

\*S. Sam Israel

R & D Center,

Department of English,

Bharathiar University,

Coimbatore-641046, Tamilnadu,

India,

samsheebakcet@gmail.com

\*\*S. Kalpalatha

Department of English,

C. Kandaswami Naidu College for Women,

Cuddalore-607001, Tamilnadu,

India,

kalpalatas@yahoo.com

### **The Dark Hold No Terror: a Heroine journey from submission to assertion**

**Abstract:** The Dark Holds No Terror exhibits the condition of a woman who is victim of childhood discrimination and her subsequent decision to become a self-actualized woman by pursuing professional education by breaking the societal and family norms. This research paper presents Sarutai, called as Saru, the protagonist of the novel, her attitude of dissent over the patriarchal norms of gender roles prescribed for a woman and her journey of hardship and her struggle to strike a balance between professional and domestic role. The imbalance in role performance creates friction in the marital life and acts as a cause of suppressed male ego that result in sadism. This article focuses the psychological and physical turmoil of the protagonist and her journey into self-discovery by taking refuge and finding inner strength in herself.

**Keywords-** Patriarchy; Gender discrimination; Role performance; Patriarchal discourse; Individual consciousness; essentialist ideology.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Shashi deshpane has unique place in the Indian literary map by voicing her version of femininity through her novels. Her description of gender issues combined with literary blend enthralls her reader over the years. Her narrative shift in the depiction of women from feminine to androgynistic traits helps the reader to understand that women can move beyond boundaries. Through the theme of women lives, she is able to portray women's world and the experience they undergo physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Her consistent

emphasis that female as a unique individual and her capacity not only to survive but also to attain self-actualization is noteworthy and got wide consensus amongst reading public and also in the literary field.

Amongst her varied themes such as power politics within family, female sexuality, complication that arises due to role conflict, female experience of her body, her declaration of her right over her body takes a prominent space. Her protagonist speaks independence through interdependence of the family values. Family relationship between father and mother, daughter and mother and the conflict that arise within the family takes a central place. Her protagonists also identify themselves with the mythical characters of Indian culture. Deshpande uses mythical allusion as a literary device and she portrays the influence of culture on individuals and the internalization of cultural values and their repercussions. Her success as a literary artist rests in portraying her characters not as victims or martyrs in the journey of life but in making their self-discoveries in the process of journey of life by facing the challenges with courage and determination. The most important issue is that she endeavours to highlight the pathetic condition of women in Indian society and the conditions they sustain due to ignorance and lack of resistance by being silent.

## **II. THE JOURNEY OF SARU IN THE DARK HOLD NO TERROR**

The protagonist of the novel is shaped by patriarchal cultural discourse. Saru's mother, who is a spokesperson of the patriarchal society, socializes Saru to be a submissive girl by making her to adhere to the norms and codes and conduct of the society. Women of Indian traditional society had been colonised by the male members of the society by the instrument of cultural discourse. The Manohar code exerts its influence which emphasized the subordination of women and made restrictions to female autonomy. Saru was entrapped in the world of Indian women shaped by the patriarchal discourse which is the strategy of the colonizers language to keep women in the eternal subordinate position. Through the interaction with the family members, the subjective self of Saru evolves with poor self-esteem due to the preference given to her brother Dhurva. Dhurva receives special treatment inside the family because he is male child and Saru has to face rejection since she is a female. The discourse of her parents which plays a pivotal role in shaping a women psyche always pronounced gender discrimination

'Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy [1]

The pain of gender discrimination perpetuated by the patriarchal discourse creates in mind of Saru that she is unwanted and a liability to be disposed through the institution of marriage. The knowledge about herself which she gained through interaction with the members of the house hold and with her peer groups disempowered her and made her understand that she is in a subordinate position in the society thus ended up in the submissiveness to all the words of the parent in the childhood. "The very existence of a girl is subordinated to the fact that that she must someday please and serve, obey and sacrifice for her man" [2].

The individual consciousness of the protagonist is battered not only by the discourse but also by the essentialist ideology that is prevalent in the traditional Indian society. The strategy for subjugation was in the pronouncement of cultural identity for woman to take second position within the members of the society. The individual consciousness of the female gender has become the inferior consciousness by the play of discourse, through the modes of representation and also by her own internalized discourse.

'And later as a growing child, she had come to look at herself in the full length mirror on the door of the almirah, willing herself, almost passionately, to be pretty. She could remember saying to herself in the mirror. 'I'm ugly. I'm ugly' [1].

The rational thinking that has the power to transform individual lives which is considered to the hallmark of twentieth century has not been identified by the protagonist because of the impact of significant others that is the family members and other members of the society. They conceal the self actualizing potential of the individual by the power of words. From the inferior consciousness Saru undergoes a paradigm shift to guilt consciousness when she was accused by her mother of letting Dhruva, her brother die by drowning and subsequent blame games orchestrated in the home. This results in the experience of alienation and further escalated by Manu's ego. "Manu lets his wounded male pride manifest itself in the form of sexual sadism" [3].

Initially, she becomes powerless by having entangled herself in her own environment and she doesn't have power to influence or change her situation. She is not able to resist her passive attitude towards injustice wrought to her by her mother. The condition of

powerlessness has a tremendous negative impact on her psychology by generating a fear consciousness when she proclaims

“The terrors are inside of us all the time. We carry them within us, and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul” [1].

The experience of alienation has resulted in meaninglessness, which disempowers an individual and makes her not to identify her contribution to her work. Saru acts mechanically despite her professional success. Even from her childhood, she was haunted by fears and that developed into a fear of disintegration and envelops her with a terrified consciousness. The experience of alienation has made Saru to be in isolation and self-estrangement that lack of attachment to her profession and marriage. “Saru has inherited insecurity as a parental gift. But her disastrous experiment with marriage only escalates it. Her dreams are full of choking sensation” [2]. Saru as career women always feel that the profession provides not only economic security but also provide a sense of identity in the society. In spite of professional role and its reward, she feels isolated and unable to reap its psychological reward instead acts as dummy

“I don’t know what i did, what i said, to the other patients. I suppose, like any other well-trained animal, i was capable of making right noises, the right gestures automatically” [1].

Even though Sarita was confined by the traditional representation of women as meek and passive, she has decided to alter the representation into an assertive individual identity. Conversely, Saru’s friend Smita had yielded herself to this representation by living an economically interdependent life with her husband. The perception of the protagonist is formed by the construction of images of women exhibited in the cultural grand narratives. Despite that she emerges as new women armed with rational thinking to find solution to her problem of subjugation through assertive action of pursuing professional education. She turns the dominant ideology of gender difference that advocates women are best suited for domestic work by adapting to a new ideology of dissent within her parental home. She understands her real situation and creates a new identity from the victim of childhood insecurity to an assertive individual by becoming a physician to make constructive contribution to the society and in home as well. The professional status outside the domestic spheres which was reserved for male members to ascertain the superiority was shared by Sarita to find gender equality which was a dream of the second wave feminist. Sarita envisaged a meaningful construction of female identity from the construction of sexual identity perpetuated by the patriarchal politics which always believed marriage a destiny for

women. She emerges as a positive role model for all career women who struggle to strike a balance between professional and family roles. The popular culture of the traditional discourse has been reframed by the endeavours of protagonist by making a meaningful contribution for herself and society.

Sarita endeavours to be a role performer by having been armed with role of competence. Even though she finds hard to strike a balance between career and family role, she manages by not quitting it immediately. She transcends the traditional normative expectancy for a woman of a home-maker by validating the traditional role expectations of women. Despite informal sanctions of her mother from denial of professional education to verbal abuse, she was able to engage in role crystallization by marrying Manohar of different caste and crystallize the role of a wife, mother and a doctor. Despite difficulties in marital life with Manohar, She was able to perform her role as a wife, mother, and a physician and was appreciated as a role performer in the society.

Sarita emerges as a new woman by the role differentiation that is a capacity for action and also accretion of behaviours and sentiments. By the principle of functional differentiation, she understands that marital life is enhanced by the division of labour. 'The second principle of functional differentiation takes account of the variability in the talents and dispositions of potential results to the role system' [5]. Instead of traditional wife who cares and imprisons herself at home, she endeavours to be a professional who shares the financial burden of the family which keeps Manohar at ease. She engages in the role differentiation of functionality by her associated skills of medical knowledge which helps her to perform as a doctor and homemaking skills through which she takes care of her children "I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them .... her..... something. What? I didn't know. 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' [1].

Sarita as an active participant in the family and as a role differentiator has an innate belief in the talents of her husband Manohar in spite of his poor economic status who is working in a private college. The role of a career woman has brought contradictory effect instead of complementary effect inside the family. Sarita, a matured woman in character, was even willing to sacrifice her job in order to avoid conflict of interest with Manohar so that the self-esteem of Manohar will be enhanced. "Modern times however have upset this unbalanced gender equation with more and more women being emancipated through education and careers" [4]. Here Saru acts as an expressive leader who consciously sooth Manohar's hurt feelings of poor recognition and low income and make efforts to solve

interpersonal conflicts which Manohar displayed in the night times. By this, Saru moved towards functional group roles of the family that is to care for her children's education and family sustenance.

The behaviour and actions of the protagonist inside the family and also in the society portrayed her representational role besides her functional role in the family. Her courage displayed in the factory accident highlights her value role to save people besides her professional responsibility.

“It was the day there was an explosion in a factory. Burnt mutilated bodies poured in, a horror so vast that it seemed meaningless. Feelings were blunted by the very immensity of the catastrophe.... The world consisted of bodies from which i drew blood , bodies into which i transfused blood, bodies on which i did venesections, bodies to be dressed, bodies in agony, bodies blessedly, quietly dead” [1].

Thereafter people were in search of Saru. As a lady doctor her reputation grew made Manohar to take up deviant roles by harbouring negatively valued characteristic to inflict physical and emotional suffering on Saru. The protagonist embraces working role of a physician which enhances the representability as a woman from traditional background to reach her professional success. In spite of the deviant role played by her husband who is detrimental to sustain her professional abilities, Saru endures for a long period of time. This ended up in intra role conflict because of the inclusion of multiple roles as a women, wife and mother to her children. The Interim refuge in her parental home doesn't makes eternal separation for Saru from her husband and children. As assertive women, Saru decided to move on in spite of her setbacks and seeks refuge in her own self. “It is an individual's own life. One will have to shape as well as face the events of one's life. There is no refuge, other than one's own self” [2]. Saru endeavours in role merger as an assertive women by showing dissent to abandon the role of a wife and mother despite the reasons to do so. Moreover, she acquires the courage, belief and right attitude appropriate for the role by believing in herself and by not turning back. “Don't turn your back on things again. Turn around and look at them. Meet him” [1].

### **III. KEY CONCEPTS**

In this article, I have analysed the role theory and postcolonial key concepts. Various aspects of feminism were taken into consideration. The methodology of the research paper mainly focuses on the friction that arises within the family and also in the society when they fail to play their allocated roles. A brief analysis has been carried out to explore the incompatibility of women and man in their social, economic, domestic and political spheres. Role theory key terms enumerated by Ralph. H. Tuner pertaining to role sets, basic roles,

status roles, deviant roles has been taken into consideration and applied to the character and their efficiency in carrying out their allotted roles. Key concepts in post-colonial theory such as patriarchy, alienation, ideology of gender difference have been applied and the analysis has been carried out in the novel.

#### **IV. PORTRAYAL OF THE PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN**

Indepth examination of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* has clearly exhibits women predicament even after the empowering mission of educating, the women folks especially the educated middle class women. The attitude of dissent employed by the protagonist to break the evil clutches of the tradition bound society such as caste, dowry and forced marriage results in vain when she suffers tortures from the so called redeemer of the protagonist that is her husband Manohar. From suppression in all domestic societal spheres, the protagonist evolves as a self-actualised individual through the process of self-reflection. She doesn't handle the militant way of western women by breaking the marriage. Instead she grows by self-discovery and takes responsibility to face her husband.

#### **V. THEME OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

The prime objective of this article is to analyse the modern English fiction written by the women writer Shashi deshpande with her predominant themes of gender discrimination, women oppression, marital conflicts which arises from the ego clashes between husband and wife. A traditional women who is a victim from childhood by gender discrimination caught by insecurity attempts to transform her situation and empower herself through the weapon of education. As a career woman, she endures hardship which arises from the professional role and also from the domestic role she plays as a mother and wife. Imbalance in the role performance creates disharmony within the spouses and ends up in sexual assault and marital discord.

The revelation of Shashi deshpande about the hidden agenda of dominant patriarchal ideology which creates limitations on the woman progress even after fifty years of independence is taken into consideration. The common element which runs across all her novels especially in *Dark Holds No Terror* is that women of their own family pose a threat and hostility which disempowers the protagonist. The novel seeks to probe the postcolonial tendencies of domination, oppression, alienation which destroys the women psychological physical and spiritual progress.

“Deshpande has employed a conscious strategy of embodying and embedding issues that are reflexive upon feminism's anti- patriarchal stance in the narrative” [4]. In this novel, the protagonist was not a silent spectator to her predicaments inflicted by her own family

members at her childhood and also at the paternal home. Instead she mounts courage to fight back the evil practices of patriarchy and embraces rationalism to combat the patriarchal culture and emerge as a self-sustaining individual. She finds solution to the family problems by not breaking the institution of marriage but by regulating marriage by the process of self-discovery. Her self-discovery leads her to take total responsibility for her condition and also for her husband Manohar condition, finally decides to face the problem in order to find solution for the problem.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Shashi deshpande concludes that Saru silence and resistance to her mother's domination in the paternal home and her husband domination in the maternal home is not going to make dramatic changes in her personal and her family life. Her journey from resistance to acceptance of the human nature combined with assertion of her own rights as an individual. The refuge in the self leads to empowerment rather than blaming the circumstances and societal condition. The concluding part of the novel 'we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk' [1] illustrates the human beings irrespective of gender have innate potential to move beyond barriers and can lead a meaningful existence even in the traditional bound Indian society. The solution for marital problems lies not in breaking the marriage but facing the marriage to rebuild with confidence and assertion by being responsible. The real success of the novelist in the end of the novel is portraying the predicament and traumas of the middle class Indian women with reality.

**REFERENCES**

- Shashi Deshpande (1990), *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Penguin books India.
- R.S Pathak (1998), *The fictions of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi:Creative Publishers.
- Mittpalli, Rajeshwar and Lelizia Alterno (2009), *Post colonial indian fiction in English and Masculinity*, New Delhi: Atlandic publishers and distributors.
- Naik, K. Chanchala (2004), *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Delhi :Pencraft International.
- Jonathan H. Turner (2001), *Hand book of sociological Theory*, Springer; Hm585.H36.