



REDUCTION OF GENDER ROLE: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS-*THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR* AND *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande has emerged on the Indian fictional scene in 1970 s. She has carved a niche for herself in the galaxy of Indian women novelists in English .The present paper entitled “ Reduction of Gender Role” tries to explore the issues like gender discrimination and social conditioning of girl child .Woman has to conform to the norms in a patriarchal set up of family. But when she refuses to be , confronts uneasiness in the relationships . Saru and Jaya, reflect an emotional fracture of women on account of gender discrimination and male dominant social set up exist in the family. Women lose their rights, identity and sustainability which culminates in the symbolic reduction of their gendered balance.

Key words: girl child, gender discrimination, reduction, education, independence, identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande a well-known woman novelist of the contemporary India was born in Karnataka and educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She won the Sahitya Academy Award for the novel *That Long Silence* in 1990. Shashi Deshpande received a good deal of attention of the critics, scholars and media . She exercises her focus on the plight of social conditioning of woman. Projecting woman as a protagonist, Deshpande tries to reveal the problems of

women that is gender discrimination, lack of identity, fruitless rebel against the subordinate position in the family and finally her helpless submission before the male domineer .Woman becomes only the object of love, marriage and sex .Through this age-old oppression she loses her birth right of gender equality . Ultimately the tradition bound family restricts the flowering of girl's personality . Self abnegation , servility ,endurance patience ,and forgiveness become the aspects of woman's personality . Shashi Deshpande excels in depicting middle-class

women with their turmoils, endurance and that long silence harboring in her mind .

The present paper focuses on how woman is subordinated because of her gender to fit in the tradition bound family . The protagonists are modern , well educated women but their lives reflect how they are the victims of prejudices emanated from society . They find themselves helpless and submissive before the male domineer.

Indian girl experiences a sense of gender differentiation within and outside the domain of family . Miserable existence becomes her fate in the family which upholds the age old customs . In the novel "*The Dark Holds No Terror*" Shashi Deshpande exposes blatant gender discrimination in the family . Saru is an educated , economically independent middle –class woman . Saru receives ignorance in favor of her brother , Dhruva . Her parents have disproportionate love for their son . In family her importance is negligible . It is revealed through the celebration Dhruva's birth day . His birth day is celebrated with overwhelming love and interest accompanied with religious programme . On the contrary , Saru's birth day used to remain out of their memory . Saru is blamed for the death of her brother . Not only gender but also her dark complexion becomes one of the objects of underestimating girl child Saru . Mother wants Saru should not go out in the sunlight as it can darken her already dark complexion . Conversation between Saru and her mother reflects the discrimination rooted in the mind of mother .

Mother : Don't go out in the sun, you will get darker .

Saru : Who cares ?

Mother : We have to get you married . Will you live with us , your whole life ?

Saru : Why not ?

Mother : You can't .

Saru : And Dhruva ?

Mother : He's different . He's boy .

(*The Dark Holds No Terror* 45)

Saru's upbringing with gender differentiation turns her into a rebel against parents . She harbors insecurity and unbeatable

hatred towards her parents . As Sarita is deprived of the motherly love ,care and affection ,she tries to react in an aggressive manner. Saru is made conscious of her being a woman . To rub out the stamp of subordinate gender , she believes in economical independence of woman . Saru's unbeatable hatred towards parents drives her to leave Bombay to seek medicine as a career .She falls in love with Manohar and marries him against her parents' wishes. It is her first step towards independence . Her marital life is not smooth . Manohar was the master of the family before she got recognition as a doctor . Saru achieved

Economical independence. Manohar got identity as a husband of renowned doctor Saru . He feels uncomfortable with Saru's steady rise in social status . It becomes root cause of their disturbed and unhappy married life . When Manohar fails to exercise his male domination over Saru , he tries to play traditional male dominated role through sexual molestation at night .The remarks of Atrey and Kirpal are ,

"His purpose , though repressed in the subconscious , is to punish her taking on the 'male' role, and to assert his superiority and power through physical violence" (43).

Saru's words " A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband " reflect what the male oriented society expects from the female counterpart . Fed up with subordinate treatment at parental and marital home , Saru takes up rebellious steps. She leaves parents' home to seek career and husband's to get her own identity.

Through the portrayal of Saru , Shashi Deshpande tries to depict the man's superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues .(Paul Premila 30)

In the novel '*That Long Silence* ' , the novelist shows the real life experiences of girl child . Jaya , who hails from a conservative , middle class family back ground possesses the inherent strength of character but inhibited by constricting traditional influences . Through the portrayal of Jaya the writer tries to express the silence of Indian wife . Jaya hovers between submission and assertion . This novel is a saga

of mental suffering of Jaya . She is known by two names _Jaya and Suhasini. Latter is the name given by her husband expecting the behavior matching the meaning of the word ‘Suhasini’. Her husband never likes to call her by parental name Jaya . “ I chose that name for you ” reflects what he expects.

But Jaya does not want to be a role model because all these are allusions of the past having no relevance to the present . She accompanies her husband Mohan only because of an evil necessity of conjugal life . Jaya finds herself like Kusum , a distant relative or Jeeja , a poor maid servant trapped in their self created silence , passivity and submission i.e. “compromise”, a euphemistic word to lead a smooth life . In the first phase of marital life Jaya believes in “ two bullocks yoked together - -----“.

Jaya moves into a small flat with her husband and two teenage children , giving up their luxurious house . A long silence grows between them that results into dismal and unsteady marital life . But when Mohan keeps on saying that , he took bribe only for Jaya and her children , she feels angry . However she can’t express her anger . She transforms her anger into a silence and tolerance which is symptomatic of traditional woman scarifying her own for husband .

Jaya and Saru go through rebellion followed by separation from family and experiences that define before becoming empowered women who can balance their role very well in the family .Their stand in the family reflects that women expect only love , respect from both family but not inferior ,subjugated or subordinate position in life .

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande , through her novels tries to put forth familial , economical and social problems in which the modern middle class woman is groping . When we take review of the protagonists of Deshpande’s novels , “quest for identity “is their goal emanated from experiences in the family. Women are the victims of patriarchy and oppression displayed by their male counterpart in the family. Saru and Jaya

are the examples of inferior position and subsequent degradation their gender . The novelist exposes various subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the family . Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer .While performing different roles in life , she has never been able to claim her own individuality . Women’s weak and submissive nature , their love and affection towards family can be responsible for their degradation . Even the educated and economically independent women lack strong willingness and courage to fight against the exploitative forces .

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