**Abstract:-**

The term 'sensitivity' evokes a feeling or an affect or something felt as much as thought. Feminine Sensibility gives rise to an intensive exploration of consciousness and sensibility as a way of understanding women's experiences and expression of that thought. A study of feminine sensibility focuses on probing into the consciousness of one's situation as a woman becoming an object of oppression. It also involves a process of understanding the mechanisms of oppression perpetrated by the male dominated society. In fact feminine sensibility expresses one's own perspective as a woman.

Keywords:

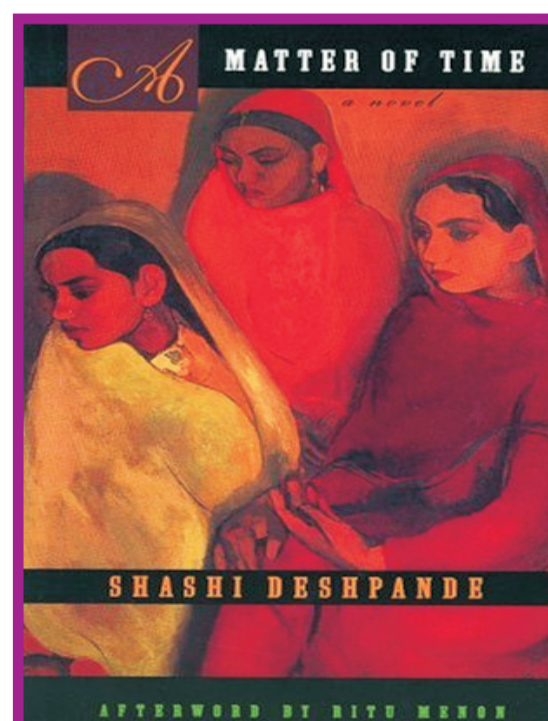
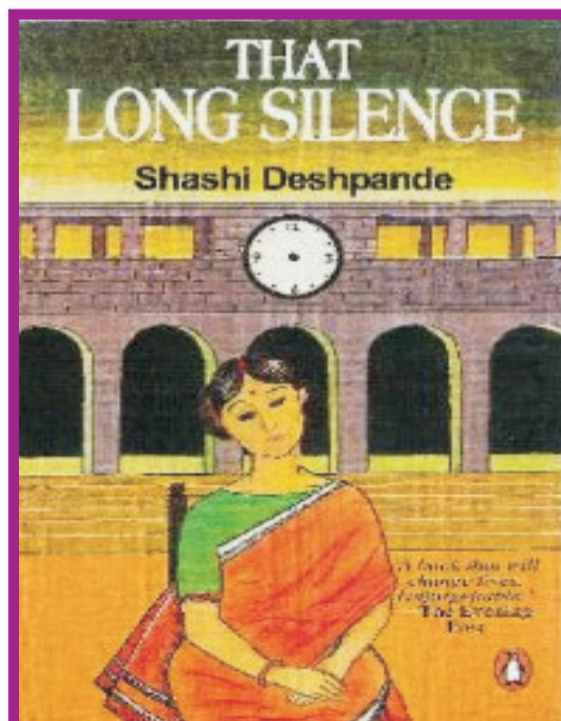
Shashi Deshpande's , The Dark Holds No Terrors , Feminine Sensibility , mechanisms.



FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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INTRODUCTION

Indian women have been exploited and victimized by the male dominated patriarchal system. The awareness of the need for liberation from the slavery of male dominated system has been realized by many educated women in the post-independent India. The pervading sense of alienation and separation from the mainstream of history and civilization are some of the important aspects of feminist literature in India. It is to be noted that this sense of isolation is the result of a past, cultural and literary neglect of women and their activities. The women protagonists of the modern feminist writings can be considered as the true representative of Indian common women who have been ruthlessly treated by male hegemony and prejudiced culture.

The aim of this research paper is to illustrate the feminine sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*. An attempt has been made to briefly overview, first, the feminine sensibility and patriarchy in the Indian middle-class family, second, the analysis of the novel with reference to these issues. Women are marginalized and subjugated comprehensively in the Indian patriarchy. The male dominance is deeply rooted in the Indian society which is patriarchal in nature as a result of which woman is pushed to a marginal position both in the family and in the society. Shashi Deshpande takes up such precarious situations from the Indian environment and explores the feminine sensibility at the backdrop of urban middle class society.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has posited the subtleties involved in the subjugation of women whose life is replete with oppression and gender inequality even though they are educated and live in the urban middle class milieu. This situation, the Indian middle class woman is inextricably intertwined, is in fact, the result of the male-centered Indian society. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* expresses the frustration and disappointment of women who experience the repression in the hegemonic male society. The novel shows feminine sensibility through the probing of women's self-quest. It also hopes to posit the view that women establish their autonomous identity. The women question the codes and practices of culture laid down by the society particularly by patriarchy. Sarita, the protagonist becomes the victim of the male dominated society, where women are denied their freedom to act according to their conscience. The male ego of her husband Manohar has subjugated Saru both psychologically and physically. She has been ruthlessly treated by male hegemony and prejudiced culture.

Shashi Deshpande's novel reflects her concern for the social and cultural consciousness of gender. She has also raised her voice against humiliation and neglect of women. Her novel reflects the feminine sensibility. In a male dominated society, she has tried to emphasize her feminine identity and her personal identity. Therefore, she has depicted Saru, the protagonist as a woman who becomes the victim of prejudiced the society which does not allow women to have no separate identity apart from men. Yet her protagonist revolts; and her revolts are the outcomes of her dissatisfaction with the present situation and her psychological trauma. It is through the silent revolt that the novelist depicts feminine sensibility with frankness.

The novel *The Dark holds no terrors* portrays a middle class women's dilemma in a hegemonic patriarchy. The novel explores how the protagonist Sarita (Saru) undergoes the exploitation by her mother during the childhood and sexual harassment in the hands of her husband during her married life. But the protagonist Saru, being career oriented woman tries to establish her feminist sensibility. She tries to resist this gender inequality through her education, economically self governing principles. She aspires for love and affection in her family as a child but she was betrayed by her mother.

Saru is a victim of gender inequality. Male child is given additional importance by the patriarchal society as he is a future progenitor of family lineage. Dhruva, the brother of Saru was showered with love and affection by his mother. Saru undergoes this gender inequality during her childhood itself. Saru recalls her childhood days which justify this gender discrimination. "There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and arati in the evening, my birthdays were almost the same... but there was no puja"³. (p169). Saru fights against gender inequality. But Saru's mother being a woman exploits her daughter as a true follower of patriarchy. When her brother dies by drowning in a pool of water, the mother holds her daughter Saru being responsible for it. She reviles her daughter "You killed him, why did not you die? Why are you alive and he dead? (p19) Her constant yearning for the departed son and rejection of her daughter causes profound and inefaceable scar on Saru's psyche. She resists this childhood inequality during the death of her brother Dhruva. She confesses this later before her father. She passively watched him (Dhruva) dying. She had left him all alone in the desolate place to die in the pool and ran away without calling anyone for help. She unconsciously hits back this inequality by keeping quiet while Dhruva was dying. When Saru hears the news of her mother's death, her first thought is "who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died." (p21)

Marriage is a sacrament according to patriarchy. It claims that parents have to get their daughters married as a mark of the principles of civilized society. Saru interrogates the notion of marriage and tries to find her own understanding of this system. She repudiates her mother "to get married and end up doing just what your mother did seem to me not only terrible but damnable." (p140) she tries to defy this gender inequality through her education and independent economic power. Premila Paul rightly said "even in childhood Saru had realised that economic independence alone could be an insurance against subordination or suppression."⁴ She seeks love and affection in her family during her childhood but she

was ruthlessly betrayed by her mother.

Education brings a sudden twist in Saru's life. Saru meets Manu in college and falls in love with him. He is a good student who has an air of dominance, supremacy and confidence. He is associated with the literary activities and is an active member of the dramatic society, a budding writer and a poet. Saru is impressed by his versatile personality and mannerisms. Lack of love, care and emotional insecurity in the family leads her to tie a knot with Manu. She finds him as a ray of hope. She believes that he is going to be her caring person and guiding angel who can protect her during her crisis and insecurities. She thought that her marriage with Manu would be the first step towards self independence. In the beginning of their conjugal life it was all happiness. Gradually Saru becomes popular doctor in the society. There is a gradual change taking place in their married life due to her success. Saru's rapid recognition and success in social status and her economic independence hurts Manu's male ego. The relation between Manu and Saru worsens as Saru is unable to procure time for her family. Manu puts pretence of an apparently happy husband in daytime, caring father for their children Renu and Abhi. But at night he becomes too different. His love becomes savage, cruel. He expresses his anger through his sexual assault. He hates Saru for taking the bread winner male position in the house and expresses his fury through rape every night. The climax of this can be seen when an interviewer from women's magazine comes to interview Saru and asks Manu "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well." (p200)

Her query triggers off an inferiority complex in Manu and he begins to feel apprehensive. The ego clash becomes inevitable. He punishes her for taking dominant role through his sexual sadism. She laments "I cannot I won't endure this anymore. I'd rather die, I cannot go on." (p199).

In other instance, Saru while rehearsing her speech for the women's college, and her inability to render the same speech there and it is her inability to stick on to that way of life. It is again a psychological subjugation of patriarchy over her mind. "Listen, girls... whatever you do, you won't be happy, not really, until you get married and have children. That's what they tell us. And we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. But if you want to be happily married, there's one thing you have to remember. Have you girls old fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important, very important, because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5' 3" tall. If he is earning Rs. 500, you should never earn more than Rs. 499. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn't worth it... No partnership can ever be equal. It 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." Saru rejects the traditional attitude of living in the control of patriarchy.

Saru visited three different families during the journey of defiance. But all the three families at logger heads with the authority of patriarchy. She confronts with these families of patriarchy. But she tries to relook at herself at the end. Saru at the end of the novel decides to confront her husband and decides go back to Bombay to meet her husband. This returning back to her husband does not imply her acceptance of patriarchy and humiliation. Saru as a doctor goes back to cure her husband who has inferiority complex and tries to bring back normalcy in their family life.

CONCLUSION:

Gender inequality is pertinent to both the men and women. But in this novel Saru identifies her feminine sensibility by being critical about the practices of her family. In this novel it is observed that Saru becomes an object of derision and ridicule initially by her own mother and later by her husband. She is unable to define her identity in the context of her education which is supposed to be a powerful instrument for liberation.

NOTES

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark holds no terrors*. New Delhi: Penguin books, 1990. All subsequent references are from this edition.
2. Paul, Premila. "The Dark holds no terrors: a call for confrontation" *The fiction of Shashi Deshpande*. (ed.) Pathak R.S. New Delhi: 1998. P31

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4. Pathak, R.S. *The fiction of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi: Creative books, 1998.