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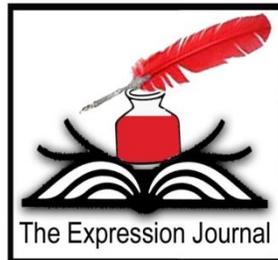
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**GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
*THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS***

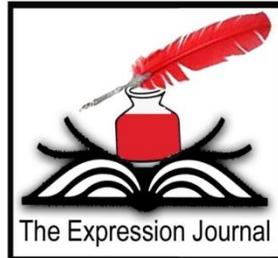
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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's novels are strong voice for the women's cause. In her novels, Women are seen under the patriarchal clutches but her women try to liberate themselves from that suffocating male-dominated environment. This paper explores the themes of gender-discrimination in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. This novel explores the story of a secluded and rejected girl, (Sarita) Saru who has to face gender discrimination since her birth. She is held responsible by her mother for his brother's death. She is considered a burden on her family and her mother does not want her to study medicines but she chooses medicine as her career and becomes a doctor. After marriage also her husband shows cruelty to her just because she becomes a successful doctor and her husband teaches in a college. Inferiority complex overpowers him but he cannot say all this in front of her and that's why he shows his manhood on the bed at night. He revenges her by his cruel sexual act that leads Saru to return her parental home where she is not entertained warmly by her father after the death of her mother.

Key-Words

Gender, Patriarchy, Discrimination, Women, Education, Success.



GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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Shashi Deshpande novels are based on the problems and marginalized positions of women. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is about the injured soul, Saru who lives in her own home like an outsider. The novel opens when Saru is a married woman and she is unhappy with her cruel husband and returns to her parental home. She enters her parental home like a stranger or an outsider and she is not confident enough whether she will be allowed to enter her parental home.

Only a suitcase of clothes. She shifted it from hand to hand, finally putting it down at her feet, reluctant to knock again. She was not apprehensive, though not eager either, for the moment of confrontation. She glanced back at the rickshaw in which she had come. She had not paid the men yet, as if keeping a route open for retreat. (15)

When her father opens the door and he finds Saru alone (without her husband) he shows no affinity with her. He neither shows any affection toward her nor allows her to enter the home at the first sight and he starts questioning her at the threshold. Thus, she is not entertained in her parental home and she considers herself like an unwanted guest. She has to seek permission to her father to enter the house:

'Can I come in, Baba?'

He moved aside. Composing his face into a normality.

'I didn't expect you.'

'No, how could you?'

'You didn't write.' (16)

When she is allowed to enter, she understands that her father doesn't seem happy to see

her there. She tells her if he doesn't feel good finding her there, then she can stay in a hotel. But fortunately her father gives his consent to stay there 'No, no, nothing like that. But I didn't know...I mean. I never imagined...What hotel? No you stay here. Only...' (19) and she stays in the puja room as all the other rooms are already occupied. Saru has a brother named Dhruva who dies when he was only seven years old. Saru was also there at that time when he drowned but she frightened and ran away from that place. That's why her mother holds her responsible for his death. She thinks: "He was drowned. I watched him drown. And my mother said...Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (34) Premila Paul writes in this context: "Dhruva's demise had always been subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment." (67) Saru's mother never wants that she and her husband face any problem in Saru's marriage that's why she takes a good care of her not because she loves her but just because they may not face any problem in her marriage. That's why she doesn't let her expose in the direct sunlight:

Don't go out in the sun. You will 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 life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (45)

When Saru grows young, her mother suggests her in a strange way. She says that she must not come in front of her father in petticoat just because she is grown up now. Thus, her adolescence becomes a curse for her. Her freedom is curtailed and she is put under pressure for everything. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around. And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your father. (62) This reminds us the very beautiful line "To be young is dangerous" (23) by a maid servant Pari in Rama Mehta's novel *Inside the Haveli*. In this novel the central character Geeta is kept under *purdah* (veil) and she is not allowed to see the males of his home and she could meet her husband also only at night and during day time no male was seen in the haveli. When Saru expectedly gets a gift to wear in her ears, she gets happy for some time. Initially she thinks that her mother has given her gift out of love but when she comes to know that this was not a gift but a necessity, a necessity of time, for her grown up body, then his happiness proves short-lived. She thinks that all this is done not to make her happy but just because she is a grown up girl now, 'You are a big girl now. Time you had something nice to wear in your ears. We must make you some gold bangles next year.'

So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but

because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear. I put the box down and flounced off to bed. (171)

There is a discriminatory attitude shown to her in her own home. When her brother Dhruva was alive, then his birthday was celebrated in the home with great enthusiasm. They worshipped in the morning and there was lunch in the afternoon and *aarti* in the evening. But when Saru's birthday was celebrated, there was no *puja* just because she was a girl and there was no need of worshipping on the occasion of a female child's birthday because the birth of a female is not considered auspicious, "My birthdays were almost the same...a festive lunch, with whatever I asked for...an arti in the evening; but there was no puja" (168-169) but after Dhruva's death, the celebrations of birthdays are stopped. "My birthday was passed over in silence, both at home and at school." (169)

This discriminatory attitude reaches at its apex level when her menstruation circles started she is not allowed to enter the kitchen or *puja* room. She was kept segregated on the straw mat and even food was given to her from a distance so that her touch may not pollute the other person. Thus, she was treated like a pariah or a Dalit whose touch may pollute them, "Not just the sleeping on the straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being a pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed, pollution." (62) When there comes the time of her marriage, she chooses a boy, Manohar (Manu) from a different caste and her mother doesn't like her choice. Her mother tells Saru that love marriages don't last long and there no love exists after some time. But Saru is firm at her decision. Her mother tells her that this love marriage will not last much long just because all such marriages fail in the long run. She says that she will come weeping to them by marrying Manohar:

I know all these 'love marriage'. It's love for a few days, then quareels all the time. Don't come crying to us then.

To you? God, that's the one thing I'll never do. Never. (69)

And Saru's mother was right. Saru's husband is not pleased with the Saru's social and professional prestige and that's why he has secret envy with her but he couldn't do anything in the face of her.

Saru understands her mother's weighty words but she wants to do what her mother dislikes. That's why she gets married with a boy whom her mother doesn't like. When Saru is unhappy with her husband's rough behavior, she he thinks, "If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him. And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight o letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him and yet pitying him too. For he is groping in the dark, as much as I'm." (96)

Her husband doesn't cooperate with her. He is a sadist who takes pleasure in Saru's pain especially when her psyche is hurt. He behaves very cruelly with her whenever he thinks that he has been insulted or humiliated. When people respect Saru and pay no attention to Manu then he takes his revenge at night while copulating:

Just hurtling hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognize. Total non-comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed me. (112)

Thus, men think themselves the proprietor and they consider their wives their property. The only duty of all the women is just to please their husbands: "Everything in a girl's life... was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male." (163) In the India it is a rule for a woman just to obey the order of her husband blindly and if she doesn't comply then she is tortured, curbed, socially ostracized or murdered. It is said that the successful life will be only when the wife is inferior to man in every respect as is said in the novel:

But if you want to be happily married, there's one thing you have to remember. That's important, very important because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A., if he's 5'4 tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage" (137)

And Saru wants divorce from his husband in the court but she is confused in what words she may tell why she wants divorce from her sadist husband. She just says: "*Can I divorce my husband?*" When magistrate asks her why she wants divorce then she says, "*He's cruel.*" (97). This is how a woman is physically exploited and mentally harassed to that extent that she has no option left except divorce.

When Saru returns her parental home ostensibly to take care of her father and to save herself from the cruelty of her husband, she finds that now this home also seems to her not her own as if after marriage she has lost all her right from this home. Thus, Saru even after becoming a successful doctor, is not satisfied with her life. She feels very lonely and disappointed and she puts the blame of everything on herself. She doesn't feel satisfied with the work she follows and even tries to retreat from her hospital job also. She thinks that she is responsible for everything:

Then can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood. (198)

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Conclusively, Saru faces many problems as a girl in her home and as a wife in her husband's home. She has achieved everything by becoming Dr. Sarika but her husband doesn't feel her importance in his life. She runs the family but she is not given any credit for her dedications for her family. Circumstances remind her many times that she is a female. Simone de Beauvoir rightly says regarding all women's conditions like Saru's "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (295)

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