



Dilemma of Tradition and Modernity in Shashi Deshpande's the Dark Holds no Terrors

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Abstract:

This paper explores the undercurrent dilemma of Indian educated middle class women caught between the traditional values that are inculcated in them as a core essence of their personality and awareness that has aroused due to their experience of the outer world and the potential to contribute in the fast growing world around them. Tradition refers to the customs, beliefs and cultural practices that are passed down from one generation to the next generation. It is the collective wisdom and modes of behavior of the ancestor's cherished and is observed by the present generations. Modernity as opposed to tradition refers to an outlook that is generally future oriented and forward looking. Movements for abolition of slavery, voting rights, women rights and universal suffrage are the natural outcome of the abandonment of traditional belief and practices in favor of a more democratic and equalitarian political and social system. Modernity refers to the contemporary behavior or way of doing things. It is fresh, new way of looking at life. Indian culture is a blend of traditional values and the modern spirit.

Keywords: *Dilemma, Modernity, Social conditioning, Tradition*

Indian writing in English especially fiction has entered in the world of literature in the first half of the nineteenth century. The early novels were based on the themes of society, upheaval of the particular period and also deals with the theme of social problems like the plight of young widows, liberty and self rule were the chief concerns of the writers. The initial years after Independence deal with the economic and social turmoil due to the partition. The Independence movement also inspired the women to come out of their shelter and the field of education has opened doors for them. Consequently women's writing has started its journey. Women attempt to portray their inner conflicts and introspections in fiction. In the field of English fiction and new era of writing, Salman Rashdi, Vikram Sheth, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai have earned international awards and honours for their contribution to English literature. After 1950s, instead of exploring the social problems, the novelists were then found to be interested in the individual's quest for self, their inner world. Many writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi entered into the field of psyche. Many women writers have enriched Indian fiction in English through their remarkable contribution like Kamla Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Santha Rama Rao and Shashi Deshpande. They have written of Indian women, their predicament and conflicts against the background of contemporary India. Shashi Deshpande is a celebrated Indian woman novelist who has great sensitivity for the welfare of women. She has presented the silent and submissive women victimized by social conditioning, trained to fit to the mythological ideal women role models. The unuttered, silent problems of women from their unexplored regions of minds are clearly portrayed in her novels. Her deep insight into woman psyche and perfect understanding of Indian society brought her international recognition has created a place for herself in the literary world with writing various fictional works. Her novel is a journey of an individual to create space for oneself and attain selfhood.

However Deshpande's reputation rests on her mature novels. Shashi Deshpande's primary focus is to represent the world of women - their struggle in the context of the modern Indian society. They are in a state where they neither defy traditional patriarchal norms of society completely nor can ignore their desire to establish their identity. Her women characters attempt to realize and preserve their identity not only as women but also as human beings. Deshpande's women characters have strength of their own and in spite of adversities and hostilities they remain uncrushed and finally succeed to achieve a peaceful balance in life.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru is representing the middle class working woman in modern India. She revolts against the traditions and old values but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. Saru has passed through many critical situations which affect her psyche as a result she becomes rebellious. Her mother's discrimination between her brother, Dhruva and her. This discrimination leads to hate her mother and in a way she starts to hate all the old traditions. Childhood is a very important period in the formation of character and for the emergence of a value structure in the life of a human being. It is often found that the girl child is ignored and marginalized by traditional patriarchal structure. She marries with Manohar against the wish of her family. It is her revolt and rejection of traditions and family. She becomes successful doctor. Her profession creates disturbances in her married life and she runs away from her sadist husband and returns to her father. There she finds an opportunity to analyze her foot prints that she has left behind in her past. Through introspection she finds solution of her life. She confesses everything that she has kept in her heart from long period of time before her father and ultimately realizes that total rejection of her past and family can never let her succeed in her future with modern perspective.

Shashi Deshpande focuses on the fact that traditions plays vital role in individual's development and in the development of society because it decides the path and pace of the progress of society. She writes about tradition and modernity that when we look at the human history we can note out that it is a continuous process of change. Sometimes gradual transformation and sometimes swift changes take place. It is an inevitable process that old replaces the new. This is a perfect concept of family in which the whole family doing their journey in this transforming world with due respect of each and every individual's existence. Saru represents in the novel the growing breed of modernity, a new tradition. While her mother and Manohar represents the values and norms established by a patriarchal society. Saru rebels against the traditions without realizing that unconsciously she is going to play the same role which she likes to rebel against. The protagonist's revolting approach against old traditional concept of family is very much deep rooted in her childhood. Saru recalls the incidents from the past how she has been treated second to Dhruva. Her mother used to tell her that she was dark complexioned and should not go out in the sun otherwise she would become darker which can create hurdle in the search of suitable husband for her.

“Don't go out in the sun. You'll get 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, Dhruva ?

He is different.

He is a boy” (The Dark Holds No Terrors 40).

Saru's hatred and anger gets intense when she attains puberty. She dislikes the experience of her woman hood. She resents the traditional practice in her orthodox home when she is segregated like an outcast during those three days. Thus rejection by her mother during the early formative years caused

her fractured and tormented childhood. She begins to express her feeling through the acts of defiance which arouse from her hatred against her mother as a young girl, and then as a child. She hated her, she wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer.

When Kamala learns about her daughter's marriage plan with Manohar, the first question she asks to Saru is about Manohar's caste and she surprises to know that Manohar belongs to low caste. She does not like Saru's choice of Manohar as her husband. Her typical question shows deep rooted orthodox attitude. According to the traditions in Indian marriages, the bride and groom are of the same caste so she is surprised to know that Saru has decided to marry a non-Brahmin. Saru opposes the parental pressure and feels vicious satisfaction in going against her parents will.

The novel is all about her escape from reality, her frustration, submission and finally an attempt to reconcile. Saru's childhood problems with her mother directly focus on the clash between old tradition and new tradition. In Indian culture girls are being trained to be submissive, docile and silent and only these feminine traits can be judged whether the girl is suitable to the society or criticized by the society. Her journey starts from 'Quest for self' to 'Quest for balance in life'. Her traumatic childhood has directed her towards rebellious nature. As her mother's attitude was traditional, she wants to rebel against them. This novel represents that whether tradition and modernity are two opposite polarities or they can be balanced to make the concept of family perfect and whole.

Saru rebels against her family in a way; it is a revolt against her mother who represents old traditions. Being an educated woman she thinks that she will prove to her mother that even if she is a girl, she can achieve success but her attraction towards that modern world with Manohar proved to be an illusion. In the novel Saru in first phase revolt against the family and its tradition and goes to search identity with modern concepts but though, she achieves success; she does not find any contentment and lacks to establish understanding with her husband. Finally she returns to her father and the process of introspection took place. She realizes that at one point of time how she looks upon her family and how much wrong she was in their interpretation.

Finally she can visualize clearly, and she looks towards her dead mother as mother and consider her father as a guide with whom she had never communicated her inner self before. At the end she succeeds to take a balanced decision that she gives priority to her profession which gives her identity along with she also accepts her family and her role as mother and wife. At the end of the novel *Dark Holds no Terrors*, Sarita learns to accept compromise and look for a solution in life with an open mind.

How traditions and beliefs can put its impact on relationships between parents and children, brother and sister, husband and wife. Here Shashi Deshpande wonderfully explores the journey of the protagonist from rejection of traditions and attraction to modernity to her acceptance of both at the balanced level. And all their transformations affect the concept of family. But it shows how the concept of family can exist in the battle between tradition and modernity. The social norm of giving the male child more importance than the girl child affects the mind set of Saru as a child. She hates her brother Druva because he was the only centre of attraction and sole receiver of mother's love and care. Her starve for attention can be seen in.

"...I must show Baba something, anything to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting on his lap. I must make him listen to me, not to Dhruva. I must make him ignore Dhruva" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 220).

Saru develops hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. Shashi Deshpande has presented the gap in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words it is a conflict between the old and the young: the tradition and the modern. It is a story of rejection and ultimately

acceptance of reality and above all revolt and compromise. Saru is brought up in traditional atmosphere but the education has changed her attitude and makes her a changed person with a rebellious attitude towards traditions. As an educated person she does not accept anything without reason. Her mother forces her to stay within four walls of the house. She even does not like to send Saru in medical college for study. Here we can see that mother puts restrictions on her daughter without even thinking that the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. On the other part Saru also revolts against her mother's authority overtly but traditions in reality. Tradition and modernity can survive together and when it happens the new prospective come out on the surface. Shashi Deshpande writes about this how traditions and modernity are inevitable part of our life.

The first idea that I would question is: are modernity and tradition two polarities, two distinct positions opposed to one another? If this is how we regard them, then certainly it would seem that they can never co-exist, and that a very positive effort needs to be made to bring them together. (Sree P.1)

Traditions are inevitable part of human history which is given to the next generations but at the same time by observing the past, we can find that by the time each tradition changes its face sometimes gradually or sometimes swift change occurs. The whole development of the novel shows four stages: revolt against tradition, frustrations, submission; and ultimately an attempt to reconsolidate. At the end Saru stops avoiding her husband and said,

“All right. So I'm alone. But so's everyone else... but because there's just us, because there is no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we are sunk” (The Dark Holds No Terrors 220).

Finally she prepared herself to face the reality of life. The family is a foundation of human history and a very little change in the role of woman seems to threaten the existence of the family which follows certain values and traditions. Shashi Deshpande has tried to show how a person can walk on the path of modernity by holding the hand of tradition in one hand. The novel does not limit itself to woman's predicament and woman's quest for identity and space as an individual but it also shows how contrast between tradition and modernity deals with each other and how it impacts on human relationship within the family. Shashi Deshpande has wonderfully conveyed that life is not pure acceptance or pure rejection but it is integration of both.

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