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Woman: A Victim of Society (Echo from Shashi Deshpande's novel - "The Dark Holds No Terrors")

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Abstract

The growth and development of Saru, the only individual in this novel, from an immature person to mature person, and her relationship with her mother. The predicament of Deshpande's protagonist, as victim of martial relationship. Which is common in society. Saru's educational, social and religious forces which shaped her life and also the struggle of women to achieve their goal.

Introduction

Society characterizes woman in various ways such as warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. Whereas family life and the work pattern convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. These are the basic ideas upon women. Her position in the world keeps on changing with an ever ending process. Finally deserves any freedom from the living world. The male dominated society does not want her to be equal to man. In spite of educational opportunities and economic independence women are surrounded by domestic injustices and the evil customs of our society. Even though they are given more responsibility than man, but the society wants to treat woman in the same way. The young girl Saru becomes the victim to meaningless custom and the materialistic ambition of selfish husband, Manu. She wants to escape from the drudgery of her life from her husband. Not just drudgery but brutality both physically and mentally. "Saru's marriage home becomes the very prison she had escaped" (Ramamoorthy 121). She is soon disappointed with her husband Manu. Though Saru professionally a doctor she can no longer be a passive silent partner to Manu. As she 'grows up', all the material in the world becomes more clear to her. The knowledge of her womanhood had been brutally and gracelessly thrust on her. Her fantasy, her dreams, fact made her conscious that she is not a girl still. From that time onwards she becomes a woman to be chosen by upper human male. The love she receives from her husband, Manu is so protective and satisfying. She considers him as a hero who cares for her life. Manu was once a member of Literary Associations, his huge figure attracts many young girls, and Saru is one among them. He shows more interest on her, with his love Saru emerges as a well-known and successful doctor. All her life she works hard to succeed in her profession. After well establishing herself as a lady doctor, her life begins to crumble. She thinks that she has glamorously defeated Padmini and has won Manu's love. Saru's love and respect for her husband, Manu is infinite. Only later she recognizes Manu to be a failure. Her husband, Manu is not a great admirer who sees his wife Saru as a second rate person. He has no concern or mercy for his wife Saru and this becomes clear when her profession begins to highlight. Although Saru loves Manu, she feels insecure at the thought of marriage. It is not out of separation from her parents, but out of fear of sex which plays a great part in her life. The discussion of sex seems to be a dirty word and dirty habit in India. "The problem in the Indian sexual panorama is that sex has been branded as a taboo and the discussion of it in public is avoided" (Mala 53). The protagonist Saru in Deshpande's novel also faces the same situation in her sexual relationship with her husband, Manu which totally disappointed her life. It is from this, the protagonist begins to hate her husband, and her attitude towards her husband begins to wither. The reason is simple, Manu, Saru's husband cannot tolerate people greeting at his wife by completely ignoring him. He can't express it openly but says out of irritation. "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of her soon" (42). She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. Whereas now the situation changes. "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (42). Her profession has terribly destroyed her marriage. Now she realizes that marital life is nothing but "two people brought together after cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generation might continue" (Mala 55). Saru very soon realizes that her husband Manu is a sadist. The brutal action with her husband seems to be a terrible torture. It makes the protagonist to suffer from frequent sexual humiliation. To free from all the brutal actions, Saru finds extra-marital relationship with Boozie and Padmakar Rao, even this doesn't fulfil her goal. Saru found no happiness or fulfilment in these relationships. It was only an escape route for Saru from the tension of married life. "The woman seeking a crutch has finally, to fall back on herself" (Dinesh 200). Later she accepts life without questioning, caring only for the home they have made together. She criticizes the inactive nature with which she is made to live. The word "Love" becomes more conscious to her what else she could call it the word love which she thought of how she had longed for. For her the word

Love ... how she scorned the word now.

There was so such thing between man and woman..., futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called 'love'. It's only a word, she thought. Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away. (72)

Now the concept 'love' becomes clear to her. That it would not bring pleasure to her. It is a treacherous word in which she becomes the part of it. Saru thought that the word love in reality will bring happiness instead it brought her suffering. She is unable to pinpoint the change in him. His way of thinking is that she is something more than him (Manu). The protagonist is prepared to go back of being nothing.

Manu wants to enjoy with Saru's money but doesn't allow her status to exist. She is prepared to sacrifice everything to make her life happy, and to free herself from him. She reveals her inner conscious.

Tell him what he does. Tell him you can't stand it any longer,
Tell him you're prepared to sacrifice every-
Thing as long as he leaves you alone. To sleep
alone in a room, to be by myself on a bed,
to be untouched, unhandled. (80)

She is aware that the relationship between an Indian husband and wife is sacred and it is one that is permanent and so Saru hesitates to talk to her husband Manu. This is what one finds in Indian woman. She says "I could do nothing I can never do anything. I just endure". (201)

The protagonist Saru thinks that she should have spoken about it the very first day, but she didn't speak. She is aware that it takes only minutes to destroy what has taken years to build. And so she decides to remain calm for the sake of comfort and security. This incident underlines how marriage often drives people into possible and awkward situations.

She perhaps does the role of wife to perfection. The protagonist knows that the husband is like a sheltering tree against whom a wife does not rage at home whom she cannot laugh (Dharker 108). She has tried many a time to discuss about her problem. Rarely she had the idea of divorcing him. The cause for her victim is her mother. If her mother hasn't neglected her from her brother Dhruva she wouldn't have come here. If her mother hasn't been so against with her husband Manu she wouldn't have married and she wouldn't have been suffering.

Manu her husband wants to satisfy his ego and thirst for sex. Saru frustrated with the same and so she defies the code word of marriage, which washes away all her happiness. Saru seeks many constructive ideas for the betterment and welfare of her life. Both the house meant for Saru the same – to ruin her life. She feels that her husband Manu is prejudice over her status. He doesn't want her to be named as "lady doctor" whereas she is pride over her presence. She says:

There was nothing for him. He almost totally ignored. (42)

Manu is unable to hear the importance of Saru as a "lady doctor" by ignoring the term of house wife. "The act of love takes on the perversity" (Dharker 108). Manu is an underpaid Lecturer, while Saru is well paid. He produces his failure by showing his brutal action. With all such happenings in the house she has taken firm decision. I will never dominate. I will never make my husband anything as she did. And yet it happened to them. It puzzled, sometimes it frightened her, giving her a feeling that there was something outside, herself driving her on; that her own will counted for nothing (86).

Saru was not in the idea of dominating her husband like her mother. But Manu takes this as a chance to show his sadist activity. It is the only place where he can show his dominating power. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body (112).

It is clear that Saru's problems are endless and now that same kind of fragmentation is not possible. Though suffering and pain seems to be nothing for Saru. They are already the past events and so it meant nothing. She thought that suffering and pain will not turn back to her, and that they are ended in her parental home. She thought that it is impossible that such things could happen to her. Her way of thinking is that sufferings happen only to girls in movies and in books, but not to girls like her. Unable to bear all the draw backs in her life, the wife prepares herself for leaving her job and remain a mere housewife. But he would not allow it to happen as he got used to comfortable living. I said I want to stop working.

This reveals the agony of Saru, her hatred towards Manu is carried out till the end of the novel. The problem starts more when the magazine woman asks her husband Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (200).

Saru lost all her hope and therefore she is prepared to go home to stay with her father, hoping her father will solve her problem. But the unchanging manners sadden her. The protagonist finds herself shrinking from his love. Indeed her conscious often reminds her that the fault is hers. This is because Saru is tired always too tired after her long day at the hospital. The burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force misbalancing the marital life. He was always the same towards Saru showing his love and concern. When he hears that his wife refuses him, he is disappointed which he rarely had the heart to do so. She undergoes a great conflict in her heart. Because:

'I'm tired', I repeated, ... Forget about the
... That night he. Behaved like a young man with the girl he Loves. (81)

The urge to confide in someone, to talk to someone is growing in her. Saru knew that she is all alone, with a kind of cold hopelessness, that it is not a dream but real. For Saru there is not even god. At last with an effort greater than Saru had ever made in her life. She manages to control her own self. She had hoped that Manu had gone away cringed with shame. Whereas Saru had been in the same mood, angry but, the same face smiling at her the next day saying "Good morning' Saru slept well".

In succumbing to his torture, Saru in reality seems to proclaim to the world that it is better to get away as soon as possible than to surrender to her husband who behaves rudely. Most of her devotional duties towards Manu and children Abhi and Renu are unattended. The children too do not get proper love and care from their mother as she returns late in the evening. I found him Sitting with a brooding expression on his face that made my heart give painful, quivering little jumps. (78)

She feels both the housewife and the doctor's profession made her lead an imbalance marital life.

With the feeling of imbalance she is prepared to be separated from her husband both mentally and physically. After her mother's death she makes her visit to her parental house. Returning to her father's residence does not feel comfortable. Everything looks strange though the things remain in the same place.

With all such imagination the protagonist finds that her father's voice and his way of entertaining is completely inverse. Looks as if he is engaged with some strange person. She feels that her father is not showing any interest towards her. Rather showing his interest and care to Madhav who has occupied her brother Dhruva's place. Like her mother she has no room for her own self. Years back Saru had a happy home of just a room with Manu. It was a time when the external world did not matter at all. Being away from her own house she feels more uneasy at home. These are the problems which often remind her. She hesitates to discuss the same with her father. She knows she is the creator of all the sufferings.

Her own plans never gave her any satisfaction. When her mother was with her she never paid any attention to her words. Only after facing disillusionment in her life now she realizes that she should have listened to her mother's words and more over if it had been an arranged marriage her parents should have had sympathy on her. She recalls the duties of the parents.

If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? (218)

The complex problem left unsolved to her, and further it widens more in the present. The feeling of pathos created upon Saru is unforgettable. Saru indicates that the root cause of the tragedy is her own mother, because she cursed Saru for she married against her will. The words had affected her and also the evils of the social order prevailing at the time. Saru decides to shed her hypocrisy, she pours out all her inner feelings to her father. The confession in which she had made brings her relief. She admits. After several years she meets her father, thinking that some sort of concern will shower on her. The time never permits her to discuss her problem with her father because Madhav is always seen with her father. Suddenly a change comes over him when Saru tells her father about her husband Manu. Father who has forgotten Saru, but even then reformation comes in a flood and the old lonely father who has a lot of understanding and sympathy promises Saru to help under any circumstances.

According to Kamini Dinesh the old father tells Saru that he cannot support her. He supported her earlier because she had made up her mind and knew what she wanted to do. Now at present he can suggest only a better way to lead a life for her (203). Whereas her wants are different she doesn't want to be reunited with her husband Manu any more. She not merely decries but also defies the cruel treatment meted out in her marriage life. All she wants is to get rid of him totally. Saru is unable to control herself and she bursts out her feelings.

My wants are simpler. To sleep peacefully the night through.

To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension. Not to think, not to dream Just to live.(27)

Saru begins to live an immortal life by deserting her family members. She wants to wind up her tragic beginning. The thoughts of her children often come to her forefront like sending her daughter Renu to school and covering bedsheets for her son Abhi, and feels disappointed when her children refuse to remain in the house. Saru a married woman is not like other women who is bound by tradition and myth to keep her silence intact and present this face of marital bliss to the world which is a burning problem for educated women to face in a contemporary society (Dinesh 198).

The protagonist finds no enthusiasm in her life, it looks as though she is made to stand in the midst of the road. So she wants to find her own way to salvation and prepares to runaway hoping to find some peace. As it is said earlier Manu is seen as a loving person towards Saru. He helps Saru at times of difficulty, and even helps for her graduation. When Saru hears that professor has failed in his effort to reconcile her parents. At this situation Manu gives his support to his wife. He says: I always imagined no mother could ever dislike her own child (197). When Saru deserts him he writes to her, But Saru completely ignores him. She opens his letter only when her father enquires about the letter. The letter unfortunately informs her about his arrival to take her. The girl hesitates to tell her husband know of her presence in her father's house. Her father tells:

....'don't do it again...Don't turn back again on things again. Turn around and look at them .Meet him'. (216)

These loving words moved her little and she remains terrified with her father's advice. Still there is a call for Saru 'Lady doctor' from the patient. If Saru separates from her husband she will never be happy in society, because she deserted her family members. Moreover in society, they consider a woman to be complete only when she is with her family. According to the novelist point of view Saru has gained the assertion of will and confidence in her she learns to trust herself (Ramamoorthy 126). Saru knows that she is needed in the society, her husband, her children, her father, above all she is not just a wife, mother, daughter, sister but so much more than that she is a 'Lady doctor' and so she asks her loving father : Baba, if Manu comes , tell him to wait'. I'll be back as soon as I can (221). The realizing fact comes only at the end of her ordeal, the protagonist realizes her mistakes. She wants to comfort Manu and doesn't want to desert her own children. It doesn't mean that Saru is willing to surrender her body to her husband by listening to her father's advice. For she says that she would not remain a doll or puppet but she would take decision on her own and affirm her being. It is to which she is willing to face any hardship in life to show him that she is a 'Lady doctor' and he (Manu) is a failure.

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