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**Alienation in Shashi Deshpande's
The Dark Holds No Terrors**

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Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the best feminists in India. Deshpande's novels are based on gender biased discrimination, man-woman relationship, women's psyche, alienation and dissolution. The objective of this paper portrays the psychological problems that a career oriented woman encounters in her life. This paper deals with the problems of a middle-class career woman and her marital constraints. It also pictures the position of women in Indian bound traditional society. Sarita (Saru), the protagonist of Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is projected as a victim of childhood and insecurity. Parental love is necessary for the growth of a child. But the perverse attitude of Saru's mother are the root causes for her alienation. Therefore the study aims at probing into the theme of alienation and how far it is relevant to this present day world.

Note: The following are the abbreviations used after quotations: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* – DHNT; *The Family child in a Family Setting* – FCFS; and *Shashi Deshpande's Novels: A Feminist Study* – SFS

'Alienation' refers to the feeling of disconnectedness from values, norms, culture even from their environment. A dictionary of literary terms defines alienation as "the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind". Encyclopaedia Britannica defines it as "the state of feeling estranged or separated from ones milieu, work, and products of work or self". The word 'Alienation' is derived from the Latin word 'Alienato', a noun. In Greek origin, the words 'alienate' and 'alienation' mean 'self-alienation' (*anomia*) and 'alienation from society' (*anomie*). Alienation is caused when an individual deviates from their environment. This feel in the individual creates a sense of loneliness, freedom, finally it leads to nothingness in life. Especially a man in modernity is unable to relate himself to his environment, to his fellowmen end the events and has become an indifferent bystander. As a result, he doubts his own existence, such a depersonalized and miserable condition of man is said to be alienation.

Many feminist writers deal with the theme of alienation. Anita Desai in her novel *Cry, the Peacock* explores the theme of husband-wife relationship. Kamala Markandeya in *A Handful of Rice* presents hunger and poverty as the causes of alienation. In Bharathi Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*, the character Jasmine experiences alienation because of migration. In Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, the sense of alienation is expressed through the protagonist, Munoo. R.K. Narayan depicts the layers of alienation of modern life in man-woman relationships through his work *Malgudi Days*.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the contemporary Indian women writers in English who has handled this theme in her novels through the characters of Saru, Jaya and Indu. All these three characters undergo self-alienation and their lives depict the condition of women in Indian bound society. By examining this theme, the writer shows that the experiences of disappointment, dissention and loneliness and conflict, between mind and body, between social conformity and individual aspirations that are common to all. She also says that all human beings irrespective of

class, caste, religion, language, age and social status are vulnerable to these realities of human experience. She not only explains the theme but also gives solution by making her characters to find meaning and harmony in life both with his inner self and outer world.

Shashi Deshpande uses the theme of alienation in her novels like *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time and Small Remedies* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in which she exposes the feeling of loneliness, breakdown of communication and gap between what one desires and what one actually gets. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, masterpiece, is a first published novel. Deshpande has depicted a true picture of an Indian educated woman who is caught between traditional ideas and modern world. The novel is about woman's self-quest and struggle to free herself from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a tale of the introspection of Saru, the protagonist. She is a most popular doctor. She loves Mohan and marries him against the will of her parents. Manohar is also a lovable and caring husband and affectionate father. But slowly the popularity and success of Saru as a doctor makes him restless and ruthless. He becomes intolerant of her wife's success and achievement.

At first, she cannot recognise what is wrong, and still she tolerates it. She believes that she can find her place at her father's house. She goes there with a hope of warm welcome. But her father receives her without showing pain or pleasure. So Saru endures a process of introspection and becomes aware of her position in the house of her parents and her husband. The dearth of emotional bond leads her to self-realization. Eventually, she personally comes to her father's house to bring her back with the promise of a fresh beginning.

Deshpande describes the predicament of the middle-class educated woman in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She portrays herself through the character of Sarita. Moreover, she admirably presents the feminine agony and anguish through the character of Saru. Deshpande has portrayed feeling of alienation in the form of disappointments, boredom, self-abnegation and machine like activities. It also finds expression in the form of over assertive and even aggressive manner.

In case of Saru, she feels alienated by the discriminatory behaviour of her mother and she is in the grip of insecurity and estrangement. As Anadalakshmi opines, "The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's fixture, creating a deep symbiotic bond." (FCFS 71)

Usually, in an Indian traditional family, the desires or wishes of a female child are scarcely bothered. Instead, male one is much cared and noticed. When Saru passes her school examination, she wants to go to Bombay to do medicine, but her mother refuses by saying,

'But she's a girl.'... and don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a proper, and will she look after you in your old age? Medicine! Five, six, seven....God knows how many years. Let her go for a B. Sc.you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over. (DHNT 144)

The disproportionate love of Saru's mother towards her creates inferiority complex leading to alienation. Dhruva's death acts as a main reason in separating Saru from her parents. Her mother misapprehends Saru and accuses her for her brother's death which is apparent through her

hysterical outburst: “You did it. You did this. You killed him.” “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (DHNT 191)

Moreover, men pressurize women towards alienation in different levels. This makes womanhood to feel insecure. But protagonists being cultured, educated and modern can neither accept it as natural nor can they initially fight against it. This contradiction goes on aggravating in their brains until some sudden crisis turns their lives upside down and sets the process of self-introspection. Finally this results in alienation. Saru is one among the victims. She attains the stage of dissolution by the domination of male oriented society. This is proved by the words of Manu as follows,

Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old days to her sons. Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God.
(SFS).

On the other hand, the novel brings out the truth that the role of family is very important in shaping the mind and attitudes of an individual towards self, society and life. The family in the social system is the one which gives emotional security, self-respect and self-worth. But if the family fails to do it then it leads to individual’s detrimental and demoralising growth and creates feelings of rootlessness, loneliness, confusion in a person.

As a writer, Deshpande has a special ability to look into the depths of human heart and give expression to the feelings buried in heart. Her novels are primarily the revelations of the inner consciousness of a character. For this purpose, she has mainly used the technique of stream of consciousness as the mode of narration in her novels. The use of this technique enables the reader to understand and appreciate the complex mental states of her characters in an authentic manner.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a completely different novel in the aspect that it breaks out the myth of man’s superiority and the myth of a woman being an epitome of all virtues and ethics. It is based on the problems experienced by a career woman, a new phenomenon in Indian English novel. One can view the character of Saru representing the middle-class working woman in modern India. She rebels against the customs and traditions but eventually tries to compromise with the prevailing reality at that time. This is widely because of the fact that she is passing through a transitional era. Thus the whole progress of the novel can be perceived in four phases, namely, flight from reality, frustration, submission and ultimately an attempt to reconsolidate.

It is obvious from the analysis of men and women in Deshpande’s fiction that alienation takes different forms in the marital relationships. It presents that the psyche of these men and women, so firmly conditioned by patriarchy, hardly allows them to connect themselves to each other in a mutually satisfying and fulfilling relationship, which could give them genuine feelings of love and belongingness. It assigns women to the position of woman in society which is termed as inferior is not a biological one, but it is constructed. As Dhalayat (2012) shows that it is civilisation which determines what is feminine and how a woman should behave and perpetuates the oppression of woman. The social position and roles that civilisation have assigned to woman have kept them in an inferior position to that of man secondary position by elevating man to the dominant one. This age-old inequality and discrimination have conditioned the psyche of man so much that he is unable to shun his ego and step down from higher pedestal to the level of equality with his wife.

Women too, are not able to come out of their myth of secondary status and do not feel at par with their male counterparts. This result in her failure to establish the required communion and moral, personal, and emotional growth of partners is rendered impossible by the role moulds in which man and woman are cast by their socialization. Imprisoned in their prescribed patterns of attitudes and behaviour in marriage, they fail to achieve the experience of oneness with each other at emotional and spiritual level. It is for these reasons the characters of Deshpande appear to suffer feelings of alienation in marital relationships. But she is not against the institution of marriage. Rather is she of the opinion that a skillful balance should be struck by both man and woman between their roles in marriage and their independent identities.

Further, the predicament of the women like Saru still prevails especially in villages and in orthodox families. Woman's quest for her true identity is a wild goose chase in the male-dominated society where the laws of Manu are blindly followed for the sake of protecting worn out traditional customs without having a better place for her on humanitarian ground. Hypocritical!

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