

## IDENTITY CRISIS IN “THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS”

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Indian English writers have made significant contribution in the realm of fiction. With ‘the Big Three’, modern Indian fiction in English has struck deep roots. They began to explore and interpret India in its various aspects. The novel is like a perennial quest of reality. The main aim of the novel is the delineation of individual’s quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms. A sense of identity is a constant sustaining creative force in a writer. For the modern man, the search for identity has been one of his chief preoccupations. Identity and its quest refer to the spiritual odyssey of the modern man. When an individual finds himself in the fullness of his capacities, he is satisfied with himself. All his needs, roles in the society, his sublimations, his personal and cultural achievements – together can give the impression of an individual with established identity. If all above factors are negated, identity crisis will result. It marks deadening life alienation of individual from social, natural and cultural aspects of life. The novel is a story of a simple, self – righteous middle class woman a lady doctor. Her ambition, simplicity of nature, eagerness to meet life in all its facts have been portrayed beautifully. She has the desire to be ‘somebody’ to have a purpose in life, to understand the meaning of life. The connecting link between her love for life and her inability to find happiness in life is lost in the areas of darkness.

The novel is divided in four parts. it is done purposefully as each part deals with one particular aspect of Saru’s problem. The first part describes the crisis when Sarita – Saru comes to her father’s house. The second part is her realization – her feeling that quest for identity is really necessary. The third part is the deepening of the crisis for her. She compares her experiences with that of her friends and gets a shocking realization that they have accepted life as it is. She has even lost her awareness of femininity. The novelist has deftly manipulated the identity crisis with its origins through this narrative. Her mother is fully disinterested in Saru’s education & personal advancement, Saru feels deprived of love and affection in her childhood. Her dark complexion, skinny frame and her gender affect her as a child and she grows up feeling unloved, unwanted and insecure as a child. For her, the happiness is unreal. she questions, “....

why is happiness always so unreal? Why does it always seem an illusion? It is grief that has a bulk, a weight, a substance and stays real even after years.”<sup>(1)</sup>

“The memory was as violent as an assault and angrily she rejected it.”<sup>(2)</sup> Alienated from her husband, she deliberately tries to reconcile herself with the present fateful situation with the thought that nothing has changed in father’s house. In the room of her parents, when she finds male clothes, Saru feels that her mother has “managed to efface her personality from the room.”<sup>(3)</sup> It is her quest working in two directions simultaneously. In one direction, she tries to assert herself as an individual and in other – her female identity. In the course of the novel they are to meet later. For Saru, her quest for self is very important. The novelist has presented the existential dilemma of the self of Saru in society and in her mind. It is our modern age where man suffers, no doubt, from decay, disintegration but more from internal problems. They are alienation, fragmentation & meaninglessness of life. It leads to perpetual quest for identity. Owing to an unbridgeable gulf between herself and Manohar after fifteen years of their long married life, her self remains clouded with terrors sparked off by various reasons. Manu though her bread winning capacity is apparent, her marriage with Saru is not smooth in relation. The fear has seized her. it is “strange new fear of disintegration, terrified consciousness of not existing.”<sup>(4)</sup> The real cause of this marital disharmony is the searching interview of Manu with her by a lady reporter. She has asked him about the key position of Saru in the family. Her focus is whether she is the bread – winner or the bread eater. Manohar becomes a sadist, starts torturing Saru in bed. Their married life is disintegrated. Her dreams of happy married life are shattered. She does not find any congenial atmosphere of her parental house with its peaceful surroundings. To her father, she wants to disclose her tortures & terrors of the night. She also tries to tell her father that it has reduced her to a “two – in – one – women” and “at night became a terrified trapped animal.”<sup>(5)</sup> She feels lonely dejected and she sinks in the past. With patients she feels real. The past haunts her.

The novelist has portrayed this crisis really

effectively. The first person narration of the story helps her to give the authentic record of the injustice done to Saru. As a child, she is rejected, her gender gives her a fault for her life that she is responsible for the death of her brother. As a wife, her body has become more precious than her own being. The basic ground for her to be a woman with status in society is denied to her. It has become the reason for her unfortunate plight after marriage. Her mother has sapped her interest in life. Saru puts it, "I just didn't exist for her. I died long before I left home."<sup>(6)</sup> It is the sense of rootless ness that is dominant in Saru's mind. Nobody loves her, protects her as a child. The crisis goes on deepening as she thinks more about her pathetic life. Saru's rejection by her mother can be understood but what about her father? He also does not encourage her to be confident & self-sufficient in her life. For the first time in her life Saru feels adored and worshipped in the hands of Manu. That is only the beginning. The knowledge that Manu has not married her for her own sake but for her money, the woman in her breaks down completely. Just like a 'prized possession' he wants to exhibit her. Her immediate reaction is to do something frightful. She is aware of the pangs of being rejected. So she decides to think of marital relationship as 'sheer necessity'. The medicine and the disease are one in her case. Her fear from the childhood of being rejected makes her conscious of the future. She has been needed by Manohar only for her status & money. When Saru puts the proposal of giving up the job because she is tired, Manohar flatly rejects it. He tries to prove her the necessity of her work. The reason is "we can't go back, we have to go on."<sup>(7)</sup>

Now, for Saru, the problem is as clear as the daylight. She has been a prized property for Manohar. Manohar does not want that she may leave the job. She really wants to run away from this male domination & physical assaults but she is unable to muster up the courage to put the condition as plainly as her mind experiences it. Her self does not want to be a partner in sexual act. But Manu fails in the act and she feels dejected. He has become a sadist. She can not do anything for him. When she narrates her sad story to her father, her father asks her only that she could have told this to Manu. Saru analyses his behavior saying that he does not know it himself because "he was so normal – at all other times ... what could I say?"<sup>(8)</sup> The helplessness of Saru, her fear that she would be called crazy by people - is always there. She has become the captive of her own fear. With her mind full of confusion, she runs for sympathy to her friend Booze, then even to Madhav. Her conscience inhibits her. The tussle between

morality and freedom of self creates a void in her psyche. The childish grief of rejection and physical attacks of the adulthood cripple her. She describes her husband as a sadist. - "My husband is a sadist."<sup>(9)</sup> It seems that Saru can not visualize anybody's sorrow. So it disturbs her, she takes revenge on her husband silently and unknowingly, as she has an escaping personality. Love, romance are illusory for her. She has no satisfaction of fulfilment. Her perplexity is so rooted in her nature that it has blinded her vision to think of the future. She is unable to take the decision and comes to her father's house. She has no remedy to cure her own disease. As a result, she becomes totally terror-stricken between these two ends. Her helplessness becomes pathetic when she is captured by the nightmare. It is like, "a monstrous invasion ... wriggling under the weight that pinned it down."<sup>(10)</sup> She has no respite from her nocturnal tortures. Her pitiable condition reminds us of her existential problem giving her no rest or no relief. Other helplessness brings her to parent's house in a sense of frustration. She has become alienated and tries to search for her 'self'. Her human misery has brought a wave of despair and disillusionment. She is unable to reconcile with her hapless lot. She has become introspective & veered to her inner self. Her first person narrative is presented in utter naturalness. Shashi Deshpande is really a master in depicting the inside feelings and the efforts of daily existence in the chaotic life of a protagonist – Saru. The sense of guilt or a sense that her mother does not accept her as she is responsible for her brother's death – is her inner understanding only. She wants to overcome this sense. She is unable to accept everything calling it 'Fate' like a traditional woman. She becomes confused. She gets nervous. There is no answer and no solution to her question. The internal need to assert herself, her quest for identity arises. After a long struggle with her husband, with the prevailing condition and above all with her own mind – she understands the basic truth of life that it's all "question of adjustment really' if you want to make it work, you can always do it."<sup>(11)</sup>

Her dream to find happiness through a man has become shattered. She wants to be a woman attracting her male partner for all the time. This loss of her feminine sensibility has affected her relationship with her children. Her nocturnal experiences had unnerved her. The stranger that she sees in her dreams terrifying her and the animal – like Manu assaulting her physically – are same for her. She is caught in a dichotomy & she has become tired of taking the burden of this dual experience. She has no

psychological explanation of Manu's behavior as he is groping his way in the darkness like her. When the realization comes to her of the things happening in a logical manner, she finds dark not terrible. For her now, "The Dark Holds No Terrors". She has become strong enough, she has understood that she carries her own hell within her and there is no hope for her. The realization of animalism of her husband's behavior under the sophisticated cover of culture is a shock for her. His hypocrisy kills the natural instincts of womanhood in her. She understands it properly well that her prison house of silence or her hall of alienation cannot present her any solution. When she tries to tell everything cohesively to her Baba, the words fail her. Her several separate selves are there as her roles are different. As a sister she has turned her back on Dhruva. As a result he died. As a daughter, she is rejected, in return, she has deserted her mother. As a wife, her husband is a failure because of her. What is her real identity? Till today, she has never thought of this. These different identities that she has adopted at different times as per the demands of her roles do not make the real 'Saru'. Her individualism and the cost that she has paid for it – has been really heavy in terms of psychological burden. She is a guilty sister, a rejected daughter & a failed wife'. She has to bring all these roles together to make her one complete whole.

Her identify, her awareness about her own self makes her a new woman. She is now "not that two – in – one woman, who, in the day time wore a white coat & an air of confidence .... and at night became a terrified trapped animal"<sup>(12)</sup> Still, she has realised that she has to go, she dreamt that she has been walking along a road thinking that something has been waiting for her at the end of it. But she can not wait, she can not stop, "even though there was doom waiting for her."<sup>(13)</sup> This realization has given her courage to face the reality of life & she marches forward to find herself. She becomes self – assertive but it is too late. She does not take proper decision at proper time. Later, she becomes aspired like a typical woman portrayed by modern novelists – with feminine independence, hungry for peace and satisfaction achieved through marriage with a typical pacified

understanding that marriage is no guarantee to happiness. She is the epitome of hunger for warmth & shelter through male strength. She knows the disease but has no remedy for it. Her run – away personality makes her run away from her brother's death, from her sadist husband & even from herself. Her unbearable pain has given her the knowledge of truth that in the trap of the world she is caught like an animal. A sense of loss & futility of life have captured her. She has opened her mind with confidence to her Baba. she gets the realization that it's her own life. She has to face it. Finally, she gets the idea that everyone in the world is alone. All hers is inside out & there is no 'other'. The naturalistic principle of life is "that man is born to be cold & lonely and alone"<sup>(14)</sup> is realized by her. She has cut herself off from the past. Her fears are faded into insubstantial ghosts.

Man, as a social animal, has a natural urge to live in a particular way. They may be the inborn qualities, may be the genes. This realization of the urge, the expression & fulfilment of it can be called the meaning of life. When Saru thinks quickly about her life, its fears and horrors, she understands that it is a captive house. She is the victim of this prison. The awareness that she is an human being first, an individual first – gives her strength to live. Then, for her, society social fears her terrors – all are futile. Her life is important & worthy for her. The need for assertion is fictionalized by Deshpande in the various phases of oppression and traumatic experiences of her life. The deprivations suffered by her in a rapidly changing life – patterns subjecting herself to alien modes of life can be said the thematic concern of Shashi Deshpande's novel. As in the words of Virginia Woolf, there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can get upon the freedom of mind. Saru achieves her personhood, her self – realization. She has her own voice – clear and strong. Her return to life – to hope – to rejuvenation – is like achieving wholeness. She has overcome her identity crisis. A knock at the beginning & at the end encompasses the journey of Saru in search of her identify. She understands that each has to fight one's own battle all alone & now, she is prepared for it thinking that her life is her own.

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## References-

1. Deshpande Shashi: 'The Dark Holds No. Terrors' – New Delhi – Penguin Books – 1990. Part 4- Chapter 2 page No. 49-41. 2. Part I-Chapter I, page No. 15. 3. Part I-Chapter I, page No. 19. 4. Part I - Chapter 2, page No. 22. 5. Part III - Chapter 3, page No. 134. 6. Part I - Chapter 3, page No. 32. 7. Part II - Chapter 2, page No. 82. 8. Part IV- Chapter 4, page No. 203. 9. Part II- Chapter 5, page No. 97. 10. - page No. 11-12. 11. Part III - Chapter I, page No. 118. 12. Part II- Chapter 3, page No. 134. 13. Part IV-Chapter 5, page No. 210. 14. Part IV-Chapter 6, Page No. 219.