

The Journey of a Downtrodden Woman to an Independent Lady through the Pen of Shashi Deshpande

Abstract

Shashi Deshpande a renowned name in the list of Novel writers has given voice to the down trodden, weak and suppressed women against innumerable barriers being put across by the society. The women of this novelist are well acquainted with the cultural and social shortcomings with which they are bound to in this male dominated society. They undoubtedly wish to fight and free themselves for their existence and identity but find helpless well-entrenched social inertia. Kalyani of *A Matter of Time* and Savitri of *The Dark Holds no Terrors* both are such pathetic characters who has made the reader's mind melt and heavy.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender Biasness, Patriarchies, Self Existence and Identity.

Introduction

The political scope of feminism has been broadened by the impact of Marxist ideology that has made feminists challenge sexism alongwith capitalism for both encouraged the patriarchal set-up. Feminism is, indeed, a serious attempt to analyze, comprehend and clarify how and why is femininity or the feminine sensibility is different from masculinity or the masculine experience. Feminism brings into perspective the points of difference that characterize the 'feminine identity' or 'feminine psyche' or 'femininity' of woman.

Shashi Deshpande has great concern for the welfare of the women in the society. Her fictions put forward subtle examples of how the personality of a woman is being determined on the basis of her position, social status and psychological growth. The novels are successful in portraying even those harsh realities of life being faced by the women in the society which couldn't be even explored or exposed by the woman herself, the sufferer. Desai's Novels are thus a reflection of the disturbed psyche of women who are victims of alienation and male dominance. However, they find a way out by self-discovery and introspection. She has revolted against the patriarchal attitudes, "However, I found out, very early in my writing career, that women's experiences are believed to be of interest only to women, that women's problems, ideas and lives are specifically and narrowly considered women's problems and not human ones. It is male problems, male ideas and male experiences which are human".¹ Her deep insight of women psychology and absolute understanding of Indian Patriarchal society brought her International Recognition.

History has witnessed that men have always kept all the concrete powers in their hands; since the earliest days of patriarchy they have thought best to keep the woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the other².

Simone De Beauvoir has very precisely exposed the condition of woman in her most famous book *The Second Sex*. Of course, the miserable condition of woman all over the world inspired the women of talent like Virginia Woolf to do something in this field and the result was the emergence of Feminism, a great movement in the western world in 1960. It is a movement for the emancipation of women and their fight for equal rights.

Aim of the Study

It can be studied by taking into account the psychosomatic, social and cultural construction of femininity vis-à-vis masculinity. The male writers have mostly seen women as inferior and weak. Gendering and some sort of misogyny are evident in the texts written by men. They see men as

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'superior sex' or the 'stronger sex' while women are seen as the 'inferior sex' or the 'weaker sex'. Men are considered as logical, rational and objective and, women are perceived as emotional, inconsistent, intuitive, subjective and lacking self-confidence. But the modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her by the system. And it is there pronouncement in an overt tone that has created the difference also in textuality. It was mainly the Women's Liberation Movement of the late nineteen sixties that the contemporary feminist ideology evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern.

These women realized that their miserable condition was due to the patriarchal society where this gender biasness feature was extremely prominent. To some extent they felt like there was a great discrimination and will never be able to ground their existence and grab their identity. They were misbehaved, maltreated, disrespected and were never benefitted with their due rights. According to Virginia Woolf the women's condition was worst in the past and it was beyond imagination and far away from acceptance of society, if a woman exhibits her talent in any field. In her book *A Room of One's Own* she states –

..... but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty³.

Similarly, Elaine Showalter has also exposed the realities of a male-dominated society through her article 'Toward a Feminist Poetics'. Giving the example of Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge*, she asserts that it is woman who becomes the victim of tyrannical behaviour of man everywhere-

Patriarchal societies do not readily sell their sons, but their daughters are all for sale sooner or later of the daughter emphatic or Central.⁴

The condition of woman is equally miserable in Indian society. The Indian society is basically patriarchal where a woman is given the secondary role. She has no individual existence and is treated as an object. Even religious do not favour her freedom.

***Pita Rakshati kaumare bhartaa rakshati yuvane
Putrastu sthavioribhavena stree swatantratarmahti.***

All her glorification, all her fulfillment lies in sacrificing her life and happiness for the sake of man in different forms-father, husband and the son. This thinking has been so much widespread, so deep rooted in Indian society that Indian woman has also come to believe it is the reality of her life. It is true that the Indian woman is a follower of traditions. She has also been taught to be the symbol of family honour and to care for the happiness of others only but changes in this approach are also taking place

gradually. The modern woman does not find any sense in such self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality and self-identity. She has started defying conventions and has become non-contonist now.

She is also trying to free herself of the dependence syndrome as says Chaman Nahal-

I define Feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome; whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.⁵

Thus with the rise of feminist movement in India the English writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande etc. have also come up against the suppression of woman. This research paper attempts to study the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* from Feminist point of view.

The Dark Holds No Terror is a very powerful novel written by Shashi Deshpande that depicts the life of Sarita, a lady doctor and a true feminist indeed who happens to escape to her father's house in the beginning being tortured by the sexual extremes of her husband Manohar but this parental home equally brings back for her horrible memories of the cruel attitude of her mother who is no more now. The father is indifferent and not supportive enough 'like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest.' Moreover, his subconscious-self also names it treachery to the dead in case he dares welcome his daughter warmly. Also like a traditional Indian father he is not concerned with the troubles of family-members, enjoying the privilege of being the master and head of the family as we know from Sarita-

He had always been so much a man, the 'master of the house', Not to be bothered by any of the trivial of daily routine.⁶

Of course, the Indian woman has also been used to this kind of behaviour. The father frowns and knits his brows in case the married daughter dares return to her parental house having quarreled or divorced her husband. A married woman is thus supposed to stay in the house of her husband till death. However tortured and unhappy she is there, the society is least concerned with it. It is understood as the destiny of poor woman. Sarita tolerated the opposition of mother, be it the question of choosing a husband or a profession. She witnesses all sorts of torture; cursed for the death of her brother, father being reserved and no way concerned to her problems, mother always unloving, husband gets converted to a sadist just because of her becoming the earner of bread and butter as well. The problem faced by Sarita is the problem of thousands of such learned and professional women in today's time even who become the victim of the double standard of society. Indian society is still tradition-bound superstitious. No one dares challenge the existing patriarchal order.

It is a very bitter truth related to Indian social system. Still in remote villages and even among

educated people a woman is considered unholy during the menstruation period. The plight is that the Indian woman has also accepted it as an unholy period of her routine. And it is when sarita studies anatomy and physiology she get rid of her shame and fears. It transforms her vision completely –

Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that.

Sarita's married life with Manu does not run smoothly for a long time and it makes her think that even pleasure is unreal and like an illusion whereas grief seems more real having weight and substance. The fact is that there is difference of status. Saru being a lady doctor is always given more importance. People come to her, surround her, ask for her and respect her and it is something which her husband can not digest. Moreover, the public-opinions are also there to aggravate the matter. When wife becomes more successful than the husband, the attitude of a loving husband into a sadist. Saru gets tortured sexually by her husband because of this reason only, which becomes too painful and bearable. The height of irony lies here that after the sadism Manu, her husband is back the same smiling person what he generally is. That rough behaviour satisfies his male ego without bothering about how emotionally, physically and mentally he was torturing her. This confounds her bitterly-

The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible familiar body. And above me a face I could not recognize.

People boast theoretically that husband and wife are two wheels of a van, two aspects of the same coin but the practical truth is that man is always considered superior to a woman. He has first right on meal, fasts are kept for his welfare and domestic walls never limit his scope.

In such circumstances the only remedy is that women will have to cooperate each other to assert their identity and come forward to protect their rights and to prove their equal status. Moreover, I think what stops a woman from taking rational decisions is that she has made herself absolutely a puppet of feelings and sentiments. Naturally, she starts following the way of punishment and sacrifice which is unfortunately glorified by society. Westerners are more rational in this regard. If they find an idea harmful, they discard it in the twinkling of an eye and propagate the truth through their media, advertisements, newspapers and news channels. Consequently, the whole society becomes aware of the fact.

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Thus we see that *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a good novel feminist novel that tells the tale of a woman who confidently makes her way in patriarchal

society. The withdrawal helps her view her situation objectively. Besides being merely a daughter, sister, wife and mother, she evolves into an individual with her own legitimate expectations of life. Her female protagonists pass through tortuous physical, mental and emotional agony which affects their entire personality largely turning them into a whole new being. Deshpande's works brought significant changes in the middle class women's life style and also gave up a boost to a consciousness of freedom in the minds of women. Shashi Deshpande has said in an article that "Many women are silenced by lack of time".

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's novels contain much that is feminist. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie. She was so fascinated by her women characters that she laid more emphasis on women. Shashi Deshpande says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. It has been observed that the predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught in a transitional world.

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