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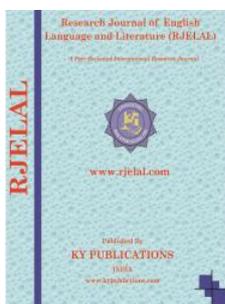
## SEXISM IN ' THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS'

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### ABSTRACT

'The Dark Holds No Terrors' depicts the story of a well educated and self independent woman Sarita who is in search of her self identity. She is a woman of self respect and strength. The heroine and leading character of the novel has been ignored and neglected during her childhood as her brother Dhurva was always given priority over her. Being a girl of dark complexion, She was never well treated by her parents. Her mother used to taunt her. Her birthday was never celebrated while Dhurva always enjoyed his birthday. When Dhurva drowns, her mother considers her responsible. She even says, " Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead". Even after marriage, she faces gender discrimination. Because of her hard work and strong determination, she became a doctor. She struggles throughout her life.

Keywords: Depict, Priority, Complexion and Discrimination

'The Dark Holds No Terrors' depicts the story of a well educated and self independent woman Sarita who is in search of her self identity. She is a woman of self respect and strength. It reveals how a woman survives in male dominated society through Sarita (Saru). She belongs to a middle class traditional family where woman has to do all household work, take care of children, husband and other family members. She has to inculcate moral values in children. As woman came out of traditional commitment, they contributed to the nourishment of family and society.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are women centred. She depicts the status of women in a male dominated society where they have to survive from dilemmas of patriarchal society. Her protagonists struggle for their self identity. They find themselves in such a critical situation where they face gender discrimination and suppression of traditional norms of patriarchy.

Linda Alcoff holds that " feminism faces an identity crisis: the category of Women is feminism's starting point, but various critiques about gender have fragmented the category and it is not clear how feminists should understand what it is to be a woman."

Since beginning, Women want to get freedom from traditional social biased set up. They want gender equality, care, love, affection, privacy, conjugal and domestic harmony in the male dominated society. Saru was not in harmonial relationship with her mother. She used to say that she would suffer throughout her life, the same Saru had feelings for her mother. Saru was of the opinion that she could achieve anything else in her life. Nobody can become obstacle in his way. Savita thinks that, " If I have been puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of

proving my mother right.” She does not want to live any pressure and suppression . She decides to raise her voice against ill-will and gender discrimination.

Saru has suffered through her whole life. In childhood,Savita ‘s mother held responsible her for brother Dhurva ‘s death. She dislikes Saru so much that she does not want to see her even on death bed. The opening part of the novel describes biased behavior of Saru’s mother. She also believes in traditional and patriarchal society . Saru faces gender discrimination at home.

As Beatrice Forbes – Robertson Hale observes,” Feminism is that part of the progress of democratic freedom which applies to women.”

Saru’s mother is a typical Indian woman who starts hating after the accidentally drowning of her son Dhurva. Saru is alienated now in the family.She feels a sense of insecurity now.After marriage also, she faces gender discrimination as wife . Her husband used to torture her sexually. Saru finds all her answers at her father’s home . She thinks that answer of all his problems is to raise voice against injustice and prejudices prevalent in surrounding and society.Shashi Despande describes dis harmonial mother- child relationship in her novel beautifully. Saru is alienated and estranged girl in the family. Her parents have great love for Dhurva. His birthday is celebrated with all whistles and bells while Saru ‘s birthday has never been in their mind. Life becomes even more worse for Saru when her brother gets drowned. Her mother held responsible Saru for his brother’s accidentally drowning. Her dark complexion and to be a girl becomes the cause of her under estimation and discrimination.Saru wants to spend all her life at her mother’s home but she denies.Home is the first school and considered a right place for overall development of a child. But for Saru, it becomes a hell.It snatches the self respect of Saru. The mother of Saru has always double standard one for Dhurva and other for Saru. There are examples of gender discrimination at home.

The conversation between Saru and her mother shows this.

Don’t go out in the sun.You ‘ll get even darker

Who cares?

We have to care if you don’t.We have to get you married.

I don’t want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can’t

And Dhurva?

He’s different. He’s a boy.

Biased behaviour of Saru’s mother pinches her. Her mother is a traditional woman who believes in set norms of society. She is of the opinion that grown up daughter should behave accordingly. It is her responsibility to make her daughter aware of this fact. During menstruation period, her mother frightens saying bleeding will be for years. She is prohibited to enter into temple and kitchen. She has to eat in different utensils and sleep separately during those days. Saru really does not understand why people consider a woman impure during menstruation period. Changes in body during the time of puberty makes Indian girls panic and fearful. She is depressed and in dilemma during her menstruation period and says,” I can remember closing my eyes and praying....Oh God, let it not happen to me.Just this once and no more.Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn’t happen.”She has gone through horrible experience during menstruation period. She thinks that being a girl she is not well treated and kept under pressure .Her brother is preferred over her .

The ill- treatment of Saru’s mother creates a sense of hatred and bitterness in her mind .She says to her mother,” If you ‘re a woman,I don’t want to be one. Gender discrimination and biased behaviour of Saru’s mother forces her to leave home and seeks admission in medical college. She has so much hatred for her mother that she says,” you don’t want me to have anything ; you don’t want me to do anything.You don’t even want me to live.” When Sarita returns to her father’s home, she is not given due respect . Though her mother is no more inspite of that her father does not want to go against the will of Saru’s mother who never liked Saru. Being male and head of family, he never took

interest in family matters but enjoyed patriarchal male rights.

"He had always been so much a man, the master of the house, not to be bothered by any of the trivial of daily routine." Saru is also ill-treated by her husband who always considers her a thing of sexual gratification. He never respected her feelings. She even complains about her husband to her father who takes less interest in her problem. The whole novel depicts the ill treatment of Saru's mother towards her. She always discriminates between Saru and Dhurva. After the death of Dhurva, she never liked Saru. She even says that

"Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless.."

Dhurva drowns into the pond. It hurts his father so much that he did not eat the food cooked by her wife. The dominance of male has been so much in the novel that every female character feels panic, isolated and discriminated whether it is Saru or her mother.

Saru's mother even considers it a, "Punishment to be deprived of a chance to serve her husband."

Saru has been in dilemma at home. After taking admission in medical college, she feels a sense of satisfaction. She faced opposition of her mother even after becoming doctor and getting married. She becomes doctor and gets married with a man of her own choice. P Ramamoorthi says, "Women in order to get freedom choose marriage as relaxation from restrictions imposed by parents and adopt the role of wife in hope of better prosperity."

Saru falls in love with a college mate and gets married with him in hope of better life against her parents' wishes. Even after marriage, her life does not change much. After marriage, people greet her, it pinches Manu her husband. Manu doesn't digest the respect owned by her wife. Her male ego hurts. He considers woman as an object of sexual gratification. It hurts Saru as a woman.

"The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible body. And above me a face and I could not recognize."

Shashi Deshpande has been successful in showing gender disparity, male dominance and patriarchal setup through Saru and Dhurva, Saru and Manu, Saru and her parents. Manu the husband of lady doctor Saru doesn't have his own identity. He is known as husband of Doctor Saru. It hurts male ego of Manu. He has been failed in male dominance over Saru. He shows his dominance at night through sexual molestation. Saru has been a sufferer throughout the novel. She leaves her parents home to seek career and husband's to search for self identity. What Saru realized is that, "A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband."

In one of his interviews, Shashi Deshpande tells to Stanley Carvalho, "Every woman has right to sympathize with women. Being a woman, I find myself sympathizing with women. Whether it is man or woman, everyone has its own perception for viewing gynocritic writing. I find lots of men unsympathetic and women sympathetic to my writing work."

Saru returns to her parental home hearing the news of her mother's death. But she still is not welcomed. She is not in good relationship with her husband. Manu comes to take her back, she is disturbed initially but finally she realizes that she has to face all the hurdles of life herself. I have to live for my own happiness. I have to develop skill to face darkness. Saru realizes that The Dark Holds No Terrors if she faces it boldly.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has been successful in exposing gender disparity, male dominance and patriarchal setup through Saru and Dhurva, Saru and Manu, Saru and her parents. It is clear that woman has been a sufferer since long time. They have to suffer at parental home, in-laws home and at work place. Saru has been shown as a sufferer at her parental home where her mother always discriminates between Saru and Dhurva. Saru even faces the same situation at her in-laws home that put her in dilemma.

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