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Eco Feminism in Shashi deshpane's The Dark Holds No Terrors

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ABSTRACT:

The origins of the two branches of the women's liberation movement are used to illustrate the micro structural prerequisites of movement formation. It is proposed that there must be a pre existing co-optable communications network within at least part of the social base of a potential movement in order for any "spontaneous" activity to have more than a temporary effect. This network must be galvanized by a combination of precipitating events and specific organizing activity. It is further hypothesized that the nature of the initial core groups will largely determine the subsequent structure and strategy of the movement.

Key words : Discrimination, plight, submissive revolt, turmoil, trauma

INTRODUCTION:

Deshpande not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. By tradition she means those values of security and harmony that symbolize the Indian way of life, while modernity essentially refers to the assertion of the independent, individual self. Her protagonist, at the beginning of their quest, find that they have passively accepted their socially ordained roles. Deshpande advocates that to realize herself, the woman must be true to her own self. The sacrifice and nobility that is expected of the woman is a stereotype that only bogs down the woman in a mire of negation and suppression. The woman needs to venture out of the familial framework, to discover her potential as an individual and give expression to her inner space and self. At the same time, she need not repudiate her marriage or family.

DISCUSSION:

The novelist, here, discusses that how a girl is brought up more like a 'daughter' than a child. Although some of the critics attribute this gender-biased attitude of Saru's mother to her own very unhappy childhood. Sarita's maternal grandmother had been deserted by her husband, leaving her with the burden of bringing up two daughters, one of whom had been Sarita's mother. The woman and her daughters had been sheltered by her parents 'unwillingly' Saru's mother's childhood had influenced her adult personality. Perhaps, her childhood feelings of insecurity and being 'unwanted' had conditioned her to an extent that she started regarding girl-child as a burden. The novelist has very well expressed this point of view by presenting a dialogue between Saru and her parents when she decides to pursue her career in medicine. Had she been a boy, her parents would have taken pride in her achievement of scoring a first class, but so is not the case.

Thus, the novelist brings on the surface the gender biasedness that has made its niche in the psyche of traditional parents, who believe their daughters to be burdens needed to be put off. For such parents the education of their daughters is of least importance. Sarita's mother goes a step further when Saru's father mentions her choice of education.

This is not only the freedom to choose one's career that a woman is ripped off but also the freedom to choose her own life partner. If a girl decides to marry by her own choice or to marry outside her caste; she is thought to be a threat to the so-called 'family honour'. If an educated and economically independent woman like Sarita is not allowed by her parents to marry by her own choice then the plight of illiterate or semi-literate woman can be well imagined. Girls like Saru who protest and marry against the wishes of their parents are never welcomed in their families. They are never 'forgotten and forgiven'. Sarita and Manohar hope that someday they will be forgiven but Saru's mother even does not want to see her again in her life. She develops so much hatred for Sarita that she does not want to go to see a doctor as Sarita is a doctor by profession

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant feminist and being a liberal feminist she takes up many issues which have been left untouched by the so-called radical feminists of the West who believe men to be entirely responsible for the plight of women. Not in mood to appease the foreign readers, the novelist depicts the issues deeply rooted in Indian patriarchal system. In order to do so, Shashi Deshpande, talks about the so-called female patriarchs. Sarita's mother is one of the female patriarchs in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The novelist explores that the male-oriented society conditions females in such a manner that these so-called 'female patriarchs' work against even those of their own gender. Through this novel, Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship only but also exist between a female-female relationship as well. Sarita, the protagonist in the novel, grows up to be a victim of her mother's gender-biased attitude. As a child, she is fully aware of her mother's preference for the son. She is not able to comprehend her mother's behaviour towards her. She is partially if not completely aware of the fact that she is merely a liability or a responsibility that can be ridden off by marrying off. Saru's mother, like a traditional Indian mother, is worried about her daughter's complexion or her appearance instead of her education. Sarita as a girl gets constant reminders of her destiny to get married and leave her father's home. This type of blatant discrimination between saru and brother creates a sense of insecurity and hatred towards her parents, particularly mother. It causes the rebellious nature of saru. Y.S.Sunita Reedy observes: "In this connection, Saru's mother's attitude is typical of most Indian mother and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context"(51).

The conversation reveals a mother's anxiety lest anything should her daughter's appearance or complexion and make it difficult to get her married. In the emphasis on a fair complexion, that must not grow dark and an appearance that should remain attractive (because men like it so), lays a concrete example of de Beauvoir's

observation that a woman is defined with reference to a man. A girl is conditioning since her childhood that physical appearance is the only criterion for being selected or rejected in marriage. If a girl is not beautiful then her parents are not able to find a very good match for her. Shashi Deshpande, here, wants to highlight the problem of a girl of marriageable age. It fills a girl with the feeling of fear of rejection. Many number of advertisements for fair complexioned girls can be found in matrimonial advertisements published in Indian newspapers. Tillie Olsen sees in such socialization the origin of a girl/woman's silence and oppression because it is a slow, corrosive form of mental colonization and pacification. Kamlatai (Saru's mother) tries her best to persuade her husband not to send Saru to a medical college. She, like male patriarchs, believes that girls belong to an altogether different family. The socialization of these female patriarchs has been done in such a manner that they look upon girls only as future wives.

This silence between Saru's parents outlines the emotional margins in the couples' relation and the way Mai kaki praises it, tells of women as a part of 'mute group'. To Mai kaki—the destiny of Saru's mother, who suffered silently, seems to be much better than her own destiny as she has to live as a widow. Mai kaki believes herself to be very unlucky as she survives her husband and is therefore unloved, unwanted and useless. She curses herself for being alive when her husband is no more. Here, Shashi Deshpande wants to assert that widowhood is taken as the worst calamity in the traditional patriarchal society.

Another issue, of gender-discrimination, that is highlighted by the novelist is that though these so-called 'female patriarchs' work against those their own gender, yet they are looked down upon by the staunch male-patriarchs. Saru's classmate Padmakar, on the one hand, wants 'favours from Sarita and on the other hand, he had no respect for his own wife who has devoted her life to none but her husband and his name. By just cooks what he likes and never calls her husband by his name. By depicting the relationship of Padmakar with his wife, the novelist raises the issue that devotion and submissiveness of women are taken to be 'social backwardness' by the so-called male-chauvinists. The novelist also wants to send the message that women can earn respect for themselves not by following the traditional path as followed by Padmakar's wife but by asserting their individuality when required.

CONCLUSION:

It is undeniably true that Shashi Deshpande is a feminist writer but with a broad humanistic outlook. Her novels are essentially reflective of the unenviable situation of the beleaguered great artistic excellence and astounding originality. Her commendably realistic depiction of the contemporary Indian women's situation and the pragmatic solution she puts forward accord her novels an imperishable importance for their affirmative eloquent message for women and the whole humanity as well.

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