

Unlocking the fetters of Anguish: An Existential Approach towards Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a reflection of life and the various experiences which encompass the same. It is equivalently outstanding and questionable to say that one must write from experience. It is believed by Donald Barthelme that, "The aim of literature ... is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart" (117). Modern fiction has come a very long way from those early subtle and obvious beginnings, but the inclinations that make the modern fiction writers are by heart probably not different from that of the primitive story tellers. Based on this concept it is obligatory to perceive Deshpande's writings in the intangible construction that embraces philosophic contributions characterized in terms with regards to major themes of existentialism.

An enormous consideration has been given to the major aspects of Deshpande's novels such as Feminism, self-alienation to self-realization, narrative techniques, determinism and will, an image of the modern woman, emancipation, and modernization, *anxiety or anguish* is quite different from the rest. The present paper Sarita's anguished nature in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Deshpande aims at studying the novel by applying one of the major themes of existentialism to relate Sarita's psychic journey of selfhood. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* represents the woman's exploration of self-identification, right, and freedom from an existentialism point of view. All through her life she had remained only cornered and suffocated by her aspiration and yearnings to emerge successful at the cost of anything. Thence she decides to persist and emerge with the acknowledgment and awareness of being on its own. *Anxiety or Anguish* is the term suggested by most of the modern existentialist writers to illustrate the concept of being on its own, and it could possibly signify the how unique human existence actually is, and thus the fact that it cannot comprehend with itself in terms of other types of existence.

Hence, this paper deals with Sarita's travels from darkness to light, and abiding torment having entwined the means of reflection, self-analysis, and self-realization, she surfaces as an assured individual, confident and entirely in command of herself, reasonably more optimistic and capable of conceding life just as her male fellow companions would do.

Keyword: Anguished, Darkness to lightness, Self realization & Being on its own.

Existentialism, in the very speculative framework, has been depicted by Deshpande in this novel by the means of Saru; the pivotal character and narrator who is agonized to constitute her own individuality. This novel depicts the story of Saru who feels like an ambushed animal, captured by her own culpable feelings. The novel represents a medical practitioner who is vanquished as a daughter since the affinity between her mother and she is quite a bit constrained. She also now enlightened with the fact that becoming is nothing but efficiency which infers making life viable, reasonable and pleasant, and com reasonable

contented for others, and so she resolves to opt and selects the field of medicine and claiming that her career is her strength. This is how she is accomplishing command and the identification of becoming a doctor.

The plot of the novel as it progresses and unfolds elucidates the remorse and guilt she has been bearing for her brother Dhruva's death. This feeling of guilt is not alone as she also blames herself for deserting her parents. G. Dominic Savio remarks: "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment"(61). Sarita the pivotal character of the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* also is subjected to endure a similar agony and traumatization, and is seen to stand up to reality and, towards the closing of the novel, perseveres to live in a world over-shadowed by the male gender which is not have an easy way out for women. This central character neither yields to pressure by surrendering nor does her attempts to run away from confronting the problems she encounters, but with immense zeal and vigour accepts the challenge on her own.

- Saru, the pivotal character in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* performs within her the melancholic effects of gender discrimination.
- Secondly, she has the deep-rooted comprehension that she was always an unwanted child.
- Thirdly and most tragically Saru suffers the bruises of physical trauma on her psyche.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is the tale of matrimony on the rocks, for Sarita is a successful doctor during the day time, however at night, she becomes a scared and trapped animal in the hands of her husband. Manohar, her husband is an English teacher in a small college. The novel begins with Saru returning back to her father's home after fifteen years, a place which she had once proclaimed that she would never come back to. She is no longer able to bear with the carnal cruelty and perversion of her husband. The rest of the novel is an account of what Saru reminiscences and also a concise disclosure to her father about the trauma she had to endure. Her aspirations and dreams seem to face a choking sensation; the nights are a terrible nightmare. Loneliness becomes an important aspect of her and she seems to be leading a dual life. For the world, she is a competent doctor but in reality, she is nothing but a tormented woman. She is going through quite an unconventional disposition of life which is only pretence and deceit in the entirety.

Deshpande personifies the wedded relationship of Sarita and Manohar. While in her father's house, Saru snatches the opportunity to think about her relationship with her husband, her children, her parents and her dead brother, Dhruva. The rest of the novel is nothing but a recollection bygone memories and an honest declaration to her father with whom she had rarely interacted until then in her life. It is significant to consider that when she arrives at her father's house she seems to feel like a stranger, as strange as how Sudama felt standing at the gates of the palace of Krishna and Rukmani. However, as expected, she encounters a cold welcome arriving there and so she seems to regret her coming back home, "Why had it seemed so important to come here, and at once?" (17).

The journey of life is not a luxurious path for her, but it has had its very own share of the impediments of existentialism too, as all since her childhood she had to endeavour hard to accomplish what she wanted; her mother was resolved to be against fulfilling her each and every wish; she leaves to Bombay to study medicine against her mother's will, and then over there she marries a man outside her caste. As observed by Premila Paul: "Saru is highly self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others"(12). She rebels against her parent's wish and elopes with Manu and then their marriage takes place. In spite of the fact that Saru marries Manohar quite opposing her parent's desire, she does not feel any grief or regret at this detachment but her traumatic childhood background still seems to threaten her. She hardly believes that Manu is her rescuer, her passionate hero who rescues her from the horrible maternal home. She had assumed that her problems were nullified after marriage, but it gets aggravated by the male chauvinistic attitude, beliefs of the society impacted the husband-wife relationship. Manu and Saru's marital life appears on the outset to be quite peaceful and equalized. This is clear when Manu confesses "When we're together, its heaven, wherever we are" (38).

After her marriage, Manohar and Saru begin to travel not only in varied directions but even in contradictory directions. There is nothing but an understated divergence with Manohar for he was a person who had relished a happy childhood. He was a man of ardent, a creative writer, a public speaker, director of plays and an inspiring and admired personality cult. Ever since his marriage with the novel's central character, the protagonist Saru, he begins to enjoy a superior financial command and respectable social status. Both of them also enjoyed a harmonious relationship until the point of time when Saru was only his wife. But when she turns out to be a renowned lady doctor, disaster begins in her marital life. She recalls, "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (42). Shubha Tiwari states that,

Helplessly entangled in the racial and social prejudices prevalent. Saru is conscious of the fact that she is superior to her husband in her qualifications, social status, mental caliber and in many other respects. But in her heart of hearts she repels against it. Being an unwanted child to her parents she has inherited a psychology which does not allow her to displease anyone. (91)

The narrator Saru, at the beginning, feels complete and satisfied in her marital life, however in an otherwise dependent and controlled by the world, the actual calamity begins to occur in her marital life when there happens to be an explosion in a factory. She adorns the role of an expert lady doctor. The social acknowledgements and appreciation that she had gained during this time resulted in a block in her relationship with Manu. "nodes and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored"(42). But as soon as she presumes the role of a lady doctor and that the fact that he is recognized as her husband, the equation begins to alternate, he becomes an egoistic, jealous, sexually aggressive husband. He is unable to receive or tolerate the fact that his wife relishes a better social status and respect gradually begins to demolish their marriage.

The ego conflict is brought out to light after her interview for a magazine a girl, who arrives at home, out of innocence naively, questions Manu: “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?”(200). At that very moment, Manu, Saru, and the interviewer laugh over it and wash it away as if it doesn’t matter. But later that same night, Manu pronounces his feelings by assaulting Saru like a wild animal. The very next morning he appears to be reasonable and very normal, unaware of his own actions. Saru depicts her agony by claiming that “He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this ...this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body” (201).

All the celebration and merrymaking of their love found in marriage seemed to dispense itself as soon as she had acquired identity and recognition as a doctor. Their marriage begins to crumble under the stress and heaviness of Sarita’s impending victory and recognition in her profession. Until now, Manu seemed to be a young man and Sarita his bride. But now she was the lady doctor and he was her husband. Gradually Manu is subjugated to callousness, he is unable to consent to people acknowledging and greeting her and neglecting him: “the same thing that made me inches taller..... made him inches shorter” (42). It became at the most unacceptable for Manu as Saru secures and relishes a superior status in the society. It progressively impels her to uncover that her freedom is actually exposed in suffering and apprehensions. As the novel progresses, Manu's male ego attempts to enslave Saru which leads to disintegration between them. Sarita is now an individual and not a dependent anymore. She is now strong enough to withstand the hassles and ordeals in life all by herself. Her self-identity is no longer in the shades of her male counterpart. Everything seemed to now become understandable, lucid and translucent at the rear of their wedded relationship. The breach begins to get broader and extensive between Saru and Manu every day, as it begins to reveal itself in Manu’s brooding and obstinate within himself

These perverse and barbarous tortures and sufferings postulate her to yearn for the sensing of her own freedom and identity. The world and the surroundings around her and his role and purpose in her life become very much unimportant and pointless. He no longer is relevant in her life she feels mortified and embarrassed. She indicates her displeasure and temper by saying:

And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and I hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfilment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (133)

Saru’s reputation in her role as a doctor makes her demean her husband who feels ignored and infringed. He is captivated with this kind of a situation in the middle-class life style. Saru’s professional demands keep her away from Manu for longer hours and she is able to reach home late at night for which he broods and laments over. Manu’s self-pride and egos are bruised by her superiority and success and as he feels inferior to her. This makes Saru think intensely. She observes that she has all possible grounds to break away from her

marriage with Manu which seemed to be contracted for reasons other than that of relationship, family or love. This was a marriage of convenience which was devoid of genuine love. She says to herself: "I have to orient myself. I have to be more sure, more certain" (69). Saru, having strived to establish herself as a doctor, upon achievement begins to realize that she is leading a thoroughly brand-new life. She considers herself to be a completely restored and changed person and also realizes that there is nothing of her old self is left in her anymore. While at her father's place, Saru begins to slowly lose the consciousness of the felinity inherent in her. "Once I found myself cutting a piece of paper, telling myself... these are bits of my mind falling on the ground.... And the fear in me that my mind had indeed gone. That it was lying there in strips on the ground" (22).

Saru was unable to face his barbarous behaviour and is not prepared to face her husband. At one point of time, she determines to leave him. It was her father who advised her to lead her life with determination. This liveliness from her father builds in her total confidence to meet her husband and to boldly encounter the situation. The concluding comprehension of reality becomes palpable to Saru, as she, on the actual ground of being a pragmatist, uncovers the fact that isolation is nothing but a channel of deterioration and downfall of one's self and a predicament from which a human is ineludible. Saru's father, who was an elementary and facile man, flounders to figure-out and seize the essence of the words and terms like-sadism, love, cruelty, etc. Her father aids her to recoup her confidence. She reacquires the understanding that how in her mission to free herself from these apprehensions and she has solely traded one role for another, and in this very procedure, she has become "Of being just a ventriloquist's dummy, that smiles, laughs...." (22).

This newly evolved woman in Saru cuts through a whole lot of procedures of conversion and transfiguration which indicates a transition from the subjugation to freedom and self-assertion. Saru is now prepared to challenge and withstand reality. Having sensed this now she yearns to affront and dare Manu. During her stay at her father's home, she begins to reason with her own self and in the ultimate ending her readiness is to go up against reality. She begins to arbitrate to not becoming a mere chimney stack, acting as a channel through which Manu could expel and force out his resentment and irritation; this makes her existentialism emanate in the personification and epitome a new woman with an aggressive charisma and individuality. It is this very comprehension and awareness of absoluteness and actuality which prepares Saru to observe the world in an apparent form. Saru's enduring opportunities of introversion and rumination into her marriage life forces her to further comprehend that her professional triumph had exterminated Manu's spirit. With this mindset, she waits with conviction to challenge her husband and decides to go back to Bombay. Actually, this act of going back to her husband is not to endure the humiliation. As R.Mala claims by telling that,

The novelist's credo is to take refuge in the self which means that self is not metaphysical but psychological. In other words, Deshpande means that the heroines will in future assert themselves; they will no longer allow their 'self' to get deceased. By this assertion of the self. (56-57)

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is an attempt to the limelight on Saru's character when she is prepared to come up with her husband and this capacitates her to abolish all other terrors of existence. As the discussion seeps through towards conclusion the Researcher attempts to say that Saru has indeed overcome the darkness of tradition and past. She does not follow the Manu's code of direction which insists that the woman should be under the control of father during the period of her abstinence, the husband in her youth and sons during her old age. In an interview with Prasanna Shree, Deshpande opines, "Saru realizes that her problem has been herself. She had been blaming her mother, her father and her husband and she realizes that the problem has been herself. She is going to change herself now. So where is the compromise?" (145).

As a very benevolent and compassionate human being, Saru has not only portrayed the perplexity of a woman in the aspect of the patriarchal society but also propounded all satisfactory solution. The epigraph itself contains the very essence of the message and also a solution to all human sufferings: "You are your own refuge; there is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve." --The Dhammapada. As per the statement was given by P. Venugopalan in "Bildungsroman: Shashi Deshpande's Version in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as follows: "The refugee fleeing from mysterious terrors of life has, in the end, to turn inwards for refuge" (21).

Finally, the researcher investigates the protagonist in terms and themes of existentialism and claims the fact that Saru, Deshpande's protagonist, stumble upon all the three fragments during her existence. In the very beginning, she seems to be like the young woman who is dreadful, aggressive, bewildered, protesting and resisting any structure of domination. But once she gets married to Manu, she is converted into an apprehensive, going behind the dictates of the society and the roles as prescribed by culture. Lastly, she is able to reach a sort of selfhood that directs her to a more protected, consequential and self- determining life. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is not a story of an oppressed woman, or abusive marriage or monstrous men.

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