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**THE STUDY OF DISHARMONY IN MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS
IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS***

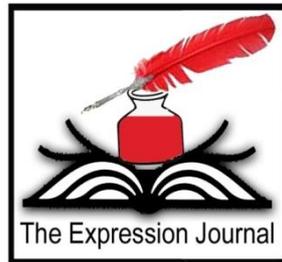
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Abstract

The Dark Holds No Terrors narrates the story of a marriage on the rocks. Marriage is the destiny of the woman; to remain unmarried is suggestive of unnaturalness. It brings shame to the woman's family. It is the parents' social obligation and moral responsibility to get their daughter married before she passes the marriageable age. For the sake of social approval and her parent's happiness, the girl has to go through the humiliating 'inspection' where she is examined by the boy's relatives as if she is a saleable commodity. Denied the freedom to choose or express herself, she is forced into marriage rituals. Neither her parents nor the man ask what she wants. Deshpande concerns in her novels with the patriarchal concept that a woman must exist only in terms of her relationship with a man where she will be able to control all stages of her life. The chief protagonist of the novel, Sarita (Saru) is a successful lady doctor. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a traditional 'Indian Society' is the theme of the novel. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a stretched mental predicament and a long drawn introspection. The aim of this research paper is to explore the world of women through the lens of Shashi Deshpande.

Keywords

Rituals, Patriarchal Pressure, Humiliating, Disillusionment, Gender Predicament.
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**THE STUDY OF DISHARMONY IN MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS
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Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, written in the first narrative form tells the story of a marriage on rocks and shocks. The focus is on the unhappy conjugal life of Sarita (generally called Saru) and Manohar, (generally known as Manu). Saru is a "two-in-one women"—a successful doctor during day and a terrified trapped animal in the hands of her husband at night. The novel opens with Saru returning after fifteen years to her father's house—a place she had once sworn never to return to—unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. The rest of the novel is remembrance of things past and a brief confession to the father with whom she had hardly communicated before. So the narrative meanders from present to past and vice-versa which maintains the movement of the story marvellously. The stay in her father's house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with the husband, her dead mother, dead brother Dhruva and her children, Renu and Abhi. Though she remains unchanged till the end she has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her courage to confront reality. The dark no longer holds any terror to her, her dreams, die down and she is disillusioned.

The title of the novel effectively asserts the need for confrontation in terms of light and darkness. In fact, the novel deals with the nebulous area of half-lights. Saru's caution to Dhruva—"the dark holds no terrors. 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" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 76-77).

The novel reveals the life of Saru who is always neglected and ignored

in favour of her brother, Dhruva. She is not given any importance and no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthdays. However, her brother's birthdays are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. In the relationship to her brother, Saru's status is belittled in the family. When he is alive he is the mother's censure and Saru is neglected what is worse Saru is later held responsible for Dhruva's death. Her mother always scolds Saru being responsible for his death. "You killed him. Why don't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?" (173). So indelibly is the guilt stamped on her mind that even after years of the episode she is guilt-ridden. "But there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedless turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood" (198).

Saru is attacked on the plane of filial relationship. She is also offended by mother again—for her body. The mother torments her by projecting the values of a male-dominated society, "You are growing up, she would say. And there was something unpleasant in the way she looked at me" (45). And it becomes something shameful, this growing up so that you had to be ashamed of yourself" (55). This is not generation gap. It is power-struggle. Where the mother, as said above, is the spokesperson of a male point of view. Saru breaks the umbilical chord—leaves home. This is her first public defiance of patriarchal power-system. Saru's defiance is further expressed when she becomes economically independent and marries of her own choice without caring for caste and creed. The institution of home, which is supposed to foster the growth of a child, robs the woman of her right of respectability and individuality. The rejection of home and family at this juncture in the novel is Saru's first foot forward towards independence.

She succeeds and emerges as a successful, well-known and reputed doctor. At the same time her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. Now the situation undergoes a change. Her inability to procure time for herself and for her family (husband and children) upsets her family life. Manu, her husband, cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him. He cannot express it openly but says out in irritation "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon" (37). Saru realizes it that he does not love her the way he used to do earlier. She asserts:

Love... how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely. Love? Romance? Both, I know too well, were illusions and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance but sex. ...And for me sex was now a dirty word. (65)

S. Tiwary rightly observes, "Her femininity being brutally crushed, she loses forever the dreams of sentiments and passions" (Tiwary 75). This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. At a personal level, she feels a

gradual disappearance of love and attachment, which she had once developed. It is now replaced by a psychological conflict, which is uncalled for but inevitable, given the situation in which both of them are placed. Most of the solemn duties towards her husband and children are unattended to. The children do not get proper love and care from their mother as she gets late in returning home. Mainly there are three problem incidents that are frequently evoked in Saru's introspection in a fragmentary fashion. Like R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Shashi Deshpande has also narrated the story through the flashback technique. She goes back to the past, returns to the present and again goes back to the past. The story moves in a meandering manner. The three incidents regulate and even control Saru's happiness.

The first incident is Saru's interview for the issue on career woman brought out by a woman's magazine. The interviewer's casual query put forth to Manu—"How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well" (*The Dark Holds No Terror* 182). Unable to come to terms with the fact that he is a failure and his wife a remarkable success in life, Manu lets his wounded male pride manifest itself in the form of sexual sadism. Bed is the only place where he can assert his animal power over her. Manu becomes a mean, loathsome fellow when he basks in her glory by day and ill-treats her at night. It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that she cannot even speak about them, even to him.

Tired of both the duties, indoors and outdoors, and her husband's heinous sadism, Saru wants to leave her practice as a doctor and to be only a housewife: "Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give it all up... my practice, the hospital, everything" (72). But Manu does not want her to leave her job as he cannot maintain the same standard with only his income, "On my salary? Come on Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that" (72). Saru's career exactly is Manu's problem. But he shudders at the suggestion of her giving up the job and tries mediocre tricks of cajoling her by offering to take her out for a movie. He cannot dream of going back to the shabby middle class way of life. The burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force imbalancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relations. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and disillusionment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable. The degree of fact and fantasy of the experience in the hands of Manu is left to the reader to consider.

The second part of the novel also begins with a dream suggestive of the uncertainty of the destination as the protagonist drifts by with no sense of direction in life. In part four there is a reference to another dream that evokes the road image again but this time with "Something, somebody awful, frightening" at the end. But she has no way out and has to proceed. The dream emphasizes the need of confrontation and consequently she is disillusioned.

The mother-daughter relationship is the second moot point that is

evoked in the novel with bitterness. In other words it is conflict between the old and the young, the traditional and the modern. The position of woman that is understood by the author appears to be blend of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality, and above all revolt and compromise. All these characteristics are inextricably blended in Saru who represents a section of society, which can be termed as middle class in the modern Indian social structure. In her is a trauma that is logically produced by a bitter conflict between the imposed and the willed. She is brought up in a traditional atmosphere but the education she receives has made her a changed person with a rebellion attitude towards tradition. Her mother almost forces her to stay within the four-walls of the house. She does not give her permission to take admission to the medical college, but Saru does not even listen to her: "I'm not talking to you, ... you don't want me to have anything. You don't even want me to live" (128). Saru sees her mother sapping her all happiness and ask herself "why should she matter dead, when she had never mattered alive" (23). She sees her as a revengeful ghost.

Her marrying Manu and claim to have thereby served umbilical cord is an act of defiance proving her strength, power and self-reliance. The mother's Parthianshot—"I know all these 'love marriage'. It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don't came crying to us then" (62)—is a sure prediction of Saru's future and failure. Ragni Rama chandra Churns out the idea of love and marriage, "To much verbalization of man-woman relationship on the sex plane. ... has threaten to destroy much of the sanctity attach to marriage, the mystery of womanhood" (120). Later Saru's hurt ego would not admit her miscalculations and defeat. Though she tries to learn from her mother what not to be, she ends up as an educated version of her mother herself. Sarabjit Sandhu sustains that:

That, here a kind of hatred towards the mother is shown as it is the mother who puts all the restriction on her daughter without considering the fact that the times have changed and the next generation is passing through a transitional period where the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. (76-77)

The third important issue that Saru recalls repeatedly is her brother Dhruva's drowning in a pond. Her love for power can be identified in her relationship with her brother too. It is said that being older to him by three years gave her advantages of dictatorship. Because of the mother's favouritism Saru hates Dhruva and the struggle for importance goes on. Saru wants him to blot out of the family picture, and, when it happens there is a definite "After Dhruva" (A.D.) gloomy atmosphere at home. The mother establishes that Saru has killed Dhruva and Saru pulls herself into the dock. Saru never boldly refutes or denies the charge of murder exception her confession to her father. This is because she had in a way passively watched him die and therefore has passively contributed to his death. The truth lies somewhere in between. She has always felt on inner derive to make him the

mythological Dhruva (pushed off the father's lap by the step-brother) and Dhruva in death becomes a tantalizing "North Star" controlling her happiness from afar. The guilt has come to stay and she is destined to be in the dock perennially—her husband, dead mother, dead brother and even her children are the accusers and she, the accused. Saru has always been a problem child and the mother a problem parent, the feelings leave Saru frightened of the possibility of the repetition of the cycle in her family too. She views the labour with its grunts, cries and pain which made "an animal out of her" to be a prelude to motherhood.

Throughout the novel Shashi Deshpande maintains commendable objectivity and avoids generalizations and partial views. In fact, the novel explores questions like "who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? or are we each of us both. Surely, Shashi Deshpande is aware of the woman's predicament in a male-dominated society, especially when woman is not economically independent. There is a reference in the novel to a woman who, illiterate by her in-laws, drowns herself in a well. There is a reference to yet another woman who is tied to a peg by her in-laws and fed in the cattle shed. Saru detests the merciless judgement of her mother who dismisses the topic saying, "She perhaps deserves it." The thrust here is not on man's cruelty to woman but woman's cruelty to woman, the internalization of the patriarchal cruelty by woman. And this is deeply devastating for a person like Saru.

The Dark Holds No Terrors presents a crucial and transitional modern society where at least economically independent woman could have choices in life. Saru has tremendous respect for the dignified, self-reliant teacher friend Nalu, who despises all compromises remains single to lead a meaningful life of convictions. Even among men there is a Padmakar Rao who complains that her wife does not relate to him on equal terms but waits on him and could talk of only middle class concerns like economizing the family budget though she does not need to. Saru's vehement advocacy of woman's subordinate position, while rehearsing her speech for the woman's college, and her inability to render the same speech there, bring out her strong reaction against such a traditional trend and her inability to adhere to that way of life.

The Dark Holds No Terrors does not limit itself to Women's problems. With a woman as the central figure, Deshpande profoundly probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships, man's tragic aloneness, and so on. Even Saru, the realist who sees the ultimate human reality in the human body and its process of decay, sees aloneness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She realizes that the suffering of multitudes does not mitigate one's own suffering in any way and that she is doomed to sit and watch happiness recede from her, all by herself. It is this realization that helps her understand mother's last words " ... that's what all of us have to face at the end. That we are alone we have to be alone" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 176).

Saru's feeling of homelessness is an affirmation of her sense of isolation. Saru leaves "home" twice to seek release—once to establish her independence from her mother suppression and the second time to establish her indispensability to her husband and children. When victimized by Manu she starts on a quest for home and reaches the home she has earlier rejected. "Home is the place", writes Frost in his poem entitled 'The Death of a Hired Man', "Where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in. "Saru is also taken in, but finds herself still, "a homeless refuge, "a fleeing interruption". The feeling of homelessness and detachment drives Saru occasionally to the longing to be realized from existence itself. She wonders awfully:

Are all human relationships doomed to be failure? ... Would it always be failure, any attempt to reach out to another human being? Had she been chasing, a chimera all her life, homing for someone? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 200)

But Saru will not let herself be bogged by this for long. The novel surely has positive suggestion to offer. Saru places tier trust in self-confidence and the possibility of human interdependence. Saru's need for a confidant and her finding some relief in unburdening her heart to her father reiterates the idea of interdependence. Pramila Paul points out that, The feeling of homelessness is indicative of inner disintegration. Tension between the different part with one's self takes away the harmony within and without. At times Saru sees herself to separate halves, a two-in-one woman, a confidant professional in white coat by day and "a well-trained animal" (39) by night.

The male dominated societies structure females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender. Through authentic examples in the novel, Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship but exist between a female -female relationship as well. Deshpande's fiction focuses on the women character trapped up in a conflict between tradition and modernity. She has clearly pointed out the gap between the prejudice stricken traditional women who prefers her daughter's marriage to career and the modern, educated, empowered women who prioritizes her personal opinion and empowerment.

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