

**‘FRACTURED SELF’ IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S *THE DARK*
HOLDS NO TERRORS: A STUDY ON STEREOTYPE**

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Literature is an art, which in itself is way beyond the limitations of time and space. It is one of the potential and the finest expressions of the culture and the human sensibility. It is a ‘mirror of life’ and acts as a force through which we can witness the evolution of roles, especially of women through ages. Any literary piece of art for that matter is deep-rooted in the basic instinct of mankind, and its ultimate goal is to achieve the essence of ‘aesthetic pleasure’.

Turning back the pages of history makes it clear that, in ancient times, women were considered as divine beings that were so innocent and physically weaker and taken to the level of ‘commodities’. These weaknesses prevented them not only from leading a bond-free life but also from entering different arenas of life, particularly from becoming a writer because women had a lot of obstacles which hindered them from writing a great work of art as she witnesses the indifferences, distractions, and discouragement of most of the world. Their writings were considered as something that ‘begins at the kitchen and ends at the verandah’.

From the blank past, we can now trace the emergence of women as a phoenix, which unraveled themselves and made their writings rise above the standards of the set markers. Now, we are living in a modern world where women’s writings are considered as catalysts in expressing powerful, uncontrollable emotions; which are apparently visible in their texts. Women writers have almost become trendsetters in using strong imageries, figurative language and powerful vocabulary to convey these emotions to the audience. There are a lot; and to name few- Zora Neale Hurston, Doris Lessing, Maya Angelou, Alice Munro, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Suraiyya, Jhumpa Lahiri and last but not least Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande is an eminent writer, feminist and a novelist of Indian- Writing in English who is always preoccupied with the complexities of Indian society. Her works throw light on darksome society and its happenings. Her style of writing is her reflection on her attitude towards the world. She molded her literary talents with the experience of life. Deshpande’s novels are well read not because she depicts the injustice and the problems that happen in the society, but she walks extra miles to give solutions. This is the quality which makes her outstanding, as a writer. There are ample novels, short stories and children books written by her which proves her literary scholarship.

Being an Indian, Deshpande works passionately to give her readers the real picture of the middle-class Indian life which deals with patriarchy. Her novels delight the readers ‘for their rootedness in everyday India’ (Nair175). And her mastery is so obvious for her depiction of characters is as natural and genuine. Here is the chosen work *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) which focuses on Sarita, the female protagonist. This work explores and highlights the issue of gender discrimination which is always under the carpet in Indian society.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the story is being narrated by the female protagonist, Saru. Only through her, we get to know about every character present in work– her parents, her brother Dhruva, her husband Manohar and her teacher Boozie. This story is all about the cycle of trauma which a girl undergoes from the birth till death. The novel focuses exclusively on the Indian society, where men are considered as the sole proprietor who controls the family as well as its inhabitants. Novel gives a clear-cut picture of Saru's life, where she makes a journey towards her maternal home after fifteen years to unravel her emotional confinement and frees away her burdens to start a new, fresh life with her husband, Manu.

Women characters of Deshpande are always engaged in bringing out their strong, deep sensation for 'self-discovery' even living in a chaotic world which is steeped in patriarchal ethics. Every women face struggle in breaking away the 'cocooned domesticity' (Bande 244). Saru born in a typically conventional Indian home is made to feel inferior by every possible means by her parents and by the society. Being a girl child, they are tutored; that a daughter is of less value than a son, they are made to believe that being a slave is the mark of purity. Their tender heart is poisoned with the idea that women are weak by nature and it is the man who is to assist and control women. To be short she has to be subservient, but being a highly educated new generation woman, Saru smashed away all the hindrances that came across her way.

Saru was a strong girl, but when it came to life she was ruined by the chauvinistic mentality of her husband's 'sexual sadism'. Male pride made him behave like an animal, to establish his control over her. This is because there is no way through which he can prove himself superior as she is the educated housewife and highly esteemed doctor. There is an incident from the novel which points at the male pride of his when a female journalist asks Manu "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?"(35-36). This is the point where his confidence is being questioned, and he feels inferior to his wife. Being a purely Indian husband he found it much difficult to cope with changing mode of roles in family and in society. The society doesn't stop with demanding a woman for the needs of patriarchy by it also holds men tight where they have to abide by the norms of the patriarchal code to be an 'ideal man'.

Any 'ideal man' would want his wife to be a helping mate, fulfilling his physical and spiritual needs. And the growth in finance and popularity of Sara drags Manohar down to an insecure position of losing the upper hand. The green-eyed monster takes over Manohar and a man cannot and never will entertain the idea of his wife being superior to him. Every word in the book expresses the gender bias that hovers in the society, "A wife always be a few feet behind her husband...if he is earning five hundred rupees you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. (137-38). Manohar's ego is what ruined their marriage and ruined the beauty of their love and relationship.

Saru meets Manohar in Bombay in the inaugural of Literary Society, he was the man of her dreams and she was so passionate about him which is quite noticeable in the text, "After that day he was a figure I fantasised about, the person around whom I wove my foolish dreams. No, not dreams, just one dream really. Always the age old feminine dream of a superior conquering male." (53).

Saru found it impossible to be loved because she has not witnessed love or care in her familial life. She has got bad treatment at home, undergoing the negative attitude of the mother and non-interfering nature of the father which made her think herself as, "Redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without. It was impossible for anyone to want me, love me, need me." (86) Living in such background made her fall for him. Yes, it is true that the parental deprivation or bad relationship that

the child has with them forces them to seek an intimate love relationship to have 'emotional safety'. It is highly evident in her words, "He cared for my feelings as no one had ever done." (39).

Talking about the other side of the coin, when she was in love, she found him understanding, caring and loving, she even considered him as a 'superior conquering male' but when he started conquering her through his masculine power, she couldn't digest it. Even Saru longed for a guy with charming masculinity, so it is the society and its expectation which shapes the man into 'ideal being'.

Deshpande sketches the women and men in the middle-class family where both muddles to manage the existing norms even though female protagonists protest against the clutches of patriarchy, to liberate themselves. Patriarchy can take different forms of oppression and subjugation. And here in this story, Saru goes back to the past to examine her relationship with her mother and because for her past seems something which is unavoidable. We all know that God has created mother, because we can find unconditional love of God only in mother, who creates us, moulds us and protects us. It is a proved concept that mother's love is essential in grooming up the personality of a child. Here in the story, the mother-daughter relationship appears to be a sickening one because Saru was neglected as a child for being 'she'. Whereas Dhruva became the apple of her parents' eye, this discrimination and unfavorable attitude assassinated Saru life.

When a girl child is born into an Indian family, it is instructed in such a way that it has to resort to the traditional norms and believes. Saru's mother is a person who gives a lot of importance to 'complexion' than to her daughter's emotion. She readily hurts Saru's ego by saying, "You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that" (marriage) (86). We are living in a century where people are so obsessed with the thought of 'fair complexion' even in matrimonial profiles we can find an exclusive column for complexion. It is true that women are made to believe that 'being fair is beautiful'. Here the saddest part is that Saru is made to believe 'she is ugly and dark who is not fit marriage' by her mother. This stereotyping is what that snubs away the blossoms of a girl's life.

Next is discrimination, which is part and parcel of life in India. It tears apart the little soul from enjoying the full essence of life. Discrimination is almost a disease which makes a girl child feel 'unwanted'.

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even 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 for all your 101 life? / Why not? / You can't? / And Dhruva? / He is different. He is a boy. (40)

Saru emotionally breaks away when she hears her mother yell at her for Dhruva's death. "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead" (34). She was not even considered as a human being who has emotions and feelings. She just had an 'object' position in her family. She was always rejected, ignored, and disowned in favor of the male child. It was the case with many girl children in India. What it really a sin to be born as a girl? No, of course not and it's highly foolish to stand by the patriarchal codes of the stereotypical world.

She was again haunted by the past trauma of being an object, being treated as a property of sexual gratification by Manohar. The horror of rape destructed her spirit and made her to walk off the nuptial bond. With a decision to fight her hardships, she moves out. The agony is so dreadful that it looks like he raped her mind too. "I can't, I won't endure this anymore. I'd rather die I can't go on." (98).

As she thinks, "The dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them with us, and like traitors, they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul." (TDHNT 85) This clearly shows how every line speaks about her tormented self and the anguish of living in terror and danger. She is broken to such an extent that she becomes 'silent'. She undergoes a suffocating silence which almost kills her as an emotional being, and "silence has almost become a habit"(199) for

her as her father says. Throughout the text we can find the agony with which Saru faced life, her entire life was marred by the 'fractured self'. The self gets deteriorated by the disgusting traditional gender role which the society constructs.

The Dark Holds No Terrors shows a life of suffocation and underserved physical and mental suffering endured by Saru in a male-dominated stereotypical society. Saru, as a neglected girl child longs for the parental affection which ends up in frustration, isolation and trauma. Shashi Deshpande's exceptional sensibility to the suffering of women is proved through her authentic delineation of the gender discrimination. It is a sensitive and pathetic documentation of the complexity of human relationship in a society where life is totally controlled by the grave and traditional issues of gender stereotyping. The focus is on the protagonist who is always being a subject of persecution and suffering from birth to death which ends with a 'fractured self'.

References

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