

A Study of Marital Rape in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors.*

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Our society is merely based on the relationship of man and woman. Shashi Deshpande is also much aware of changing man-woman relationship in the modern society. But she especially underlines the predicament of those helpless and tortured women who are not carefully handled by their callous husbands after their marriage. It causes failure of marriage which leads to frustration and frustration ends with insanity, alienation, murder suicide, etc. In India, a woman after marriage is supposed to be concerned only to the household of the house, feels delighted to this wife cut affairs for a successful marriage. Husband, the boss of the house, feels delighted to cut his wife off from the main stream of life because of his traditional bent of mind. Whenever a woman dares to step out of her confine, she has to struggle against the fixed image of women in the minds of men.

In a male-dominated society the position of a woman is precarious. Down the ages they are being suppressed in the name of traditions of the society. Formerly, the Indian woman was forcefully denied to do various activities by the custodians of traditions who never thought in doing the same works. This casual attitude of men against women causes for them constant suffering and miserable life. Marriage is the other name of adjustment on various levels not only done by either husband or wife but both are expected to sacrifice something to make their marriage successful. Unfortunately, when marriage remains unsuccessful, a woman is always assumed to be responsible for it and it is not an easy task for a self-respected woman to believe herself responsible even when she is not responsible for it. Sometimes in frustration a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide and becomes a murderer.

Shashi Deshpande, who holds in great worth as an Indian English woman novelist, is very much aware of the vulnerable conditions as well as secondary status of the Indian women. The reason behind their sub-graded status in the society, according to Shashi Deshpande, is long practiced socio-religious traditions, which place them under secondary sex. Moreover, illiteracy of the women, their weak and submissive nature and their love and affection towards husbands and children are also responsible for their degradation. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. Marriage, in India, is more a social contract than an emotional bonding. Most of the marriages are arranged by family members by matching their social and economic status, caste and religion, ignoring completely likes and dislikes of the partners, especially the girl.

In Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Sarita (Saru) is the main protagonist. This novel portrays the secondary position of the woman in her parental house as well as her husband's home where the male ego overpowers all other considerations in the relationship of marriage. Sarita was in love with Manohar

(Manu) and she was trying to win his heart, she made conscious efforts to achieve her end. She tried to win his heart by giving him gifts about the first of which she reports: "... I met him alone later and offered him my small, foolish gift" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 53). Further references to *The Dark Holds No Terrors* will appear as page numbers preceded by *DHNT*). She also marries Manu against the wish of her parents, particularly her mother, severs the umbilical cord as an act of defiance, proving her strength, power and self-reliance.

After marriage Saru becomes a doctor due to her sincere efforts while her husband remains far behind in profession career. Saru the protagonist has greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar. This leads to the victimization of Saru in the form of the sexual harassment, inflicted upon her due to the inferiority complex that her husband is suffering from. Manohar, her husband, was the master of the family before she got recognition as a doctor. Earlier she was known as the wife of Manohar but now after the explosion in the factory people recognized Manohar as the doctor's husband. The explosion provides her an opportunity to prove her worth and assert herself, though unconsciously. But this shatters their family life. Manohar

thinks Saru's success as his failure. He has no guts to appreciate wife's advancement and assist her. Rather she dislikes her with the result that Saru becomes the subject of exploitation by her own husband only because he is not ready to tolerate his wife's superiority in profession. The husband whom she submits her entire self, tortures her because he is the victim of inferiority complex. Her husband vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism.

Sarita does not dare to oppose excessiveness of her husband. Rather she tolerates it silently and feels bad inside. Saru has a tough time during this period because Manu basks in her glory during the daytime but ill-treats her in the nights. Manu's indifference to her becomes intolerable and he uses sex as a tool of revenge and final estrangement. With her responsibilities increasing outside home, she recoils from Manu's love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as a rejection of himself. Manohar has realized that his wife's being a doctor has made her superior to him. The oddness of his tone indicates that he is not happy with the fact and may do something to assert himself. Another incident of the kind occurs when one day Manohar and Sarita reveal to a friendly couple that they are going to Ooty in the summer vacation.

On hearing this the friend's wife says to her husband: "If you had married a doctor ... you'd have gone to Ooty too" (*DHNT* 111) suggesting thereby that according to her Manohar is able to afford to go to Ooty, in spite of the fact that his salary is not fat, because his wife is a doctor and has a handsome income. Naturally this must have made Manohar feel humiliated and must have made him aware of his inferiority to his wife.

Yet another incident of the kind Sarita narrates occurs when a lady reporter for a women's magazine asks Manohar: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but bread as well?" (*DHNT* 35-36). On hearing the question Manohar's self-respect must have been hurt because according to the established practice in India earning one's bread is the duty of the husband rather than of the wife. This question makes Manu even more conscious of the reversed positions held by them. That night Manu attacks and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated and with increased brutality every time he is reminded of his inferior status.

Shashi Deshpande portrays many women who have no identity of their own. There is Vidya, the incipient women's liberator who finds gender bias even in Shakespeare's

treatment of women. Shakespeare has a typical man's view of life—the man at the centre, the woman always on the periphery. “But it's not just their roles. It's the way he made the woman's personality merge into the stronger colours of man's personality” (156). Later Vidya turns a housewife as her husband does not like the idea of her going on the stage. “Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male. But what did you do when you failed to please?” (163). After marriage a girl is never allowed to do things she wants to do. She has to do what her husband wants her to do. A husband even changes the name of his wife. A girl surrenders herself so completely to her husband that she does not mind sacrificing her identity to please him.

Through the Saru-Manu relationship Deshpande raises the question of marital rape, which the Indian tradition does not recognize. She shows that rape within marriage becomes the ultimate means by which the husband subjugates his wife. The theme of marital rape in the novel was inspired by “a couple, the uneasiness or tension between them. And I knew that the man was not doing as well in his career as the woman was, and I connected the two.”(Holmstrom 244). Thus the novel ends

with the certainty that now Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu's frustrations. She derives pride in her professional success and decides not to feel guilty for someone else's failure. A confident Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge she readies herself to confront Manu.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande's pre-occupation with man-woman relationship has led to her analysis of the institution of marriage in this age of transition. Analyzing from a woman's point of view, Shashi Deshpande points the uneasiness of woman in the traditional role, which expects her to be an embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, a monument of patience and devotion and a selfless bestowed of love and affection.

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