

A TRAUMATIC JOURNEY OF SARITA: THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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Abstract: Shashi Deshpande has become a leading novelist to give a deep resonant voice on various issues which reflect Indian Society. Her every novel presents the true picture of society. She successfully analyzes the psychology of women. She tries to strike a balance between what they want and what they are compelled to do, between the necessity and the wish. She feels women mostly exploit themselves. This present paper studies her first novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', where she explains, how a neglected attitude is kept for a girl child by her own parents and how that girl becomes a psychiatric patient and perennial sufferer till coming over by own assertion.

Novel presents the suffocating atmosphere of a girl, who never gets love from her parents and looks marriage as a heaven on the earth, but after marriage she finds dichotomy between her expectations and reality. It is a story of internal and external traumatic experiences of a middle-class educated working woman, who is a famous doctor and working person. Her dichotomy breaks out with self-realization and confrontation the entire situation. She takes long journey painfully with bitter experiences to come over from this perennial psychic problem and release her trauma openly in talking with her father.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, Perennial Problem, Psychological suffering, Self-confrontation, Self-assertion.

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'You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?'...

These words always keep echoing in her ears making her feel guilty and becomes a painful knot in her psyche and she feels alienate from everyone and become psychic sufferer even also after marriage. The reminiscence of estrange relation earlier with mother and later with husband make her a ventriloquist. This is a story of the character Sarita in novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' of Shashi Deshpande. Sarita's, known as 'Saru' in novel, is a tragic story. She is victim of circumstances and conventions of an orthodox and conservative society. Saru's mother could not forget her for being alive after her son death, and Saru never forgot the perennial psychic comments of her mother, "You did it. You did this. You killed him...you killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?"(Deshpande, TDHNT 191), the words followed her for days, months, years, all her life and become nightmare follows her every night. Her childhood traumatic experience haunts her for many years.

Introduction:

Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors, exhibits the trauma of a girl-child who is a victim of her own mother's sexist and gender-based bias; which loses her later life into precipitate fighting to overcome the initial victimization, to justify her diversified roles as a wife, and as a career woman. Although, Deshpande has lift up other problems too, which are faced by a woman in patriarchy society, yet the strange mother-daughter relationship is centrally significant to the understanding of this novel. The mother-daughter relationship occupies a center place in this novel. It presents a realistic study of the conservative attitude and conduct of those women, who have keen desire for boys only, in Indian middle class families. Sarita is also one type of character, who is deprived and neglected girl child by her mother, an ordinary, modest, sensitive, middle class woman, aware of her own drawback. She was unhappy before marriage and after marriage as well, until her inner volcano of the soul is burst out.

Sarita's Childhood Suffering:

The main character of the novel Sarita, is elucidated by Deshpande in a psychiatric manner. A child is sufferer due to the dearth of Mother's love and deprived and deserted daughter in her family since childhood. She is always blamed for the death of her own brother by her mother. Saru's mother's comments become perennial psychic problem, as shadow of terror. This terror has been rooted in her mind, which visits her every night, and she suffers even after marriage also. The nightmare comes to her when she falls asleep and hears a small voice saying, Sarutai, Sarutai. She cries: "Oh, go away. I'm sleeping... Go away. Don't trouble me... Go away..." (Deshpande, TDHNT 145) Saru cannot hold the whole great sorrow within her. She wants to run away from everyone to rid herself from this nightmare terror. Gahlawat (39) rightly satire, "The unsympathetic dogmatic societal environment has molded the psyche of a mother as a woman and the young uninitiated girl child has made a special object of the mother's persecution".

Like all traditional Hindus, Saru's mother was also very much concerned about who will light her pyre after death? Because her mother also believed that her soul would not get salvation until her pyre is lit by her own son. Y.S. Sunita Reddy aptly observes that: "In this connection, Saru mother's attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context." (qtd. in Siddharth Sharma 28) This sort of blatant gender based biasness that Dhruva is different because he is boy makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted, leading to a sense of insecurity and alienation. Many Indian girls are victims of gender discrimination in the Indian society. Shashi Deshpande through Saru's character reveals the social aspect of gender discrimination. Saru is always made to feel ugly, neglected and undesirable by her mother. She thinks: "I was an ugly girl, At least, my mother told me so". (Deshpande, TDNT 61). These things make her feel annoyed and unwanted girl child. This psychological problem manifests itself in the form of alienation, loneliness, annoyance and withdrawal from the family.

Saru is passionate of love and caring. In college, she meets Manohar, she falls in love with him. She gets love first time from him and marries him against her parents' wishes. Saru looks marriage as a door of full freedom and enters in her married life with the hope of new beginning, after being frustrated in her unmarried life. Earlier years of marriage she considers herself the luckiest women on earth. But she finds that being a woman she is not free from shackles. She is a wife, who is more successful than her husband. This creates an inferiority complex in Manohar and becomes the main cause of Saru sufferings and physical tortures. She finds herself in a very quandary position. She is frustrated and disappointed with this external behaviour of her beloved. She realises that: "I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved." (Deshpande, TDHNT 40) She had once determined that she would never come back to her mother's house but circumstances compelled her to come back as unable to bear her husband's masochism

Sarita's Traumatic Journey:

Novel presents traumatic journey of Sarita. First turning point was in her childhood home, the real trouble begins when her younger brother Dhruva, accidentally died. Secondly, after marriage when her husband behaves like a sadist in night. It is a paradox of modern India that after being self-dependent, they are not free from shackles. Many psychological knots woven into her personality which were stifled since childhood burst out with dual behaviour of her husband. During day he is totally different and during night totally different. She never gets courage to talk to Manu with open-mind. She does not speak and regrets her silence; "I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death. Perhaps the process has already begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself." (Deshpande, TDHNT 96). She is very aware for her silence but at early stage, she has not courage to break her silence. She remains upset so long as she considers her married home is also only a 'paradise of matching and handloom bedspreads, a hell of savagery and submission.' (Deshpande, TDHNT 28). She never succeeded in talking to Manu about his nightmarish brutality. "I've never spoken to him about it. Nor has he. Why haven't I?" (Deshpande, TDHNT 201). Each time she tried to speak, to open her mouth, her heart failed her. She returns to the family home, to escape the nightmarish attack. In her father's company she reflects on the every event of her life so far with everyone. The process of evaluation of her life begins with this stage and ends with self-confrontation.

Deshpande presents story in retrospectively. She visits her father's house to escape from the sadist husband, and to get a kind of solace from her hectic routine. Here she takes an enough time to review her relationship with her father, husband and her dead mother. She remains upset so long as she considers her

married home is also only a 'paradise of matching and handloom bedspreads, a hell of savagery and submission.' (Deshpande, TDHNT 28). She sees the truth about her mother and her husband after voicing her inner traumas. The epigraph, 'you are your own refuge/ there is no other refuge', sets the tone for Saru's journey. In her father's home, every moment she visits in flashback of bitter experiences with her mother before marriage and later with her husband. This conflicted state of her mind is a reflection of the inner darkness she has developed. She does not have any good memories of her mother because she was always blamed by her mother for her brother's death. Her mother words: "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (Deshpande, TDHNT 34-35) always keep echoing in her ears making her feel guilty and becomes a painful knot in her psyche and she feels alienate from everyone.

Deshpande shows that how bitter words and silence become the biggest barrier in one's life and creates traumatic experiences. Hers had been a life of misery and suffering. She takes the blame on herself for that: "I am a dark, damp, smelly hole", she often thinks when the pain of the night comes back to her during day, shaming her as if it was evidence of her wrong doing, "I am like a house full of unclear things, never cleaned, never opened. Sometimes I don't know how I can bear myself." (Deshpande, TDHNT 29). It is clear that something was burning inside her. She comes to her father not for him, but just because of herself only. The memory of her mother was as violent as an assault. She never forgives her mother for her misbehaviour. In her father's house she analyses all the dark corners of her soul and her relations with others and peeps into her past and tries to overcome her psychological fears and realises: "That the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us, and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul." (Deshpande, TDHNT 85)

There was an angry consciousness in Saru that she was behaving badly and disappointment blotted out everything. All her grief, pain, dissatisfaction, frustration burst out when she talks to father and tells her nightmare dreams of Dhruva: "... And every night he comes and accuses me. Yes, Dhruva. He looks at me as if I killed him. Why are you all against me? Why do you all accuse me of something I never did?" (Deshpande, TDHNT 181). These were not only her tears, but it was an explosion of inner volcano which brought out many things bad and good as well. Author explains in the novel: "All the grievance of an old but monumental injustice was in her words. She was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat." (Deshpande, TDHNT 182)

Sarita blamed herself for doing wrong with Dhruva, mother and husband. "Her cruelty to Dhruva, to her mother, to Manu ... she would never be rid of it. She would carry this ugly, unbearable burden until she died." (Deshpande, TDHNT 212). She asks her Baba: "...am I to be punished all my life for one childish fault?" (Deshpande, TDHNT 184). She does not feel scared of Manu for what he has done to her, but she is scared of what she has done to him. She is aware of Manu's mental state, she says: "Baba ... I think he doesn't know it himself, what he does to me at night." (Deshpande, TDHNT 203)

It was her father's persuasiveness that made Saru breaks her painful silence that had estranged her from Manu and increased her fear. She bursts when she says: "My husband is a sadist" (Deshpande, TDHNT 199). It is here that real purgation of the inner darkness takes place. She had been her own enemy. She thought that Duryodhana had waited for his enemies to come and kill him. But she had been her own enemy and wanted to kill herself of fear of darkness, which has no existence in the light of day. She comes to the conclusion: "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." (Deshpande, TDHNT 220). She overcomes all her fears and guilt with new vitality that her life is her own.

The above discussion of novel shows that Deshpande has presented the episodes in retrospect with the positivity of looking at things, in all aspects from a distance. She has very cleverly and judiciously decided to present facts in retrospect. She could scrutinize the event impartially by looking at them from a distance. Therefore, Sarita blames herself only because from distance she could see her fault in deserting her mother. Finally, as novelist mentions in the novel: "she was overcome by a queer sensation, as if everything was unreal. Her own body felt insubstantial. There was a feeling of weightlessness that made her almost euphoric. Even her fears faded into insubstantial ghosts. And with this sense of unreality came the thought ... none of this matter, not really." (Deshpande, TDHNT 219). Sarita is a girl of firm determination and achieved her ambition by hard working. She wants to face Manu with more assertion and wants to go with him. She tells her father: "Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can." (TDHNT 221)

Conclusion

Deshpande presents Saru as a representative of 'New Woman', who could not accept her destiny as fate written on her forehead. She represents such Indian middle class families, where sons are given more importance, and girls are subjected to a strict discipline and taken as a burden. Saru's decision to go with Manu shows her confidence and courage in this direction. She decides, she will no longer be a puppet. She realizes that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems. She realizes that we come into this world alone and go out of it alone. Hence, it is a self-discovery that the narrative has been woven with the pain of isolation, the terror of silence, the feel of ignorance and the joy of discovery and in the last she finds her own real refuge.

Thus, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents the deeply complicated and hard relationship of a daughter with her mother. The character of Sarita gives a voice to the mythic 'stone women', and the many voiceless women who bear their darkness stoically. She was not a mute sufferer but found comfortable space to speak about dark corners of her soul.

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