



The Quest For Self In Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors

ABSTRACT

The Writers always throw light on the darker aspect of life which act as a voice of change and enlighten the readers' mind. Shashi Deshpande, an Indian women novelist describes the psychological conflicts faced by an Indian woman. Generally, the novels of her are about women's self-quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature. Shashi Deshpande novels explore the plights of women's lives and literally empower them. Saritha (Saru), a female protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors portrayed as an ordinary middle-class professional woman who articulates her defeats, conflicts, sufferings, struggles, loss and finally found her way out of depths by introspecting herself. Saru always has the quest and emphasize the essentiality of asserting one's identity as an independent individual.

KEYWORDS: Identity, conflict, gender, family, society, patriarchy, profession, retrospect, introspect.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Dark Holds No Terrors, an Indian novel written and published in 1980 by Shashi Deshpande. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande reflects the status and position of the Indian women lived in 1970-1980's. The novel deals with the female protagonist Sarita who face conflicts as a Doctor and a wife. She has faced many traumatic incidents in her life which paves a way to search for her own 'self' and find herself courage to confront the reality in the end. This novel could be seen from the feminist perspectives as it brings women's identity issues. The role of Saru being a Doctor and wife reflects the pathetic condition of an educated woman who struggles in between the traditional rules of the society in the lives of 1980's.

The main theme of the novel is a woman searching for her identity. Saru confronts many problems being imposed by her family and the society. Saru had bitter childhood experiences and as a grown adult faced conflicts in her love marriage relationship. The negative experiences that she faced were the result of patriarchal constructed society. Saru was completely traumatized and psychologically disturbed by facing difficult situations and experiences which gradually developed the quest for being independent and acclaim her identity.

Since childhood, Saru was being distressed with disappointments and humiliations that affects her psychologically a lot. Saru would get night mares often. Her mother's rebuking words " Why are you still alive...why didn't you die? Why are you alive when he's dead? (173)" haunted always because everyone believed that Saru is the reason for drowning of her little brother Dhruva. She frequently recalls her mother's words and tangles herself in guilty which often leads her to have a fearful nightmare of her brother calling out "Hey Saru, wait for me, I'm also coming (131)." Saru introspects deeply by recollecting her memories from the past. The guilt couldn't allow her to enjoy the present. She blamed herself as timid and culpable as she couldn't help her little brother from death. Saru acquires serenity only in the last chapter after hearing her father's(Baba) declaration that she is not responsible for Dhruva's death. This affirmation pleased Saru and replied to her father with a relaxing tone "A Poor little boy who never grow up to know the Dark holds, no terrors...The terror is always present inside us (226)." She comes out of her guilt by forgiving herself in the present.

Saru faced lots of pain in her childhood. She has been subjected to gender discrimination, lack of care and love from her parents, rebuking words of the mother and the father's detachment in her studies and health. Saru was dissatisfied with her family. Her parents poured enormous love on her brother Dhruva. The refrain words of her mother hurt her a lot "Now you are a woman", "You are not like Dhruva to stay with us throughout the life", Parents had strict curfews by not letting out to visit her friends' house, cinemas or even to play out. These restrictions carried out with severe beats and scolding. This pained her a lot externally and internally. Saru was depressed and always felt that her emotions were not out, her desires were not allowed. Saru neither has dressed nor done hairstyle of her choice. She felt her mother was over protective. She was isolated for being a 'girl'. This clearly illustrates that she has been subjugated to the patriarchal norms of the society. Saru hated her mother lot. Her hatred and silent pain irrepressibly burst out and reflected as anger to her mom after many

years. She found her father remained silent in all her humiliation at young. However only in the last chapter, her father helps to rid out anxieties and fear about her mother. The continuous discouragement from the family isolated her. This gradually turned into a quest. She quested for happiness, care, love and totally to be independent. This spirit made her focus more on education and got admission in the medical college. She believed that having the best education and career will able to receive recognition from the society. Education empowered and uplifted her by acclaiming her identity as a Doctor.

Saru was comfortable and satisfied to live as reputed Doctor in the society. She finds happiness in doing service to the people. She didn't imagine that professional reputation ruins her marital life to be worse in spite of her love marriage. As the years passed, due to her busy work Saru couldn't take care of her children and husband Manu. Once again she was guilty of not being a mother and wife. She finds difficulty and tired in handling personal life and career life. She exhaustedly felt her husband was a sexual sadist and had developed the inferiority complex and bestowed vengeance on Saru during the night. Saru was unhappy. She wished to break the marital relationship but scared about the social conventions and reputations. she feared that her identity would be demolished if she breaks up the marital relationship.

The social norms or the social characteristics would make a woman still submissive and dependent on a man. A critic noted: Day and night women should be submissive to a man. In childhood to a father, young to the husband, old to her sons. Throughout the novel, Saru finds herself to be submissive to her parents, husband and social norms. However, women in 1980's tried to find out themselves and come out of the traditions. Saru one of the best example in this novel who fights within herself as well as against the social norms, the dominance of man (her husband). In each stage of her life, she tries to explore herself from the pain, sufferings and dominance. Saru says "In this world, no partnership can never be equal (137)." The social constraint is that women shouldn't be higher than their husband to create a good family in Indian society. A husband should dominate wife. Manu rapes her wife Saru to let out his strong emotions and violent anger at the fact that she has overtaken him professionally and financially too. She couldn't stop Manu because she trapped in between the social norms where the wife couldn't do anything against husband except being 'silence'. However when Saru had introspected herself with questions When returned to her home, why she had come home? Was it to get away from her husband ? was it so important to come here? by questioning herself she finds out the truth that she can't bear the pain. she completely hates her husband for his sexual torture. Saru describes herself as a trapped animal to her husband over the night. Saru couldn't be voiced out at her husband because she feared at first for the society and child. It disturbed her physically as well as emotionally. This reflected in her nightmares where a stranger trying to abuse her. Saru searched herself during her childhood and now searching the lost soul into the marital relationship. After traumatic situations, Saru flew away from Bombay to her home. As days passed Saru retrospect and explored herself by revealing " This is my life, I want to live my life on my own way." She is ready to confront her husband and decides to go back to Bombay. Actually, this going back to her husband is not to endure the humiliation (Kavitha, Vol.2). According to Holmstrom, Saritha is not going back and he is surprised that people haven't understood that (Holmstrom 247). Saru identifies herself with her profession and dares to talk to her husband. The novel ends with a positive hope with a chance of change.Despite all struggles and pain, Saru identifies her 'self' strength to solve everything through retrospection and introspecting herself and challenges. Her passion as being Doctor drives her to be independent and fortified. The spirit in her recognizes that she is no longer a victim of her husband and past. She is bold enough to confront her husband by curing his depression caused by the inferiority complex. Saru picked herself and ready to face the upcoming challenges and expected to derive harmony in her family and career life. Saru's courage came from within as it signifies the fact that she identified herself.The novelist brings out the struggles of Indian women handling the battle between career and domestic life. The role of Saru represents the women in the 1980's and laid a base for awakening women's identity. This would be reliable to the current scenario where most of the working women face severe struggles and conflicts in dealing with their personal and career life. Saru as a protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and the novelist Shashi Deshpande gives a hope that women should find their way out of their depths and must grow out surpassing all the defeats and obstacles without losing her identity.

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