

Pangs of Domestic Violence in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's first novel is The Dark Holds No Terrors. She is a Winner of Sahitaya Academy Award and the Nanjangud Thirunalamba Award. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with theme of the quest for female freedom and identity. The Dark Holds No Terrors depicts the life of the protagonist, Sarita, a lady doctor who has been burdened by event from past and present. She feels like an animal trapped by her own guilty feelings. She still remembers her mother's bitter word uttered in her childhood when she was not able to save her brother from drowning. Now her mother is dead and Sarita returns to the family home, ostensibly to take care of her father but in reality to escape the nightmarish brutality her husband inflicting on her every night, because she becomes the dominant breadwinner in the family. Sarita in the lull of her old father's company wants to forget all her grief. she reflects on the events of her life, which includes her small town childhood, her tyrannizing mother, her marriage to the charismatic Manohar, her children etc. At last, Sarita gradually realizes her arduous journey and learns to free herself of guilt, shame, and humiliation. "You are your own refuge. There is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve".

Domestic Violence in Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

Domestic Violence against Women remains a major concern in today's society. The problem is so severe that it affects people from all ways of life regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, and religion. The statistics on this issue is alarming that everyday four women die in this country as a result of domestic violence, the euphemism for murders and assaults by husbands and boy friends, that is approximately 1,400 women a year, according to the FBI.

Many feministic movements, Government Acts pass every time woman becomes a victim or falls prey in male dominated, Patriarchal Indian Society. Some social activists bring forth women's sufferings in the public eye in the form of novel, drama and through some other medium. The modern Indo-Anglian novelists have clearly visible trend of writing on the deplorable conditions of women. Deshpande is a novelist of a different class. She not only depicts the sufferings of women but also present them solution. This paper highlights the domestic problems faced by Deshpande's protagonist Saru in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and how Saru emerges out from the woods of domestic suppression and attains a light of hope.

Saru has undergone excruciating painful experiences in her life in terms of gender discrimination, male domination, marital rupture, education deprivation, sexual assault, etc...

Deshpande has portrayed many different types of Women protagonists in her novels to express how they have to suffer for being women. Women are the common victims of Domestic violence. It first emerges out from parental house in the form of Gender bias. It is true that some females fall prey to violence before they are born when expectant parents abort their unborn daughters hoping for sons instead. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the women protagonist Saru is an unwanted female child to her parents. She often feels lonely and anticipates to taste parent's love. she wrote in a note book even when she was a child. "Nobody Like me. Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me"(The Dark Holds No Terrors 83)

Perhaps it is the feeling of female children in all the middle class families and unfortunately the same feeling is given to the female children in India even today. This feeling goes deeper in Saru after her brother Dhruva, has drowned in a pool. Her mother, thinking Saru is wholly responsible for her brother's death, starts to hate her completely and says straight to her Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead? (The Dark Holds No Terror 34- 35)

These hateful words of her mother have wounded her mind profoundly. She remains alienated from her parents. No parental love is showered on her and she is not given any recognition. Dhruva's birthday is celebrated ceremoniously every year, but Saru's birthday is not even acknowledged. The mother's discriminatory behavior makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. She is in the grips of insecurity irrespective of the geographical or chronological space and any Indian girl is a victim of gender discrimination in the Indian social set up.

A woman is put under several restrictions right from the day she was born to death. Saritha becomes a victim of her domineering mother's rigidity of dos and don'ts.

She doesn't allow even to play in the outside
don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't we have to get you married.

I don't want to get married will you live with us all your link?

Why not?

You not?

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (The Dark Holds No Terror 45)

The restriction becomes severe when a woman due to menstruation, Saru is told by her mother.

The mother has been unmotherly in the way Saru is treated. This adverse attitude of the mother has mounted frustrations and tensions in Saru's life. "You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around (The Dark Holds No Terror 62).

She is ashamed and aghast to hear her mother's prejudicial words. This hostile circumstance grows her more wild and rebellious later. She feels that she has lost her freedom; she wants to separate herself from her mother and this thought takes her to study medicine in Bombay. As usual Saru's

mother's oppression takes a big blow in her studies. Fortunately her father's support helps her to join the Medical College. In fact Saru's mother does not realize the importance of girl's education. The same kind of oppression comes visits her again when Saru decides to marry Manu. Indian

culture concords “Marriages are made in heaven”. That woman chooses a man herself to marry him without the consent of her parents’ is not acceptable in Indian Society. Moreover, parent in Indian families keep on strict vigil on the daughters to make sure that they do not make love with anybody before marriage . Pre-Marital love is considered “sin”. Saru actually chooses Manu to reject the orthodox social ways and values. The conversation of her mother with Saru obviously shows the real picture of orthodox Indian women’s thoughts.

What caste is he?

I Don’t know

A Brahmin?

Of course not

Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low-caste people are they?

The tone of disgust hatred and prejudice of her mother has so enraged her to reply. I hope so, (The Dark Holds No Terrors 96).

Akin to Shakespeare’s saying, “life is full of sounds and fury signifying nothing” Saru has been confronting many kind of domestic violence from her child hood. At one stage, Saru decided to walk out from her marital home and comes to her parental house as an unwanted guest after 15 years. The story actually begins here. Saru’s mind swings from past to present recalling the separation from her husband, and mother’s cruelties. Realizing the reality, Saru seeks her own identify, her sexuality and individuality.

Ultimately Saru ends up the wisdom of exercising hybrid patience to all excruciating and subjugating practices in domestic climate to lead life. In many of Deshpande’s novel her protagonist comes out as a bright light of home. One can incur from the novel of study that Laws, and Movements to ensure equality and freedom of woman remain passive in the face of fossilized patriarchal system and woman, inspite of their educational and social status, to be the victims of domestic violence. Being conscious of this fate ,woman, by understanding, should try to overcome all hurdles gently to seek harmony in life.

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