Exploitation and Subjugation of Women in 'The Dark Holds no Terrors'

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Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande has been the champion of the disquietude and struggles of women. Her works, very indisputably depict the various roles of women in their life as a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter, , a daughter-in-law and so on. Her works can't be called directly feminist since her works are not against man; in fact, her novel depicts the dilemma of the new educated modern working women in the traditional Indian society. This present paper attempts to critically analyse the selected novelof Shashi Deshpande _The Dark Holds No Terrors. The focus of the paper is to present why women are no longer afraid of darkness and why women are really oppressed in the society. Women, for ages altogether, have been subjected to exploitation and suppression; their lives have been spent in the darkness and thus, they are not afraid of darkness instead they feel comfort in the dark and even they feel estranged from others due to suppression by the patriarchal society. The study also attempts to highlight the fact that women are denied rights not only because of the circumstances but also because women themselves suppress other women and use men as instruments.The Dark Holds No Terrors is the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in the novel, and her disruptions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother.She is not given any heed-no parental love is shown upon her even on her birthdays. Her brother's birthdays, however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it. Feminine sensibility is an appealing quality in literature. Almost all the writers in India express and expose this quality in their writings. The renowned novelist Shashi Deshpande is no exception in portraying this aspect in her novels. In this study, an attempt is made to study Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists as portrayed in her novels, with a view to understand and appreciate their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. It critically analyses their response to the emerging situation in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. The study considers the problems of her characters which have had to contend with the given situation.

Keywords: ***Women Empowerment, Subjugation, Conflicts, Suppression, Dilemma, Oppression***

Introduction

Every year 8th March is celebrated as women's day worldwide. But as long as we continue to look at 365 days of the year as men's days and one single day as women's, we will fail as a society. Women make up 50% of world's population, comprise 33.3% of labour force, perform nearly 66.6% of all working hours,

receive just 10% of world's income and own less than 1% of world's property. This significant statistical statement of UNO is enough to illustrate the status of women in any society from economic point of view.There is enough evidence of widespread prejudice against women from years of sociological and psychological research. Studies reveal that some of the strongest forces behind persistent gender gaps are harmful social norms and stereotypes regarding males and females. It is these stereotypes that shape the perceived value of girls in relation to boys. These stereotypes normalize the idea that men are superior to women and should have control over women's choices, determine what is considered to be gender appropriate behaviour, burden women with disproportionate shares of unpaid household work and family care and can, at times, sanction violence against women. A woman is a dawn of light where all the darkness vanishes. She is the sun that enlightens everyone and possesses the ability to vanish all the fear that grows in darkness of mind. Women are essentially the origin of life. No one can deny the substantiality of women that they are the ultimate creators of this very existence. The woman strengthens the foundation of family as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife embracing everyone with the unconditional love. If allowed to grow their potential they not only enhance a women's world as writers, entrepreneurs, mystics, painters, counsellors, scientists but can also provide a better vision to the men's world.Women make half of humanity and, without any doubt, they are equally important to keep the universe moving. Men and women must be treated alike, nevertheless, the same.

Objectives

The present paper aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of **the research** also focuses on the promotion of **women's** rights and interests.

Analysis

Shashi Deshpande has been considered as a leading woman novelist on the Indian literary
horizon. She has been awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel 'That Long Silence'. She projects woman in various roles on the screen of Indian English Literature. Woman has to play the role of a daughter, a wife, a mother and at the same time she has to prove her individuality. Existence of girls is always neglected in the presence of boys in our society. Lack of correspondence creates problems in the husband-wife relationship in which wife is the only sufferer as she has to be confined in the four walls of the house. Due to the patriarchal domination, a woman has remained introvert for ages but now she has begun to raise her voice against the system.. Sarita says:"…this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too….that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband."Manohar's inferiority complex resulted in callousness. He couldn't find any other way to satisfy his ego. Sarita confessed to her father that her husband Manohar was a sadist:"He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this…this man hurting me. With his hands , his teeth, his whole body."

In her childhood, Sarita was ignored and tortured by her mother and after her marriage she had to bear her husband's sadism. During day time, she had to play the role of a doctor and at night she was a terrified trapped animal. In Indian society, woman is not supposed to return to her parent's house without her husband's permission. She has to be with her husband under any circumstances and has to be faithful to her husband.

"Since woman is not capable of living independently, she is to be kept under the custody of herfather as a

daughter, under her husband as a wife and under her son as a widow"

But Sarita had to leave her husband. When she left her husband and returned to her father's house, her father was surprised at the unexpectedness of her present. His eyes moved from her to her suitcase at her feet, and then beyond her to the rickshaw standing on the road. She was an unwelcome guest in her father's house. Saru says:"….he sat gingerly on the edge of his chair, like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest." Sarita's long hours in solitude gave her chance to think over her married life and her profession as a doctor. Her introspection helped her to make herself free from her sense of guilt that she had made Manohar what he was. She knew that her life was her own which she had to shape as per her will. She came to know that there is no refuge other than one's own self. She decided to return to her own house to live with her husband and to cure her husband of his inferiority complex. Shashi Deshpande's fiction has something in it which is closely related to the intellectual and emotional aspects of woman. She has depicted the real plight of women in Indian society. The woman can be satisfied with one love, utterly fulfilled, because she does not look at the body of the man but she looks at the innermost qualities. She does not fall in love with a man who has muscular body; she falls in love with a man who has charisma –something indefinable. On the other hand a man's love is more or less a physical necessity.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande, through this novel, suggests that a woman has to analyse her 'self' in order to free herself from the problems of married life. The analysis of her past helped Sarita to understand her true self. Sarita fell victim to marital rape by her husband whom she loved very much. She had to suffer a lot due to the male dominated society. In her parent's house Sarita recalled the memories of her life: her mother's discrimination between her brother and herself, her brother's death, her decision to pursue medicine, her bold decision to marry Manohar, her returning to her father's house and finally deciding to go back to her husband. The novel reflects women's awareness. Saru rebelled against the customs and traditions of the society, but finally compromised with the harsh reality. She, finally, realized 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." Thus, she accepted her mistakes and decided to maintain her individuality in her relationship with her husband Manohar.

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