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The Dark Holds No Terror: Demythifying Womanhood

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Abstract

The fictional world of Shashi Deshpande epitomizes the social setup of India with all its complicatedness. In the process of emancipation, the women are redefining and rediscovering themselves which is an outcome of their self-examination of their past experiences. The women struggle to establish their individuality due to the gender based discrimination of the society. They discard the domineering social setting, where the family controls and moulds a girl child to live in silence, later this situation continues in the veil of ideal wife, the role which they willingly accepted. The mute woman undergoes self-analysis based on the terrific experiences she has faced in her life which becomes instrumental in enlightening her inherent strength. This paper examines the unassailable emergence of Shashi Deshpande's protagonist Saru of The Holds No Terror who strongly protests the social taboos and forges a sturdy space within in the family bonds.

Keywords : complicatedness, discrimination, domineering, unassailable

Shashi Deshpande mirrors life realistically as it did not leave space for any criticisms. She seems fulfilled by bringing forth the Indian woman's effort in search of her happiness by compromising herself to the social system rather than revolting it. Critics discover her women to be, "creatures of conventional morality: they are the ones who are unfairly abused, misused and ill-used. But they believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord" (Gupta 39).

Shashi Deshpande's women characters search their individuality within the bounds of family and relationships. Her novels discover the intricate issues and provide solutions through self-analysis. The protagonists themselves become their own critic and the final analysis gives them positive hope towards life. The protagonists presented in her novels are neither demi-goddesses nor strong-willed women; rather, they are ordinary middle class educated women who are self-determining only to a certain extent. They sometimes become meek and vulnerable because they are ensnared by the traditional bonds. William Walsh remarks that the novels of Shashi Deshpande to have a peculiar and a strange quality and expresses:

A turmoil of feeling is conveyed in cool, idiomatic and sensitive prose. And it is served by a memory which is so rich and minutely specific and able to produce not just bright discrete images but rather a flow of naturally related scenes that it is a creative faculty making past life live again in the present (117).

Shashi Deshpande's writing has become a true articulator of the middle-class modern Indian woman's pains and pangs. For an Indian male it is simple to support and accept the traditional norms as it requires only little sacrifice from his part; but an educated Indian woman is persistently restricted by the patriarchal society and it becomes difficult to accept the role imposed on her and thereby the native traditions. She wants woman to share in material welfare equally as man and advance her levels of power. She examines and re-examines the ways to empower woman, and finds out that through education and self-reliance she can break the chains of slavery entangled her.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are intelligent and educated modern women who hold realistic thoughts. Her writings centre on the issues of the contemporary women; their education, marriage, family and career. The excruciating crisis of the Indian woman who has been exposed to the impact of growing education and western feminism is inured and curbed by stereotyped role-models of India. This status of women is brilliantly carved in novel after novel by Shashi Deshpande. As Sarabjit Sandhu points out, "Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are very brave ... heroines, but women struggling to find their own voice" (51).

The novelist wants her protagonists to whittle the layers of superimposed rules and roles to be true to their own self. She does not portray them as submissive women surrendering themselves before the antagonistic situations; rather they revolt whenever their individual self gets injured.

The Dark Holds No Terrors narrates the myth of a man's superior complex which takes marriage to a state of disaster and portrays realistic picture of a career woman. Sarita or Saru, the protagonist of the novel is empowered with an ability to initiate a self-search as well as offer a critique of the society in general without over-dramatizing the picture. The novel dramatizes the response against the traditional idea that entirety in a woman's life is shaped towards the very end of gratifying a male.

Saru shows her independence by getting married a person whom her parents opposed. She has exhibited herself as an independent woman to her husband. When she returns to her parent's home in order to escape from the brutalities of her husband, she determines to encounter the circumstance. Initially, she asks her father to open the door if Manu comes and then she decides herself to open it. This action does not show her submissiveness but the willpower to meet the odd situations. The novelist expresses that the turbulences of the Indian woman are not only because of the patriarchal society but also she herself is responsible as she refrains from raising her voice against her torments.

Male dominations started generations ago and Saru's revolt against her husband is an expression of her suffering that comes naturally. Nevertheless, in the last phase of the novel, her attitude towards married life takes a turn after assessing and re-assessing her experiences of the past. She emerges out like a conventional Indian woman who, despite their bitter past, make sacrifices to continue with their married life. Though her marital bliss is only for a short period, she is not able to forget it. Shashi Deshpande's women make sacrifices with everyone whom they feel to have compliance within familial relationships and sometimes even with others. This sacrificing sense of Saru incites her to ruminate over her past life and fills her with the feeling of guilt and remorse. Certainly, the protagonist through this understanding of life decides to harmonize with contrasting and conflicting ideals which is the typical Indian mind set. Siddhartha Sharma is absolutely right when he expresses this about her:

She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage (37).

Shashi Deshpande presents her protagonist with a dual perspective where Saru becomes the critic of herself as well as of others. Throughout the novel, the protagonist's perception is projected but one could not find any mark of sentimentalizing or exaggerating woman's problems. Though the novelist sympathizes with the protagonist, she is never biased and does not deify woman's suffering. The fabric of the novel raises woman's voice and indicates that woman too has independence to have choices in life. Saru is presented with incredible power that she outlives in an androcentric society which provides no freedom to women. Throughout the novel, Shashi Deshpande keeps up exemplary impartiality and refrains from vague notions and imperfect ideas. She thrusts only one idea that each imperfect relationship always sustains only on hope. As J.Krishnamurti observes, a relationship itself has different notions:

To be related implies contact, not only physically, emotionally, intellectually, and there can be relationship only when there is great affection. I am not related to you and you are not related to me, if what is between us is merely intellectual verbal; that it is not a relationship. There is relationship only when there is a sense of contact, a sense of communication (58).

The novelist tries to depict the agony of modern women caught in between personal and professional lives and in the attempt to synthesize both faces opposition within and outside her family bounds. She struggles against many impediments and sometimes she feels a divide in herself because of her submissive and sacrificing nature of Indian womanhood. "Her problems arise, firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity" (Maria Miles 130). The similar situation is experienced by some of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's novels. Her protagonists resent the suppression encountered at home and as a result leave their

parental home; as a sign of revolt against their parents' they get married to the man of their own choice though the parents oppose it; later they find marriage to be a hellish ensnarement rather than a heaven. Attempts to take shelter in their ancestral homes give them a chance to brood over their past. They engross themselves in self-analysis, understand their own individual self and at last assert their self-identity. But some protagonists discard their own home in search of relief from their marital discord and find their individuality with the experiences of others who share the similar suffering.

Shashi Deshpande is much concerned about the women in India which is discerned through her novels. She does not accuse man for the cause of woman's issues. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* exhibits that there are several problems in a woman's life, and Sharma Futenhally rightly finds that "she writes as an insider, not as a viewer: that bane of post-independent writing which was so much more of a ban when Shashi Deshpande began her career" (3). The novelist has carefully voiced her apprehensions and concerns for the future of women who, like Saru is being misinterpreted and they pass through severe turbulences in their search for space and self-identity. The persistent examination of her own self empowers her to realize and resolve her miseries. She liberates herself from the irrational restrictions of tradition to celebrate a life filled with happiness and harmony. She exhibits steadfastness to encounter the enigmas of life bravely. The protagonists successfully liberate themselves from the stereotyped notions that bind them and finally arrive at the right destination. Moving towards emancipation, Saru emerges with resoluteness and create a firmly fixed space for her in this male-dominated society. She became aware that the success doesn't lie in the defeat and devastation of the male, rather than making him realize the need of each other's space. Though Saru began her life in a very repulsive manner, she finally ended up revived and revitalized.

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