

Shashi Deshpande's "The dark holds no terror" in woman's state in Indian society

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* which is reflective of the feminist aspirations. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound 'Indian Society' is the theme of the novel. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a prolonged mental dilemma and a long drawn introspection. Women's quest for self-exploration is the principal theme of this novel. The novels of Shashi Deshpande are about women's self-quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature.

Keywords: tradition, exploration, culture and nature

Introduction

Sarita read books sent by Nalu and it was for the first time that she absorbed them into her. She was stirred up by Virginia Woolfe's observation that a woman should have a right to a 'room of her own', implying that a woman should be the presiding deity in certain spheres of life. But Deshpande observe regretfully that woman, irrespective of her class and character, has to play a second fiddle to man, has no room of her own.

Restraints on woman

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 carefully 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". She was aghast to hear that she was to be ashamed of herself, even in the presence of her own father. It became tortuous when she was prohibited to enter the kitchen or Puja room during those three days. she had virtually become a pariah in her own home as she was 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 pollution. A kind of shame engulfed her when she was told at sixteen that she was a woman, and classed with her mother. Sarita did not want to be a woman like her mother, who had an unshapely figure, having "The cleft which ran down her back, a deep furrow, dividing her body sharply in two. The two buttocks sharply outlined by the kind of sari she wore, tucked in between her legs. The way her hips moved as she walked". Therefore she said to herself, "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one". But it was not easy to escape being one in the conditions she was living. Soon she became an over-plump adolescent with 'hideous skirts that came between lumpy calves. Her breasts caused her agony as she tried to hide them from staring looks of the people. Girls in such state find their movements hampered by the consciousness of burgeoning breasts and hips.

Handmaid

Figure a part, women in Indian society have to live virtually a life of a maid servant. Sarita had the example of her mother before her. She had to retreat to the kitchen to dress up, go to a dingy and dark room to comb her hair and apply kumkum, slept in bed like an over-night guest in a strange place. She had literally no room of her own. Sarita realized, "And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing, 'a room of our own,'" they had never desired it also since they had accepted it as fait accompli.

Subservient to husband

Worse was the case of Smith. She was a slim, frail-looking girl, with large vulnerable and innocent eyes when she was a student. But she became fat, looked not only ugly but obscene, after marriage, and to make the change complete she became Gitanjali, the new name that her husband gave her, and ceased to be Smitha, delicate and innocent of yester-years. As she had lost her name and figure. She deprived of much-needed freedom of thought and action. She could stay at Bombay for a few days, when 'he' is with her. Her husband had given her money just enough to buy a small toy for the child, while she wanted to buy a sari for her sister-in-law, because four of them, the children and she, had stayed there for over a month, and also because all others had given her saris as presents. Her marriage had made her so low that she asked Sarita as presents. Her marriage had made her so low that she asked Sarita unabashedly to give her hundred rupees to enable her to buy a saree for her sister-in-law. "Since they last met, Smita had graduated, married, given birth to three children, doubled her size, lost her father". Her husband had deprived her of small freedoms, self-respect, and used her to satisfy his sexual urge. Smita told her friends about her husband's letter asking her to return to him since he would not be able to live without her any more. But the irony of the situation was that Smita had accepted all this with pleasure. Nalu has rightly summed up Smita's condition, "There is

always time to do all things 'he' wants to do, but never any time for doing the things you want to do. You just tag on him and drift, a small boat towed by a larger ship". Thus, Smita's position is no better than that of an appendix to a book". Smita is an example of Indian housewives most of whom accept the dictates of the husband in all matters.

Victims of male chauvinism

Sarita had experiences during her married life to show that women are often victims of male chauvinism. It happened once with herself also. Once she went home late in the night because she had to visit a newly admitted patient. She had to go directly from consulting room to the nursing home. She had asked her compounder to inform her husband that she would be late. Yet when she reached home, she found Manohar in a brooding mood, Sarita couldn't understand what she had done to spoil the mood of her husband. Manohar was not prepared to talk to her. Therefore she had to express her penitence and contrition. He joined her at dinner only after she had served both of them. Again, while living in a chawl, Manohar was upset to see that people greeted his wife, showed greater regard for her. In order to be rid of such a humiliating situation, he declared that he was fed up of the place and wanted to shift to a new house. The situation became a cause for troubles in her married life. Man always tries to dominate over woman in Indian society.

Acceptance of Miseries

Sarita had heard about several women who lived utterly neglected yet they did not revolt or try to change their lives, as if the life was a cul-de-sac, with no way out. Her own grandmother, she was told, had been deserted by her own mother, she was told, had been deserted by her husband only a few years after marriage, leaving her a young woman, with two little daughters, one of whom was her own mother. No one knew when he had gone though there was the family legend that he had taken sanyas.

Conclusion

Though Indian woman who is educated and employed is economically independent, financial freedom is not enough. Family, Marriage and social norms bind her completely. We learn much through education but we find her that Saru cannot raise her voice against the injustice meted out to her by her husband. Now here one can feel that after marriage when Saru helps her husband to reduce economic burden and also minimize the burden of psychological stress and tension what she gets as a reward in his ingratitude so education fails to equal woman with man. In spite of education and economic independence women are surrounded by domestic injustice, traditions and custom of our society.

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