



GENDER DISCRIMINATION – WITH REFERENCE TO SHASHI DESHPANDE’S NOVEL "THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS"

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ABSTRACT

This paper on Gender Discrimination throws light on various parameters where human beings are discriminated. Women are treated as a separate entity as a second sex rather than, as an individual as a “Human Being”. Discrimination by caste, colour and creed is dangerous. Women who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalised in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfilment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband and children. Women have always been treated like beasts of burden and an object for pleasure. This disturbing picture of women is not something new or unique in India. This has been the predicament of women all over the world. With much liking towards Women’s writing and Women’s issues I have selected one among the best novels of Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to bring into limelight the pain of discrimination a woman under goes in the society. It is not the plight of a single woman Saru, the heroine of the novel, but she is the voice of many such women travelling along the path with Saru. My paper on Gender Bias brushes once again on various issues where women are discriminated and steps to be taken to lessen the roots of Discrimination.

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Literature is a mirror of life and it also acts like a weapon and a garb to protect ourselves from various social evils that are threat to us. The manifold benefits of literature is- Literature not only acts like an umbrella but it cleanses our mind deep within and enlightens our soul and refreshes our body. That’s the magic of literature. That’s the reason why a person’s mind is rejuvenated after listening to a melody, after reading a good piece of work. Literature carries everything in its womb. Nature and Literature are related with each other. Literature acts like the medium of expression, an

outburst of the suppressed. This paper contains – Introduction, Traces of Discrimination, Victims of Discrimination at Large and Conclusion.

Women of our country have faced discrimination at all ages, now and hence forth this discrimination continues to exist in various forms. Any denial of equality, gender and opportunity on the bias of gender, is gender discrimination. Nature doesn’t discriminate men from women. But women worldwide have been the victim’s of inequality not only in terms of social and political rights but also on grounds of employment and opportunities. In the

male dominant society women have become habituated of this discrimination. As a result, most women fail to understand their own rights and freedom.

A great woman novelist and a prolific writer who is remarkably known for her writings and won many hearts is Shashi Deshpande. In all traditions women have always been considered inferior and incapable. She has rightly remarked in an interview given to Vanamala Vishwanath for 'Literature Alive' about gender discrimination in her writings -

"I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men"(Vishwanath)¹

Discrimination is not about a man or woman, the human race is being discriminated on various issues regarding Caste, Creed, and Colour. These are the branches of a tree called discrimination. But in today's generation there are many sub branches and new leaves sprouting in no relation with time and season. We discriminate people by the way they carry themselves, by their social status – rich or poor basing on class. Our minds immediately come to conclusions by their outward appearances. Is this not discrimination? Traces of discrimination can be found at home, at work place, at social gatherings. Gender is not a product of different properties of bodies but it is a product of social behaviour and practices. Discrimination is found at every nook and corner of our existence. Gender bias, however has been a fact of life since time immemorial and we cannot wash it away. Women were not treated equally on par with men, in all traditions women has always been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking; irrespective of religion, country and race. The victims of Discrimination at large is about mothers, daughters, grandmothers and wives, women working within the family or outside the home, are treated with bias. In a country like India a son is regarded as something indispensable in an Indian family. The absence or death of the son makes the parents world empty. Girls can't live with their parents after a certain age. Parents regard them as "Paraya Dhan", something to be handed over, given to the rightful owner.

Woman in the novels of Shashi Deshpande occupy a prominent place in Indian women writings.

Her heroines have less right to choose when compared with the freedom given to the male characters. Her novels help us to see the intricacies of a women's life as a mother, daughter, wife, lover and a victim of circumstances. If we look into the novel of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande we find Gender Discrimination and quest for Self Identity as a prominent feature of the novel. The author stresses on the changing pattern of the life of Indian middle class women their urge to have freedom in their lives and along with their weakness that does not help them to come out totally from the traditional norms of thoughts. The novel is about the protagonist Saru who is discriminated by her own mother and her brother Dhruva is treated as a blessing into their family. Saru being a girl she is considered as a burden to the family. Her brother's birthdays are celebrated with much joy and fun, filled with rituals and rites when compared to her birthdays. She is treated as a second in preference and special attention is given to her brother.

Gahlawat (2012) says that in the novel the novelist explains the fear, the panic, the suffocation and the helplessness of the protagonist. In the Indian society a woman has many rules and obligations to follow. That a girl should obey her husband she should be loyal at all times to in-laws and never to bring any shame to her parent's household. After marriage a girl is never allowed to do things she wants to do. She has to do what her husband wants her to do. A girl surrenders herself completely to her husband that she does not mind sacrificing her identity to please him. Woman becomes a sacrifice at the altar of family many a times. When it comes to the question of family we find woman bounded in chains. She lacks freedom of decision making. She has entangled in the cobwebs of age old traditions and culture, dominance of men and society. She has no chance to raise her voice to question or to fight back for the survival of her existence. She remains calm as a sacrificial animal with moist eyes ready to accept whatever life has in for her. We find how men in the veil of discrimination take women for granted. As Siddhartha Sharma (2011) says about Saru's mother her adoration towards her son, at her daughter's cost is the rallying point for the novelists to bring her

“feminist” ideas together. The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes and is linked with Indian psyche. Saru becomes hostile and forms hatred towards her mother due to the discrimination made by her mother.

The discrimination against women is not only hampering the growth of women at social, economic and personal level but also significantly lowering female-to-male ratio. Thus, gender discrimination also impedes the country’s growth. Gender equality is not only for social and economic freedom but the longingness of women want to be treated as a human being. Awareness about gender bias has slowly spread over time. But it will take a long time for this awareness to seep into the grassroots and translate into social change. The world has moved forward. Today, we have women astronauts, women prime ministers, even women wrestlers, but there are still millions of women who face these double standards at every juncture of their lives. Feminists have been shouting themselves hoarse, demanding equality for women. Some people believe that women and men can never be equal, just different. Yes, but different does not necessarily mean inferior or lesser in any way. Women must be provided equal opportunity and this is not a task to be left to the government or any organization or authority.

There are many spheres of life where women are denied opportunities. Discrimination against females starts with their birth and continues through their lives. An unborn girl child is aborted with the help of sex determination techniques. A girl child who is born is seen as a burden to her parents or family. One strong reason for the preference for boys than girls is that most parents think their sons will look after them in their old age, while they cannot expect the same from their daughters. To conclude social change begins at home. Parents have to learn to adopt an androgynous attitude towards bringing up their children. They shouldn't panic if their son prefers to play with dolls or their daughters decide they don't want to marry till they are thirty. Parents should give equal opportunities to sons and daughters in education and jobs. Parents need to give both sons and daughters the

chance to live their lives free from the fetters of gender bias.

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