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Fractured Psyche and Estranged Self in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande, one of the most renowned novelists daringly evoked the sexual frustration and sadism that leads to female's fractured psyche and alienated self. The biological divisions between man and woman is being interpreted and scrutinized by many gender theorists. These theorists through their theories shaped the lives of men and women. According to French philosopher and novelist Simone de Beauvoir, the woman is the "One is not born, one is made woman". As a result woman is automatically made to hold the subjugated secondary position. On the other hand in literary theory "feminism" means demanding the patriarchal supremacy. Feminism is the conviction that women should be allowed to possess the same rights, power and opportunities as men. In this regard, Deshpande clearly attempts to bestow an honest portrayal of the women's sufferings, disappointments and frustrations. These women finally emerge out from the clutches of patriarchy. The women characters of Deshpande have strength of their own which makes them to remain uncrushed. Shashi Deshpande in '*The Dark Holds No Terrors*' strongly explores the inner broken struggle and estranged self of the protagonist Sarita.

Keywords: Gender, Patriarchy, Frustration, Emergence.

Many of the Indian women novelists deal with women's issues through their writings. In fact there has been a great need for the interest to work on this particular subject that is 'Woman'. It is a great pleasure, to know that the University Grants Commission and the Indian Council for Social Sciences and Research have decided that women's issues should be a separate subject of study, and that the social science should take the special standpoint on women in

society. Through this the women get the opportunity to exhibit their knowledge in various fields. On the other hand gender study is also a ground of interdisciplinary study which analyses the occurrence of gender. Feminism and gender play a vital role in any woman's life. India is regarded conventionally as a male-dominated society. Women always possess the secondary position. In such a set-up, a purely social, spiritual or rational relationship between man and woman becomes nearly impossible. A woman's individual self has very little appreciation and self-effacements in her normal way of life. Indian woman has subjected to this scenario for a long period of time or to say for ages. As a social movement, feminism largely pinpoints on preventing or eliminating gender inequality. It also focuses on promoting women's rights, interests and concerns in society.

Shashi Deshpande occupies an important position among the modern women novelists who deals with the problems of women and their pursuit for uniqueness. Deshpande challenges to grant an honest depiction of woman's anguish, discontents and disappointments. She however maintains that her novels are not projected to be read as feminist point of views. Her novels expose a deep understanding of female psyche particularly that of the educated, urban, middle-class woman. Her foremost anxiety is to depict the anguish and conflicts of the modern educated Indian women, who are caught between patriarchy and tradition. She explores the search for the woman to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. She has examined a variety of general domestic crisis, which activate the search.

Deshpande's concern and sympathy are primarily for the woman. While revealing the woman's struggle to self-respect Deshpande cleverly uncovered the multiple levels of oppression, experienced by women particularly in South Indian society. Like Virginia Woolf or Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande explores the inner feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through human consciousness. Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* indicates the arrival of an important new feminist voice in Indian fiction; through the network of familial relationships, and above all man-woman relationships. Deshpande explores contemporary Indians and illustrates the complex adjustments and social changes of the 1980s. The main theme in her novel is not the simplistic one of opposing tradition with modernity or westernization with Indian culture. Her women characters struggle with their sufferings, which drags them through virtue and experience, ignorance and knowledge, girlhood and adulthood, submission and rebellion, happiness and sadness.

The central character Sarita is a woman who is married to a man of sadistic tendency. Shashi Deshpande makes an extensive use of inner monologue to bring out Sarita's suffering due to the husbands sadistic treatment and the mother's cruel attitude towards her. Sarita is the daughter, depressed of parental care and affection. Her mother's hatred for her and preference for her brother Dhruva is clearly evident from her actions. This split between the mother and daughter forces Sarita to step on the path of rebellion. This bias is so deeply engraved in her

mind that all her future actions are stained. Rajini, P. in “*Sociological Disparities in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors*,” points out that, “Even at a very tender age, this disparity gets fixed in the female’s psyche which forces her to opt for other choices where it might get rectified. Yet to the contrary, the agonising indifference continues on all spheres which the woman is unable to reach during her life time”. (80)

Sarita instead of receiving solace from her mother always receives tortures and cruelty. For any girl the mother relationship should be pleasant. For Sarita it is cruel. The fear, the panic, and the helplessness is all there in her life and the thought of one’s own self disowning one’s own mother is the question. If a girl is dark the parents should give more dowries. Sarita’s mother keeping in mind the dowry restricts her not to be exposed in the sun. She was often reminded about the complexion. Sarita in a depressed mood recollects her conversation with her mother,

Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get darker.
 Who cares?
 We have to care if you don’t .we have to get you married.
 I don’t want to get married.
 Will you live with us all your life?
 Why not?
 You can’t
 And Dhruva?
 He’s different. He’s a boy (DHNT, 40).

The gender difference between a girl and a boy is clearly portrayed by Shashi Deshpande through these words. These words are firmly entrenched in Sarita’s mind paving way for her rebellious attitude in future. In this connection, as a typical Indian mother Sarita’s mother ingrained the seeds of ill-treatment to her own daughter. Her mother strong preference for her brother turns Sarita to a sense of agitation and alienation. The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Sarita. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she was totally tormented by her mother. Though her mother shows favoritism to her brother Sarita is completely haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Her mother shouts at Sarita as, “You killed your brother” (146). Premila Paul in ‘*The Dark Holds No Terror A Women’s Search for Refuge Indian Women Novelists*’ (1997) asserts that, “Dhruva’s demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment”(67). Sarita is left struggling with her life although there is no link with her mother.

Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* fervently argues that the women are thrown in an intolerable subordinate position in the patriarchal social setup. She graphically explains the sense of insecurity in women and the problem that society would face in future in the form of female

feticide through pre-natal sex-determination tests. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1969) asserts, "The phenomenon of parent's prenatal preferences for male issues is too common to require such elaboration. In the light of the imminent possibility of parents actually choosing the sex of their child, such a tendency is becoming the cause of some concern in scientific circles". (57) It is absolutely true that in Indian traditional society more importance is given only for boys than girls.

With a good score in her school, Sarita decides to pursue for higher studies. Sarita explains about her higher studies to her father, her mother objects suddenly. She tries to stop her father for sending the application for Medicine. Sarita again explains to her father her interest on going for medicine in Bombay. Sarita bears in mind that she wanted to study Medicine but her mother was against her. Though unsuccessful, her mother tried her best to persuade her husband not to allow Sarita to join in the medical course.

Yes, but they're girls whose fathers have lots of money. You don't belong to that class. And don't forget medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both. Medicine! Five, six, seven....god knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc ... You can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over. (DHNT, 144)

Sarita remembers that when she wanted to study in medical college, her mother had been against her studies but it was her father who gave his motivation to do medicine. Sarita recollects it to be the first time her father ignored her mother's words not purposefully, not intentionally but he did it as if he could not listen to her at all. Sarita recalls her conversation with her father,

Are you sure you want to do it? Have you thought it over?'

'Yes Baba'.

'You can't change your mind later.

This isn't something taking singing lessons'.

I flushed. Why remind me of that?

'I am eighteen now. Not a child'.

It isn't easy .You'll have to work enormously hard. (143)

Sarita succeeds in persuading her father to send her to medical college. Shashi Deshpande conveys us clearly the fatherly affection and motherly oppression towards their daughters. She does not forget to bring out the importance of a father in an Indian family. Sarita tells her father that her mother annoyed and cursed all her life. Her mother's vengeance made her life destroyed. Sarita always imagined that no mother could ever dislike her own child.

Sarita grows up hating her womanhood that consisted of feeling tainted and ashamed of one's sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. She swears to rebel against

such traditions and inspite of her mother's objection joins at medical college in Bombay. While studying anatomy and physiology she begins to enjoy her female individuality and learns to dress and walk gracefully. In the college she falls in love with a college-mate and wants to marry him against her parent's wishes. Her mother, being a traditional and orthodox woman, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste. Sarita recalls the conversation with her mother,

What caste is he?
 I don't know
 A Brahmin?
 Of course not.
 Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop
 "Oh, so they are low caste people, are they? (DHNT, 96)

Her mother's condemnation of the match because of Manu belonging to a inferior caste, brings back in Sarita's life the obstacle laid by tradition. Sarita confronts her mother to join the medical and later she defies her once more to marry out of her likings. In fact, she appears to take a great pleasure in deliberately going against her mother's inflexible conventional mode of life. Submerged in the pool of sufferings, Sarita as a modern and educated woman eradicates the traditional way and emerges from the hold of submission. Primarily she voices against her mother for education and secondly she voices for the marriage.

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed Sarita as a 'New Woman' of progressive thoughts. She has represented the protagonist as a powerful woman who can win every crucial circumstance that she faces. Sarita selects a man named Manu as her life partner. This attitude of Sarita exemplifies an act of rebelliousness and implies an enduring break in her relationship. Later this relationship has turned bitter, though started in a romantic approach. The passion between her and her husband continued as long as she is only a medical student and he the bread winner of the family. The troubles and tribulations occur only when she gains acknowledgment as a doctor. Later on Sarita becomes a successful doctor. She earns the recognition as a doctor and the people start paying more attention to her than previously. Her neighbours keep coming to her with a variety of complaints. They felt very glad to have a doctor in their midst. This atmosphere of Sarita motivates Manu to a negative thought.

Sarita does not observe the slow change in her husband, in the initial excitement at her glorious status as a doctor. In a retrospective mood, after a few days, however, she is able to trace the events which lead to the disastrous condition of her marriage saying, "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (DHNT, 42). This turnaround role apparently is too much for Manu to accept. He gradually undergoes a change from that of a romantic hero quoting Shelley and Keats to his beloved, to a miserable husband uncomfortable with his wife's steady rise in career. Sarita's new found admiration and

respect blinds her to Manu's changing attitude. He becomes ill-tempered and grows tired of being ignored everywhere and his wife getting all the attention and praise. His incapability to accept the hitch of traditional roles makes him bad and Sarita unaware of this considers his roughness in bed. This nightmarish attitude of Manu devastates Sarita's feelings. She once loved him for his language and care but she eventually hates him for this egotistical approach. Generally in Indian society man is placed superior whether he is intelligent or not. The woman as a wife, mother, daughter and sister should always after man. She could not do or speak without their permission. At present women goes beyond men in all aspects. Modern women deviate from the traditional women in all the ways. This happened because of the writings of many writers in several languages. Deshpande is one among them, who identified the root for all the sufferings.

Sarita asserts openly in an interview for a magazine. When the interviewer, in a lighter way mentions bread and butter, Sarita clearly confesses that she is a doctor earns not only bread but also butter for the family. This infuriates Manu's inferiority complex and thinks that in terms of earning. He further thinks that his wife earns more than him and he is no longer her equal in prosperity. Immediately, he decides that he must show her that he is more powerful than Sarita in the bed, Sarita in a distressed mood says "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" (DHNT, 201). Man with his sexual affluence can only show his superiority. This condition of man is really a shame on male community. Manu's offended male pride manifests itself in the form of sexual brutality. Manu behaves like a fearful stranger at night and the pathetic and ignorant man of other times. The sexual attack of her husband leads Sarita to think of divorce a number of times. As a true Indian woman she does not do so because of the children and society. Sarita also relises that, 'a wife must be a few feet behind man'. In an occasion when Sarita deliver her lecture for college students she advises that "If he is an M.A, you should only be a B.A." (37).

With the fractured psyche and alienated self Sarita plans to visit her father. The ultimate place for any disheartened Indian married woman is her parental home. Though she rebelled from her mother she finally decides to go to her mother's home to meet her father. She was totally deserted and there no one to express her feeling except her father. There she evaluates the relationship with her husband, her dead mother and brother and her children. Her father once helped her for her education and now for her life. He encourages her to face the world of reality. She carries within her the sad possessions of gender discrimination. Secondly Sarita also has the deep rooted mentality of an unwanted child. Thirdly, Sarita suffers the bruises of a terrible physical trauma on her psyche. She desires herself from the fetters of tradition and exercises her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realize her feminine self through contention and self-affirmation. In the words of S. P. Swain: "Sarita's journey is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from indifference to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self." (Swain39). Deshpande is perhaps the only Indian author who has made a

bold attempt to give voice to the disappointment and disappointments of women despite her passionate denial of being a feminist.

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