

## **SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR***

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### **ABSTRACT**

“Man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what mandecrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex, absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential.” (Beauvoir 534)

**KEYWORDS:** Shashi Deshpande's, Social Empowerment

### **INTRODUCTION**

Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male domination. It is both a process and the result of the process. It is transformation of the structure of institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. Empowerment is envisaged as an aid to help women achieve equality with men, or at least reduce the gender biased discriminations considerably. The major strategies of women empowerment include – social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice to eliminate all types of discrimination against women and the girl child.

The freedom to choose her own life partner or life goals is a modern value which leads ultimately to women empowerment. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are focused on their responses to questions pertaining to women's identity maintaining their family relationship. They don't decide to escape from the reality but they decide to fight against the social injustice done to them. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* describes Sarita's struggling with her emotions and anxieties as she had overcome her husband in all ways. When she returned back to her father's house, through herself introspection Sarita gradually realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions. And subsequently she resolves to use her new found truths to make her life better. Thus she empowers herself to face the social challenges because of which she has been suffering.

*The Dark Holds No Terror* is a reflective novel of feminist aspirations. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound “Indian Society” is the elective theme of the novel. But after the ultimate realization at the end, after a prolonged mental dilemma and a long drawn introspection women empowerment or women's quest for self exploration is recognized as the principle theme of the novel.

It narrates the story of a marriage on the rocks. The protagonist Sarita is a successful lady doctor. It tells her conflict that she has to face as a doctor and as a wife. During daytime she is a popular lady doctor and in night she is a

trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar who is an English teacher in small college. The novel begins with Sarita returning after fifteen years to her father's house. She once proclaimed that she would never come back to her father's place. She returns being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. Her stay in her father's house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with her father, husband and her dead mother. She remains unchanged till the end.

*The Dark Holds No Terror* is a story of a girl finding her inner self. The initial experiences in her girlhood days influenced Saru heavily that she wanted to become a powerful dominant person in her life. This made her realize that she can fulfill her school years she aspired for college education and became a doctor. Her neighbors become aware of her professional identity, the day she walks back to her home in a blood stained coat, after treating victims of an accident. Instantly her profession achieves for her a position superior to Manu's. She is recognized and respected by the neighbors who came frequently to consult her. The respect that Saru gets disturbs the traditional equilibrium of the superior husband and inferior wife. Later, analyzing her marital relationship she recalls,

"But now I know it began this terrible thing has destroyed our marriage. I know this to that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But, perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his pride. Now, I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (Deshpande 42)

Later in the novel Sarita is bold enough to go back to her husband and cure him of his depression caused by inferiority complex and being normal harmony in her family life. This is how she is attaining power and identity of becoming a doctor and this doctor in her has given her comfort and happiness in her personal life as well as in the life of others.

Thus the novel ends with the certainty that how Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu's frustration confident and empowered Saru realizes the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge she readies herself confront Manu. She could take such a revolutionary decision only because of her empowerment.

The novel *Dark Holds No Terror* clearly reveals the author's perception of the endemic imbalance between the sexes. In this novel we can find out that, after distancing herself from her family, Saru realizes that one has to grow up to know that dark holds no terror, that "the terrors are inside us all the time, we can carry them within us, and like traitors they springs out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul" (85).

We have to find our own way of salvation by killing the ghost that haunts us. The denouement of *The Dark Holds No Terror* tells us that women should not only be independent, but they should also believe in their strength. Thus this novel has a particular significance for today's Indian society.

## REFERENCES

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