



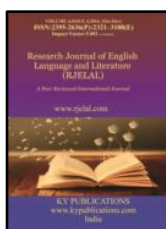
## A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to throw light upon the decimation of woman in the male dominating society through the character of Sarita in the novel *The Dark Hold No Terror*. Sarita or Saru is the main character of the novel. This novel presents the search for identity discrimination and suppression faced by Sarita from her childhood to her married life. It is the story of an educated and economically independent woman who is in search of her identity, which leads her to unearth the hidden strength within her. *The Dark Holds No Terror* ' is a story of Sarita and her relationship with her parents, husband and the agonizing discrimination she faces throughout her life. It is the story of a marriage on the verge of breakdown and of a woman who has been made acutely conscious of her childhood. The novels counter the prevalent concept that "everything in girls life is fashioned to a single purpose and that is to please a male".

### Introduction

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dhanwad, India. She is the second daughter of the great Sanskrit scholar and renowned kanada dramatist, Shriranga. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970. She began her writing with short stories , which later developed into writing novels. Her first collection of short stories The Legacy published in 1972 had been prescribed for graduate student in Columbia university. Deshpande first novels '*The Dark Holds No Terror*' was published in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi award for her famous novels 'That Long Silence' in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009. Her novel 'Shadow play' was shortlisted for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2014. She has written four Children's books , a number of short stories and nine novels besides several perceptive essays which is now available in a volume entitled Writing from the Margin and Other Essays.

Shashi Deshpande is well-knowned for portraying contemporary Indian women character . Her woman protagonist are victims of prevalent gross gender discrimination , first as daughter and later as wives, which are prevailing in our society. In the novel , "*The Dark Holds No Terror*" , she portrays the suppression and discrimination faced by the protagonist Saru. The friction and the disenchantment of the educated women in a tradition bound ' Indian Society ' is the theme of this novel. This paper focuses on the gender discrimination faced by the protagonist in the novel, Saru, in the patriarchal society. Gender discrimination or sexism is a prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Sexism can affect either gender, but it is particularly documented as affecting women and girls. In the male dominating society , women are treated as inferior to men. They are treated differently and

unequal then men in their education , career, economic advancement and political influences. For centuries women are bogged down by aged-old blind belief and superstitions practices , which proved to be stumbling blocks for the independent growth of women in an atmosphere of free thinking with will and reason of their own . Men are allowed to enjoy their life where women should remain within the four walls. Our society provides many customs and procedures only for women but not for men. It is considered as a common Indian Psyche. This paper attempt to find out how Saru is a victim of gender discrimination and how she fights it in her own way by questioning some of the patriarchal norms norms that chained women at every stage of life.

#### Discrimination by parents

Saru the protagonist of the story face discrimination from her home. Being a girl child she was treated differently from her brother (dhruva). After the birth of her brother Dhruva, her parents ignored her in favour of her brother. She never enjoys the parental love in her life. Her importance in the family is negligible. She recalls the occasion of her brother's naming ceremony which provides great excitement to the family. On the contrary saru's birthday used to remained out of their memory.. So she felt alienated within her own family. Shashi Despande presents the typical character of Middle class Indian mother through the character of Saru's mother. Indian mother gave more preference to the male child than the female child. Because they thought that they would raise the condition of the family in future and he brought dowry to the family. Like that Saru's mother also giving importance to her son not to her daughter. Saru's father also gives importance to Dhruva only. He used to listen to Dhruva always. Shashi Deshpande beautifully presents the aspects of patriarchal society through the character of Saru's father and mother.

Saru's mother was always rival to her. After the death of dhruv, things becomes worst. Her ,mother blames her for the death of her brother ( dhruv). So she accused her and said

"You killed him. Why didn't you die? why are you alive, When he is dead?"(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, 7)

After the death of Dhruva, Saru was prohibited from doing anything she wish. She condemned her for everything. This sense of rejection of her mother provides hatred in the heart of Saru.

ShashiDespande presents the colour discrimination also in this novel the character of Saru's mother. Saru's mother did not allow her to go out and play with her brother. Because of the hot sun, Saru might become a dark complexion. But she allowed Dhruva to play out. When Saru enquired about that to her mother, she told if she would become dark, the groom would ask for more dowries. Saru replied that she did not want to get married. She would be with her parents till the end. Her mother told that she could not be with them like that because it is our Indian custom that the girl should get married and go to her husband's house. Then she asked about Dhruva. Her mother said that Dhruva's case was different. He could live with them and there would not be any dowry problem also. She said:

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. (*The Dark Holds No Terror*, 45)

Shashi Deshpande presents the typical mindset of Indian mothers through this colour discrimination. All mothers want her daughter to be fair enough to get married without any dowry. Being a mother of daughter, they expected her daughter to be married without much dowry and problem in her marriage. When they become a mother of son, their attitude was totally changed. They expect the bride to bring as much as dowry to their family. They consider the dowry as a pride to their family. Saru's mother was also with this mentality.

Being a traditional Hindu woman, it is the duty of a mother to remind her daughter that she is grown up and she should behave accordingly. When Saru attains menarche, the first experience of menstruation is horrifying and painful. Instead of explaining the process to her and putting her at ease, the mother frighten her with the fact that she would bleed for years. She is not permitted to enter the kitchen, puja-room and eat in a separate plate. She is also expected to sleep on a straw. Saru feels why the woman is considered unholy during menstruation periods.

For Saru the very word "mother" stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a Being... Thus, the strange childhood experiences up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.

She worked hard to become a doctor. She had clear view of her life and her studies. She did not enter into the college for love and dreams. She wanted to study and become a successful doctor. She knew that that was the reality of her life – to achieve the destination.

#### **Discrimination after marriage**

Sarita got admission in the Medical College. She concentrated in her studies earlier. When she met Manohar or Manu, she fell in love with him. She thought that he would be the person that she dreamt of. She told her parents that she wanted to marry Manohar. He belonged to the lower caste. So her mother strongly opposed her decision. Saru protested against her parents and married Manu. She led a peaceful life in the earlier period of marriage life. She enjoyed the love and care of Manu for which she was longing all through her life. She became popular in her locality. Patients started to come to Saru's home and she listened to them and examined them. And when Saru and Manu walked out of the room, there were lots of greetings to Saru not to Manu. He did not like this kind of fame of Saru and took it very serious concern of it. But Saru did not notice all those things. She was busy with her works and ignored the physical and mental desire of Manu. So he became rude to her. He sexually assaulted her in her bed. As a man Manu had the liberty to treat his wife the way he

wanted, even to the brink of marital rape, but Saru being a woman could but stop his overtures or even complain about it.

"The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible body. And above me a face I could not recognize" (p.112)

Deshpande explores the strain and anguish of being a woman. She concentrate on woman's pursuit to find out her true worth. The strength of Deshpande's work is her awareness of gender –disparity, sexual division of labor which start at home and which are deeply rooted in the public and empower themselves. Manu gains the identity of the husband of a famous doctor, he is not very happy with the steady rise in saru's social status. This rise in her social status become the root cause of disturbance between them. Manu fails to exercise his male domination over his wife hence he tries to play the traditional male dominated role through sexual molestation at night to show his superiority. This is also the result of the gender discrimination which prevailed in the society at that period. Shashi Deshpande clearly presented the gender discrimination of male chauvinistic Indian society through the character of Manohar.

It doesn't take long for Saru to realized that her coming to her paternal home after she gets to know about her mothers death and to seek refuge from her husband was a futile exercise as she is not welcome there; being a daughter she is expected to be happily parked with her husband. At the end of the novel when saru is informed about manu's arrival to her paternal home to take her back she is disturbed initially as she is totally upset about her relationship and does not want to face him. After a bit of pondering over the issue she is able to come to a conclusion. The moment she realizes the importance of life, she resolves to take charge to her life.

She feels ".....because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we cant believe in ourselves, we're sunk"

The realization that saru gets nearly a fortnights stay in her father's house is that it is her life that she is living and she has to face all the hurdles herself. She has to live for her own happiness by forgetting all

about the past. "It is my life and I have rights to live in my own way". She gets courage to face darkness, the dark wherein she was subjugated to physical and mental torture by her husband, she knows that *The Dark Holds No Terror* if she rises to face it and end with a positive feelings.

**Conclusion:**

Shashi Deshpande portrays the gender discrimination through the character of Sarita in this novel. She clearly presents the discrimination followed by her mother in Saru's early childhood and the discrimination of the society which makes Manu to ill-treat her after her marriage. This novels also present the social practices prevailing in male dominating society. Through the character of Saru, Deshpande conveys a significant truth regarding the relegation of women, that in most cases, women are responsible for their lot. She reveals the problems of women gender discrimination, lack of identity, fruitless rebel against the subordinate position in the family and her helpless submission before the male dominating society. Women becomes the object of love, marriage and sex. Towards the end of the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru evolves as a confident woman who understand that darkness makes one incapable to see things clearly and objectively.

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