

The Socio-Cultural Aspect in Shashi Deshpande “THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR”

Punita Jha

Department of English, M. R. M. College, L. N. Mithila University, Darbhanga-846004

ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande, one of the most significant women novelists of the Post-independence era justifies the problems faced by the Indian women, who are basically responsible for maintaining the relationship within the family at all cost. It is through her female characters that she highlights on the Indian socio-cultural aspects. In this article I have tried to explore all the characteristics of Shashi Deshpande as a novelist, who beautifully records the trauma of sensitive young woman who does not accept anything without reason.

“My writing comes out myself, my ancestry, the place I was born in, the place lived in, the culture I am steeped in, the fact that the writing is in English, changes none of these things” (Shashi Deshpande)¹

So far scholars and critics have known Shashi Deshpande as the most significant female novelist of the post-independence phase. This article has presented her as a novelist in search for meaningful existence within the socio-cultural context. She justifies her writings which are rooted in her own experiences and the culture and society to which she belongs. It is through her female characters that she confines herself to the customs and practices of her regions Karnataka and Maharashtra. Being a woman she knowingly or unknowingly reveals her natural concern towards the problems of contemporary urban women and their reach and identity. Shashi Deshpande identifies the problems of Indian women who have to bear the great burden of holding family and novels and sustaining relationships at all costs. The dilemma of these women is depicted through their calm and silent rebellion against the traditional values in their subjective experiences within the prevailing socio-cultural context.

Her first “*THE DARK HOLD NO TERROR*” is based on experience of some real people. In fact, she has accepted in an interview that this novel was based on her encounter with a couple. “It all starts with people, e.g.: *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*; came to me when I saw a couple”.²

Among Indian novelists Shashi Deshpande is unique in the sense that she writes about the customs and traditions of the people belongs to Maharashtra and Karnataka. She very skillfully uses local words and terms which shows her sense of belonging to the milieu she writes about. On yet another occasion, she has justified her writings as something which is rooted in her own experiences and the society to which she belongs. Like R.K. Narayan, Shashi Deshpande confines herself to the customs and practices which are confined to the regions which fall between Karnataka and Maharashtra. Her back ground as the urban middle-class Brahmin has something to do with the depiction of various socio-cultural ceremonies. All these details account for the documentation but in fact, her real success lies in dealing with average women belonging to middle class and their lives in a very authentic manner. She had of course, deemed the tag that she is a feminist writer as the term is usually understood. She is mainly interested in the lives of human beings particularly the women who raise their voice and form a community.

In the changing scenario of Post-Colonial Indian society that observed cross-currents of traditional ideals Shashi Deshpande was burdened with the task of giving the specific roles

Punita Jha

that would fit in the Socio-Cultural modes and values of the changed society. A new generation emerged embracing the changed values according to which women have a choice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries; women caught between the patriarchy and tradition on the one hand self-expression and individuality on the other hand. In 'THE DARRK HOLDS NO TERRORS' Deshpande communicates her thoughts, experiences and situation which becomes unbearable and it is time to decide she utters :

*"My Life is my own"*³

Saru is to live in spite of her miserable existence and in the novel she is referred to as *'The Guilty Sister'*, *'Undutiful Daughter'*, *'Unloving wife'* the novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in the favour of her brother. Her brother Druva dies at the age of seven and from then onwards she has to face her mother and she in fact curses her daughter.

"You killed him. Why don't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead".

As a result of her mother's constant occupation she develops a guilty conscious and at times she wonder whether she is really responsible for his death. Saru grows up and starts her struggle by acquiring education, much against her mother's will. As a educated lady, her sense of reasoning as well as questioning develops and she refuses to take the discrimination for granted. Gradually as she grows up, resentment and hatred drive her to leave the house and prove herself by getting admission in a medical college. Unfortunately she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parent's wishes. Her mother disapproves of her marriage because the groom belongs to a lower caste and has no social status. The dialogue between mother and daughter is quite instructive:

"What caste is he? I don't know!

A Brahmin?Of course not

*Then cruelly His father keeps a bicycle shop"*⁴

Saru once again revolt and runs away to get married. This happiness is short-lived and Manohar her husband gets jealous of her name and fame as a famous actor. Manohar degenerates in esteem since he is unable to face the reality of that she is the bread winner and he a parasite. Her inability to find time for herself and her family, husband and children upsets her conjugal life. She wants to get out of the place but this is not possible for her. Conflicts and tension destroy her marital life and she (Saru) realizes that love has oozed out of her life.

Paradoxically her decline in conjugal relationship is counterbalanced by her success in the profession. The emasculated husband tries to assert his masculinity by becoming violent towards her and behaves like a brute. This burden of double duties is yet another disadvantage and a paradoxical situation which the working women in a middle class society have to face. Against such a complex syndrome, it requires a strong mental balance of nerves to adjust. The strain becomes too much, culminating in disenchantment, accusation and inevitable suppression.

It is at this critical moment she hears the news of her mother's death and goes back to her parents' home quite emotionless. She feels uncomfortable everybody gives her strange looks what actually shocks her most is the disappearance of the spirit of affability in the house where she was born. As she is unable to communicate to her father or anybody she has a feeling of guilt and this leaves her quite sad and speechless. In a very strained and articulate language, she expresses her feeling in these words.

Punita Jha

“My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother was alone because I deserted. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood”.⁵

Even her father, instead of showing sympathy turns his back pretending to be engaged in doing his domestic chores in the absence of his wife. The wheel finally comes full circle and she decides to compromise with the situation and the novel on a very small note of hope. Her delayed stay results in the dispatch of a letter from Manu signalling his arrival. This releases her pent-up emotions and she becomes quite confused but in her heart she nurses a hope that someone would offer her proper advice and support. In a highly introspective frame of mind, she begins to have various feelings, sometimes resorting to fantasy and sometimes reacting to reality while thinking of her own fact she sometimes begins to assert herself and defend her decision but the very next moment, she begins to hope for a miracle cursing that her fate may not be fall on other women. She develops hatred towards her mother because she had always come in her way and had often discriminated between she and her brother.

This novel beautifully records the trauma of sensitive young woman who does not accept anything without reason. Apart from presenting the clash between tradition and modernity, this novel records the resentment and frustration of Saru who has finally learnt to sue for reconciliation.

*“The whole development of the novel can be observed in four phase namely, flight from reality, frustration, submission and ultimately an attempt to reconciliation”*⁶.

REFERENCES

1. Deshpande, Shashi, language No Bar, Vol-10, in The Sunday Times of India, 10th May 1992, p12.
2. Vishwanth, Vanamala: An Interview With Shashi Deshpande: A Woman's World Literature Alive December 1987:8-14.
3. The Dark Holds No Terror, Deshpande Shashi, New Delhi, Vikas, 1980: 220.
4. Ibid . p89.
5. Ibid . p198.
6. Sandhu Sarabjit: “The Dark Holds No Terror’ The Novel of Shashi Deshpande. p26.