious and highly self-willed girl. She treats the patients in the daytime but, at night, lives as a terrified and trapped animal at the hands of her husband, Mano. In the end, she learns that her life is her own which she will have to shape on her own. She also learns that terror is not enforced from outside rather it comes from within. The objective of this paper is to portray the psychological problems that a career oriented woman encounters in her life. The crisis of identity is because of the darkness that persists in one's mind and to get rid of it the person should come out of this terror and face the problems boldly with courage. The quest for identity has become a dominant theme in literature since the rise and development of feminism, which studies various problems, related to women and creates awareness among them. It is an anti-masculinist movement of the women, by the women and for the women. It is a protest, started by women of the west, for equal social, political, legal, moral and cultural rights for women. The feminist thoughts and movements influenced Indian women as well.

Women's quest for identity is the central theme of all the novels written by Shashi Deshpande. According to the author after a great deal of suffering and self-inspection, the woman come to terms with their present with an understanding and acceptance of their past and are ready now to march ahead with new acceptance of life.

It explores the man's unquestionable superiority and the woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues. It also talks about the other Indian novels dealing with woman's issues like patience, devotion and acceptance of whatever is meted out to her.

Shashi Deshpande is an outstanding novelist who has highlighted the problems encountered by the Indian woman caught between the native Indian and invading western culture. Saru, the woman protagonist of the novel, "The Dark Holds No Terrors" is analyzed in this light, she searches for herself.

Commenting on the position of the woman in India's male-dominated society, Shantha Krishnaswamy writes:

"she is a creature who, as a child, is sold off to a stranger for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband's family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sati-Savitri' as an immortal".

Deshpande refers to the myths, epics, puranas as well as other holy books in which women, even though innocent, have been presented as the embodiments of pativatra--- obeying male persons

and submitting to their wishes. As long as Saru is a student, her husband, Manu is the bread earner. They had peace at home despite its different kind of obstacles. But the problem begins at that moment when Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. Saru emerges as a successful and reputed doctor and almost every morning there is a knock at the door and her visitors demand medical attention. As new in the profession, she feels thrill in the profession, but Manu's behavior begins to change. He feels totally ignored as Saru gets all the attention Manu's earning now makes her feel that it barely covers her needs. Her profession keeps her away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches later at night. His male ego feels inferior and cool, calm husband becomes treacherous rapist at night and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. She scorns the world of 'love' and refuse to believe that such a thing can never exist between man and woman. Saru changes her attitude towards Manu as well as from her marital life. The world around her life becomes insignificant and Manu's position and place also becomes relatively unimportant. She becomes so unhappy over the situation she desperately takes the decision to sacrifice her lucrative profession. To Saru, the idea of men going to work, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrap and sweep staying at home to work, clean, scrap 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 totally new life and now as Saru discovers herself as a changed person. Neighborhood women visit her to talk about their ailments. Although Saru's social and financial status grows, there's no peace for her at her home. Her feelings on beings economically, independent individual are worse. In fact, her economic independence though asserted by feminists, brings to fulfillment to her. Another extra marital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her classmate in medical college, whom she meets years later, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her.

"And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. (P-133).

Darkness makes one capable to see things clearly and objectively. Darkness is also a some of constant fear when viewed from outside. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saru has begun to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible. As realization draws upon her, becomes aware that neither secluded life nor the "wall of silence" shall be of any help to her. She decides to speak of her being; the individual fragment will not be taken away by

anyone. To Saru, marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman, a new Sarita is identified to whom past was always receding and there was no future. Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual.

Saru understands that it is she, who is self-assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhruva, 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,

"You are your own refuge, there is no other refuge."

Saru realizes that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere and Saru needs to apply to herself what she has cautioned Dhruva once. There is no need to escape from the darkness or curse the darkness.

In all these relationships; the woman occupies the central stage and significantly the narration shifts through her feminine / feminist consciousness. Her novels reflect the lives of suffocated women in search of a refuge from suffering. Searching for a solution to their private problems, the women protagonists in her novels shift from their personal pains to the sufferings of the other women around. Their professions or social commitments sometimes come in conflict with the expectations of the husband and create tensions within the family. Finding it difficult to cope with the tensions arising out of their professional roles and domestic expectations, Deshpande's women initially seek relief through abandonment of their professional roles. They quit their profession and try to seek peace by confining themselves to their familial roles as homemakers. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, reduced to certain stereotyped and the society denies to sanction them as an identity. So, her women characters crave for identity – to establish a space of their own as the New Women who is primarily characterized by the spirit of rebelliousness, visibly exercising its influence on all relationships, the boundaries of time and space notwithstanding. Deshpande's novels clearly spell out the faith that a woman's desire to succeed as an individual does not negate her desire for love, marriage and domesticity. A balanced and purposeful life is not a Utopian fancy for a woman if she liberates herself from the stereotyped conditioning of the society and is not dependent on the male presence to authentic her thoughts and deeds at every step.

The message which Shashi Deshpande finally conveys is that the women's emancipation lies neither in suffering quietly like a fatalist nor in repudiating all claims of the family and society like a rebel. She must draw upon her inner strength, which her education and knowledge has given her and

bring about reconciliation between tradition and modernity without losing her own identity.

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