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QUEST FOR IDENTITY OF A WOMAN CHARACTER IN SHASI DESPANDE'S NOVEL
"THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS"

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the study of quest for identity of a woman character in Shasi Despande's novel *The Dark holds No Terrors*. Shasi Despande's novels deal with a crisis in the life of the protagonist. In this sense her work is women-oriented, yet it would be unjust to brand her as a feminist for there is nothing 'doctrinaire' about her writings. Her protagonists are extremely intelligent, introspective and hypersensitive women who embark on a quest for identity and the true meaning of life. The onset of this novel reacts against the traditional concept that girl's life is tuned only to please male society. The male chauvinism is well portrayed in the character Manohar, husband of Sarita who plays a central role in the novel. This paper highlights the freedom of women from the traditional duty of sacrificing themselves for their family members.

Key Words: Relationship, Gender, Discrimination, Inferiority complex, Career woman, Doctor

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Hindu philosophy, women had no right to study the Vedas and so literacy became a rare quality among women. The Digambara Jains hold the view that women can never attain salvation except by being reborn as man. These are the views thrust upon women by the male dominated society.

Her second novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is about a well educated, economically independent woman's search for her identity which leads to discover the dormant strength in female gender. It is the story of Sarita (called Saru) and her relationship with parents, husband and her agonizing search for herself. It is the story of a marriage of a woman who has been acutely conscious of her gender since childhood.

The novel opens with Saru returning to her parent's house after a gap of fifteen years. Her stay in her parents' house gives her a chance to review her relationship with her husband, mother, husband, and her brother Dhurva. The novel derives its strength from the stark presentation of Saru's childhood, her trauma of being an unloved child and her marriage to a man of inferiority complex.

Saru's earliest memories are those which underlined the discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother. His birthdays and other religious rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp and fanfare, whereas her birthdays are barely acknowledged.

Saru's most important and recurrent childhood memory is that her brother Dhurva's drowning in a pond. She is persistently haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death because she is a mute spectator of the incident. When her mother accuses her of murdering her brother, she does not refute or deny the charge. Saru's mother obvious preference for her brother, Dhurva, creates a sense of alienation with her and precipitates a sense of restlessness and insecurity.

Her mother takes no particular interest in her education, personal advancement and snubs her at every given opportunity. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the minds of adolescent Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. Without the support and understanding of sympathetic mother, Saru develops a version to traditional practices in the crucial years of puberty and adolescence. The rejection by her mother during these impressionable years leads her to psychological insecurity.

She rebels against her mother by going to Bombay to study medicine. Saru is attached to Manohar called Manu, a fellow student in her college. He is the active secretary of literary association and member of the Dramatic society. He is the heart throb of many girl students. Saru remains totally unacknowledged by the handsome Manu, a lecturer in a local college. After her conservative upbringing and the rigid atmosphere at home; Saru savors a sense of freedom for the first time in her life. In the flush of her infatuation with Manohar, Saru considers herself highly privileged to have been chosen by him to marry.

The initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss when she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on earth. As long as she is a medical student and her husband the bread winner they lead a peaceful life, even the home is surrounded by filth and stench. Gradually Saru's social and financial status grows far beyond that of her husband. She is a busy, successful doctor in contrast to Manu who is an underpaid lecturer in a third rate college. She establishes herself as a career woman and her profession satisfies her ego, but this brings her no happiness at home.

Saru remembers even the exact incident which becomes a turning point in their existence. Once there is a fire accident in a factory near –by and she returns home late, in a stupor, after helping out the victims, still wearing her blood stained coat. The news spread in the neighborhood that she is a doctor. Gradually people start paying attention to her than previously. Her neighbors keep coming to her with sundry complaints, glad to have a doctor in their midst. Saru does not observe the slow change in her husband, in the initial exhilaration at her exalted change in her husband.

The rift between Saru and her husband gradually grows wider. Many unfortunate incidents blow the lid of the simmering pot to Manu. It changes Manu into a wild animal at night and appears normal in the morning. Unable to bear the torture any longer, Saru returns to her parent's home. Saru's bitter realization is that a woman must necessarily remain a step behind her husband. Even she prepares herself to resign the job. But he is not ready to accept because he may lose income and comforts it brings.

Saru's affair with Boozie (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her college mate) seem temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. A close study of the novel reveals that Saru does not indulge in any physical relationship with Boozie and Padmakar Rao, and so the question of being unfaithful does not arise.

CONCLUSION

The Dark Holds No Terrors has an open ending. Saru during her stay in her father's house receives many letters from her husband which remain unanswered, as she still in an undecided state. Towards the end of the novel Saru receives a telegram and prepares herself to confront Manu. This decision reveals her as a woman of self confidence and courage.

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