

INDIAN WOMAN SENSIBILITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as an outstanding novelist as well as a short-story writer on the literary scene. As one who has taken up the women's cause most ardently, she represents India and contemporary Indian literature, especially in the English-speaking world, with great distinction.

This paper discusses some selected novels from Shashi Deshpande's one of the novels 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'. The primary focus of attention in Shashi Deshpande's novels is women- her travails' and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her novels suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle- class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions, she finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, and marital discord and male chauvinism. Shashi Deshpande in the novel not only stresses upon the darker experience of a woman's life but also emphasizes the significance of the mother's role in motivating a daughter to live and rise above the debasing sentimentality.

Keywords: Outstanding, contemporary, Anguish, Suppression & Chauvinism

As an Indian author Shashi Deshpande belongs to the saner group who choose marriage and motherhood- even thorough her vociferous against the creature called the husband, immediately surfaces to the mind.

“A case for moral equality of women and men with an explicit acknowledgement of difference in women's and men's biological functions in society.”¹

This bitter experience of her protagonist which she chooses to use as some sort of a prologue to the book inevitably brands her as a feminist of the top order which she is not. In fact her own confessions and assertions of her protagonist tell us something to the contrary. Replying to the questions of an interviewer as to what extent does she consider herself a feminist Deshpande says that:

I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism.
And it was much later that I read books about it².

Indian feminist of all hues, it may be mentioned in this context, lament the absence of the Shringara Rasa in the lives of Indian couples.

She urged me don't, don't
Thief of my pride Don't for me
It's more than enough,
Then I don't know was she asleep
Or dead? Did she merge?
With my heart?
Did she dissolve into nothing³?

If "Amarusataka" glorifies love and sex and portrays "Shringara Rasa" OF Indian literary criticism, deviations from this traditional Hindu approach comes under criticism by a writer, like Shashi Deshpande, commenting on the issue AdyaRangaCharya in his essay "Sex and Indian literature" writes:

It is no surprise, in view of the origin of the conception, to find
That Rasa of love is called the king of all Rasa. Sex experience
is at the root of the conception.⁴

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* precisely laments this lack of pleasure or joy or ecstasy in sex experience after the initial period of euphoria.

Saritha for better part of the novel was bereft of any such experience. It was a monstrous invasion of her body which was much away from the state where the lovers lose their identity out of sheer ecstasy, but this deplorable state of affair is not alone due to Manohar's lack of concern for the feelings of Saritha but because of a plethora of factors directly or indirectly contributing to the logjam in the relationship between the husband and the wife.

Shashi Deshpande has picked up the pet Indian theme of the rise of status of the wife in the society. The matter almost comes to the boiling point when Saritha addresses a group of girls and out of sheer anguish because of the intolerance of the society.

And in the case of Saritha the scales did tilt in her favour. She was a successful doctor and was getting hand some returns for her services. On the other hand Manohar, her husband was just a struggling writer. In fact something that happens here is really strange. 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. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a moral life, my idea of feminism materializes."⁵

Obviously, most of the dependence of women is economic dependence. Even this economic dependence is not common to all societies. To a great extent this economic dependence is absent among modern educated woman like Saritha. Prabhati Mukherjee in her *Hindu Women: Normative Mode's* writes:

The separate economic entity of a woman was respected by Kautilya
and that entirely appears to have had a role to play in society. This
aspect of women's status namely, her right to separate property was
considered by Maine to be a unique feature of Hindu Jurisprudence⁶

In fact, Saritha's independent mode of existence including her economic freedom becomes the thorn on the path of her normal life and contrary to what Prof. Nahal says it disables her from realizing whatever feminist ideology she ever had.

The financial ascendance of Saritha comes to have a terrible negative impact on Manohar. It renders Manohar impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity

is through sexual assault upon Saritha, which for him becomes an assertion of his manhood, and which becomes in him a sort of perverse nocturnal abnormality. Strangely enough he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, who turns into a rapist at night. It terrifies and humiliates Saritha so much that she can not even about them, even to him.⁷

Against this backdrop of centuries of male supremacy and consequent apathy for the girl child Saritha revulsions against the attitude of her husband is something that is very natural. However, at the end she behaves like a typical Indian woman who inspite of all earlier bitterness can not forget the marital bliss of early years even though that is very short lived. After all Indian women are famous for making sacrifices. They make sacrifices for everybody they consider to be their own and something even for outsiders. And perhaps with this spirit of sacrifice she broods over her past and is filled with sense of guilt and remorse. Obviously the protagonist through her such actions proclaims harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves which is the typical Indian attitude, Siddhartha Sharma is right when he says 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.⁸

In fact Shashi Deshpande, voices the implicit idea that man always expects sacrifice from woman and he is always callous enough to overlook the need of her fulfilment. He consciously remains ignorant of the fact that self-respect for a woman is essential to give happiness to others and to herself. Through positive and negative pictures, Shashi Deshpande's intent is quite clear and unchanged: the loss of self-identity in a woman is the root cause of many conflicts; a promising search for selfhood is essential for all-round happiness.

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