

The Feminist Aspects of Shashi Deshpande's Novel - The Dark Holds No Terror

Jyoti Mishra

Ph.D. Scholar (English)
R.S.K.D.P.G. College
Jaunpur



Abstract

Shashi Deshpande has made use of woman's issues in the texture of her novels. Being a woman she can better experience and express the problems of womankind. She presents a realistic picture of woman's living conditions and their struggles in a man-dominated society.

The Dark Holds No Terror (1980) is Deshpande's first novel. In this novel she attempts a psychological probe into an educated middle class woman's tortures in married life. Her husband becomes an abnormal man in the grip of his inferiority complex. The protagonist Sarita or Saru, faces problems of gender discriminations and biased attitudes right from her childhood. She is ever in clash with her mother who could never forgive her for neglecting her responsibility towards her younger brother Dhruva.

Because of her negligence the brother drowned in a pond near the parental house. The mother blamed her for his death and never pardoned her. Saru's mother took no interest in the child's education and progress. She, unlike Dhruva's, did not celebrate her birthdays. Even her movements were restricted. She made unkind remarks about her dark skin. Saru, thus, grew up in a hostile atmosphere - unloved, unwanted, and insecure. The mother gave her a differential treatment, and praised Dhruva by such statements as following.

"And Dhruva ? He's different. He's a boy." (1980 : 45)¹

Saru were to feel that she was responsible for the death of her younger brother. She became guilt-conscious and psychologically depressed.

As she grew up, Saru turned out to be rebellious against her parents, especially mother. To hurt them with her action and choice, she chose Manu as her husband. Manu was a non-brahmin, belonging to a lower class.

She had joined the medical college to pursue her career, and, there she fell in love with Manu, a college mate, and married him against the wishes of her parents. Her mother's love for Saru could have averted this marriage, but that was not to be. Saru wanted someone who could love her and care for her.

"I gave myself up unconditionally unreservedly to him. To love him and to be loved." (1980:66)²

For her the married life was all happy in the initial years. Manu also loved her deeply. But later, their love turned into a nightmare.

For this strained relationship between Manu and Saru, there are some reasons. One reason is her rise in the eyes of the public as a doctor. The public recognition of Saru as doctor breeds the inferiority complex in Manu. People come over to her for advice and treatment, and Manu felt uncomfortable with her evergrowing popularity. He felt a bit ignored, as Saru was not able to spare time for him. They had no time to move out, to go to a movie, or to enjoy life together. So their love dwindled, their warmth waned.

Another reason is Dr. Broozie's filtrations with Saru. He helped her financially to establish her clinic in a posh area. Saru, accepted his help unreservedly. She took it as a teacher assisting a student. He was her senior in medical profession. In the words of Saru herself.

It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me... that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with me and Manu. [1980:91]³

Broozie did all this to conceal his homosexual nature, and Saru wanted to take advantage of her nearness to him in order to become a reputed doctor. This behaviour of the two doctors bred a sort of discomfort in Saru's relations with her husband. Manu started neglecting her. Their love touched a new low. Saru also felt within that she was not paying proper attention to her husband and children, and to domestic responsibilities.

A third reason that precipitated the crisis in Manu-Saru's relations was a journalist's question in an interview with Manu. The question asked was "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well ?" [1980:35]⁴

Manu, who was a teacher in a local college, felt hurt by this remark. He was mentally hurt, for he knew that his wife was a successful doctor, earning a lot of money. Hereafter, Manu became an aggressive man in bed with Saru. He assaulted her sexually to assert his manliness.

In the words of Saru:

He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and woke up and there was this This man hurting me with his hands, his teeth, his whole body. [1980:201]⁵

Night turned highly tortuous for Saru. She could not tolerate his beastly behaviour at nights. While in day times he remained normal as though nothing terrible had happened in night time.

In the meantime, Saru received the news of her mother's death and decided to go to her Baba to console him and to consult him about her strained relationship. Her Baba remained detached from her personal matter. He advised her to sort out her matter by talking to Manu about it. Saru, now realised that she had to be self-assertive and confident in charting out the future course of her life. So, she returns to her children and husband. In fact, Shashi Deshpande does not allow to go the western way, totally liberated. She rather strikes a note of compromise for a married Indian woman, and that way she maintains the Indian social tradition.

REFERENCES

1. Shashi Deshpande, The Dark Holds No Terror, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House : 1980, p. 45.
2. Ibid. p. 66.
3. Ibid. p. 91.
4. Ibid. p. 35.
5. Ibid p. 201.