CHAPTER VI

FEMININE CONCERNS AND SEARCH FOR IDENTITY
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In the male dominated world, woman is always search of her place identity and room of her own..

Therefore, man has become naturally the law-maker in the society always imposing authority on the 'other' (woman) who followed rules. One enjoyed the freedom and the other remained unseen, and obscure. Gradually things were classified and labelled as strong and weak, male and female, teller and hearer, giver and receiver, culture and nature, high and low, ruler and ruled and male and female stood as the two opposite ends in the same social and cultural background. Eventually all forms of judgments and beliefs were founded on the preconceived ideas, now institutionalized. In due course, one became the centre-force and the other marginalized, decentred and unrepresented, unable to enter into the "symbolic order". One became fortified and the other became the dark and unknown territory of genderized representation. This division went much deeper than the sexual definitions of 'male' and 'female', and embraced as it grew in social
consciousness of other social, cultural and psychological ideas, beliefs, symbols, behaviour and role allocations in respect of political and economic spheres and than of division of labour.

Feminism has dawned the freedom of woman and as a literary theory, it entered the academic circle in the late 1960s with the advent of post structuralism which is different from the traditional approaches of literary criticism.

The post-structuralist theory asserts that literature can be written according to the literary theory. As Jaidev points out:

"Such a premise seems depressing because it expects literature to learn from a theory. In any case, several post-structuralists are feminists and naturally therefore they are busy creating a feminist aesthetics, a feminist literary theory which, out of politeness, is supposed to illumine past text but actually will be fulfilled in expressed written text for theory".1

It seems Shashi Deshpande's novel The Dark holds no Terrors is written under the sweeping influence of such
a literary theory in its moments of euphoria. This contention of mine is rooted in the concern when her protagonist Sarita voices her anxiety:

"There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing. No, worse, of being just a ventriloquist’s dummy, that smiles, laughs and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face" (p. 22)

Ventriloquist is "one who can speak so that his voice seems to come from some other person or place." This is precisely the situation not only with Sarita but also with her creator. In the process of creating an exclusively feminist text, Shashi Deshpande seems to be tremendously influenced by the individualistic feminism propagated by the Anglo-American feminist tradition. This appears more so in the deliberate distortion of her female and especially male characters and sacrificing of many human values at the altar of a trendy feminism. In this chapter, the focus is to analyse Shashi Deshpande's use of feminism as a literary device in the portrayal of her male and female
characters from a post feminist point of view and critique how far her feminist discourse contributes to the transformation of woman which has question her individuality identity and place in the context of Indian society.

At the outset of the novel, the protagonist Sarita is discovered as a victim of her husband Manohar's sadistic torture and violence physically as well as sexually. Her state of mind is expressed in a very realistic and touching manner:

"It was a monstrous invasion of my body. I tried to move, twisting my body, wriggling under the weight that pinned it down. It was impossible. I was pinioned to a position of an object surrender of myself. I began, in sheer helplessness, to make small whimpering sounds, piteous cries. The small pains merged all at once into one large one. And still the body above mine, hard and tense, went on with its rhythmic movements. The hands continued their quest for new areas of pain. Now the horror of what was happening to me was lost in a fierce desire to end it. I
could not, would not, beat it, I began to fight back helplessly, savagely" (pp. 11-12)

Going through such gory details of excruciating pain and unendurable agony, who could ever imagine of such a nightmarish event not in a criminally assaulted rape scene but in a decade-old marriage bed on a mother of two children? And not an ordinary housewife, but a doctor by profession, a working woman of considerable social repute? what sense does the author aim at evoking in her readers through such unbelievable stuff? Expecting the readers simultaneously to be sane and naive enough to take her for granted, is not that asking for too much?

In any case, in order to create a complete female text, one must create a female space that demarcated women different. As Dorothy Kaufman Mc Call Writes:

"This was specifically the trend in post-1968 French movement of the groups known as Psych et Po [Psychoanalyse et politique] which emphasized the centrality of biological differences between the sexes. Drawing heavily on Lacanian & Psychoanalytic postulates, this group argues that just this woman's difference which
lies in a sexuality that has been repressed by patriarchal culture is the source of women's potential liberation\(^3\).

Considering Shashi Deshpande's protagonist Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, one cannot fail to notice this differentness in her since her childhood till she is a grown up woman. Her kid brother Dhruva is her primary target in her contestation with the male power. Being a son, he had the advantage of receiving more attention, care and love from her parents. Her childhood jealousy comes to the forefront when she pushes him from her father's lap when he was hardly a year old. He had been completely loyal to her in all respects, always running after his beloved Sarutai. But she spared no occasion to assert her authority over him on every little opportunity:

"Just three years between them. But what immense advantage those three years gave her. She had ruled over him completely. No dictatorship could have been more absolute" (p. 35).

It seems, at first, that against the patriarchal power of domination, her relationship with Dhruva forms the battleground on which she is fighting for a space of her
own. However, the novelist, surprisingly enough, chooses the mother to represent the patriarchal power. One is impelled to ask why the mother (not the father) should be chosen when her protagonist is meant to carve a female space by challenging the old order, the myriad bondages of tradition imposed by a male dominated society. Probably, it presupposes a psychological conflict in the protagonist's own self to problematise her femininity through the mother daughter relationship. Simultaneously, with a decisive stroke of her pen the author brings the brother-sister relationship to a catastrophe. Before the very eyes of Sarita, her kid brother drowns in a pit full of muddy water. Her desperate attempt to save him reflects her concern for her brother more. But she vehemently denies any knowledge of him when asked by her parents. Inevitably, she is confronted with her mother's hysterical accusation:

"you did it, you did this, you

Killed him"

"I didn’t. I didn’t know. I

never saw him" (p. 191)
Dhruva's death should have restored Sarita to her parental love and care as she is their only child left. On the other hand, this event becomes instrumental in alienating her from them by putting a guilt consciousness permanently in her psyche. Throughout the novel, this guilt consciousness seems to act like fatal flaw, at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia. This is the turning point in the novel that brings the mother daughter (Matriarchal Vs Filial) conflict to the forefront. Every suggestion of her mother like "Don't go out in the sun. You will get even darker," (p.45) which differentiated her from her brother, made her contemptuous of her femininity which leads to search her identity.

Even the onset of biological changes like menstruation is unbearable for her. She prays to God that it should not happen to her any more and save her from being ashamed of herself forever. In these and many more occasions, her reactions betray the influence of individualistic feminism on her author who seems to put
Jardine's textual process of "Gynesis" to work in her present undertaking:

"The putting into discourse of 'women' as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity; indeed, the valorization of the feminine, woman and her obligatory, that is historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing and speaking". In projecting her protagonist in conflict with the hegemonic power structure and the social, institutions, Shashi Deshpande carries the true spirit of feminism very effectively. Yet, in her haste, it seems she has ascribed too problematic a personality to her positing her as a kind of psychotic rebel.

During all these moments of mother-daughter problematic, the father is either relegated to a nonentity space or seen silently supporting the daughter against the mother. When Saru decides to pursue a course in medicine in Bombay, the mother is traditionally ill disposed to let her have her way. But the father who already understands the modernized idea of a professional woman, supports her morally and financially to achieve her goal.
Sarita is at least able to escape the maternal tantrums of do's and don't. Yet, at a later stage, her father's momentous help appears to her as a too tacitly committed act:

"Standing up against her, asserting her will against her......that had seemed impossible. But she had done it. I won that time. But I was not alone then. Baba was with me. He helped me without him, I would never have succeeded. Now I wonder whether his was a fight for me or against her. Whether he used me as a weapon against her? Whether that hurt her more than my own rebellion did?" (p. 139).

In a way, the father seems the villain. But she takes her sweet revenge on her mother, at least she feels so, by another more shocking decision in choosing Manohar, a lower caste man as her husband. By breaking away from the barriers of caste system, she frees herself from the matriarchal and patriarchal bondage.

Although she is dark and not so good-looking Manohar becomes the recluse in whom she finds her sense of belongingness. To her inferiority complex stricken
psyche and love-starved body and mind, her proves the much-needed panacea:

"I was insatiable, not for sex but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. If ever I had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me. And he would again and again and again" (p. 40).

It is his moral support that restores her self-confidence. He proves that she is as much desirable as any other beautiful woman. With his help, she completes her medical degree and embarks on a profession that has a high social respect. Already they have two children- Son Abhijeet and daughter Renuka. But she is no more interested in the family life as she is possessed with a psychotic will to defy socially ascribed role of a wife and a mother. To Manohar she can only offer hollow suggestion to resign her job and devote her time to family. But, the truth is that she, once again, wills to be different and free from all bondage as she had done by breaking away from her parents.
Her once a big catch, a handsome and virile man as husband, Manohar fails her in bed in satisfying her nymphomaniac urge. Now she is empowered to ride over him either by blackmailing to resign her job or corner him to accept her domination as the bread-earner of the family:

"Does the sword of domination become lethal only when a woman holds it over a man?........... I will never dominate. I will never make my husband nothing as she did. And yet it happened to them. It puzzled, sometimes it frightened her, giving her a feeling that there was something outside herself, driving her on "(p-86)

Her dominion over her husband despite herself and her confession of being under the spell of a force outside herself strengthens the earlier assumption that she is a feminist rebel all set to assert her autonomy in the patriarchal society. Poor Manohar, with his meagre income as a lecturer in a private college, cannot accept the first suggestion and must resist the second. As Michal Foucault says: "Where there is power, there is resistance" must not Manohar fight for the little space that he owns? she is now
her old self again, clamouring to assert her power as she did with Dhruva and her parents. After the father, it is the turn of Manohar to be proved a villain for denying her authority. In a complete about turn, the novelist sweeps him off his ground through a few master strokes. The very person who provided a paradise of sex (or love) now turns a monstrous sadist inflicting in human torture on his wife. Is this real or imagined? Does not it point to a certain hallucinatory discovery on the part of the protagonist?

Yet again, freedom from all social bondage and escape from personal obligation is not enough for a Shashi Deshpande heroine. She must try her possessed idea (or idealism) of freedom in sex too. Her brief stint of adultery with Pad-maker Rao, her classmate and now a colleague, reflects not only the fall of her character but also her maniac obsession with self. Such an arduous journey for rebellious self-assertion must tell upon her psychic health considerably. She now has to find another recluse for convalescence and introspection.

It is in this moment of crisis that her parental home provides her recluse. Her mother is long dead of cancer.
During all their days of difficulty and suffering, she had kept herself selfishly and grudgingly absent. Ironically, her lonely father once again comes to her rescue. Far away from the humdrum and incessant heat of Bombay city, in this remote village, she regains her control over herself. She comes to terms with the fact of her mother's death and the boundless jealousy and hate she bore for her evaporates. Realization descends on her that she and her mother did not have "a room of their own". Desperately, she had been searching for this room in her parents, in Dhruva, in her husband Manohar and her children, always outside herself but in vain. The epilogue of the novel, taken from the Dhammapada, authentically reflects her self-realisation:

"You are your own refuge.
There is no other refuge.
This refuge is hard to achieve" (p. 27)

Shashi Deshpande's art of characterization needs special mention here. Who are those who crowd her canvas? The protagonist Sarita, a possessed and psychotic woman, who is ready to ride roughshod over every male
she associates with for her self-assertion and her selfish ulterior gain. Is she supposed to be the role model for the 'new woman'? what a nightmarish world she inhabits? Intolerant nagging mother, indifferent father, sadist husband, womanizing professor, and lecherous sex-hunting colleagues- it is a world crowded with too many dark creatures full of dark desire. It is but natural that woman like Sarita must rise above all this, putting their dark knowledge viciously against them and declare boldly: "The Dark Holds No Terrors" This is no world for the same men and women.

Finally, it is time again to refer to the quoted lines of W.B. Yeats. Sarita, a middle-class woman, is mastered by the brute blood of a Sadist husband as much as her author by the western individualistic feminism. In problematising the feminal discourse, she does deserve our praise holding out a bold suggestion for feministic autonomy. In doing so, she comes closer to Chaman Nahal's definition of feminism:

"I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a
dependence syndrome: Whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group, when women free themselves or the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes."

While her protagonist Sarita frees herself from the dependence syndrome, her final disposition in the novel leaves little scope to surmise that she would lead a normal life, hence forth, as a responsible member of family and society. The problematic of her life, in the process of search for a feminist space, only brings out the inner conflict of the modern Indian woman who is trying to balance her multiple role as a member of the family, as professional and above all, as a human being. In the case of Sarita, her author seems to have made no attempt to bring her finally anywhere close to accept the new feminist moral vision proposed by Robin Morgan:

"The women have over the centuries developed an ethic that is appropriate to the world view that is emerging out of the new physics: they see in terms of relationship and in terms of environmental of human values for
centuries. Their primary value is a reverence for life. This ethic must become the governing world ethic.  

Achievement of individual identity and female autonomy must not be the only goal of Feminism. After having accorded that autonomy to her, she should be brought on to accept that basic human values like motherhood and responsibility of the family, thereby, of the society, at least an her own terms. There is a need a harmonies the man-woman relationship as equal partners. 

As Toril Moi views, "In a non-sexist, non patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist". Victory is there, not in the subjugation and destruction of the male, rather in bringing him to see the indispensability of each other's space. The ones lies upon women writers like Shashi Deshpande who are using feminism as a literary device to further the cause of Indian woman, if any social transformation is, at all, to be effected.  

Leonard Carmichael explains it- psychologically: "For a woman, the role model is often a man, as the emphasis is not on respect for valid authority but on an exaggerated need to submit to some external power or control".
This attitude is developed as a defence-mechanism to protect oneself from hostile situations. The individual attempts to overcome humiliation and suppression by an overly controlled, excessively obedient attitude towards superiors. Other attitudes in this syndrome include extreme conventionalism, hard-core cynicism and preoccupation with power—these behavioural traits are commonly found among those Indian women who conform to the traditional societal norms. Often, there have been attempts in Indian writing to side track problems related with this syndrome and present them with a romantic fervour to distract the attention from the core issues faced by women. She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter's wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has enriched and helped her acquire a quality of concentration. Aness Jung in Unveiling India, Thus, writes:

"The nobility of her being does not depend merely upon race though but upon ideals, is the outcome of a certain view of life."10.
Jaya, the protagonist of That Long silence, aptly represents these facets of the contemporary woman. She wants to understand her own bare self, devoid of all embellishments, as that alone can prove to be a reservoir of strength in her tedious, lonely journey towards self-actualization. The novel begins with the sensitive presentation of the loneliness of a woman and the haunting question of the ultimate purpose of her life in the context of her familial relationships. The women she had come into contact with previously had moulded her self-perception and she initially assessed her worth not as an individual but by her capability to model herself upon the dreams of her husband. She goes for a hair-cut like Mehra's wife\textsuperscript{11} and want to pattern herself after the docile and silent women of Mohan's family, "That way lay, well, if not happiness, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt" (p. 84).

Jaya's creativity provides her an outlet for her frustration. Mohan also takes pride in his writer wife, but wants her to write non-controversial middles only. The thought of failing as a writer had enfeebled her, but she
blames it on the restrictions imposed on her creativity by Mohan. Suppression of creativity frustrates her. She is not able to go beyond the social conditioning and somehow believes that a woman's choice, independent of that of her husband, should not have a significant role in her life. Her thwarted creativity and attempts to acquiesce to Mohan's desires, generate a feeling of guilt in her, which makes her social poise somewhat artificial. Her relationship with Kamat, which is never very precisely defined in the novel, is also an escapade to find some humane empathy and sharing. This relationship imparts on inner fulfilment to Jaya which her relationship with Mohan alone had failed to provide. Jaya's need for Kamat also reinforces the truth of Maslow's theory of sequential motivational hierarchy. The motives and needs of human beings are considered as arranged in a hierarchy, in order of potency to the unsatisfied organism. The hierarchy has several levels. At the first level, the physiological needs are the most basic aspects of human motivation and action. At the second, the motives pertaining to the organism's desire for a stable, secure environment become important. At the next level in the hierarchy, love and belonging are the motives for
having friends, companions, family and identification with a group or individual. These needs involve affiliation and friendship, and as they are satisfied, self-esteem motives become important, involving the desire for respect, confidence, and admiration. The desire for affectionate relationship is important in the motivation of this stage.\textsuperscript{13}

Jaya's identification with Kamat comes in this category. Once the need for conductive relationships is fulfilled, she is free to move towards the utilization of her personal capacities, self-comprehension and to understand and develop her potential to the fullest, which is the highest level known as self-actualization. Jaya wants to develop into an unrestrained individual who is not surrounded by the superficial restrictions of her milieu, yet not at odds with its basic prohibitions. The novel suggestively and with resonance portrays Jaya's internal journey towards self-actualization in a highly evocative manner.

Jaya's relationship with Kamat is also significant to the development of the novel, not only because it represents her need of emotional sharing, but also because
it enables her to analyze her individuality once again and have faith in her capability to transcend the social barriers in the pursuit of fulfilment. Kamat's words provide her an insight into the truth about herself and make her accept responsibility for her deeds. Kamat points out that it was her fear of failing as a writer that kept her away from her profession, and not her responsibility towards her family. Kamat cautions her against self pity,

"I'm warning you-beware of this women are the victims theory of yours. It 'l drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't sulk behind a false name. And work-work if you want others to take you seriously" (p. 148) Jaya discovers that Kamat is right in his assessment about her. She realizes now that she was scared of failing and the best way of avoiding and , neglecting this truth was by taking refuge in her home. At this stage, Jaya decides to live her life by actively participating in it and not by running away from it. Once Jaya understands it, she is able to find out the answer to all her pending questions which had caused remorse and grief to her earlier. She frankly admits.
And so I have crawled back into my hole. I had felt safe then. Comfortable, unassailable. And so I had stopped writing. It had not been Mohan's fault at all. And it had been just a coincidence, through it has helped, that just then, Mohan had propelled me into the other kind of writing. "I encouraged you," he had said to me. He was right. But I went on with my chest-beating fit of penitence, Mohan had not forced me to do that kind of writing. I'd gone into it myself. With my eyes open" (p. 148)

Jaya's awareness of her own incompleteness make her more sensitive to the emotional needs of her husband. She realizes that her failure to establish normal reciprocal relationship with her husband had enhanced her self alienation. Negation alone can never lead a woman towards 'selfhood'. A wife's relation with her husband must take form within the totality of her life as a woman, only then it can lead to a harmonious existence. In her search for a positive response from her life and surroundings to obtain a self-actualized individuality in a world of pre-fixed norms and standardized behaviour, Jaya concludes that a holistic approach towards life is essential and one must
be resilient in approach, "We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything to know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (p.193) while living a life of solitude at her Dadar flat, Jaya reassesses her life with some objectivity. Long hours of contemplation lead her to a decision of giving up the role of a silent and passive partner and to clarify the misunderstandings and turbulence in her relationship with Mohan. Understanding of the motives behind one's deeds and acceptance of responsibilities for one's decisions alone can lead to a true uninhibited liberation of the 'self'.

The novel ends with a resurgence of faith. Jaya's decision to erase the silence which had defined and distorted her communication with her husband should be interpreted as the harbinger of a new hope. A woman's desire to succeed like an individual is not incompatible with the desire for love and small pleasures of domesticity. If marriage/love without independence dissipates a woman's personality into nothingness, independence
without love also exhausts her sensitivity in a constant tussle with the self and the society. Jaya's story proves that a balance fulfilled life is not merely a utopian fancy for a woman if she decides to realize her creative energy to erase her conditioning and frees her from her psychic fears and the bondage of centuries. In short, self-actualization is possible if a woman decides to 'Be Herself', to exhibit the genuine significance of her free, innate and uninhibited personality in its totality.

In brief, Shashi Deshpande's female characters are facing conflicts, problems and adjustments at psychological, social and economic level which decides their journey from 'womanhood' to 'selfhood' or 'personhood'
REFERENCE


