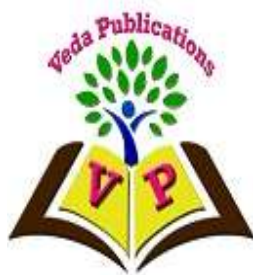




AN EVALUATIVE APPROACH OF THE QUEST FOR SELF IDENTITY IN WOMAN SELF IN *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*

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ABSTRACT

The novels of Shashi Deshpande revolve around the sufferings and suffocating situation of female section in the contemporary Indian society. The second novel of Shashi Deshpande *The Dark Holds No Terror* presents the pictures of the various parts of Sarita's life, the protagonist dividing into four parts. Sarita expresses her heart core desire to get identity which she finds a lack in her many folded life. In the first part Sarita finds a lack of maternal link when she finds herself a nonentity to her father as well as the neighbour Madhav who takes care of her father after the death of her mother. In the second part Sarita reminisces the insignificance of her existence to her mother who wants the presence of Dhruva in her life instead of Sarita. In the third part Sarita presents the points of view of the common women who live in this caged glided life assuming that they are happy and it is the custom to be happy in life. Sarita in the fourth part reflects her crisis of own existence and its importance which reminds her that everything is meaningless and tenses to Nihilism. The Beckett's concept of 'I' is reverberated through this chapter. Here Sarita is presented as the mouthpiece of Shashi Deshpande. Through the life-circle of Sarita, Shashi Deshpande portrays the endless meaningless circle of woman life in this patriarchal system.

Keywords: *Quest, Self-identity, Suppression, Patriarchal system, Feminism, Sufferings.*


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**INTRODUCTION**

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* asserts,

“This is the tradition that continues into the Middle Ages. The woman is absolutely dependent on her father and husband: during Clovis’s time, the *mundium* weighs on her throughout her life; but the Franks rejected Germanic chastity: under the Merovingians and Carolingians polygamy reigns; the woman is married without her consent and can be repudiated by her husband, who holds the right of life or death over her according to his whim. She is treated like a servant.” (page 135)

The slave like condition of woman is found its vivid picture in Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Shashi Deshpande is the prominent writer on feministic approach in India as well as the world in respect of Indian society and its prevailing effect on the women. In India before the 19th century the women have to lead a life of slavery. Before marriage they have to spend their life according to their father, after marriage they have to obey word by word their husbands as master and after reaching the old age they spend the rest of their lives on the will of their sons. So, in Indian society women have no sole identity. Even they lose their Christian name and they are introduced to the society as someone’s daughter or someone’s wife or someone’s mother. They are known by the relations not by their own identity that can reflect only the self not its surroundings. In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* the main protagonist Sarita reflects through her life the utter quest for self identity that reveals to Sarita the life as bondage mainly meaningless. Sarita finds many questions in her way of life-struggle but the answers are unknown to her. She reminds her past childhood life as well as her early married life but in both situation she finds herself nothing but a woman who gets birth only to please the man.

“Everything in a girl’s life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male.”(Chapter-7, part-3, page-163)

The quest for identity is also found in Shashi Deshpande’s debut novel *The Long Silence*. The woman self is indicated in the society as weak, and mainly is erected to woo man. This sense of pleasing

other sex is very much chasing factor to Shashi Deshpande’s characters. The characters find themselves in a society where women are mainly named after man. The patriarchal weapon cut the self from female section and they are supposed to be depended upon male to get an identity. The woman cannot recognize themselves as independent self. They are regarded as burden to the patriarchal society and they seem to be not as human but the ‘other’. So, this feeling creates a quest to get self-identity that chases the characters in *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

FEMINISTIC APPROACH

‘Feminism’ literally means a movement of woman section which had begun in 1960s. It is actually a revolutionary step against age old idea and thought or tradition which places woman in a marginalized area. Women are supposed to be weak and mild without any kind of protesting power. In the poem “*The Introduction*” written by Anne Finch, we find that the women are labelled by the identity given to them by the society and thus they cannot enable themselves to express their individual talent or identity. Society acts as a bar to their way of individual freedom.

“Alas! A woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature, is esteemed,
The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.
They tell us we mistake our sex and way;
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play
Are the accomplishments we should desire;
To write, to read, to think, or to inquire
Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,”
Through these lines of the poem *The Introduction* the woman self is pointed out in a very derogatory sense.

They are regarded as an object of beauty which cannot compete in the society with the men. This type of idea about female section is shuttered down by the revolt to get equal power and position in the society with the male section. Gender inequality is protested through the movement of feminism. As human beings, women have the same right to enjoy their life and get a human identity. This feministic approach is found its theoretical basis in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). This essay establishes the quest for identity among the female section. In *Room of One’s*



Own (1929) by Virginia Woolf shows the self of woman which lacks its own sole-identity. In *Dark Hold No Terror*, Sarita, the protagonist reflects through her reminiscence of past life the quest for identity. She points out how her life sinks into insignificance only to be a girl or woman. She effaces the weakness as a woman and the dexterity among the male and female. Sarita's approach towards life reveals the wave of 1960's feminism which struggle against patriarchal society and its customs.

SOCIO-ASPECT

In *Dark Holds No Terror*, the socio-economic condition of an Indian society is portrayed in a very realistic tint. Manohar is Sarita's husband who is a low paid college lecturer, on the other hand Sarita is a well established doctor. So from social status Sarita is higher than Manohar but this status is very much problematic for their husband wife relationship where Sarita realizes that "a+b=a+b" this mathematical equation is not true in social-marriage system. Here husband+wife is not equal to wife+husband. The society where husband is always placed above the wife and a wife is always introduced by the surname of her husband is presented in this novel. The woman is placed in a lower stature in the society where a male-child is very much expected to a mother than a female-child. Sarita's mother very often mentions the word "Why are you still alive?... Why didn't you die?" Dhruva, the brother of Sarita died suddenly at a premature age. It is a great shock to her mother. She does not place Sarita at the equal affectionate position as she has placed Dhruva. The social deprivation of a girl child from both her parents and others is reflected through the life of Sarita. After marriage, her father does not take casually the return of Sarita to her maternal home as well as her wish to stay there permanently. She is forced to endure the sexual-harassment of her husband only due to the marital bondage. Sarita portrays a societal bondage which does not let the woman to enjoy her life as her own according to her rule.

ECONOMIC-ASPECT

Shashi Deshpande very amazingly presents the economic barrier behind a woman upliftment. The parents are very much concerned about the marriage of their daughters rather than their

education. In *Dark Holds No Terror*, Shashi Deshpande very beautifully portrays this economic condition through the speech of Sarita's mother:

"Yes, but they're girls whose fathers have lots of money. You don't belong to that class. And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper, and will she look after you in your old age? Medicine! Five, six, seven....god knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc...you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over.'" (ch 4 part 3 page 144)

Girls' treatment as a burden is found in this novel which degrades the status of woman self. Economically the society regards the girl child as a curse which is revealed in the life of Sarita.

FAMILY IMPORTANCE

Women are mainly bound by their family affection. But the family regards them as good for nothing. This important less, useless feeling of woman for own self is revealed through her novels which portray the miserable plight of the now then urban women and their lot which remains unchanged even during the twentieth century. Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terror* once in a stage of her life makes her mind determined to forsake her occupation to spend her time for her family's sake. This reflects that the woman places the importance of family much more above than her own freedom or desire or ambition.

'I want to give up working'. Was it I who had said that? We stared at each other in equal astonishment. And silence again. But now I knew my lines. They came to me, the words I had rehearsed to myself. 'Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give it all up...my practice, the hospital, everything.'(ch 2 part 2 page 79)

The family engrosses the sole identity of a woman. A woman begins to think herself as a mother, beloved, wife etc and she leaves behind her individuality as a human being, adopting the in-general costumes of the society to be a housewife. This fact is vividly portrayed by the words of Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terror*:



"I saw myself, the end of my sari tucked into my waist, hair tied into a neat knot, smiling at them all as I served them. And all of them smiled back at me. A mother in an ad, in a movie, dressed in a crisply starched, ironed sari. Wife and mother, loving and beloved. A picture of grace, harmony and happiness could I not achieve that?" (ch 2 part 2 page 80)

In chapter six of part three of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sarita expresses her irritation to be introduced by the help of the relation of her husband. In spite of being a renowned medical student her merit, her talent have no value to the society. The identity of a girl depends only upon her marital status. Society is such a system of the contemporary India that it regards everything on the basis of marriage. From the very day of birth a girl child becomes a great cause of anxiety and is brought up only to be married one day. Their lives are not regarded from other aspects unlike the man.

DOMINANCE OF PATRIARCHY

The Dark Holds No Terror presents the Indian Patriarchal society which dominates the female section from their very birth. Sarita, the protagonist remembers by her past life reminiscence that how difference has been drawn between her and her brother Dhruva. She often has to hear the words from her mother –

"Why are you still alive?" The female is nothing but others to the society. The behaviour of Madhav, the neighbour also gives Sarita a feeling of selflessness.

"For a moment his complete disregard of her and her feelings gave her a feeling of not existing." (Ch 7 part 1 page 55)

The woman's individual identity is no where accepted in a patriarchal society. The children also are known by the identity of their paternal relations. The women self everywhere face the identity crisis. Sarita says with disgust

"why can't you accept my children as themselves? Why do you have to link them to the past, to others I have nothing to do with?"(Ch 3 part 1 page 34)

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* expresses the patriarchal bondage that cages the woman self and they indulge into the sea of ignorance and oblivion. Patriarchal society regards the girl child as a burden.

One finds reflection of *A Room of One's Own* through Sarita's words. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sarita says-

"Is that all I am, a responsibility?" (ch 4, part 3, page 144)

A woman is portrayed as if nothing but a nonentity who has no self. They are treated in the society as a pleasurable subject. In this novel Sarita resentfully said,

"Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male."(ch 7 part 3 p 163)

The disgusting feeling for patriarchal system and a keen quest of self are traced in this remark of Saru. Shashi Deshpande portrays the situation of women through the words the dominant trait of the Indian society which holds the men always above the women.

"A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage."(ch 3 p 3 page 137)

AGE OLD BELIEFS

The Indian society is famous for its cultural values. But Shashi Deshpande presents the age old values of Indian society which chains the woman section by the bar of marriage which snatches the self- identity of women. So, Shashi Deshpande in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* says-

"Listen girls, she would say, whatever you do, you won't be happy, not really, until you get married and have children."(ch 3 part 3 page 137)

The so called belief of the society presents the women as objects and they themselves take this as granted and behave as the society wants them to behave. Thus they lack their individuality which creates a deep quest for self-identity in their hearts.

SUPPRESSION

In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sarita, the protagonist says with a sense of disgust-

"Can one never control one's life? Do we walk on chalked lines drawn by others?" (ch 3 part 2 page 86)

The society has been suppressing the woman section from its very birth till its death. This suppression



snatches the liberty of speech as well as liberty of making friendship or keeping on friendship with others. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sarita, Nalu and Smita were three close friends and were known as "The Three Musketeers" (ch 1 part 3 page 117). But due to their marriage they become separated from each other and lose their individuality which has been their identity during their college life. Smita is portrayed as a fully suppressed and altered woman who forsakes all her past life only to reform herself according to her husband's will. Sarita thinks that only Smita can have used the word 'funny' to describe the meeting of these three old friends. Nalu also feels the same way and retorts:

"Funny? It isn't funny at all. It's tragic. How easily we give up things. You could have met me any time if you had tried," She says accusingly to Smita, "You come here almost each year." " But how could I?" Smita complained:

"I rarely stay here more than a few days, and when "he's with me..." - 'Ah! There it is! "He"! There's always time to do all the things "he" wants to do, but never any time for doing the things you want to do. You just tag on to him and drift a small boat towed by a larger ship..." (ch 1 part 3 page 117)

The suppression is found in the voice of Smita but she accepts it to alter herself by rejecting all her past identity. Even she is renamed by her husband as "Geetanjali" and she tells this to her friends with a sense of pride. But this sense is criticised in a very derogatory feeling by Nalu and Saru. Saru replies, when Smita protested—

"Surrender? What have I given up?"

" 'Your name for one thing', Saru said wryly."

Here it is obvious that a sense of losing identity is found in the voice of Sarita as well as Nalu.

"Smita's conversation was littered with 'he's'...her own 'he' distinguished from the others by a scarcely noticeable something... a kind of coy emphasis." (ch 1 p 3 page 117)

This suppressive condition of woman section by the chain of social marriage gets its visual image through the words of Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

"It's all a question of adjustment, really. If you want to make it work, you can always do it." (ch 1 part 3 page 118)

This same feeling of suffering due to suppression in patriarchal society is found in Virginia Woolf's *Room of Own's One* which reflects the quest of identity that must be separated from any kind of bondage or suppression.

LACK OF SELF

Shashi Deshpande through her novels points out the existential problem of woman self in this patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande portrays the caged bird image which presents that a woman lives her life as an inanimate object which has no self that can be recognized as an individual identity. The lack of self and a sense of loneliness in this vast world are echoed by Sarita's words in *The Dark Holds No Terror*: "That we are alone. We have to be alone. To be alone? Never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of...my husband, my life, my children, my parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure?" (ch 3 part 4 page 194-195)

The theory of existentialism is found where the struggle to find the meaning of relations and life is tensed to nothingness. The nihilistic approach is found its trace in Sarita's words. The quest to find out the significance of 'I' is portrayed through Shashi Deshpande's novels.

CONCLUSION

The women self is predominantly suppressed in this world by levelling them as 'others'. The quest for own space and name is traced its step in Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own*. As an individual identity, woman tries to establish herself. So, in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sarita says-

" But I had to make myself secure so that no one would ever say to me again... Why are you alive? Why was I alive? The answer, I then imagined, lay in hard work and success." (ch 6, part 1, page 50)

The struggle to establish as an individual person without any kind of other's introduction is found which places the very essence of ontological search and the feeling of getting one's own identity in the society. The quest for identity is reflected through



the novel of Shashi Deshpande. Her second novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* expresses the traumatic experience of the protagonist Saru who feels the suppression as a woman. In this novel we find that Saru goes through a great humiliating journey only due to be a female and this humiliation breeds the quest for self-identity in her.

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