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SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *WOMEN*, AS REPRESENTED IN *DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*

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ABSTRACT

Gloria Steinem, an American journalist and social activist, once said, "Women are always saying, we can do anything that men can do. But men should say we can do anything that women can do" to highlight that women's empowerment relies on society. Women are neither biologically nor psychologically inferior to men; nonetheless, the general perception of women is disturbing and discouraging. In most cases, her status and significance are secondary to men. However, more recently, since the 1960s, there has been an increased revolution in the status of women through feminist writing, which continuously aims to liberate women from man's subjugation and misuse and establish a libertarian society.

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known feminist author whose primary objective is to educate society on the importance of equal rights for women. Her work *Dark Holds No Terrors* is one of her remarkable works. This article focuses on the struggle of women to prove themselves.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, Tradition, *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Feminism, Identity.

Introduction

*Dark Holds No Terrors* talks about Sarita, nicknamed Saru and Kamala, Saru's mother, an abusive elderly, traditional woman who wants her daughter to marry someone from a lower social class because she thinks her daughter doesn't deserve a good man. Sarita is often rejected and ignored because of her younger brother Dhruva. She begins her story as an enraged child with many questions, opposing and challenging any form of mastery. Her need for selfhood and her desire to be significant and independent in life qualifies her as a fighter.

Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's Novel

Shashi Deshpande focuses on women's anguish and turmoil as they navigate the balance between male-dominated society and tradition on the one hand and self-articulation, individuality, and independence for women on the other. Her writing explores women's quest to achieve self-identity than the traditional roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. In an article on the *Assertion of Liberating Self in Shashi Deshpande's Dark Holds No Terrors*, Ponni underlines female characters and the portrayal of patriarchal social oppressions. As she says,

"Women characters in *Dark Holds No Terrors* raise their voices against the straight-jacketed role models of a daughter, sister, wife and mother and refuse to be the object of cultural and social oppression of

the ancient patriarchal society. They rebel against the social prohibitions, the cramped, wrinkled traditions and values of their ancestors, question the concept of love, marriage and sex and feel the urge to redefine human relationship and behaviour." (Ponni, 6803)

*Dark Holds No Terror* is a brilliant novel involving Sarita, the protagonist, who runs away to her father's house before being tormented by her significant other Manohar's sexual extraordinary. However, the memory of her home brings back terrible feelings about her mother's merciless disposition.

Deshpande has used a conscious process of epitomising and adding concerns reflective of Feminism against a male-centric perspective. Chanchala Naik's *Writing Difference*, Kailash Baral highlights that "The problem of liberating the female body from domination and subjugation is an area of critical focus within feminism" (Naik, 86)

The novel focuses on a woman's awareness of her situation; her wish to be recognised as a person rather than a lady, and her desire to construct a self-sufficient social image. At the story's beginning, Sarita is identified as having been the victim of Manohar's torture through physical and sexual viciousness. Her psychological state is described in a highly logical and approachable way. The shifts in her mental state throughout the story, from childhood to adulthood, are essential points of her life. Her mother's affection for her brother prompted her to investigate why her mother had chopped a female by testing an old request, the mass subjugations of custom imposed by a male-overrun culture. Dhurva's death becomes a tool for separating her from them by laying blame on her awareness, which seems to operate as a weak spot from time to time, bringing her to a psychiatric condition bordering on insanity. This pushes the mother-daughter conflict to the foreground.

Saru views her financial independence as a weapon against oppression. When she decides to pursue a course in medicine in Bombay, her mother is unwilling to allow her to pursue her dreams. Eventually, she tries to win her over and even sets herself apart from her mother. She tries to win her over and even sets herself apart from her mother. Valli Rao describes it as "... a search for her feminine side and herself, and finally, we see her' rebirthing' her own independent identity apart from her mother." (Rao)

Atrey and Kripal's comment is noteworthy that he cannot assert his masculinity over her (Saru), who prefers a conventional man (financially). During the day, he plays the loving spouse while sexually assaulting her daily. However, his purpose, masked in his mind, is to rebuff her for taking up the 'male' task and assert his control and power through physical violence. Manus' conscience is affected by her wealth; he feels inferior, and this sense of inadequacy drives him to behave harshly. Despite appearing normal throughout the day, he transforms into a merciless, deceiving attacker in the evenings, attempting to reclaim his manhood by raping Saru. Her vision of marital discovery is quickly shattered. Saru understands that reintegration alone will never be enough to make her whole again and that a battle with the degradation components will never be possible.

Saru's Journey is from estrangement to self-distancing proof, from negation to affirmation, and from humility to assurance. Saru aspires to break free from shadier traditions and use her right to self-assertion and personality attestation to discover her unique qualities and realise her feminine self. She discovers how to be comfortable with herself as a woman.

#### **Analysis of Feminism in *Dark Holds No Terror***

The Novel *Dark Holds No Terrors* is about the plight of Indian women, how they fight and how they are mistreated in a male-dominated culture. Sarita's quest for identity is the exploration of the unknown. Sarita continues her search for self-identity and freedom. She learns to have faith in herself.

The novel depicts the scenario of a lady enraged by an attack on her autonomy and individuality. Sarita has faced sexual assault and grew up as a victim of sexist prejudice. From the start, she was made to feel like a meaningless, substandard young woman compared to her brother, Dhruva. She was frequently greeted with irresponsibility and disrespect. "The night...", she reflects painfully, the insignificant mark of her birthday, "My

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birthday celebrations were virtually identical... only there was no Puja. On Dhruva's birthday, there was always a puja." (Deshpande, 98)

She has been counselled and taught to behave like a traditional young girl with a 'good' manner and does so with seeming assurance. She had to cope with her mother's teasing and shortening of workouts. She remembers:

"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 life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy." (Deshpande, 63)

Saru's contempt grows as she approaches pubescence. She starts to despise everything. She despises the traditional practice in her home, where she is always treated as untouchable. She expresses her feelings by being adamant and refrains from following any rituals. She fantasises about a supernatural happening and growing up and being self-sufficient. In any event, as she grows older, she becomes vile due to increased constraints.

"Perhaps there is something in the man that has been cut down and finally eliminated by feminine control, she reasoned. With a female, this isn't the case. She can be governed and surrender, yet she keeps a part of herself open for later as if something prevents her from disintegrating and imploding." (Deshpande, 70)

Saru's feud with her mother climaxes when she chooses to marry Manu, a lower-ranking man, and Saru's mother rejects him. As she says: "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?" (Deshpande, 143)

Saru marries Manu and believes that everything will be fine and that she will live happily ever after. Regardless, this did not happen. When Sarita became strong, things began to shift. She became more self-assured and autonomous. This calling has improved her relationship with her better half, Manohar tiny.

In a male-dominated culture, a wife's role is not defined by what she accomplishes but by her confirmation of specific standards that are expected in society. In any event, the relationship between Sarita and Manohar is entirely unusual contrary to the general opinion of people. Ironically Sarita appears to be more aware of her status.

Shashi Deshpande has examined how women feel suffocated in a male-dominated culture and how society has imposed rigid norms on them:

"A wife must constantly trail her husband by a few paces. You should be a BA if he's an MA. You shouldn't be taller than 5'3" if he's 5'4". You should never make more than 499 rupees if he earns 500. If you desire a good marriage, this is the sole guideline to follow." (Deshpande, 207)

The above lines exemplify the status of women's identity. In every aspect, they are suppressed and oppressed.

When people pay more attention to Saru as her popularity rises, her husband begins to feel uncomfortable and humiliated. Compared to Saru's increase in social prestige, Manu's status is that of a low-paid professor, which creates a lot of conflict and strain in their marriage. She sets her priority on her job than her family. She seemed to want to carve out a niche in this culture. She aspires to be fulfilled and complete in her life. The urge for self-fulfilment-autonomy, self-realisation, independence, uniqueness, and self-actualisation is as vital for women as it is for men.

Witnessing the success of Saru is not easy for Manu, who gradually grows dissatisfied with her everything. He begins assaulting her at night to demonstrate his manhood and masculinity, despite still being the standard and cheerful Manu during the day. Moreover, he begins to tease and abuse Saru. Specific incidences heightened the difficulties to the point that Manu acts more like a rapist than a husband. Moreover, Saru feels powerless and unable to protect herself in this situation. "I could not fight back," she tells her father. I could not scream or weep because I was frightened the children in the adjacent room would hear me. There was nothing I could do. I am never able to do anything. I put up with it." (Deshpande, 111)

Even after the economic freedom and social status, Saru faces the cruelty of life. Her success as a doctor does not make any difference in her life nor bring any hope for the future. She goes home after hearing the news of her mother's death to be quiet and spend some time alone. She feels guilty about herself, takes responsibility for everything, and accepts it deep inside. "My brother perished because I turned my back on him carelessly." Because I abandoned her, my mother died alone. Because I ruined his manhood, my spouse is a failure." (Deshpande, 81)

Later, there was a transformation of the self, and the transformed Saru learned to reject being an extremist but gradually adapted to be pragmatic in life.

"My life is my own –she felt as though she had finally located the missing connection. It implies you're simply a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage between stretches of darkness for a little moment. If I've been a puppet, it's because I've built one for myself. I've been clinging to the shaky shadow of a marriage long ago crumbled because I'm frightened of being unable to provide for my mother properly." (Deshpande, 164)

## Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande seeks to show feminine rationality in her story. When everything is said and done, women, like men, are entitled to have freedom. The rights and qualities of women are essential. These novel approaches the female struggle through Saru. For a long time, the Indian woman has been a silent sufferer, taking multiple roles as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter. However, she has never been able to ensure her originality. Saru is a 'Renewed Person' who is educated, intellectual, and financially self-sufficient; she could not allow her predetermination due to the brow furrow.

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