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INDIAN FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

P. SRIDEVI

Indian Feminism:

Indian Feminism is a kind of movement which aims to raise voice for woman to attain equal rights and opportunities in the field of political, social and economic in the man dominated traditional bound patriarchal Indian society. Indian feminism mainly focuses on women’s issues such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry, woman education, property, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Persons whose beliefs and behaviours are based on feminism are called feminist.

In all most, all over the place in India, Feminists bring the subjugation faced by women into light in various forms. Indian writers such as Raja Rao, MulkRaj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Kamala Markandeya, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kushwant Singh, Anitha Desai, Anitha Kumar and Shashi Deshpande besides the unmentioned numerous others approach this movement in a different dimensions. These writers bring the inner turmoil of the woman and her psyche in their novels and also through the medium of their novels they struggle, plead and fight to a change in the attitude of society towards woman.

Deshpande’s Feminism

Shashi Deshpande, a leading Indian novelist, articulates her serious concern within the portrayal of women in literature. Her writings are based on the internal journey in the psychological realm of the feminine sensibilities. In her novels she presents the real-life sufferings of Indian women. As Deshpande’s novels deal with in and around the problems of women, her works are generally categorized as a woman’s works and she is called a woman writer. But Deshpande, in fact, hates to be called her as a feminist writer in the narrow sense of the word. It is acceptable that Deshpande highlights the predicaments faced by the Indian woman in her novels but she does not portray men as just wrongdoers. She with full heart accepts her thoughts are like feminist. But strongly opposes the words “Feminist writer”. In an interview with Geetha Gandhaharam, She said that she is a feminist.
Yes, I would. I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simon de Beauvoir that ‘the fact that we are human, is much more important than our being men and women’ I think that’s my idea of feminism......My objection was to bring called a feminist writer. Yes I am very much and a not man’s writing women’s writing.... When you deal with just my work then take me as an individual writer and deal accordingly. Don’t call it women’s writing or feminist writing, (http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/6723/7/07)

Deshpande, moreover, thinks that Indian feminism is entirely different from western feminism. She strongly believes that western feminism and their theories cannot be applicable to traditional bound Indian society. It is because the way of life, the social set up and the culture and tradition are totally different from the custom oriented country like India, She clearly argues that walking away from tradition, and bad-temperedness do not compose feminism. She says that many women have feminism in their lives without knowing that they actually have it. Shashi Deshpande perceptibly thinks that feminism is using the survival used to endure the torments for the betterment of life.

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is no, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of people in India are feminists without realizing it ...... For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength. (Interview by Lakshmi Holmstorm 248) (http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/6723/7/07)
rebellious character. Saritha’s this character emerges when her brother Dhurva was drawn in the pond accidently. She quietly watches the scene without rushing or fussing herself to help Dhurva. Later on this rebellious behaviour haunted Saritha that she is responsible for his brother Dhurva’s death.

Saritha’s mother was always woeful after the death of Dhurva. Life becomes darker to saritha. Even the essential rituals or functions are avoided to celebrate at saritha’s home. Saritha’s mind was totally vexed and filled with sorrows. She feels isolated and deserted. The wounding words of her mother makes an incurable scar in her heart. When she attains puberty. Saritha feels the situations becomes worsen to her. The tradition bound Indian Society’s restrictions imposed on saritha, she can not escape or in fringe the rules drawn on woman by the patriarchal orthodox society. Saritha resents the people who treat her like an outcast during those three days. She hates her woman hood. Discriminatory behaviour of her mother makes Saritha feels unloved and unwanded leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. She feels psychologically insecure. She begins to expresses her suppressed feelings through the acts of defiance, she seeks a way to hurt her mother.

I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer. But I did not know how. I was no more that naive child who had once said, trying to wound her, ‘I dreamt you were dead.’ (The Dart Holds No Terrors P.No.142)

Saritha becomes a victim of her domineering mother’s rigidity of do’s and don’t. She doesn’t allow even to play in the outside.
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 link?
Why not?
You can’t
And Dhruva?
He’s different. He’s a boy. (The Date Holds No terrors P.No.45)

This circumstance grows her more wild and defiant later. She feels that she has lost her freedom she wants to separate herself from her mother this
Shashi Deshpande’s Indian Feminism, expresses neither to be bound under the society created the traditional based custom on woman nor to be a fully plight from family and a label against the Indian patriarchal society but it depicts Indian woman to grow their inner strength by using their knowledge and Education and have to bring about reconciliation between tradition and modernity without losing her our identity. This is what she tries to bring out through her stories.

This paper attempts to high light Deshpande’s concept of Indian Feminism by the character Saritha in The Dark Holds No Terror.

Feminism in The Dark Holds No Terrors

Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors is a tremendously powerful portrayal of a woman’s mental struggle to survive in the society which is well soaked with the cultural and traditional habituats. They story reveals the real struggle of an Indian woman’s stand up on her own leg than depending on her husband or parents or the social supports.

Long time back, saritha the protagonist of the novel returns back to her parents’ house on hearing through a friend about her mother’s death a month ago. But actually she wants to escape the nightmarish brutality husband’s imposes on her every night. She is welcomed by her father as an unwanted guest. The traditional orthodox family in Indian Society does not give any respect to the woman who marries a man she loves, because in Indian middle class society, Love on a person before his or her marriage is sin. Saritha marries manohar in a romantic way. Leaving her parents alone she goes with manohar to start her new married life. Now Saritha comes back her father’s house as a well-aroused doctor and a mother of two children. She appears as a stranger; dull almost thoughtless and an outsider. This situation remains her Krishna Sudama story. Ready to confront the critical situation, Saritha entered her parental house; she saw her father’s house remaining unchanged, the same sagging easy chair, the curtain of the inner door, a faded photograph of her grandfather, even the same Hamaam soap too left behind unchanged. Through the scene, Deshpande symbolically mentions the age old customs in Indian society still unchanged.

In childhood Saritha was being an unwanted female child to her mother. She was not recognized at her home. Even her birthday was not identified. Her mother’s prejudice approaches on her and gender discrimination bring her
thought takes her to study medicine in Bombay. As usual Saritha’s mother’s oppression takes a big part in her studies fortunately her father’s support helps her to join medical college. In fact, Saritha’s mother doesn’t realise the importance of girls’ education. The same oppression comes once again when Saritha decides to marry manu Saritha actually selects manu to reject her orthodox social setup’s ways and values. The ceveration of Saritha with her mother obviously shows the real picture of orthodox Indian women’s thoughts.

What caste is he?
I don’t know
A Brahmin?
Of course not
Then, cruelly....his father keeps a cycle shop,
Oh, so they are low caste people, are they?

The word her mother had used, with the disguise, hatred and prejudices of centuries had so enraged her that she had replied...I hope so, (The Dark Holds No Terrors P.No.96)

Saritha is no longer happy with manu, as a doctor saritha naturally becomes popular and economically indepentant, It has changed manu to think whether he is an inch lower than saritha manu’s this ago and his inferior thinking makes him brutal in his behaviour, Manu expresses his love on saritha in morning but at night he turns a deceptive rapist and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon saritha. At the beginning saritha is hungry for love, when manu pours his love on saritha she hopes that she would be happy if she marries manu. The orthodox Indian culture strictly prohibits sex before marriage. The middle-class saritha, when she tastes sex with manu she feels extacy. She thinks the heaven comes on earth.

All the cliches, I discovered, were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved, was an intense joy. It was as if little wave ends of pleasure had sprung up all over my body.
'who said about some place......"If there is a heaven on earth it is this" ... or something like that? (The Dark Holds No Terror P.No.40)

Saritha enjoys Manu’s touch not for sex, but for love. Each of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted. It I even 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. (The Dark Holds No Terrors P.No.40)

The mere love-making is not enough to lead a normal human beings life. Saritha was a professionalist, she has more responsibilities both at her home and hospital. The incident of an explosion happens in a factory injured a large number of people. Saritha, as a doctor, attends the spot and does the doctor’s duty at best of her. This event identifies Saritha as a responsible doctor in the society. The love, at the beginning is enjoyed by Saritha, slowly starts to fade.

I found myself shrinking from his love making. I thought, then, that the fault was mine. It was because I was tired, always too tired after my long day at the hospital. He was the same, still so eager to love me. So, and if there were times when he was rough and abrupt with me, I put it down to the ardour of his love. (The Dark Holds No Terror P.no.42)

This is due to the over responsibilities in outside of home. Saritha avoids sex as she is tired in her job but manu considers her rejection of sex as the rejection of himself. This situation turns saritha completely unhappy.

Though women are educated, career and economically independent. They always trap in marriage. Because the Indian society teaches woman that the family is temple and her husband is god. So saritha, who bound by the orthodox traditional society, prepares herself to sacrifice her lucrative profession in order to save her marriage.

Married Indian women are generally seek a place for reconciliation only at their parental house. In this way, saritha returns her father house after 15 years to escape from her sadist husband’s sexual harrassment and for seeking mental calmness.
She wants her father to support her and she wants to feel all of her husband’s brutal manner and expects moral supports from her father. She anticipates her father who supports and arranges her separate room for her throughout her life. But Her father never does this instead he advises her to face the situation. But Saritha is in a desperate state of mind. She strongly opposes manu’s arrival to her father’s house to meet her. She goes the state of confused, nervous and finds no answer. But the thought of her children and society bring her the state of awakening slowly yet steadily. Her lamentation slowly turns as confidence she reconcils herself the darkness is terror when it happens to see from outside but really it is nothing except lack of light. The darkness of mind becomes brighter when one stands up courageously to confront the problem to seek the solution for it.

Saritha, at first, thought it is impossible to live with a distraught husband and suffer violence for the whole life. But in the end, she decides to give treatment for his disease instead of leaving her ailing husband. She realizes how she is being the guilty sister to Dhurva, the undutiful daughter to her mother and the unloving wife to her husband. She also realises that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. At last she tells her father to ask manu to wait for her as she comes back soon.

Through the decision of saru, Deshpande finally conveys that women’s real emancipation is not in suffering mentally like a fatalist or in refusing all claims of the family and society like a rebel. But it lies to draw upon her inner strength and ready to face the situation in positive manner.

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THEME OF IDENTITY - CRISIS IN DESHPANDE’S
NOVELS

P. SRIDEVI

“Literature is a mirror of life” it always reflects the reality and handles the social dilemmas. Fiction is the right genre that has never fail to commit itself to the exposition of realities. Indian English writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan bestow space to different national and social realities in their works. Indo English Novels, in the beginning, has based on the description of the ancient Indian cultural and traditional social set up, in which women are portrayed as devoted, sacrifices, patient and tolerated. The Indian tradition designs the image of woman to adjust the male dominated society. It also crystalized that a woman should have an extraordinary moral virtues coped with suffering and sacrificing. These images of Indian women constantly get changes only after the arrival of Indian women writers in English. Women Novelists of the post - modern India like kamala Das, Anitha Desai, Bharathi Muckerjee, Shashi Deshpande focus the issues of women marginality and their position in the contemporary society. ‘The hall Mark of Desai’s fiction is to focus on the inner experience of life’. (Kanwar 7) and in the greatness of shashi Deshpande lies in the fact that her women characters seek self - identity and find harmony within the customary social setup. Women quest for seeking self - Identity, Individuality and self - exploration are the common theme of Deshpande’s novels.

‘Woman’s Struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all the important stories’ (Amur ,10)

Deshpande’s Indian women are generally married, matured, Educated, professional and sophisticated. They always want to live bold, assertive and independent. They struggle between tradition and modernity. Their conflict between emotion and psyche, their trauma, traits and dilemma are very obviously depicted by each of her novel. Deshpande basically classifies Indian women into three types. Each type stands on their own traits and characteristics. Her clear portrayal of traditional women are often taking part in the role of Heroines’ mothers. Fully liberated and tradition breakers are the friends of heroines. The third types are presented the followers of Indian tradition that drawn by male - dominated society but at the end they walk as a new modern Indian women who attain their self - Identity without break the cultural and traditional Indian social set up.
Three categories of Women.

S.No Type Example Specialization
1 A Woman soaked by tradition based Indian society. Heroines' Mothers • Humble
  • Obident to male
  • Victim of Male
  • Mute spectator
  • Silent Suffer
2 Tradition Breakers Heroines’ Friends • Ready to renounce / walk out partly or fully from
  the family.
3 A Woman seeks her self-Identity in the patriarchal society within her family. Heroines • Rebellious at the beginning
  • Educated
  • Economically independent
  • Socially influenced
  • Seeking self-Identity

The present paper highlights the novels of Shashi Deshpande that have the theme of Identity crisis.

Saritha - The Dark Holds No Terrors:

The Dark Holds no terrors is a tremendously powerful portrayal of a woman’s mental conflict and seeking self-Identity not only in domestic life but also in the marital relationship. Saritha, a woman protagonist, returns her paternal house after fifteen years as an unwanted guest.

‘Can I come in Baba?
He moved aside composing his face into a normality.
I didn’t expect you’. (P16)

Years passed on Saritha still remembers her mother’s harsh and wounding words uttered when she was as a little girl who unable to save her younger brother Dhruba drowning.

‘Why did not you die? Why are you alive and he dead?’ (P.No. 34 - 35)
Now, her mother is no more. She visits her father’s house to console her father. In fact she visits her father’s house in order to escape from her husband’s brutal sexual assault at every night. When the real purpose of her arrival reveals to her father, Saritha expects her father will be a supportive one and arrange her a separate room. On contrary her father says that she has to face has own problems ‘Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him.’ (P.No.216) Saritha becomes in a desperate state of mind. She goes the state of confused, nervous and finds no answer. Her lamentations slowly turns as confidence she reconcils herself. ‘All right So I’m alone, But So’s everyone else.

Jaya - That long silence.

It is a haunting story of Jaya, the woman protagonist of the novel who is disillusioned with her marriage and rediscover herself after seeking her self-identity. Jaya, Mohan’s wife and a mother of two children, leads a subjugated life. Though she is educated and a talented writer, she is being in the circle that draws by male-dominated patriarchal society. The outside image of Jaya and Mohan’s life exposes their sharing the burden of life together. No one in Jaya’s family or the people outside their world care for their life whether they are love or hatred between them. In Jaya’s mechanical marital life she resents the kind of treatment meted out to her by her husband but she cannot speak it out. ‘One day in a state of sexual ecstasy when Jaya was restless for the passionate response, Mohan withdrew himself from her contact and did not care for her heat of passion ... Jaya is frustrated but instead of being destructive, she endeavour’s to sublimate her suppressed energy. She decides to revive her career as a journalist (Agarwal, 78). She writes for the newspaper column Seeta in which she portrays the travails of the middle-class wives and becomes very popular. Equipped with the weapons of her imagination and self-assertion she probes the meaning of marriage, love and life. She confronts life through her fiction and writes a story about a man ‘who could not reach out to his wife except through her body’ (144). The story is considered to be an authentic depiction of life and wins her a prize but her husband Mohan was deeply hurt by this’ and asks Jaya to stop writing. She gives up her writing for Mohan’s order. She sets her mind that ‘Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you’re Safe’. (P.No.17) She watches the surrounding of her life blindly and suffers silently. She even mutely accepts her husband’s new name ‘Suhasini’ that means ‘a softly smiling placid motherly woman’. (P.No.16) Jaya understands that it is difficult to change Mohan’s attitude that has set his mind with the patriarchal society. He indirectly warns her ‘My mother never raised her voice
against my father, however badly he behaved to her” (P.No 83 ) Even though Jaya survives to her whole life ‘waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch carrier man’ (P.No 30 ) and does nothing, she emerges, towards the end of the novel, as bold and matured woman. She decides to break the silence and determines to assert herself ‘I will have to speak to listen; I will have to erase the silence between us’ (P.No 192). Deshpande creates Jaya as a woman who recovers her last life at the beginning attains and rediscover her ‘self’ at the end.

Urmila - The Binding Vine:

It is a story about Urmii, an educated, middle -class, college lecturer who is grieving over the death of her one-year old female baby. In fact it is a story of three kinds of women and their sufferings and sorrows. One about ‘Urmii’ and the other about her mother-in-law Mira a victim of marital rape and Shakuntala a rape victim Kalpana’s mother. Urmila happens to meet Shakuntala in a hospital where her sister-in-law Vaana employs as a medical social worker. Shakuntala, creates as an Indian Mother, neither wants to complaint her daughter’s brutal rape to police nor does she want it to be leaked in public freely for the fear of the society. ‘No, no, no, Tell him, tae, It’s not true, don’t tell anyone, I’ll never be able to hold up my head again. Who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people. Doctor, she turns to him, don’t tell the police’ (P.No 58). But Urmila struggles to get justice for Kalpana. She takes the matter to the press and gets the case reopened.

The culprit is identified that he is nothing but Prabhakar, Shakuntala’s Sister’s husband. With the help of Akka, Urmii has come to know Mira’s life, that how a college going cum poet falls in a trap of unwanted marriage and her unpleasant life with her husband. And then with the help of Mira’s poem Urmii comes to understand Mira’s miserable state of mental agony and the rape happens to her every day night by her own husband in the name of marriage and Indian custom. The poetical lines of Mira obviously exhibit her pain and fear of her marital rape to Urmii.

‘But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too

twist brocade tassels round her fingers

and tremble, fearing the coming

of the dark - clouded, engulfing night? (P.No. 66)

The keen attention and the focus of Mira’s poems and diaries lead Urmii to publish her poems. Deshpande through the central -
figure Urmila exposes the central status of Indian middle-class women's real ordeals and their mute sufferings both in marital and societal life. Urmila, unlike an ordinary Indian woman, 'draws society's' attention to the plight of the rape victim and is determined to get Mira's poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist, for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fights only their own battles' (Qtd. By Dhawan 66).

In all her works, Deshpande defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system. Her protagonists, who are economically independent and socially influenced, portray as in search for freedom and self-Identity within marriage. Her protagonist - Saritha, Jaya and Urmila are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning. Then slowly they go through a process of introspection, self-analysis emerge as more confident more in control of themselves and attain their 'self-Identity'.

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