

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S VIEW ON FEMINISM IN DARK HOLDS NO TERROR

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Introduction

When women begin to searching her identity, she is called feminist. Feminism stands for women's struggle against their continuing circumscribed existence in society and in the culture of the country. Women's life is full of compromises. She has to compromises in every walk of life. She does not own her own life. So, women are set to fight for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by society and men. Those who are able to comprehend and surmount their personal problems seem to gain a healthy vision of life after some struggles. As Shashi Deshpande believed that

" a woman is also an individual like man with lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every right to develop all that. She is a female like man she also has her own qualities. She has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decision, to be independent and to take charge of her own destiny. "(6)

Shashi Deshpande's view on feminism

Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent place among the contemporary women novelist. She made use of the term feminism only to identify and erase the gender discrimination. Her novels help us see the intricacies of the life of women as mother, wife, daughter, lover, a victim of circumstance. Her primary focus of attention is the world women-The struggle of women in modern society. Unable to defy what is traditional and patriarchal norms of society. The women characters try to be assertive and preserve their identity not only as women but also as human beings.

Deshpande's protagonists are educated, urban middle class women but suffering in a male dominated and tradition bound society. Many educated women of today have to compromise their career for their family in order to save their marriage. So, 'Violence need not be physical but can be psychological'. Many women characters of Shashi face this psychological violence and ill-treated by men characters like Saritha ill-treated by Manu in her novel 'The Dark Holds No Terror'. Their problems and plight, exploitation and disillusionment, inner conflict and quest for identity need to be talked and should be addressed.

Shashi Deshpande's novel "The Dark Holds No Terror"

Shashi Deshpande's first novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terror' is about Saritha the protagonist and her frustrations, her awareness of the problems her recognition of the crisis in her life and her efforts at resolution. The novel is a bitter commentary on marriage and married life which have lost their original sanctity and compatibility and are reduced to the level of a facade or sham. Saru enjoys a greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar for which she

becomes the victim of her husband's frustration which manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism. This hurts his male ego and makes him to develop inferiority complex. The novel also highlights the gender discrimination of serious nature shown by parents towards their own daughters. Deshpande effectively conveys the patriarchal setup in our society and parent's craving for a male child. Denied parental love and as victim of her husband's ill-treatment Saru struggles a lot to lead her successful life.

Saritha's search for Individuality in this Novel

Saritha is neither illiterate nor an economically helpless female dependent on her husband like other ordinary women. On the contrary, Saru, being highly educated, has a profession of her own. She is a successful and prosperous lady doctor. But her husband Manu, whom she has married for love defying her mother, is only low- paid teacher in a third-rate college. A typical egoistic male, a product of patriarchy, he soon starts resenting the superior status of his wife. When they go out together, there are nods, smiles and respect, but these are for her, and not for him. She describes the situation thus:

“And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller.
But the same thing which made me inches taller made him inches shorter.
He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and
he my husband”. (42)

Shashi Deshpande strikes at the root of the unequal relationship between man and woman; ‘the woman must follow the shadow of man, but no man will like to live in the shadow of a woman’. While he keeps up a normal relationship with his wife during the day, in the darkness of the night in the bedroom he becomes a beast and tries to show his superiority and manliness by raping her ruthlessly. Saru in the hands of her husband felt herself a terrified trapped and bruised animal whimpers and cries out against the terrors looming in the darkness of the night. When Saru comes to know her mother's death, she decides to go home to her father. Though she tells her husband and children that she wants to be with her father at this hour of grief, she knows in the heart of her heart that it is nothing but a desperate attempt on her part to get away from the fearful and tortuous experiences of the cruel nights. For this she even ready to give up her career also.

Saritha's sufferings under gender discrimination

She came back to her father's house and stayed there. The novel reveals the life of Saritha who is always neglected and ignored by her parents in favour of her brother Dhruva. He was three year younger to his sister. She had ruled over Dhruva completely. Those differences of three years gave Saru immense pleasure and advantages. He died when he was seven year old. He was drowned. Saru was there and she had seen him drowning. She tried to save him but it was useless. Later she was blamed for the death of her younger brother. Her mother accused her and said: “You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?”(7)

This part is about Saru's unhappy childhood is a female struggle on gender discrimination, which unfortunately forms an integral part of the socialization of a girl child in the male-dominated society of India. Her mother compels her to live within a four walls because she is a girl and she has different sets of rules to follow. Dhruva is more important than Saru because as a son he will carry the family line forward and he alone will light the pyre of his parents. As a daughter, she is only a temporary inmate of her parental home. ‘According to tradition and culture girls cannot live with their parents after a certain age. Parents regard them

as something to be handed over given to the rightful owner'. As a child Saru deeply affects psychologically by her mother's obvious preference of her brother. Back now as an educated discerning adult, she sees herself as the victim of gender discrimination and the hegemonic values of a male-dominated society. Simon de Beauvoir correctly affirms that, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".

Once there a lady doctor comes to Saru's place. She was looking nice and superior to all other women. Saru was much impressed by her personality and later on she came to know that she was a doctor and so she was different. Impressed by the personality of that lady, Saru decided that she could be a doctor and that would be the key which would unlock the door out of this life. Saru's decision to take up medicine as a career stunned her mother. Her mother disliked her and was always against her. Saru never sees her mother as a role model. There is no friendship relation between the mother and daughter. She remembered how her mother had strongly opposed her admission in medical college. Contrary to her expectations, it was her father who has supported her. Saru regarded her mother as a failure – one who had lost her both children and died silently. With shocking resentment, Saru tells her:

"If you are a woman, I don't want to be one, I thought resentfully, watching her body. The cleft which ran down her back, a deep furrow, dividing her body sharply in two. The two buttocks sharply outlined by the kind of sari she wore, tucked in between her legs. The way her hips moved as she walked. I can remember walking as stiffly as possible, holding my pelvis rigid willing it not to move, so that I would be as unlike her as possible". (62-63)

It is an unusual reaction for a daughter and a very unusual image of a mother. At the end of the novel, Saru feels guilty of having deserted her mother and of not having tried to cross the bridge, which had kept them apart. Saru wanted to be friendly with her children, otherwise there was a fear to lose them. She desired to be a good wife and a good mother .although she had failed as a good daughter.

Saritha's decision at the end of the novel

Saru's attitude gradually changed towards Manu and marriage. Saru felt herself deserted, so she was trying to find the occasion to talk with her father, because there was no one who could comfort her. In her father's house she got time to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, her dead brother Dhruva and her children Renu and Abhi. She has forgiven her mother, her father and her brother. Her review over the relationship gives her the courage to face reality.

She realised that the dark no longer hold any terror to her. At the end Saru tries to compromise with the situation with a little hope of resettlement. She received a letter from Manu of his arrival. The very fact that she agrees to meet Manu shows that she is no longer afraid of him. And more importantly she is able to turn to her profession, in her own interest, not to prove herself successful and rich but to realize her true and uninhibited free self. The bitter emotions strengthen the future. Saru revolts against the tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality.

Conclusion

Saritha moves to self-discovery and strength. Through this novel we can understand that, ‘No doubt life is a continuous process marked by changes and renewal’. Those who are able to comprehend and overcome their problems seem to gain a healthy vision of life after some struggles like our protagonist, Saritha. Saru succeeds by deciding to lead a life of her own at the end. She achieves the results women seek to gain, in order to expose not only the extremity of the suffering endured by women, but also the deep psychological problems that beset many human beings.

References

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