

VOICING THE VOICELESS FOR THE EQUALITY OF FEMINISM IN THE NOVEL “*THE DARK HOLD NO TERROR*” BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstracts:-

Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among the contemporary novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. In her novels she has portrayed the sufferings, disappointments and frustrations which make her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle. She however maintains that her novels are not intended to be read as feminist texts. Although Deshpande's intention may not be to propound any particular theory, but even a brief reading of her novels displays a tremendous amount of sympathy for women.

This novel presents the search for identity, discrimination and suppression faced by Sarita from her birth till death. It is a story about the life of a sophisticated and economically independent woman who is in search of her identity, which leads her to expose the hidden strength within her. It is the story of Saru and her relationship with her parents and husband and also the excruciating discrimination she faces throughout her life. It is the story of a marriage on the edge of breakdown and of a woman who has been made extremely conscious of her childhood. The purpose of this paper is to portray the destroy of female gender in the male chauvinistic society through the character of Sarita by Shashi Deshpande in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

Keywords:- Gender, Protagonist, oppression, Marginality, Discrimination, depression.

Introduction:-

Shashi Deshpande is an award-winning Indian novelist. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978, and her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award from the Government of India for the novel *That Long Silence* in 1990 and the Padma Shri Award in 2009. Her novel *Shadow Play* was short listed for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2014. Shashi Deshpande has written four children's books, a number of short stories, and nine novels. She is well-known for portraying contemporary Indian woman's character. Her woman characters experience a coarse gender discrimination right from their birth till death.

The novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror* deals with a well educated, economically independent women's search for her identity which leads to uncover the dormant strength in human beings. The novel is a story of Sarita or Saru and her relationship with her parents and her husband and her agonizing search for herself. It is the story of a marriage on the verge of breakdown and of a woman who is the victim of gender discrimination since her childhood.

The novel begins with Saru returning to her parent's house after a gap of fifteen years. She had walked out once with a vow never to return. But unable to bear the barbarism to her husband, she stays in her parents' house gives her a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her mother, her children and her dead brother, Dhruva. The novel is a stark

presentation of Saru's childhood and her trauma of her marriage to man who is consumed by a inferiority complex which manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism.

The narrative of the novel moves between present and past between the first person and the third, to face on certain events in the past which have made permanent mark on her mind and which are responsible for molding and shaping her personality. Saru's earliest memories are those of gender discrimination which forms her earliest memories. Her mother always favored her brother Dhruva which is indicated by the fact that his birthdays and other rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp and fanfare on other hand her birthdays are barely acknowledged. This makes Saru wonder whether her birth was a cause of discontentment to her mother.

Saru was always reminded by her mother about her dark complex and warned not step into the sun otherwise she will become darker as she is to be married. When Saru says she doesn't want to get married, her mother replies that being a girl she cannot stay with her parents. This statement of her mother is firmly implanted in Saru's mind leading to her rebellious attitude in future. Saru's mother's attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a very common phenomenon in the Indian context.

Saru's mother's obvious preference for her brother, Dhruva creates a sense of alienation within her and precipitate a sense of rootlessness and in security. Things are further worsened after Dhruva's death when her mother with her characteristic insensitivity blames her for her death. Her mother therefore is left with no interest in living after her son's death. Her constant pining for dead son and rejection of her daughter causes deep and indelible scars in Saru's mind. Her mother doesn't take any interest in her education and personal advancement and snubs her at every given opportunity. This sense of rejection by her mother fills mind of the adolescent Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. The feeling is so intense that on attaining puberty she resentfully thinks, that: "if you are woman, I don't want to be one." (62)

During the crucial years of puberty and adolescence, her mother's rejection leads to Saru's psychological insecurity which finds release in two ways. One is through constant and recurrent dreams and the other is through acts of defiance. Her dreams mostly represent her guilty feelings and therefore she often dreams of Dhruva's death and the accusation made her mother. The acts of defiance mostly spring from her resentment against her mother and all that she stands for. She admits that she hated her mother, wanted to hurt her and make her suffer. She rebels against her mother by going to Bombay to study medicine and then later by marrying a man outside her caste. Saru defies traditional codes at the slightest threat in her mother's house. Saru also witnesses the conditions of her grandmother who was deserted by her husband and considered a burden by her own people. This leads to Saru seeking economic independence as an insurance against suppression. And therefore the events that follow in her life are mostly inspired by this goal. In her adolescence stage, Saru is attracted towards Manohar or Manu, a senior in her college. He is very popular in the college. Manu on the other hand is attracted to another girl Padmini. Saru therefore tries to imitate Padmini but fails miserably. Saru undergoes a great transformation after moving in the hostel after getting admission in medical college. She experiences a sense of freedom from the conservative upbringing and rigid atmosphere at home. She sheds some of her puppy fat and and acquires some sophistication from her cosmopolitan company and on the whole, presents an attractive picture. Her acquaintance with Manu is renewed a few years later which leads to a greater friendship and then to marriage. Years later Saru bitterly recollects that if her mother had not been so against him, perhaps, she would not have married him and landed herself in such a position. Her rushing into marrying Manu is the outcome of her desire to hurt her.

Initially Saru considers herself highly privileged to have been chosen by him. The initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss as she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on the earth. But she soon discovers that happiness is only an illusion and one is left with memories which give grief. As long as she is merely a medical student and her husband a breadwinner there is peace at home. But the problem arises when she gains recognition as a doctor. Manu is unable to accept this reversal of roles. He gradually undergoes a change from that of romantic hero quoting Shelley and Keats to his beloved, to a morose husband uncomfortable with his wife's steady rise in status.

On the other hand Saru is no longer happy in their shabby apartment and prefers to move into something more decent as now she was in a new role as a career woman. Initially she managed in Manu's salary but eventually she begins to miss the small things that money can buy and resents Manu's acceptance of such a kind of living. She says:

“I had began to wonder at his acceptance of our shabby way of living. For me, things now began to hurt.... A frayed saree I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable.” (92)

Perhaps, life would have remained smooth and without turmoil had Saru not been ambitious. But, Saru aims higher and wants to specialize in order to achieve the things, she dreams of, for this purpose she uses handsome, debonair and efficient doctor Boozy to further her career. He has a playboy image and Saru herself is surprised at his interest in her. She also responds to him and soon their relationship reaches a stage where Boozy helps her financially to setup her clinic in a posh area. There is nothing ‘physical’ in Saru’s affairs with Boozy. To suit his own interest, Boozy openly flaunts his relationship with Saru as a cover to his homosexuality. Saru on her part does nothing to clear this misunderstanding in her husband’s mind. In fact she is slowly filled with such a loathing and contempt for her husband that she deliberately goads him into believing the obvious.

Saru’s social and financial status gradually grows far beyond that of her husband. She is a busy, successful doctor in comparison to Manu who is an underpaid lecturer in a third rate college. She establishes herself as a career woman and her profession satisfies her ego, but this brings her no happiness at home. Her predicament is contrary to the assertion of most feminists that economic independence brings fulfillment to the woman. The rift between Saru and her husband gradually grows wider and one unfortunate incident changes Manu into a wild animal at night when he begins to physically abuse her in the privacy of their room at slightest provocation. Unable to bear the torture any longer, Saru returns to her parent’s home, a place she had decided never to come back to. She is able to return partly because she knows her mother is dead and she will be spared the humiliation due to her taunts and also because she could offer an immediate explanation to her father for her coming.

The novel in reality presents a stark picture of the gross inequalities prevailing in our society, gender discrimination by the parents towards their own children and the superiority of the male in a marriage, if it must survive. Saru bitterly realizes that a woman must necessarily remain a step behind her husband. Initially she seeks refuge to escape from domestic, professional and sexual traps in which she finds herself. But each refuge whether it is love, marriage or sex, only turns out to be another trap wherein she further loses her freedom and identity. Towards the end of the novel Saru learns to live up to the challenge. She decides to face her husband and not to run away.

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