



Winnowing The Woes : Saru , The Worthy, and Never The Weak. A Study of Gender Binarism Affecting Feminine Sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors

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ABSTRACT *Sensibility exemplifies how a person is affected by the world around. Feminine sensibility refers to the emotions and sentiments of women. It also corresponds to the mental makeup of women and their moral development. No heed was paid to a woman's feelings in the ancient times The joys and sorrows of her heart were never exposed It was only from the early 19th century that a woman's inner mind was unraveled to society through the writings of many. Indian writing in English started attaining popularity rapidly. The women writers have overcome all impediments and have contributed immensely to English Literature. In India we have a plethora of woman writers starting from Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and many more. These writers are noted for their dexterous portrayal of the female psyche. The description of the woman icon has undergone a lot to change in the past few decades The writings have expanded from depiction of the traditional self-sacrificing women to the resilient triumphant women. This paper focuses on the Effects of Gender Binarism on the Feminine Sensibility, through a study of Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terror.*

A Study of Gender Binarism Affecting Feminine Sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors

Binarism means a pair of opposites. Society divides people into male and female roles, identities and characteristics. This is termed as Gender Binarism. A ubiquitous feature of gender binary is that woman give birth and man is the bread winner of the family. The motive of gender binary is to bring some order into the system, but many critics argue that gender binary divides the society and causes conflict.

Riki Wilchins in *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary*, argues that gender binaries divide and polarise society. Femininity and masculinity describe behaviours and attitudes of an individual. They must not be tied up to gender roles. Both males and females exhibit, femininity and masculinity in them. Hence the assumption that femininity applies to females and masculinity applies to males is wrong. This restricts the individual to act outside his gender role.

This paper aims to throw light on how Gender Binarism affects the Feminine Sensibility of a woman through Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark holds no terrors*. Let us analyse Sarita the protagonist's feelings and perceptions, which traumatises her and how she triumphantly overcomes them.

"It was more as if my mind had deserted my shamefully bruised body, discovering it, making it insensate"(12)

Sensibility means the ability to feel and perceive. It reflects the emotions, sentiments and feelings of people. Feminine Sensibility refers to the tender and true emotions of women. Feminist Sensibility, shows how a woman reacts to the circumstances and miseries in her life. It illustrates how a woman reacts to the experiences that affect her. During Ancient times no one paid heed to a woman's feelings. It is only in the 19th century, that writers started writing about woman and her feelings. Many women writers emerged successful, among whom Shashi Deshpande's holds a special place for herself. She delves into the mind of a woman, and brings to surface her psyche, revealing the myriad problems she faces. *The Dark Holds No Ter-*

rors is her pioneer novel, about Sarita a woman who suffers gender discrimination, fear, insecurity, physical and mental trauma due to Gender Binarism. She resists and becomes insensate initially, but ultimately becomes resilient and breaks free from the fetters of the psychological terrors in her mind and achieves self-realisation and actualisation. Shashi Deshpande portrays a society as it is. She does not exaggerate or trivialise details. She presents it, as they are.

"Shashi Deshpande is one of the novelists whom you can read with seriousness. She is never after gimmicks. There is an earnest voice, very serious about the story being told and it's manner. She is one of the writers with little posturing"(Shashi Deshpande and *Indian Feminism*, Kamalakar...)

Womanhood is synonymous to woes. Due to the multifaceted role a woman plays she faces myriad challenges. She becomes economically independent and asserts her status in society. She is suppressed as society feels she's stepping into the shoes of a man and playing his role. A woman resists such situations and becomes resilient in solving her problems. In ancient times women were subjugated, but gradually women have started fighting back, and have emerged successful.

Shashi Deshpande focuses on the challenges of a professional woman, in her story *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She adeptly brings out the psychological turmoils a woman undergoes due to Gender Binarism

Saru, the protagonist of the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, reconstructs herself and redefines the feminine sensibility. She encounters difficult situations throughout her life. From childhood to adulthood her womanhood, is woe-begone. At a young age Saru suffers insecurity due to her mother's attitude towards her, as she was a girl child. She is deprived of mother's love. She feels unwanted. The family showers love and affection to the male heir, her brother, which leads to sibling jealousy. In childhood, she suffers due to gender bias and misogyny. She breaks free from the Patriarchal clutches, and educates herself to become a doctor. She meets the right man, marries

him, and everything goes on well until she becomes popular and the breadwinner of the family. This Success makes her husband feel inferior and his true colour comes out. She suffers due to a complex she creates in her husband, by playing the masculine role, being the bread winner of the family. He becomes a sadist at night, and behaves normally during the day. Saru seeks refuge to the problem by returning to her home. She gets no solace. She introspects and understands running away from a problem, seeking comfort outside is foolish. Comfort and Peace comes in facing the terrors. The rest of the story deals with how Saru resists such pressures and becomes resilient. Thus Gender Binarism plays havoc in Sarita's life, making it miserable. Shashi Deshpande, reveals how Gender Binarism can injure a Woman's Psyche and she becomes resilient and faces it bravely.

Let us analyse the effect of Gender Binarism on Feminine Sensibility through a few incidences in the

Saru - A victim of Misogyny

Saru is a victim of Misogyny. Misogyny is the hatred of women or girls. Saru's mother is traditionally and psychologically programmed, by the male dominated society to consider a female child inferior. Saru feels insecure. Her parents dote on her brother.

Sociologist Michael Flood, at the University of Wollongong, defines Misogyny as the hatred of women, and notes "Though most common in men, misogyny also exists in and is practised by women against other women or even themselves. Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that as accompanied Patriarchal, or male dominated societies for thousands of years and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making"

Saru develops a poor self esteem, "I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying...You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that"(60).

Even attaining puberty, was not rejoiced by Saru. "It was torture. A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother.(62) "You're growing up" she would say. And there was something unpleasant in the way she looked at me, so that I longed to run away, to hide whatever part of me she was staring at.(62)

Due to the subjugation of her mother, Saru breeds anger and hostility towards her. Till the end, this feeling never changes. "Her mother was dead. But the realisation brought not grief but anger. A childish rage filled her. It was no use now. She would never show her as she had so often told herself she would." I'll show her. I'll make her realise"(60).

Here one finds a wedge in the mother daughter relationship. Daughters develop love and affection for the mother, but Saru hates and despises her. On exploring her mind deeper, one can clearly understand that such behaviour is a sign of resistance and rebellion. Childhood sentiments and emotions get deep rooted in one's mind, that it incessantly disturbs the mind and cripples one's personality. Exposed to such traumas, Saru fears life. She rebels and resists to uphold her identity.

Gender Bias leading Sibling Hatred and Jealousy

As a child, she develops profound hatred towards her brother, because of the partial treatment given to him by her. Saru feels insecure. Her parents dote on her younger brother Dhruva, pushing Saru to dark corners. This breeds sibling jealousy and hatred in Saru. She even wishes her brother would die. As an expression of resisting, and asserting superiority over Dhruva, she teases and mocks him always. "She had ruled over him completely, no dictatorship could have been more absolute"(35) But he had been loyal. Completely loyal. He had never given her away to their parents. Not once. Their bond, their pact, had been secure against treachery. It was she on the contrary, who had so often been treacherous. Running away from him, Avoiding him(35). Suddenly, Dhruva drowns himself to death, while Saru stands watching. The guilt haunts her mind throughout her life. So one finds, Saru, a girl child, a sister, has only guilty Consciousness, deep seated in her mind.

The man behind the mask

In her quest for identity, Saru grows up to become a doctor resisting and overcoming all the challenges thrown on her due to gender discrimination.

She falls in love with Manu, whom she feels gives her the due importance, love and care. She works hard and becomes successful. But fate spelt doom for her. The gap between Manu and Saru widens, as she becomes professionally successful. Manu suffers from inferiority complex when a journalist asks him about his feelings, when his wife is the breadwinner of the family. He becomes a terror and inflicts pain to Saru. "This was not death by strangulation; it was a monstrous invasion of my body"(12). He becomes a split person and abuses Saru physically and psychologically at nights. During the day he seems docile. "I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me, snoring softly. No more a stranger, but my husband"(12) This split personality appalls and surprises Saru. Outwardly she is a doctor, happily married and settled with two children, but in real she is a victim of physical and psychological injuries. Saru is unable to talk about this to her husband or to anyone else. This affects her terribly. Once again she resists, she leaves to her native place. It is here that Saru introspects and becomes resilient to the world around her.

She unleashes her mind of fears. She realises that the dark holds no terrors. Saru has understood that peace and happiness lies within. Social Stereotypes in gender relations are not uncommon. But coming to terms with the sudden maniac like behaviour of her husband Manu, who was earlier loving and caring did shake the very fabric of her marital relationship. Getting back, fighting it out, and attaining mental peace and happiness was Saru's achievement. Her bereavements did make her feel alone and insecure. But Saru frees herself from such blocks and becomes resilient like a bamboo shoot.

"All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings...they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves we're sunk" "My life is my own...somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing furtively on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one"(220)

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