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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is an award winning Indian novelist, in Indian writing in English. She has written nine novels, a number of short stories and several perceptive essays. She published her first novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' in 1980 and she won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel 'That Long Silence' in 1990 and the Padma Shri Award in 2009. She presents a social world of many complex relationships through her novels. She has presented the modern Indian women's search for the self through her fictional world. She has delineated the social reality in which the women have to struggle hard for their survival. She is mainly interested in the clash of tradition and modernity as reflected in the generation gap and conflict between women. Her young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life, its rituals, ceremonies and patriarchal values. Women like Indu, Jaya, Sarita and Sumi perceive the structuring of men and women in gendered roles restricting their human potentiality.

The *'Dark Holds No Terrors'* by Shashi Deshpande presents the world of Indian women in the context of modern Indian society. They are unable to give up traditional patriarchal norms of society. These women characters try to realize and preserve their identity not only as women but also as human beings. The novel throws light on woman's awareness of her predicament, her desire to be recognized as a person and to have an independent social image of her own. Saru's feminist reactions date back to her childhood, when she had to content with sexist discrimination at her home. Her mother loves her brother but hates Saru. She says, 'You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?' we find that this is the condition of not only Saru but millions who are born girls. The fault lies with their gender, not with them. The novelist focuses on the man-made concept of gender through such events in the novel.

Saru's first public defiance of the patriarchal power system is evident when she breaks the umbilical chord and leaves home. Her further defiance is clear when she economically becomes independent and marries the boy of her own choice. She falls in love with him and marries him. Her marriage with Manohar is a means to get away from her mother as well as her home. However Saru is disappointed with her married life. Thus the novel is a reaction against the traditional Indian concept that everything in a married girl's life is shaped to the single purpose of pleasing her male partner. Saru became a famous doctor and Manu turned out to be a simple lecturer. This made Saru socially and economically superior to Manu. The simmering inferiority complex of Manu burst out when a girl came to interview Saru and asked Manu : 'How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?' Here Manu's ego is terribly hurt. His masculinity asserts itself through nocturnal sexual assaults on Saru. Since that day Manu became a sadist. The benevolent, cheerful husband by day turns into a lecherous, libidinous rapist at night.

The novelist presents the realistic facts of the traditional Indian society through this novel. Saru is the representative of all the Indian women who go through the domestic calamities in a typical Indian society. One can look at Saru not as a rebellious daughter who is searching for her identity, not as an agonist who is unable to understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by her mother, but as a woman who possesses 'Soft and Clean' hands in the beginning of the novel and roughened palms at the end.

One significant fact to be noted in the novel is that Saru recognizes, Janakibai, their domestic servant as the caretaker of the family. She is aware of the fact that it is because of Janakibai she could possess white, soft and clean hands. Janakibai is the slum dweller. She comes to Saru's house to look after the children and to look after all of them. She is not only one Janakibai, but there are so many Janakibais in our country who are going through countless miseries. She is the representative of all those women who belong to the section of the

working women in the society who has no job security whatsoever. The existence of these marginal figures makes it possible for so many women to articulate about the plight of the women. Saru's mother also occupies the marginal position when Saru's father supports his daughter and allows her to go to Bombay to study medicine. Here we find how formal education is identified at least to some extent, with liberation, with breaking the bonds of parental house. Saru's mother indicates the delaying of her daughter's marriage, which suggests non-fulfillment of responsibility. Saru resides in a hostel in Bombay to study medicine. It cannot be interpreted as liberation for a young woman. For inequality in Indian culture is sanctioned by its tradition.

However, at the end of the novel we find that, though Saru faces life boldly, the facts of life have not changed for her. Her dead brother and mother are not going to come back. She has no idea that her husband Manu will ever understand if she tells him that he is the creator of nightmare in her world. Her stay in her father's house shows her as homebound. The distinction 'here' and 'there' does make any difference for Saru. 'Here' in Deshpande's novels stands for the parental home. And there denotes the husband's house. She has been restricted either by father or husband. She has to follow the patriarchal traditions in her father's house. Likewise she is restricted by the surroundings of her in laws after marriage. Saru is the representative of postcolonial women. Her plight and dilemma should be considered in this post colonial and post modern context. The novel *'The Dark Holds No Terrors'* thus handles the question of a husband's sexual brutality to his wife. Manu uses the bedroom to get even with his much more successful doctor wife Saru. She does not know what to do. Can Saru tell anyone about her nightmare, about the hurting hands, the savage teeth, the brutal assault? Even if she were to show someone her bruised body, she is not sure that the persons listening to her miserable; Plight would ever try to understand her. A husband raping his own wife? Nobody in the traditional Indian society would take it as untraditional idea especially in the typical Indian society where a woman is considered as an object of use by the male community where male community has an upper hand over the female section of the society.

Thus Shashi Deshpande's novel reflect the problems of women in terms of ideological brainwashing in patriarchal societal structures, the problems of dowry, the complexity of the issues like caste, illiteracy, economic status. Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of women is a process of balancing the traditional and the modern. She suggests free and mature adjustment rather than helplessness. Saru's sense of fear, guilt and self-accusation finally becomes strong for her. She recognizes her role in damaging many of her relations. Her father advises her to hold on to her positive role and duties, so that she may make something of her life. She realizes that a woman's role in society in much wider than her personal relationships. The duties of a doctor relate her to many others around her. And as Saru realizes this social role, she is prepared to face the world and her husband Manu once again without refusing the cultural and social bonds.

Deshpande's heroines operate within and rebel against. The novelist has suggested liberalizing alternative in terms of individual support and initiative. Fear of public approval should not crush their vision. They should fight to finish. In the 80s and 90s one of the most effective slogans thrown up by women fighting rape has been, 'Break the Silence'. The novelist suggests that the only legal safeguards will not do. The solution to their problems lies in a new collective consciousness built up on the ethical concept.

The novelist as if suggests through the character of Saru that every dark cloud has a silver lining. We should not be afraid of darkness. After every sunset, sunrise is sure. As the happiness does not last for a long time in life, so does the sadness. If today is sad, tomorrow

will be glad. It is a note of an optimism traced out through the protagonists of her novels in general and Saru in particular. The writer suggests that one should keep in mind that what cannot be cured must be endured in life for his or her survival.

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