

Social Consciousness in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande's fiction sets forth the natural and influence of Indian Woman's role as a 'co-provider' on her own as well as on her husband's domestic role on their familial and marital relations. The question's related to professional woman's role, status, power, duty, obligations and empowerment *vis-à-vis* her husband's are congenial to feminist studies and clear a assessment of professional woman's experience regarding their role conflict, role overload marital stress, dilemma, fatigue and self doubt can be explicated through the study of *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Saruis caught in an emotional flux; endeavour to come to term with her protean roles, while trying her best to integrate her true self.

Keywords: professional woman's role, status, power, duty, obligations

I. INTRODUCTION

Growing into the woman is, for Saru, "Something Shameful" and "Torture" (55). In her quest for gender free identity, Saru opts for the medical profession. Saru's profession gives her self reliance and meaningfulness in life. Smita, Saru's friend is a 'feminine archetype' as she signs to her husband's whims, becomes Geetanjali after marriage and is subsequently reduced to a mechanical existence even after receiving medical education. Embarrassed Smita, once borrows hundred rupees from Saru and utters: "You don't know how lucky you are not to have ask any one for money. If you know my problems". Saru is repelled by Smita's resilience and herself effacing strategy to keep her husband happy. In spite of her radical and modern outlook Vidhya bows down to the worn out customs and the traditions of a conventional life for the sake of harmony. Being a doctor, Saru comes to terms with the reasons behind the inert, passive,

unconcerned existence of her patients. She acknowledges that many of their ailments stem from neglect at home, over burden, loneliness, sexual abuse, physical violence and silence. She calls such women 'Stupid Silly Martyrs'.

Backache, headache, leucorrhea, menorrhagea, dysmenorrhea, loss of appetite, burning silently and as long as possible, because 'how do you tell anyone about these things?' Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. Stupid, silly martyrs, she thought; idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty (107).

There is a reference in the novel to a woman who ill-treated by her in-laws drowns herself in a well. There is another woman mentioned who is tied to peg by the family and fed into the castle shed. These incidents of violence against woman cultivate to fear of the men in women.

The physical, sexual and psychological violence against women is normative punishment for every woman who rebels against the defined codes of society. Woman role is prescribed by Manu, "Women never deserve freedom" and yet as wife she should advise like a minister, be a slave, have the appearance of Laxmi, pardon like mother Earth and in bed be the celestial prostitute Rambha. Despite their higher 'Virtues' and 'attainments' they must be 'inferior' to their husbands. In Saru's case economic security seems to be the part of the marriage arrangement which is more like a contract than a loving and intense relationship. Manu feels proud of being called the husband of a 'lady doctor' he is responsible for the disintegration of the Saru into a 'terrified-trapped animal'. Saru's married life crumbles as she attains height in her profession career and Manu fails to become a famous poet. Unable to accept his failure, Manu manifest his frustration in the form of sexual sadist attacks by the night. Gerda Learner rightly posits that men punish women by "ridicule, exclusion or ostracism" if they attempt to "interpret their own rules"(12-13). Saru shows remarkable restraint in order to save some peace for her family life:

We belong to the same caste really. Both of us despise ourselves. What he does to me, he does it not so much because he hates me, but because he hates himself. And I...I hate myself more for letting him to do it to me than I hate him for doing it to me (8).

Deshpande's Saru is not radically defiant like Ibsen's Nora or Toni Morrison's Sethe. Though she has overcome the 'scarcity-syndrome' and 'Identify-crisis', she is also vulnerable, submissive and conformist to a certain extent. In spite of her repulsion for social establishment Sam has condescended to the concept of the "total female" Deshpande reworks and reshapes the 'feminine archetypes' to express her protest and her repugnance. Saru's girlhood dreams of a Prince charming and hopes for 'being the adored and chosen superior, super-human male. That was glory enough... to be chosen by that wonderful man"(53).

The desires to become indispensable for someone, 'to belong' and 'to be loved' make evident the 'internalized femininity' in Saru:

As a child my fantasies, my dreams, has no relevance to the fact that I was a girl. The fact had not meant to me then what it would later. But as I grew up, they became the dreams of a total female- I saw myself humbly adoring, worshipping and being given the father-liver kind

of love that was protective, condescending yet all encompassing and satisfying. There was no 'I' then, not as yet, craving for recognition, satisfaction (53).

Saru, a professional, woman dislocates the binary of husband as 'provider' and 'protector' versus wife as 'recipient' and 'protected'. Saru's employment is acceptable only because it supplements her husband's income. The story of Saru's clearly depicts a duality deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian society which sways social definitions and expectations of woman's public and private roles, consequently, women are expected to be both traditional and modern in domestic and public jurisdictions. Saru's economic independence makes her husband insecure. Saru tries to conform her husband's expectations and yet Manu's male pride is wounded when an interviewer from a woman's magazine, ask Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (182). This remark shows the dualistic approach of Indian middle class working woman.

My mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in this dingy room to comb her hair and apply kumkum, she slept in her bed like any overnight guest strange place. And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing" a room of one's own (135-136).

Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumptions that the employment of the wife can serve as the means of her economic independence and self actualization. At the same time the profession of woman does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between the men and women. While Saru's income provides a higher living standard to her family her contribution remains unnoticed. The hierarchic nature of marital role is acknowledged by Saru in the following words;

Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principle-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And I assure you; it isn't worth it. He'll suffer, you'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazine will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership.

That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, god help you, both of you.

II. WORKS CITED

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