

CHAPTER - II

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

Shashi Deshpande's first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors, published in the year 1980, presents an unusual character "Sarita, whose predicament is her inability to accept her husband for what he is, on the one hand, and who does not receive the kind of love and understanding she craves from her parents, particularly the mother, on the other."¹

The novel begins with the unexpected arrival of Sarita who is a doctor, now estranged from her husband, in her parental home. Her father (Baba) is surprised because she had abandoned the house 15 years before, after marrying Manu who belongs to another caste against the wishes of her mother for which she had cursed her.

Dhruva (Sarita's only brother) was afraid of darkness and he used to find quite refuge in Sarita's bed. That poor boy never grew up to know that 'the dark holds no terrors' and that the terrors are inside us all the time which frighten us when we least expect. Dhruva was full of terrors. He died by drowning even before his thread ceremony. Hence Sarita's mother had cursed her that she could have died instead of Dhruva. Sarita used to get nightmares till she joined Medical College. She used to hear the voice of poor Dhruva calling :

"Sarutai wait for me, I am coming" ..(p.165)

Sarita had thought it was her last battle to defy her parents to marry Manohar, but as the novel begins, she returns where she finds refuge in her father's home when her mother is no more.

"For Sarita: the loss of the eternal female dream of finding happiness through man (which comes rather too soon in her life) drives her to seek refuge in."²

Soon after she returns from her husband, she finds cold comfort in her parental home. She is unwilling to ask for help for it would be self-humiliation. She comes to know from Madhav (who is staying in the house with her father after the death of her mother) that her mother had been sick for a year who had refused to take any medicine. Now she remembers how powerful her mother was as she remembers the curse of her mother still echoing in her ears. She had thought that she would find some comfort in her father's home and the skeleton (past memories) is completely locked in the cupboard but the very thought itself makes her to recall the past events. When she had heard the news of the death of her mother, she never grieved but was rather angry because she had determined to make mother realise her folly; but unfortunately her mother left the battle

unfinished and took the victory with herself. Therefore, Sarita thinks that it is foolish and ridiculous to hold anything against a person who is not there. She feels that her mother's death has deprived her of some satisfaction of a possible retaliation.

But now she finds some comfort in her parental home without fear. All aches and the bruises have disappeared and she thinks there wouldn't be any question of going back to her husband's house. And yet when new tortures (what she feels) have ceased, the old ones (past memories) have come back, as if in exchange of one with another. She recalls her childhood she had thought that nobody liked her, nobody wanted her, she was an unloved child. When she loved Manu - her mother was enraged and said:

"You won't be happy with him, I know you won't. A man of different caste, different community. What will you two have in common" (p.90)

After they got married, they had lived in a room and though it was inconvenient, it was like heaven for them. Sarita had a dream of her own when she married Manu. But now that dream has shattered and she is staying in her parental home and leaving behind her children and patients. She remembers bitterly how once her mother had resented:

"I know all these love marriages, It's love for a few days, then quarrels, all the time. Don't come crying to us then." ..(p.62)

Those words still echo in her mind. Actually there is no conflict or anything serious. Yet something ^{has} gone wrong and she is frightened.

After many years of marriage she finds that her husband is a sadist. Her husband is attacking her at night and it is intolerable agony of night. She feels to tell him about his abnormality at night and the sexual torture that she is feeling but she hasn't courage to say anything about it because Manu is found always sober and pleasing asking her whether she had slept well. Sometimes she feels like making divorce. The very word 'divorce' frightenes her. Sometimes she thinks about Boozie (her Professor in Medical College who is responsible for her career advancement). But Boozie would not fit into her scheme of things as he is impotent. There was a time when women used to accept everything as their luck or fate without struggling and they believed in it. She knew that her grandmother never complained though her husband deserted her. She thought it was written on her forehead. She does not believe in such orthodox ideas like fate. Here in the house (parental) she

is not a woman who can be described as 'two-in-one' who, in the day time wears white coat and an air of confidence, and at night a terrified, trapped animal.

She receives letters from her children which make her angry and resentful. She feels that nobody can dictate her for their needs but she is to attend her own needs. It is comfortable to stay in this house. (But the guilt (as she had taken her brother to a muddy water lake near mango grove.) She had left him there, all alone and he drowned in the muddy water lake) reminds her and she remembers her brother and she utters:

'I should not have gone there myself,
Dhruva could not have died'.

She thinks that sense of guilt is the punishment for one childish fault. 'Just one act of dis-obedience ...isn't the punishment disproportionate to the act?. Her mother had been cruel to her after Dhruva's death. Baba consoles her that they never blamed her for Dhruva's death and her mother never mentioned it before her own death. So Baba asks her to forgive her mother. Baba wants to know what has gone wrong with her husband as he has received a letter from Manu in which he has complained that Sarita was not responding to him.

At last she pronounces that 'her husband is a sadist' thinking that Baba would take her side. That happened after she gave an interview to a girl who wanted to publish it in Women's magazine. That girl asked a question to Manu too:

'How does it feel when his wife earns not only butter but most of the bread as well?' ..(p.182)

She is earning more than her husband - but that had not been mattered till then. As she tells her father, she was attacked by her husband like an animal that night. She says:

'I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this man hurting me with his hands, his teeth, his whole body ...(p.182)

'Never knew till then he had so much strength in him'

'I couldn't fight back. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure' ..(p.182)

She never asked Manu about this. She thought perhaps she must have dreamt it. May be nightmare.

She feels that she is suffering because of wrong done to Dhruva and her mother. She wants Baba to help her. After

so many yers, she comes to know why Dhruva was coming to her to escape from the dark and how he must have felt when she told him to go away. Just when she feels that it is a complete failure to come to her parental home, she receives letters from her son Abhi stating that Manu is coming to visit her. She is advised by Baba to meet her husband and not to avoid him. Sarita realises that it is she who has wronged Manu and not Manu to her. So she wants to go away without meeting her husband. Once even she had a terrible thought of committing suicide but never liked to be called a coward. As she says:

"My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood." ..(p.198)

She broods gloomily that she is the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife ... all persons spiked with guilts.

Finally the author hints about the possible reconciliation between the rebel protagonist and her husband. The only alternative is to:

"Go back home, woman, there is no escape.

A woman who protests against her

depersonalisation and annihilation and who walks out of her home to live and be human is made aware of the futility of her action."³

There is no escape except going back to her husband's house if at all she wishes to lead a happy life. That's:

"For her world is her husband, her family, her children and her home, hence the out-standing and highest calling of woman is always that of wife and mother."⁴

"A woman's place is with her husband."⁵ It means woman's efforts are only to please her husband. In other words without her husband her life is incomplete.

Thus the individual crisis is the focal point of the narrative of the novel. It is the female consciousness that is at the centre of the crisis. Does the female have to accept her traditional role ^{of} model of wife and mother or rebel against it? What are the consequences of the rebellion? That seems to be the central problematics of the novel.

It is not a forced marriage by which one can say that the protagonist is not able to adjust herself with her

husband. It is the rebellious attitude of Sarita to find freedom that makes her to marry Manu; but something has gone wrong with her and she finds her husband is a sadist, and thinks that she cannot lead happy life. Nowhere suggested that Manu (her husband) is assertive or objected her decisions at any time.

Sarita could have helped herself to bear the torture of her husband (which she thought) instead of leaving home. The protagonist is the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife - who wins sympathy of the readers for sometime but she loses this claim very soon as the reader:

"realises that if things had gone wrong for her it is because of her own myriad complexes bred largely by her feminist outlook."⁶

From the very beginning Sarita is 'Schizophrenic' - (split personality), - the world of reality and the world she could create by her rebellious attitude are different. The second significant aspect of her personality is that she is guilt conscious - a sinner driving towards expiation. Finally, she thinks that her punishment is disproportionate to her fault. It is from this step she moves towards resignation to her lot. Indian woman is supposed to be a paragon of resignation howsoever rebellious she may be, and generally,

"A married woman is a legal infant under the guardianship of her husband, infant who could never in his life time attain adult status."⁷

Indian woman is prepared to accept reconciliation in all the situations because she is not like her counterpart in Western countries whatever may be her economic conditions.

Thus Uma Alladi has pointed:

"There is, no doubt in the works of the Indian English women writers the image of the silent suffering pativrata. But she may not be totally oblivious to her position; may be she is conscious of her situation and nevertheless, accedes to it or she may even rebel and perhaps finally give in to the age - old dictum, the necessity of man's umbrage."⁸

No doubt, there:

"Some Indian woman rebel against their present positions and try to assert their individuality."⁹

But as compared to the western women, Indian women have less courage to assert their individuality. This may be the reason why that the Indian woman is called as paragon of resignation and therefore this image of Indian woman is reflected in writing of Indian women writers. To quote Ragini Ramchandra:

"From the final hinting of a possible reconciliation between the rebel protagonist and her husband (despite its somewhat forced appearance), it could be argued that the novelist is after all in the mainstream of Indian tradition."¹⁰

The unity of the novel consists in the fact that all issues are resolved in final feminist attitude of accepting fate. Thus there is thematic and structural unity in the novel. Regarding the portrayal of character K.R.Srinivas Iyengar says that "Shashi Deshpande presents an unusual character Sarita, who defies her mother to become a Doctor, defies her caste to marry outside and defies social conventional by using Booze to advance her career."¹¹

Sarita is the central character of the novel. The crisis of her identity as woman is the main preoccupation of the author. Her rebellion and self-assertion in the matters

of education, marriage and career are the stages which drive her to such a stage where she has to resolve the crisis either by taking the extreme step of divorce or accepting the traditional solution of reconciliation. She opts for the latter. Indirectly, she accepts the traditional role i.e. the feminist role.

The story is narrated on two levels. The present and the past. And this is narrated through the First Person 'I', and the Third Person that is, from the point of view of an overview of the past - objective - and neutral. This technique is appropriately used to bring about an objective, introspective, self-understanding on the part of the protagonist of the novel.



NOTES AND REFERENCES

All the references to the text of The Dark Holds No Terrors are from the first edition published in 1980 by Vikas. New Delhi.

1. Ramchandra, Ragini. 'Review of Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors. Literary Criterion. 21,102(1986)-20.
2. Ibid, p.20.
3. Uma, Alladi. 'To accept or Rebel', 'The woman as Wife'. The Literary Criterion. 20,4(1985).
4. Dey, Esha. 'Women as Object: The Feminine condition in a Decadant Patriarch' The Literary Criterion, 20,4,(1985), 12-Millet, Sexual Politics, 1971, Abocus, 1972, pp.164-165.
5. Uma, Alladi, 'To accept or Rebel', 'The woman as Wife'. The Literary Criterion. 20,4(1985).
6. Ramchandra, Ragini. 'Review' of Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors. Literary Criterion. 20,102(1986)- 20.
7. Lenta Margaret. 'Jane Austin's Feminism: an original response to convention', Critical Quarterly, 23,2(Autumn - 1981) - 27.
8. Uma Alladi, 'To accept or Rebel', 'The woman as Wife'. The Literary Criterion. 20,4(1985). pp.79-90.
9. Ibid, pp.79-90.
10. Ramchandra, Ragini. 'Review' of Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors. Literary Criterion. 20,102,(1986) - 20.
11. Iyengar K.R.Srinivas. Indian Writing in English, 6th Edn. 1962 ...pt. New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, Pvt.Ltd.,1986 ...p.758.