

A Study on Sexual Violence, Patriarchy and Compromise as the Dignified Survival Mechanism in Shashi Deshpande's "The Dark Holds No Terrors"

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Abstract—*The general protest against the unmitigated autocratic patriarchal society is voiced in varied forms in Indian fiction by both men and women writers. Like many women writers, Shashi Deshpande has differently recorded her protest by highlighting the plight of women in Indian society in her writings. This paper makes an attempt to focus on the Sexual Violence, Struggle for identity and Compromise for survival in Shashi Deshpande's "The Dark Holds No Terrors".*

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most renowned contemporary writers in English. Born to the famous Kannada dramatist and writer Sriranga, entered into the literary scenario through her Collection of Short stories in 1978. Her first and the most read novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors" published in 1980 brought her the most coveted 'Sahitya Academy Award'.

This novel diagnoses the trauma and struggles of a middle class woman who becomes a victim trapped in the net of male chauvinists. Deshpande who has direct contact with the commoners paints not only the women but also men as the victims of the modernities. Her eyes as of a zoom camera captures the society and has given her the mastery in exhibiting the pathos of her characters.

Keywords: *Oppression, male chauvinists, patriarchy, sadism, self-esteem, supremacy, Compromise.*

(Saru) is the central character in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The novel begins with Saru returning to her father's house after a long gap on hearing about her mother's death. She tries this opportunity to renew her lost relationship with her family members.

Sarita, the protagonist is the narrator. She makes the readers to understand well about all the characters of the novel. As it is said, 'women are weaker sex', Sarita, the protagonist doesn't register her protest against the oppressions that she encounters but accepts them silently. She understands the reality clearly that a wife could be happy if she acts according to the whims and fancies of her husband.

In a patriarchal society where man enjoys the maximum privileges, is expected as the 'Head' to steer the family. Every action will move around him only. As he is the breadwinner,

he keeps the family under his control. But now, it is totally changed.

Women are no more inferior to men. They have to play a ray of varied roles in her family and in the society.

Deshpande, who is the voice of the voiceless women folk, shows her men characters as somewhat powerless. The emergence of women makes Deshpande's male characters feel uncomfortable to adjust with the family structure and the society.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the novelist employs the flashback technique to narrate the life of the successful doctor in the day time and at night, a terrified and trapped animal in the hands of her husband. Sarita, against her parent's wish, is married to Manohar, an English teacher in a college. She is a renowned doctor whereas her husband Manohar (Manu) is less known and underpaid teacher. This is the main reason for the gulf between the husband and wife. In the beginning days of their married life, everything was normal and passed peacefully. But when Saru became well known and respected medical practitioner, her husband Manohar develops a kind of inferiority complex. To hurt him more, once a journalist asked him, how he felt his wife earned the maximum in the family.

How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?

Manu became helpless. He simply laughed with his wife. But it was an assault on his individuality. He had to heal this. So she tries to find the ways of projecting his male authority. Sexual sadism is the only way. During nights he employs it and feels satisfied. But next morning he appears to be normal, a loving husband.

India is a male dominated society. The laws were enacted by men and women were drafted in favor of them. Most of the study will also take place in men's eye. It is strange when he asks his wife Saru about the marks on her body. If examined, it is clearly understood that he asks this in order to establish

his control on her. In Indian social setup, a man that is husband is given a prominent place in family and in the society. So he feels disturbed when there is a threat or challenge to his pride. At the same time he is driven to compromise with his self-esteem.

Saru's earnings and her growing popularity hurt him a lot. When someone makes reference to this, his male authority and male pride get wounded. Some social gatherings and visits also humiliate Manohar, the husband of Sarita.

When we walked out of our room, there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me. There was nothing for him.

Once Manohar and Sarita planned for a trip to Ooty. While shopping for the trip, they met Manu's colleague and his wife. When Manu informed him of their trip, his friend expresses his inability to afford such things. His wife expresses; he could have afforded it if he had married a doctor. These incidents amount to huge anger in Manu and hence he behaves differently. When he has sex with his wife in the privacy, there is no love of a husband to a wife. He appears as a 'rapist'.

Not only Saru is projected as a 'lead' but also the other women characters dominate the male characters. Saru controls Manu and Boozie, her old teacher. Her old mother establishes her supremacy over her Baba. Women characters are strong and dominating.

Until Saru's mother was alive, her father was found to be tight-lipped and never showed any protest against his wife. Even he used to be very silent when she punished Saru for the mistakes which were actually not hers. But now, to Saru, her father matured, bold and loving who listens to her problems patiently and counseling her. It is strange to the readers to see Saru's father becoming stronger and matured.

Saru's name and fame as a medical practitioner started growing day by day and also her money. This made her husband Manu feel inferior. Now, Saru became totally changed. She wanted only money and fame and she was ready to do anything for this. She used her men as pawns in her game.

Her teacher Boozie helped her by all means to reach the peak. He even taught her how to speak Good English with refined accent. He financially helped her to start her own clinic. Boozie who was a homosexual roamed and flirted with Saru. Saru allowed him to touch and hug her. She was ready to compromise with anything for making money. She never cared about other's comments. Saru uses men as ladders. She uses Boozie to achieve her goal. In the beginning, while studying, she considered her simply furnished rooms as heaven.

If there is a heaven on earth, it is this.

But when her position goes up, she feels uncomfortable and is not at all happy in that small nest. At every stage of Saru's growth, Manu feels inferior. Saru used Boozie for her happiness. She uses men characters in the same way to satisfy her needs. But once her wishes and needs fulfilled, she used to reject them completely and show her back to them. It is clearly learnt from Boozi. Saru wanted money and wanted to be a reputed doctor. Boozie had money. So she tried to please him by allowing him to touch and hug her.

Now Sara has no regard and respect for her husband Manu. He also doesn't want to question her. But he entertains revenge on her by behaving sadistically towards her in the nights turning the darkness, once more a terrifying experience. She is heartbroken and at this point she accidentally hears about her mother's death. Saru goes back to her house in the pretext of comforting her father but actually seeking comfort herself from moving away from her marriage which actually appears to be 'farce' to her.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* both Saru and Manu are the victims of patriarchy. Deshpande weighs both her male and female characters equally. Though it seems that Deshpande tries to give prominent role for women characters in her novels, she succeeds in giving equal significance to the male characters. Women in her works talk about their miseries, sufferings and fulfilled desires and men through their silence they speak. If they open their mouth or rebel, they will lose a lot. Survival becomes a question for them. So they become adapted and adjusted to the environment and society.

Deshpande's all characters both men and women caught between tradition and modernity. When men fail to establish their power over women they appear to be pathetic creatures. Being a man, Manu wants to earn more than his wife and project himself as a man.

Sarita, though she earns more and enjoys the public respect, she has her own trauma. At the same time, she is helpless as she is not ready to any strong decision such as estrangement or divorce since she is an Indian born lady. The culture and indianised blood that flows in her body mould her which prevent her from taking any drastic decision.

Saru and Manu are microcosmic representing the macrocosmic world. They are not individuals but representatives of their society. The ethics and family sentiments are bonds which are backbone for adjusting with the disharmony prevailing in the family. They are ready to give up their self by compromising with everyone in the family for the sake of the family.

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