



INCONGRUITY AMONG WOMEN AS A MAJOR CAUSE FOR GENDER INEQUALITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDES NOVEL THE DARK HOLD NO TERROR

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Abstract

ShashiDeshpande presents the state Indian women exactly as they are. She proves it with the help of examples of women from different families. The slogan of equality between man and woman is a contradiction or a hoax. The fact, she finds, is that a woman suffers due to man and marriage. But she holds that male domination or more appropriately male chauvinism has also done great harm to the women. On the other hand women who are imbued with patriarchal ideologies also play an important role for gender inequality in India.

Keywords: Predicaments, Suppression, Oppression, Autonomy, Essentialism, Sorority, Conflict.

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Not only men it is also women who are the root cause of the suppression and oppression of women. Women themselves ill-treat their sorority. The heroine of the novel comes out with a struggle against injustice meted out to women for centuries. Through her character ShashiDeshpande reminds us that women too have the right to live with autonomy and they don't need the shadow of essentialism and biologism.

The most striking example of the predicaments faced by the Indian educated women suppressed by the complex ideologies of Indian patriarchal society is Saritha the heroine of 'Dark Holds No Terror'. Saru a self-willed and ambitious person is a successful doctor living in Bombay. She is married to Manohar, a lecturer in a college. Her two children are Abhi and Renu. But to achieve this

position as a leading doctor, the hardship she faced was a herculean task. Sarita nicknamed as Saru at home and among friends in her childhood is the daughter of a Bank clerk and a reactionary mother. She is a victim of circumstances and conventions of an orthodox and a reactionary society. Her family consists of only four persons -her parents, younger brother, named Dhruva, and herself. In Indian middle-class families, a son is always given a preferential treatment, while a daughter is subjected to a strict discipline and treated as a burden at times. Sarita is not an exception to this general rule. Educating a girl child is seen as a bad investment because she is bound to get married and leave her paternal home one day. When she expresses her plan of joining in a medical college, her mother becomes furious and says...



Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper' and will she look after you in your old age? Medicine! Five six, seven....god knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc...you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over" (152)

Her father is pusillanimous, a timid fellow, a non-entity type. Sarita, consequently is deprived of love even of the parents from childhood. This particular fact of her life is the cause to a great extent for her miseries. The social stigma that women are housekeepers and should be confined to the four walls of the house is perhaps a viable cause of gender disparity. Women should not raise their voice regarding their fortune for the sake of the prestige of the family. In patriarchal society a lot of weight age is given to men.

Sarita's life is a series of incidents which come one after the other, all by them, to deprive her of even simplest of joys. Her life begins with the serious charge of killing her brother Dhruva. She is just a victim of fate because it is a false accusation imposed upon her. She wants to go out of the house to show her anger to her parents for not allowing her to go to the film with Smita's family. Children very often show their resentment against the parents, but when Sarita did it, her brother, pampered and self-willed as he is, follows her and gets drowned. She made every possible effort that a child could make to retrieve her brother, but she couldn't succeed. Thus, Saritha is branded as a murderer and the stigma sticks to her till the end. This mischance or stroke of fate alienates her from her mother completely. Her mother says again and again that she is the murderer and that she should have also died. As

a child she could not bear the false allegation. She stops calling her Ai, while her mother opposes her in every possible way. Since her mother gives more importance to her son than her daughter, his death gives her a thunder stroke. Saru becomes a victim to the hatred of her mother.

Sarita's married life begins on a high note. She has been hither to denied love even of her mother as her mother was shells-Shocked by Dhruva's death, and mother's allegation that Sarita has killed him has caused a chasm between mother and daughter. Her father is 'pusillanimous' as she has written below her father's picture. She is naturally hungry for love, which she gets first time form Manohar. She is extremely happy when she finds Manohar's true and innocent love for her. She observes

"True, we had been so far, considering our opportunities, almost impossibly innocent in our relationship, never going beyond holding hands. Not even on the bench where we found ourselves surrounded by huddled shapes, soft whispers, sound of suggestive laughter and kisses. Once or twice, we passed a couple wordlessly, passionately locked together. And yet we stayed physically apart". (93)

This behavior of Manohar is enough to convince Sarita that Manohar is not merely flirting with her and his addresses to her that they are expressions of genuine, pure love"

Old and the New



The conflict between Saru and her mother represents the clash between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. Her mother is an obstruction in her path to self-realization. Like most of the Indian mothers Saru's mother gives more importance to Dhruva, her son than Saru who is not given the due importance from her childhood days. Saru is aware of this gender discrimination and tries her level best to fight for equality. Saru's education helps her to accept the rational thinking and reject the reasonable irrational ideas, the irrational ideas are her mother accusing her for Dhruva's death and taking care of some with obligation.

Home gives security for everyone, but for Saru home is a place of disappointment. Her childhood home becomes a place of hatred because of her mother's accusations. Her utmost struggle to win the heart of her mother is futile. So, the escape route is Bombay. Her hostel life in Bombay is no better. The seniors often humiliate her. Her marriage with Manu gives her a secured feeling temporarily because of his presence though during the early years she lives in one room house with common bathroom. Her recognition as a lady doctor, the rise in income flow, a new house luxury, gave her satisfaction and security. The happiness is short – lived and the sense of security of home diminishes by her husband's sadistic behavior. So she leaves that house and goes to her parental house to find solace. But there are other surprises in store. She has come to her own house, but when she moves to go to her room, her father stops her, saying that it is now of Madhav's room. She has no room for her in this house. She is asked to rest in the puja room which her father says he cleans every day. She is an outsider in her own home. She gets a cold welcome from her father and begins conversation with an enquiry about the train—

whether she has come by mail and whether the train has arrived on time. Naturally, she asks her father that she will go to a hotel if it is a trouble to him in having her there. It is very unusual, and it has to be so because the fifteen years' ice has to be broken.

Saru often feels a sense of homelessness. Saru's parental home symbolizes tradition whereas the Bombay house represents modernity. Saru's attempts to move from one house to another exhibits her insecure feeling. She blunts out in anger at her helplessness and the discovery that she has no home at all. Saru's feeling of homelessness is an affirmation of her sense of isolation. Saru is emotionally bonded with her family. She loves her parents very much in spite of her mother's hatred. She also dislikes her mother because she is hurt by her mother's behavior. Instead of solving the problems in a harmonious way, she escapes from her mother, she is forced to think that any attempt to reach out to another human being is futile and that man is born to be lonely and alone. Her helplessness makes her to her think thus

“To be alone? never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? is it all fraud then, the external cry of... My husband, my wife, my children, my parents? are all human relationships doomed to be failure”
(30)



For fifteen years she is isolated from her parents but longed for them every day. Saru and her mother are two strong character they could sustain suffering. She turns her back to her mother forever because of mother's rude and stubborn behavior after the death of Dhruva. Prof. Kulkarni a family friend of Saru brings the message of her mother's death Mother. She refused to see her doctor-daughter even while dying which creates the idea of total rejection in Saru's mind. Even when her neighbor encourages her to see a doctor or her daughter who is a doctor now but mother in a determined voice said, "what daughter? I have no daughter" (33), Saru feels totally betrayed when she heard this through Prof Kulkarni.

As long as her mother is alive, Saru has hopes of their understanding each other and coming closer but death seals of all the possibilities of straightening things leaving Saru with a feeling of guilt and defeat. Mother's changed behavior after the death of Dhruva, her behavior towards Saru as a social obligation, her opposing Saru's study in medical college all these are responsible for a revenge full attitude in Saru. She deliberately marries Manu out of her caste defying the Hindu custom. The conflict between mother and daughter represents a clash between the tradition and modern and the fight for equality.

Saru exhibits her jealous and fighting quality when both mother and father dotted on her brother Dhruva. There are many instances when she tries to divert her parent's attention from Dhuruva. Once when Dhuruva sat on father's lap talking to him Saru thinks.

"I must show
baba
something,
anything to
take is
attention away

from Dhruva,
sitting on his
lap. I must
make him listen
to me not to
Dhruva, I must
make him
ignore Dhruva"
(34)

Saru considers herself highly honored to have been chosen by him. She says:" how could I be loved by anyone. In her dreams Saru longs for Manohar's love. She is crazy about him and his love appears to her protective, condescending, all-encompassing and satisfying. Saru starts fantasizing about Manohar. In her imagination Manohar is tender, imperious and passionate. Till they get married both of them are quite innocent in their relationship. Marriage opens the sesame for all the enjoyments. Their marital life becomes quite good. To Saru all this seems to be difficult to believe. She feels that all these things could only happen to girls in movies.

But her happiness is short-lived. It is an undisputed fact admitted by all; from Shakespeare to Deshpande that Fate and Chance play an important role in life. It is also an admitted fact that the greater a man is, the greater is the role of fate in his life. Sarita, the heroine of this novel, suffers without any fault of hers. Incidents and accidents happen in such a way that she couldn't have happiness in life. She inculcates the thoughts of pride in patience, self – abnegation and humbleness to accept her inferior status in par with legendary models of Sita, Savithri and Gandhari.

They start their life in a chawl. Incidents which hurt the male ego of Manohar takes place one after the other soon after their marriage. It appears that fate is dead set against saru. She is not allowed to live in peace even in the chawl.



When the neighbors come to know that a lady doctor has come to live among them, they begin to take advantage of the situation. The men around her house look at her lasciviously and women say admiringly that she is the lady doctor. One evening, a woman knocks at her door. When Manu opens the door, she asks whether the doctor is at home. The woman wants to consult her about her.

A woman is put under several restraints right from the day a girl becomes a woman due to menstruation. Sarita was told by her mother, "You are growing up. You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around". It becomes torturous when she is prohibited to enter the kitchen or puja room during those three days. She has virtually become an exile in her own home as she has to sleep on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet, eat out of a cup and plate placed by her side and served from a distance as if her touch would cause contamination. A kind of shame overwhelms her at the age of sixteen when she realises that she is a woman, and classes with her mother. Women in Indian society must live practically a life of a maid servant. Saritha's mother is an example before her. She must hide away in the kitchen to dress up, go to a dirty and dark room to comb her hair and apply Kumkum, sleep in bed like an over-night guest in a weird place. She has literally no room of her own. Sarita realises, "And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing, 'a room of our own'". They never desire for that also as they have accepted it as fait accompli. Sarita has heard about several women who live in an utterly neglected situation. Yet they never rebel or try to change their lives, as if the life is an impasse, with no way out. She was told, her own grandmother has been abandoned by her husband after a

few years of her marriage, leaving her a young woman, with two little daughters, one of whom is her own mother. No one knew where he had gone though there was the family legend that he had taken Sanyas. Her grandmother's father took the deserted grandmother and her daughters to his house, where her grandmother lived virtually like a widow. The young, deserted grandmother didn't even think of marrying again. Her grandmother's father married away his two granddaughters. Sarita laments that such deserted women are destitute left to live a burdensome life.

Equality can be realized only if we believe that equality is not a privilege and it is a human right. Gender is not an identity and it's not our choice also. No matter man or woman we are born into different roles and we have to act according to the different roles assigned to us by the society. Women are expected to be graceful, gentle, elegant, docile and feminine. When a woman wishes to stand on her tiptoes, wishes to thrash she glides across the floor. It is women's responsibility to understand what their role in the society what is their role in the society. They have to free themselves and realise what being a woman means and what equality means. Equality can be achieved only if we take the initiative to have equal rights. Gender equality is not an issue of women alone men should also understand that it is their issue too. Men and women instead of fighting with each other should join hands together and make their journey towards equality as a joint endeavour. The educated middle-class women with the growth of educational opportunities and economic independence have become conscious of their rights. Impelled by a desire to realise their importance women express their uneasiness in the traditional role, this anticipates them to be the embodiment of



suffering. ShashiDeshpande asserts that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society daringly. Woman's self-prestige, confidence, and courage will earn her stable position not only in family, but in the society as well.

Walk, and raise your fist
Affirm your decision to be free
Don't walk three yards behind
It's your place by right
Mother, Woman!
The Revolution is you
-Indira Kulkshreshtha

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