



Feminine Sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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ABSTRACT *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world is the most quoted words when it comes to talking of women empowerment. Woman is an asset to any family living multiple lives in a single life time. She is a mother, mentor, wife, sister, friend and embodiment of all that is good and sweet on earth. With the coming of feminism women empowerment is truly visible in all walks of life. There is hardly any field left untouched by women. According to Tagore "What hast thou to give to me, I had had the heart to give Thee my all "(Gitanjali,50) reflects the heart of any Indian women whose giving is always endless. She keeps giving endlessly without expecting anything in return. This paper aims to present the feminine sensibility of women in general and in particular pertaining to age, place, and socio-cultural background.*

The multifarious role of a woman remains impeccable. Gone were the days when woman was confined to her home. Today she is engrossed in her job, work and travel. The growth graph is truly in a progressive way. She is truly the 'New Woman' of Bharathiyar the greatest Tamil poet of National acclaim. Even the 'New Woman' of Bharathi faced hardship, however she has unwavering focus on the finer aspects of life. She is the true embodiment of cultural, social and moral values. She exemplifies love, sacrifice, courage, faith in God, and an attitude of optimism in life. Women in Indian fiction are portrayed as submissive, obedient as in R.K.Narayan's *The Dark Room*, Mulk Raj Anand's *The old woman and the cow Or Gauri*. Within a span of 20 years there is a vast change in the reflection of these writers where woman no more succumbs to ordinary situations of life, but rather expounds from ordinary to extraordinary actions through wise decisions they take. Thus women are really daring, determined, extrovert, as against the stereotyped portrayal as timid, meek, introvert of earlier times. There is total transformation of self shedding all her inabilities, timidity and gender. They are sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative. Economic insurance is sought through economic independence. She instantly resents the onslaught of her individual self.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are usually educated women who voiced the agony of their self, who need to depend on their better half for the choices the decisions of their life. Her works reflect issues pertaining to women and her position in human society. "The Dark holds no terrors" brings out the strength and struggle of a sensitive woman for whom the dark holds no terror. She is portrayed as a sensitive woman who is less preferred in an Indian household. In-fact she is made to feel inferior, an unwanted child, a burden on the family as Sarita in *The dark holds no terrors*. Her mother's words "You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that" (p 61) is reflective of the same. Her life is a life of guilt totally suppressed by her mother and husband. Shashi Deshpande's works constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian Literature in English. She presents her characters in a woman's eye thus breaking patriarchal representation of a woman. Sarita clearly states that-

"I was female. I was born that way ,that was the way my body had

to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that."

(p-63)

Her characters emerge out from the cocoon of self-pity to an entirely new world where feminist ideologies are rooted strongly. It is true that no society will progress without the progress of women. She takes the robe of humanist to express feminist thought which is clear in her interview given to Vanamala Viswanatha where she says that

"I want to reach a stage where i can write about human being and not about

women in relation to men .I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist

purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective ,It's only coincidence."

The Dark holds no terrors is a beautiful narrative meander between the past and the present. The bitter past makes Sarita a dominant person in her later life. The social status of Charu as a doctor disturbs the family equilibrium. She questions her position when she frankly says:

"a+b they told us in mathematics is equal to b+a. But here a+b was not , definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible." (p-42)

Here the protagonist sensibility is touched upon where she comes to terms with true meaning behind every marriage. Marriage though they say that it is a true union of souls but never a union of true minds. If it is so then the marriage reaches an ideal status and there is progress in family along with the progress in mind. There is the matching of two horoscopes but never the matching of mind and both the man and the woman take the less travelled path in the institution of marriage where the roads never converge leading to endless complexities and disharmony .That is why Sarita take refuge in her parental home.

She realises that her success is someone's failure, the failure of her husband Manu. Being a doctor, gives her com-

plete joy and satisfaction both in her personal and professional life. In-fact it is this identity which evokes a new thought of accepting Manu's failure and courting his failure as her own and thus confronting him. It clearly projects how a woman's world will be jolted by a man's thinking.

"And so you must pretend that you've not as smart as you really are ,not as competent as you are, not as rational as you are, and not as strong either. You can nag ,complain, henpeck, whine, moan, but you can never be strong.

That's a wrong which will never be forgiven."(p-137)

Sarita's return to her parental home is in-fact a true search for her lost identity which is normally looked down upon in Indian society. She tries to seek refuge in her past particularly her childhood. Her childhood was bitter as she turns unanswerable for the untimely death of Dhruva her brother. It is a bitter memory of a past which is dark. She is scorned by her mother from childhood till adulthood. Thus her mother beholds her a bundle of darkness heaped against the ugly time. Her father remains a mute spectator though he allows her to pursue medicine in Bombay. However, it could be still treated as one kind of darkness in the pretext of silence. Her marriage with Manu was supposed to be the silver lining amidst the dark clouds of her past. But poor Sarita never realises that sky may change, but mentality and attitude of men never change. Marriage which was once a bliss turns hell for Sarita. That is the sole reason why she returns to her parental home .Her very house is a symbol of dark past to which she has never returned for fifteen long years. It was a long period of silence, alienation from her bitter past and above all a guilty past never reflecting happy moments of life. The sudden demise of her mother, coupled by her personal problems drives Sarita to her house. Thus standing at the threshold of life , of her home many thoughts ponder her mind. She is reminded of the ancient purana of king krishna receiving his poor friend. May the association is perfect in one way where both Sarita and Sudama stand with some kind of emptiness before the Lord. For Sarita it is the emptiness of heart and for Sudama it is the physical emptiness where he is bereft of any riches."Sudama in rags, bare feet and humility"(p-1) suits Sarita's mental status when she knocks the door. Thus engulfed in the darkness she strives for identity.

She represents a typical Indian woman torn between culture and tradition. She trods the path of her mother in certain aspects but never exhibits the inhibition her mother had. She tries to balance and blend tradition and modernity by compromising with life. It is beautifully said that "when light comes on it goes away. when the dark comes it returns ."She realizes her mistake of deserting her mother. Her confession knew no bound when she starkly states "It's because i wronged her that I'm suffering now."She had gone all these days hoping for something .Now all that was left was a sense of bewilderment. She in-fact comes to terms with her husband seeing him

more through the eyes of a wife and education comes her way to treat people in a dignified way thus respecting him as a human than as a husband. Humiliations and sufferings are never new to her. She accepts reality thus courting her life which could never be devoid of her husband and of course her deceased mother. Her reflections "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died because i deserted her. My husband is a failure because i destroyed his manhood."(p217) bore ample testimony to her souls purging of from guilt .This very thought of her brings a new dawn on her thus realisation soon sets taking her up and above. Her statement, "My life is my own" (p220) proves that she is the author of her own problems and that nobody else could be blamed for her situation. Shashi Deshpande's male counterparts are never people who do more harm or mistakes nor the women terrible sufferers. Her women know their limitation, rights and they thwart women oppression. Her novels are very sensitive in the sense they reflect women sense and sensibility clearly. Sarita experiences various human emotions which leads her to schizophrenia where there is a total retreat from social life marked by a sudden breakdown of her social life as a doctor and her own guilt feeling associated with the past. The novel is truly a search for her feminine self which she lost close to her adulthood by the harsh words of her mother. She becomes an emotional wreck when she questions the institution of marriage when she says:

"But perhaps, the same thing that made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and i his bride .Now i was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (p-42)

Saru's practical and balanced approach makes life more appreciable and happy. She does understand the true balance between marriage, family and profession and what brings the real harmony is sheer acceptance. She doesn't escape reality but fights the injustice done to her. She understands that there is life beyond dependency in marriage, parents and family. True power lies in achieving equality with men against the gender based discrimination. The real empowerment lies in economic independence. This is in-fact a universally accepted and recognised key factor to achieve success. And the rise in women education helps women like Saru to court success. The rejection of her parents, the rejection of her husband shows the autonomous status of being independent than being dependent. There is this quest for the self which releases them from shackles of her past. Thus Sarita try to evade reality and fights the injustice done to her. It is a true emancipation from darkness to light, silence to speech and subordination to autonomy.

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