

STRUGGLES OF A WOMAN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS*

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Abstract

The paper aims to examine the struggles of an educated and career woman Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Deshpande's novels demonstrate the pathetic condition of Indian women and their struggles in a patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande's quest for identity, freedom, isolation, women's emancipation and struggles of women, have become part of major themes in literature. She unfolds the problems, struggles and issues of female in a pragmatic manner. She has created such women characters, who sculpt herself for self-identity, self-assertion, independency and freedom. Sarita is also one such women characters of Shashi Deshpande, who has faced a lot of suppression, oppression, struggles and ill-treatments of the male dominated patriarchal society.

Key Words: *Suppression, Inequality, Mental Trauma, Frustration and Female Subordination.*

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a distinguished novel written by an eminent Indian English writer, Shashi Deshpande. This novel was published in 1980 and translated into Russian and German. In this novel, Deshpande represents the difficult endeavors and struggles of the protagonist Sarita. It visualizes the struggle of a woman's survival, freedom and her search for identity in a patriarchal society. It reflects Sarita's struggle between the traditional values and modern trends. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was considered as a favorite work to Deshpande, which she remarks in an interview that, 'It

was simple theme and few characters. It gripped me so much that I whipped through the writing the wife had a better job and there was a very obvious tension between them' (1). She has vividly presented the struggles of women in a conservative society through the female protagonist Sarita.

The title, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* suggests that the life of the protagonist Sarita which seems dark. She had a mother who blamed her for not saving her brother from drowning during her childhood days. She had a husband who was brutal and venomous. Along with all such struggles and barriers she takes care of her father and children. But Sarita who was a strong woman, resolved to make a better life for herself amidst the dark situations, hence the dark holds no terror. She can rise up and bring light to her life instead.

The story of the novel revolves around Sarita, who herself narrate it. Sarita is familiarly known as Saru among her friends and family. She was the daughter of a Bank clerk and a conventional mother. Sarita's problem was that she was a rebel of sorts in a custom-ridden society. Saru was the victim of occurrences and conventions of an orthodox and conservative society. Her family consisted of only four members- her parents, younger brother (Dhruva), and Sarita. In Indian middle class families, son is always treated well and given superior treatment, whereas the daughter is subjected to a strict discipline and patriarchal rules of the society. The protagonist Sarita was also no exception to this general rule of the patriarchal society.

Sarita's life was a series of incidents which came one after the other in order to divest and alienate her from even simplest joys in life. From the beginning of her life, she has been constantly reminded by her mother that she is a 'woman'. So, there are number of do's and don'ts for her. Even from her childhood she was asked to keep her complexion attractive so that she can be easily appreciated by her groom and his mother. Sarita's mother asked her not to go in the sun which made a deep impact in her mind. She admits that: 'Don't go out in the sun. You will get even darker. Who cares? We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married' (9). The statement of Saru's mother shows how women are treated like a marriage property in the hands of their parents in a conventional society.

Even in her early life Sarita was under a serious charge of killing her brother Dhruva, who died accidentally by drowning into the water. Saru's mother makes her feel guilty of his death, which leads the relationship alienated. Her friend Smita asked Saru to see the film Rani of Jhansi with her family. Sarita also grew eager to go with her friend, but her parents denied. In order to show her anger, Saru decided to go out of the home for some time without telling her parents. Her brother Dhruva, who insisted on going with her and would not be put off in any way. She went near a pool in which Dhruva drowned. She could not save him in spite of her finest efforts. Sarita's mother was grievously shocked and held Sarita responsible for Dhruva's death. Her mother remarks that, 'You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead' (191). In fact, Sarita had tried her best efforts to prevent him from going with her and also from going into the pool but Dhruva was self-willed, pampered and unyielding.

Words of Saru's mother made a deep cut in her heart, which bled ever after. It was a child's mistake but it caused harshness between their relationship for the whole life. Both were alienated from each other to the extent that Sarita always referred to her as 'she', and her mother stood against Sarita like a rock. Her mother admits that she has no daughter at all. This bitterness was reflected in all matters of the family. She was never cared by her mother after such heart-breaking issue in their life.

Sarita reveals her plan to go to the Medical College for higher studies but her mother firmly opposes her on various grounds, she just ignores and neglects her views. Even her mother argues that his father was not a millionaire to spend huge amount of money to reach her goal. She further said that they would spend money for her marriage also. She is unwilling to admit her daughter in a Medical College. She remarks that: "Medicine! Five, Six, Seven... God knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc... You can get her married in two years and our personality will be over." (144). Saru's mother proves herself as a person who deeply rooted in Indian traditional values and norms, so that she doesn't allow her daughter's wish. After many struggles and problems, she has joined in a Medical College with her father's support.

Sarita get alienated from her family in the name of higher studies, she wants to stay away from her family for some time. She thought that it may lead her to reconcile with her mother, unfortunately it increases their alienation. Saru was hungry for love, who was

actually a girl of great determination and self-restraint. But chance it that she met Manohar and fell in love at first sight. Sarita was very happy when she found that Manohar's was true and innocent love for her.

Sarita's happiness was short-lived. After their marriage, events which hurt the male ego of Manohar took place one after the other. People in their colony began to notice Saru as a Lady Doctor, they smiled and greeted her. The men around her house looked at her lasciviously and women said admiringly that she was a Lady Doctor. Whenever Saru closed the door of the room, she overheard the words of 'Lady doctor, Lady doctor'. Growing recognition of Sarita became a cause of discomfiture for Manohar. Whenever they went for out of their chawl for a walk, people greeted her. But such admirations and greetings are all for Saru, there was nothing for him, which kindled his male ego. Manohar has absolutely no limitations and reservations about treating his wife as an equal and as a person. He is shocked very much and wounded deeply by the unexpected question of an interviewer that 'How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?' (182). Such hurting words of an interviewer, agitates his male pride and confidence completely.

As a result of his inferiority complex, to take revenge, he imposes physical torture- every night Sarita is raped by him. Consequently, he became a psychopath and started gnawing, biting, beating his wife in a stupor. Manohar would become a normal man, a lovable husband in the morning, because he would not remember what he had done in the night. Sarita finds herself trapped in Manohar's frustrated sexuality. Her limitless agony, oppression, deep psychological trauma, suppression finally prompts her to leave her husband and look forward to her father.

Sarita is proved to be marginalized and suppressed by her husband in terms of resistance because she could not resist or avoid her husband's ill-treatments and brutal tortures. Sarita is silenced by the dominant role of her husband in their private life, which prompts her to react against the patriarchal setup and speak on behalf of herself. The patriarchal society voluntarily provides a superior power to men for use the physical body of woman according to his wish-whether the purpose of love making or it may be consuming her body without her support. So, a woman is recognized as a doubly marginalized one- first because of being a woman, then she is inferior to man.

The character of Sarita can be understood in terms of psychological percepts. During her childhood days she had the clear idea of gender inequality- her mother insisted that boys are ‘assets’ whereas girls are burdens. This is actually a very stereotypical idea of a gender biased society. It reflects the condition of Indian women who are squeezed between tradition and modernity. Simone De Beauvoir admits that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine’ (146). Deshpande’s writings reflect this kind of socialization and impeding effects of culture-based thoughts of marriage and wifehood of Indian women. Our society accepts women as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, who always forced to take care of others. They never given freedom to recognize themselves as individuals, which is still remain as a question mark. Even women accept this silently because of the literary figures which are given to them are such as Draupadi, Sita, Shakuntala and Gandhari who never asked any questions regarding their individuality and freedom.

At the end of the novel, Saru reacts against the traditional concept of society that single purpose of a woman is to obey and blindly follow the rules of the elders especially the male ones. Through the character of Sarita, the author projects the post-modern dilemma and chaos of a woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality and identity. She sculpts herself to be a strong and powerful woman in all the three aspects like psychological, biological and social. Sarita proves herself with the different roles fulfilled. Sarita decides to give up the traditional and cultural bonds of marriage and home, through which she overcomes the oppression of the menfolk.

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