

Patriarchal Designs in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'

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ABSTRACT:- Beginning from the first inception of the Universe, there is a fascinating myth associated with the creation of woman by the Supreme Creator, Lord Brahma. And indeed, beginning from Brahma himself, the idea of feminism in Indian literature, both oral and written, had begun to be established, though perhaps not as blatant as is today. It is said that Brahma had first created man and in his generosity, had desired to give man a companion. But by then he had depleted all the material in the creation of man and hence he had borrowed umpteen components from the handsome creation of nature and had thus made woman out of them. Lord Brahma had introduced woman to his earlier creation man stating, "She will serve you lifelong and if you cannot live with her, neither can you live without her". The primeval myth carries an unambiguous implication of woman's image in life and literature for centuries. Hence, feminism in Indian literature as well as the broader perspective of feminism in India, is not a singular theoretical point of reference; it has metamorphosed with time maintaining proportion with historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women and women en masse.

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Women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous beings. Women had to face many obstacles in the academic circuit, which symbolizes the effects of an educational culture that radically restricts the scope of women's intellectual exposure. Woolf identifies the certain information of being denied access to buildings or ideas as another type of infringement on the freedom of the female mind. This exclusion is a more radical kind of information, one that disturbs not just as a single thought or review but the life-long development of an individual or the historical development of an intellectual tradition. Ashraf Behan first entered into the world of art and earned through writing. She was forced to earn her livelihood when she lost her husband. Women abstained from the world of imagination so to look after their household duties. Women work a lot from early morning to late night; still their work is not being paid. Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes great humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child. After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manohar, all begins to fall apart. Her husband's sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society's reaction to Saru's superior position develops sadism in him. Her husband Mann vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie.

Man's relationship with woman is most often the bond that exists between a master and slave. Women is an object and she is essential to man because it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self realization. Women who are conscious of their emotional needs are striving for self – fulfilment, rejecting the existing traditions and social setup and longing for a more liberal and unconventional ways of life.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita survives in a male dominated world which offers no easy-outs to women. The preference for boys over girls which is openly witnessed in most Indian homes is seen in the blatant discrimination between Saru and her brother which leads to a sense of insecurity and hatred towards her parents. Devoid of love and security, she wanted to be loved and gets that attention from Manu whom she marries. There is an inverse decline in her conjugal relationship with her social and financial rise. She becomes clear eyed with no illusions left about love and romance, after her relationship with three men Manu her husband, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padmakar. Saru neither surrenders nor escapes from the problem, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protégé.

Saru for whom escape has always been her mode of resolving the tangled knots has come to realize that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. Saru learns to see reality clearly. She realizes that "we come into this world alone and go out of it alone." (208) Finally she realizes that if all is 'alone' what is there to fear. She realizes that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept into her life. Escapism is no solution, a permanent solution has to come from within. Her father's advice and the call of her profession steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. The steadied woman in Sant says: "Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can." (221) These words stand as a proof of the assertion of her individuality and her willingness to confront reality.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is all about male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage. A mature Saru shuns extremes and takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage. Deshpande provides a revised version of Indian women's world as her protagonists come out of the bedrooms, kitchens and attics to articulate and reconstitute their lives through their 'feminist awareness' and introspection. Deshpande's novels record polyphonic voices behind every structure and relationship which have contributed to silent Indian women. Muted by society and patriarchy her protagonists feel crippled by a sense of inferiorization, non- entity and loss of 'self.'

Marching on her way to seek ultimate realisation of the self, she encounters several problems. From self-alienation to self-identification, the novel evinces how she comes out of her fear which is the root cause of her suffering. She was so scared of the final confrontation with Manu that she says, "Promise me", "Promise me you won't open the door to him. Don't open the door when he comes." (218) Her father was a man who was indecisive in her eyes, but she was utterly surprised when he advised her to face the situation: "Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong. Tell him all that you told me. Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him." (216) He exhorts her not to leave the house without meeting him as no escape route was ever possible, "Don't go without meeting your husband. Talk to him. Tell him what's wrong." (217) Thus she hits upon the idea that everyone is alone ultimately in this world; an idea with which she was not reconciled earlier but now she seemed to accept that hard reality; however bitter it was but it had to be truthful that one is alone in this world; alone to tackle the umpteen problems which cling to oneself like the flies gather on carcass, but now she comes to terms with that concept and becomes comfortable "So I'm alone. But so's every one else. Human beings... they're going to fail you...we have to go on trying." (220) Ultimately she realises that the fault of her misery has been her own self, "I have been my own enemy." (221) Thus she enters into a phase of light leaving behind the darkness which has blinded her vision completely. 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 futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right. (220) She realises that escapism can never be possible way out. "Escapism is no solution; a permanent solution has to come from within."(14) Truly Deshpande sets new ideas working in this novel. She exhorts the fact that human relations cannot furnish solutions to rectify our problems. One has to look within only; then true path can be sought. It is like seeking God within. There is no possible glancing at God outside but only a real peep inside can prove fulfilling and can help in attaining the spiritual truth. No doubt Sarita is awakened in the end. She does not want to escape now but she wants to confront the harsh reality. She wants to face Manohar tooth and nail. She no more camouflages herself from Manohar's arrival. Here it is quite significant to quote Shashi Deshpande herself. The novel spells out the faith that a woman's desire to succeed like an individual does not negate or cancel her desire for love, marriage and domesticity. A balanced and purposeful life is not a utopian fantasy for a woman if she liberates herself from the stereotyped conditioning of society and is not dependent on the male presence to authenticate her thoughts, emotions and deeds at every step. The novel aesthetically communicates the essence of the creed of feminism along with the contemporary realities.

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