

Destruction of the Oppressed Self in Shashi Deshpande's "The Dark Holds no Terror"

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Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande is the novelist with the most sustained achievement, having published eight novels. She seems to grapple with the identity crisis of the contemporary women in her works. Her important novels include *The Dark Holds No Terrors* 1980, *If I Die Today* 1982, *A Matter of Times* 1996 and *Small Remedies* 2000. Deshpande's glimpse of novels reveals frustrations and disappointment of her women. They experience social and cultural oppressions in the male-dominated society. *Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs, which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from "self-surrender" and "self-abnegation" to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. The novel *That Long Silence* traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men on the subjugation of women find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential as a human being.

A Matter of Time, Shashi Deshpande's latest novel portrays a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. While others cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond, she finding herself in is unperturbed. Being a little detached, she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent.

The Binding Vine shows how the educational earning woman helps a poor woman of solidarity among women. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife who, is the victim of marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence in the name of family honor. Shashi Deshpande's concern about the problems of women and their quest for identity makes one consider her novels as feminist's texts.

Shashi Deshpande describes, in unequivocal terms, her ideas of feminism. Thus, Shashi Deshpande's is a writer par excellence when she deals with human issues which are of interest to all humanity. She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things resulting in their self-abnegation in her writing. Shashi Deshpande's feminist conception has been beautifully described from her novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in the following chapters.

Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande also deals with the excesses committed upon the female fold for centuries leading to their deep but quiet suffering and passive resignation. But

Deshpande shows how the women revolt against suffering and try to search their own identity in the hostile World of male chauvinism.

Deshpande feels that security is also an important requirement for women. So, if a home is there with a position to provide safety, a woman may not revolt against the home in that case. Women are generally gentle, dependent, submissive and passive.

In Indian fiction in English, women play two types of roles traditional and unconventional. The unorthodox suffer for their floating of accepted social norms and for their rebelliousness. The conventional people suffer too, but their suffering is sanctified by the norms of a patriarchal male-oriented culture.

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the representative work exposing middle –class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with existing reality. The novel is the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in the novel and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in favor of her brother. She is not given any importance no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthdays. Sari's brother's birthday however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals.

I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men. A woman in this society is a non-person, an appendage, a slave to the master-man. Women in Indian culture are not individuals in their own right but objects through whom man aspires for self – affirmation and self-relationship. The culture that has created a sita and a savitri has denied the rights of existence to woman save as daughter, sister, wife, mother and others.

Women rarely lead an independent life. They exist in a bipolar world on the one hand they are subordinated to the masculine

world of their husbands and on the other hand committed to the assertion of their womanhood, their female ego. A woman is seen in terms of the identity of her male counterpart and as such the female world is not one with the male world but is adjacent to it. They run parallel.

Women are generally gentle, dependent, submissive and passive. Within the family women are usually their husband's yes-person. In the society, she is subordinate to man. Woman is often found trapped in a myth of the wife and mother or the animal. "Maybe woman had been an animal, only a nice obedient, domestic one, sitting on a cushion, doing as she was told and is return she had been fed and sheltered".(p59)

But the new woman protests. In novels of the Anita Desai and NayantaraSahgal, women are not mere goddesses or lifeless engines of propaganda. They pass through a process of transformation which signifies for them change from a bondage to freedom, from indecision to self-assertion and from weakness to strength.

ShashiDeshpande presents the middle-class educated woman, because firstly she herself hails from a middle class family, secondly the middle class women constitute a large part of the contemporary Indian society and thirdly they are fit subject to show the clash between tradition and modernity, idealism and pragmatism.

In Deshpande's novels, the Indian middle class woman is engaged in an unconscious struggle to release herself from the stranglehold of tradition bound society. Deshpande tries to transcend it but fails. Deshpande's women are neither the old orthodox type nor the modern, westernized type. They are the familiar Indian women of the middle -class society.

The Deshpande heroine is anti-matriarchal. The heroine looks for a

new environment where the mother cannot exercise her will she hates the parental home, "Well educated, hardworking people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident fund, with two healthy, well-fed children going to good school".(p69) That is the setting of Deshpande's novels.

The Dark Holds No Terrors tells the harrowing tale of Sarita, Deprived a parental care and affection she lives a pale, loveless life. Her mother loves her brother but hates her. And, when she is drowned, the mother blames Saru for no fault of her own. "You killed him. Why didn't you do? Why are you alive? when he's dead?".(p71) This is the plight of not only Saru but also millions who are born girls. The fault lies with their gender, not with them.

Conclusion:

ShashiDeshpande's major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality and independence for the women on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the women to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. She has examined a variety of common domestic crisis, which trigger off the search. Deshpande's concern and sympathy are primarily for the woman. While revealing the woman's struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity for herself, the author subtly bares the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society.

In the changing scenario of post-colonial Indian society that observed crosscurrents of traditional ideals and newly imported ones, ShashiDeshpande's was burdened with the task of giving then women characters the specific roles that would fit in the socio-cultural modes and values of the changed society. A new

generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values according to which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. These women, who have the capacity to make free choice and need not therefore depend on the choice of the male, are portrayed in the novels of the new generation women novelists. These new women characters are not however the same everywhere dilemmas are exposed accordingly.

In her novels, we get the theme of poverty stricken, hardworking, sincere and silent women of India who live like animals, embrace intolerable sufferings for survival and yet hope for a better future for their issues only to be crest fallen at the end. Nothing happens in their life but series of disappoints along with humiliation, torture and repeated displacement. Besides the rural mass, there are middle class woman in the innumerable towns and cities of India who are often unable to enjoy the legal status conferred on them. Women are now treated on equal terms by law as far as inheritance of property and opportunities of jobs are concerned. But on the social level, these women who have been struggling since ages to assert themselves are still being heckled by their male counterparts and forced to remain silent. The voice of this newly emerged class of woman, who have the same education as the men are having and are sometimes given the opportunity of supporting themselves financially, is heard in the writings of ShashiDeshpande. A voice of protest against the marginalized condition of women as a class is also audible in her works. The bold heroines, having moral courage necessary for self-assertion replace the meek and submissive heroines who were accepted as the standard women characters.

In ShashiDeshpande's novels, we can find the variety of characters too. In Deshpande's literary world there are

characters taken from almost all the sections of life. They are medical practitioners and writers, educated housewives, uneducated ones and maidservants. Besides poverty, bereavement and such other common adversities, there are some causes of suffering exclusively for the female. Deshpande renders with sympathetic understanding the variety of suffering a woman has to undergo. Sometimes the suffering is attached to the social taboos and sometimes the women are silenced in the name of family honor and are compelled to digest torture.

ShashiDeshpande usually describes Indian women in her novels. That is why the condition of women in our families. ShashiDeshpande's sincere attempt to break the silence of women has been widely acclaimed in home and abroad. Her clear understanding of human relationship, her close observation of the way of the world, her unbiased attitude to dogmas and movement enforced me to do the present attempt in this direction.

Research Programme Shashi Deshpande, in her works, defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of

creating strong, glorified female heroes and has presented the Indian woman as facing the very dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. Deshpande bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male centered Indian society. Deshpande's feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include religious and cultural elements (such as myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies) and social and psychological factors such as woman's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. The protagonists of ShashiDeshpande's novels are modern, educated, independent women, roughly between the age of 30 or 35. Their search for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme.

Reference:-

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