

Darkness to Twilight in Sashi Deshpande's DARK HOLDS NO TERROR: Study of Patriarchies

Saroj Kumar Pasayat

Manisha Mishra

Abstract-

Sashi Deshpande is among those Indian novelists who have in a sustained manner questioned the traditional disparities and discriminations existing in the contemporary society. Particularly her most cherished thematic concern is the women's struggle for emancipation from the yoke of patriarchal subjugation. Taking note of the long tradition of Indian patriarchy, she has explored the multitudinal dimensions of it both in family and social spheres. She has represented a variety of patriarchies in a most subtle and sensible manner in her novels through a scope of relationships. But she is sensitive to the realities and necessities of man-woman equilibrium in spite of the lopsided dynamics within. Her first novel **Dark Holds No Terror** serves an interesting note on the New Patriarchy which theoretically situates itself in a significant divergence to the traditional one. But the critical probing of this new patriarchy reveals its identity as a transmuted form of the traditional one. In spite of the socio-economic and political changes within the society, the residue of patriarchal subjection and discrimination continues. Manohar, the liberal, sensitized and modern hero becomes a sadist in his relationship with Sarita, the protagonist. Sarita's quest for "a life of her own" evades her till; she realizes the futility of searching for it through an illusion of man-woman equilibrium. Her struggle for emancipation encounters hurdles she never expected and she prepares to take the final plunge. Her scrambling through the contour of "Darkness", a gift of patriarchy, enlivens the gender dynamics in contemporary Indian society presented in the novel.

Key Words- New Patriarchy, Gender dynamics, Indian patriarchy, Residue, Equilibrium, Subjugation etc.

Introduction

It is said that, Literature is an expression of life through language. It is not only a mirror of the society but also of the inexpressible social vibes. It presents the reality of the world by blending it with imagination and creativity. In modern times novel has emerged as the most significant genre of literature with its multi-layered representation and simulation of human experiences. Thus it has been successful in putting across the binaries of life in a most convincing manner. In different times novel has aptly pointed out the lacking and development in our society. It has enabled us to diagnose our Time, Space, Action and Thoughts in a proper manner. Indian novel writing has also been following these characteristics in representing Indian society to its own people as well as to the outside.

As critic M.K.Naik puts it, "Like the women poets of the post-independence period, the women novelists too form a sizable and significant school."(Naik 2016: P-244)From Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya to Anita Desai to Sashi Deshpande and Namita Gokhale, it has been an impressive line of writers. They have represented the myriad colour of Indian life and particularly of Indian urban middle class with ease and elegance. The most impressive aspect of their writing is the man-woman relationship and the womanhood in diversity. Their works have been successful in bringing an unprecedented awareness about womanhood within the historically reinforced patriarchy in Indian society. Indian concept of "life" is associated with

'Purusha' and 'Prakriti' being represented by man and woman in their variegated permutations and combinations. Simultaneously, the impact of the liberal West and its Feminist Movement in the twentieth century catalyzed Indian women writers to blend both the values and entities. Thus the Indian novels have a rich treasure of man- woman relationships from mythical to modern and historical to hybridized.

Many Indian writers got significantly influenced by the theme of women's quest for identity. They realized that novels proved to be a fruitful and powerful instrument in the struggle for Women Liberation. Mostly with subtlety and adroitness these women writers unraveled the intricate human relationships in Indian society and particularly of gender relationships. Being the "insider" they delineate in a coherent manner the binaries, the inconsistencies, the anxieties, the apprehensions etc, within a woman in a highly patriarchal society. Their works proved to be an uncompromising picture of the harsh reality that the Indian women live through. From the veneration like consecrated goddesses on one hand to the suppression and brutalisation beyond humanism, women in India present a panoramic view of gender consciousness.

Feminist writing both creative and critical are a response to the age old patriarchal prejudices and practices. Patriarchy not only dominates in social spheres but also in the cultural, political, economic and literary ones. It is equally true in both public and private domain. Women's dependency upon and subordination to men is conditioned by a whole range of institutional practices embedded in the family. The Indian patriarchy enjoys a more comprehensive leverage through a highly complex socio-historical legacy. Thus it provides a more interesting and engaging study of man-woman relationship or patriarchy. That is why when Indian women novelists subject their theme to a far deeper probing, they are able to create vibrant characters in meaningful dilemmas, providing the reader with an uncanny insight.

Theory

Feminist writers and critics all over the world are struggling to assert the women rights through their writings. They subscribe to the idea that all of literature is phallogocentric and aim to reveal patterns of male discourse that oppress women and privilege men. Therefore, women have to write about themselves, "...to know where women are,... the story of their own domesticity, the story of their own seclusion... and the possibilities and impossibilities provided by that." (Mitchell 1974: P-407) Feminist writers and critics in 20th century had focused on probing the positioning of the women in this patriarchal society in general and at home or family in particular. This approach brought a fundamental shift and re-evaluated the works written earlier from a new perspective. These critics delved into the history and thought to brighten the prospect of the women who were oppressed under the burden of tradition, norms etc. They tried to re-evaluate history to give women their deserved position in a harmonized and sensitised society. These approaches inspired writers to break the traditional structure of the society and present the woman as an important figure in the household as well as in the society. They not only presented the perspective of the women folk but also portrayed how patriarchy is still commanding the social hierarchy and interaction. It is not only the traditional patriarchy which is preventing women to flourish and live freely but also the evolving "New Patriarchy" which is obstructing the struggling and emerging "New-Women" from enjoying their hard earned liberation in an unfastened manner.

Author

Sashi Deshpande is among those writers who are greatly influenced by the Feminist Movement of 20th century. She started her writing career during the peak of this movement. She, like her contemporaries in the West, focused on all the obstacles and oppressions faced by women at home, marriage, work place and also fought for equal socio-political rights. In her writings she also expressed her solidarity for these and depicts the “quest” of women protagonists. She portrayed the conditions prevailing in the highly complex patriarchal Indian society through her works. Her settings, narrative and characters assiduously present this issue. She can be considered as one of those major voices of India who campaigns against the convention of patriarchy. Her own experiences and thinking helped her to develop and form her own idea of fiction. All her writings are basically toned by her own experiences with women around. She always tries to explore this dimension in binaries of individual-social and local-global. All her works can be considered as a criticism of the patriarchal legacy prevailed and continued within the society. “Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle class, urban Indian woman and also analyse how their lot has not changed much even in the 20th century,”(Jagadeesh&Kumar 2016: P-33)

This paper basically focuses on the evaluation of the evolving patriarchal system prevalent in our Indian society with reference to Sashi Deshpande’s novel **The Dark Holds No Terror**.

Methodology- Library Work is the method followed in this paper. Books and discussions on critical analysis is followed with sincerity.

Limitation- The paper follows the application of feminist theory only in the characters of the novel to study the characteristics of different patriarchies.

Analysis

The term ‘Patriarchy’ is not something new. It is a historical thought within feminism. It is generally used to analyse the principles of women subordination and subjugation. It is a concept developed within feminist writings and is neither a simple or singular concept but has a whole array of suggestiveness. “At the most general level, patriarchy has been used to refer to male domination to the power relationships by which men dominate women” (Millet 1969: P-66). Juliet Mitchell uses patriarchy to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women and to the symbolic power which fathers have within these systems , and the consequences of this power for the “inferiorized...psychology of women”(Mitchell1974: P-402). This is the traditional concept of patriarchy which means complete domination and oppression of women under the patriarchal norms which does not give them any ‘Rights’ at all be it education, health, property, freedom of decision, expression etc. This is also called traditional or old patriarchy.

With the experience of sustained Feminist Movement and other advancements the dynamics of man-woman relationship has undergone myriad changes. The evolution of patriarchy into ‘New Patriarchy’- a modern and surrealistic version of patriarchy- has been identified by the feminist scholars. Monica Sjojo defines ‘New Patriarchy’ as a transcendent entity where Man belongs to the light, the sunlight that does not belong to the earth. “His soul not in the earth, it is not in the creation. We are never within him; we are never part of his being.”(Sjojo1992: P-22). This means that though modern man has been sensitized through his education, awareness and experiences to be liberal and balanced in his relationship and dealings with women, the hangover of the traditional patriarchy is still discernible in different manners. This metamorphosed characteristic is

difficult to identify. Somewhere within the mind of the modern man there is the resistance to the new dynamism in women at the intrinsic level. In spite of learning to be liberal and accepting to treat her as equal and being witness to her emancipation, modern man strangely holds on to his historical privilege. He feels still as the lord and woman as the vassal.

Both the above patriarchies are presented by Deshpande in her novel **Dark Holds No Terror**. The novel presents the story of Sarita who experiences the patriarchy in all its manifestations. From her childhood she struggles and makes every effort for realizing her “self”. But when she feels that she has achieved it, both in his professional and personal life, she realizes to her utter dismay that, emancipation is highly fallacious. She is torn apart by both old and new patriarchy. In the first part of her life, the novelist presents a grim picture of girls under patriarchy. She grows up facing sexist discrimination at her home. She has always been an unloved and unwanted child tied to unhappy relationship with her parents. Her craving for undiluted parental love and attention is shattered by their preferential treatment to Dhruv, the male sibling. His naming ceremony and birthdays were celebrated while she was denied. His care was even thrust on her. When Dhruv died by drowning, her mother hold her responsible for the tragedy, “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (Deshpande1990: P-191) It is a typical patriarchal mindset where the girl child is a curse and the boy is an asset and the means of progenial pride.

Sarita’s mother emerges as the representative of patriarchy in this part of the novel. She is instrumental in enforcing the discrimination, the first characteristics of patriarchy. She herself has been preparing Sarita for the submission. Her only birthday gift to her, a pair of ear rings was not a gift of love but an incentive to make her look attractive for the boys. She was worried about her marriage. All her thoughts centered around the traditional beliefs that girls are born to get married, give birth to children and look after the family. From Sarita’s childhood itself she was made to feel ugly, unwanted, and inferior to her brother. Her mother was worried about her dark skin, which is not appreciated in the Indian patriarchal society. Thus she was not allowed to play in the open sunshine, which may darken the skin further and make her most ineligible for marriage. “Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker....We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.”(Deshpande1990:P-45)

Sarita’s journey of emancipation begins when she realizes that to fulfill her own desires she needs her own identity in the society. She decides to study medicine. But her mother didn’t approve the idea as well as her staying in a hostel away from her watchful presence, “ ...In a hostel? What do you think...your father’s a millionaire? (Deshpande1990:P-142)The patriarchal restrictions and restrains imposed on the girls are to prepare them for the voluntary subordination. “Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments”(Mill2004: P-20). Women are trained from their childhood to behave in a way acceptable to the patriarchal tradition prevalent in the society. Sarita’s mother behaves as the guiding agent of that very practice, “You should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even if its only your father who is around” (Deshpande1990:P-62). Her mother being one of the products of the patriarchal society, expects Sarita’s compliancy and co-operation in the subservience. She is both a victim and a perpetrator.

Sarita’s mother emerges as the embodiment of traditional patriarchy in this novel. She is expectedly supported by her husband in considering Sarita as a liability to be well disposed. In the second part of her life when Sarita returns to live with him after being disenchanted by her marriage to Manohar, she discovers her father’s reluctance to accept her presence as the daughter of the house. Her expectation of finding a space of her own is being resented by her father, who is comfortable with a stranger boy, Madhav. Sarita is displaced by Madhav. Her visit after fifteen long years doesn’t evoke any emotion or inquisitiveness within him. Rather he suffers from awkwardness, “...he sat gingerly on the edge of chair, like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest (P-18). Madhav has not only occupied his father’s affection but also most significantly her own

room. She awakens with a jolt to the reality when she was rudely forbade by her father, “That’s Madhav’s room...Go and lie down in the Puja room”(Deshpande1990:P-19).

Sarita’s experience at her own home brings out diverse forms of patriarchy and Indian patriarchy in particular. She felt let down in her own home by her own parents. If it was her mother for whom she didn’t come home for fifteen years, it was his father who disinherited her permanently from his affections and her belongingness. He remains the “boss” not a father, “...He had always been so much a man, the ‘master’ of the house...”(Deshpande1990:P-21). Women are traditionally viewed on the side of passivity by the patriarchy. They are both the manifestation and victims of patriarchal culture and philosophy, “The female psyche can be studied as the product or construction of cultural forces.”(Showalter1991: P-345). Sarita’s attempt to escape the patriarchy has been unsuccessful. She has been sandwiched between her parents and Manohar, her husband.

Manohar represents the new patriarchy in the novel. He idealises the woman only to exploit her and mystifies her only to domesticate her, “...a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness”(Mill2004 : P-21). Manohar, as a student representing the liberal, sensitized and a poetic character attracts Sarita and her quest for emancipation. She was impressed by his suave, sensible and supportive personality at the college. She was ecstatic that she had at last found a person who can appreciate and lead her to her destination of realizing the self. “All the clichés, I discovered, were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved, was an intense joy.”(Deshpande1990:P-40)

But after marriage, the liberal attitude of Manohar and the sense of freedom that Sarita felt with him were lost. Manohar let her work to realise her dream but gradually his behavior changed. The feeling of ecstasy in their mutual love and trust started depleting. All those love and care changed into torture when Sarita worked as a doctor and her own social identity began emerging. Her own name, not as a daughter or wife got recognized. The transformation in Manohar’s character was not instant but gradual. As Sunita Reddy says, “Manohar gradually undergoes a change from that of a romantic hero quoting Shelley and Keats to a beloved to a morose husband uncomfortable with his wife’s steady rise in status.”(Reddy2006: P-57) Initially, in their married life when Sarita was struggling to establish herself as a doctor, Manohar was not that expressive of his uncomfortable feelings with a more worthy woman. In fact, when she was thinking of resigning her job, he prevented her. But all these reached a peak when a girl came to take interview of Sarita and asked Manohar, “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread?”(Deshpande1990:P-200)

The comment made by the girl somehow hurt his male ego and aroused his passive patriarchal sense within him. Finding no other way of exercising his superiority over Sarita, he began torturing her in both subtle and subverted manner. When in the light of the day he was no one compared to her in the society, at night he proved his power by hurting her physically. He became a sexual sadist. To quote Sarita, “He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this...this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body”(Deshpande1990:P-201). This physical attack on her went on for a long time. She thought of protesting but could not because somewhere she was aware of the fact that there was this residue of old patriarchy in Manohar which got revealed in a camouflaged manner. In fact, the physical torture and its mental trauma on Sarita is very acutely felt. The way her sadist husband forced on her and tried to prove his superiority through a bruised personality is seen in these lines,” ...I’m dreaming-this-is-not real...into the savage reality of a monstrous onslaught.’(Deshpande1990:P-11).

Thus we find a drastic change in Manohar from a romantic life-partner to a sadistic husband. In the initial stage he exhibited an awareness and open-mindedness about man-woman relationship. But in later stage he

changed that into a neo-slave-vassal relationship. Marriage as an institution is a patriarchal concept, "Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house." (Mill2004: P-95) Manohar is different from Sarita's parents in exhibiting the degree and dimension of patriarchal disposition. Her father is a typical character of traditional Indian Patriarchy who was never concerned with the diurnal wellbeing nor the dreams of her. He was the apathetic dispassionate father whose only duty is to provide the basic needs of being a mere living being. On the other hand, her mother who should have taken the responsibility of Sarita's existential concerns and importance of a being, turns out to be a converted agent of Patriarchy in sustaining its dominance over the female, lock, stock and barrel. In spite of being a victim herself she emerges as the champion of the system by preparing her both physically and mentally for a socially perfect surrender in a marriage. The girl child to them is only a social material to be prepared for social dispensation without individual wishes, desires and dreams. They exhibit their traditional patriarchal values.

Manohar, the savior and refuge of Sarita from the subjection and attrition of patriarchy was different. To her, he appeared as a chivalrous, sensitised and modern hero destined to save her from social anonymity or invisibility and being divorced from her cherished dreams. He not only allowed her to work as a professional but also looked after their children in her absence. He never complained. He exhibited the liberal ideas of man-woman relationship and was helping Sarita to realise her emancipated self. She discovered in him a real man without patriarchal shade. But as their conjugal life progresses and Sarita becomes more socially visible as a doctor, he displays a maniacal behavior that surprises her. Without being obvious, he hurts her physically and mentally. The distinction of his behavior in their relationship in day and night represents his complexity as both an individual and a male. It is the streak of a new patriarchy that asserts itself in spite of the awareness about unjustified lord and vassal relationship between man and woman. He represents that new breed of male who are suave, sensitized and rational but suffer from compulsive natures of patriarchal instincts. Manohar is more complex as a character, "There are exceptions. There always have been those uncertain, poetic, beings, who have not themselves be reduced to the state of coded mannequins.....Men or women, complex, mobile, open beings."(Cixous1991:P-292)

He retains the residue of patriarchy in a transmuted form. In spite of all his broadness as a human being, he is entrapped within his male ego. He considers himself to be the part of that luminous light where the woman is non-existent. She, like every woman, is the quintessence of darkness to him. She can never be the part of him or the light. If the old patriarchy was discriminating in its treatment of women the new one is very discreet. It has dissembled its intentions under the influence of emancipation movements. The older one attempted to make its object invisible by pushing it to darkness, but the new one makes its very tools invisible to subvert the process of emancipation.

Deshpande has been very astute and bold in depicting the whole ambit of patriarchy in her novel. She has scoured through myriad relationships and incidents to establish the subjection of women in society. She has also expressed her doubt and reservation about the social evolutions through awareness, advocacy, agitation etc. particularly in the aspect of women emancipation. The very concept of "darkness" presented by her has its own contour. The "darkness" as a metaphor that pervades a great range of psycho-social experiences within the novel. From the childlike fear of Dhruva in his lonely bed to the maniacal sex of Manohar in the marital bed and the ultimate isolation and empowerment of Sarita in the pariah bed at his Father's home, represent different shades and suggestiveness of darkness. Both the old and new patriarchy has subjected the women to darkness. The light belongs to it. The darkness has to wait for it. But at the end of the novel Sarita rejects that light as she discovers her own, "My life is my own...somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link."(Deshpande1990:P-220) She now decides to come out of the shadow of man-woman relationship and its

intermittent areas of darkness. She becomes the light of her own, “And oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait.”(Deshpande1990:P-221)

Findings- The colonizing essence of patriarchy never evaporates completely. It only changes its hue. Advancement in education, socio-economic progress and political changes are very tardy in affecting it. The sensitizations through them have failed to establish a gender-parity in its true sense. The novelist with a subtlety but certainty suggests the gender disparity in contemporary Indian society manifested with variety at different levels. Manohar’s character exhibits the preemptive nature of new patriarchy.

Suggestions- The introspection, the movement towards gender equilibrium must not be abandoned, “One must constantly work to keep this equilibrium in movement.”(CixousP-213) Sarita finally moves in that direction with gracefulness. The Lawrencian concept of man-woman equilibrium in the form of “balancing stars” is an illusion, “Therefore the only thing is to go on as if it is real, knowing all the while it is only an illusion.”(Deshpande1990:P-220) The novel can be treated as a document of gender dynamics beside the individual quest at its background to study the contemporary social issues. It also can be a study of different patriarchal characteristics particularly that of the New Patriarchy.

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