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Re-defining Discourse on Power-Politics, the Genealogy of Family and Womanhood: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

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Abstract: In social science and politics, power is the capacity of an individual to influence the conduct (behaviour) of others. The term 'authority' is often used for power that is perceived as legitimate by the social structure. Power can be seen as evil or unjust. The effects of power have been taken as negative connotations: as it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', and it 'conceals'. Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. My paper will focus on the positive aspects of power politics, the genealogy of family and womanhood. In this context, my paper will include the select novels of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2003) through which I will discuss the condition of women in Indian society, their overall developments as social beings, what sort of characteristics they possess and what kind of women fit in the concept of 'Womanhood'.

Keywords: Womanhood; Partition; Power-Politics; Genealogical Tradition

Introduction

Henry James, an American-British author, has popularized the term "New Women," and this has been represented as the heroines of the novels, such as Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady* and Daisy Miller in the novella *Daisy Miller*. The term 'New Woman' always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives, be it personal, social, or economic. Although the term 'New Women' was becoming a more active participant in life as a member of society and the workforce, she was most often

portrayed exerting her authority in the domestic and private spheres in literature, theatre, and other artistic representations.

In India, the situation was entirely different from the West. Indian women have been subjugated and oppressed for ages. She was under the authority of a man. Medieval India was considered a woman's age, and it was supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. The Hindu moral code known as "The Laws of Manu" denies women an existence apart from that of their husbands. In Indian patriarchal society, a husband was considered as God. A woman has been taught since her childhood that she has to obey her husband and family. In this way, her parents offered her no chance to think about her identity. For this reason, their freedom was lost. Even if they were not allowed to move freely, this led to the further deterioration of their status.

In the post-colonial era, the portrayal of Women in Indian English novels underwent a radical change. The conventional ideal Women who meekly tolerated traditional, domestic, and sexual oppression and whose mouths were muzzled, voices arrested, and movements fettered by patriarchal norms and control, were replaced by the 'New Women' who started resisting traditions, orthodox concepts, and values. Western feminism sought to change human consciousness to challenge dominance.

The birth of 'New Woman' in Indian is a reality as the concept and position of womanhood have changed in the modern context. This new woman is an assimilation of Western influences as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who, despite all kinds of upheavals, can strike a balance among the diverse spheres of her life. The post-colonial modern novelists depict a 'New Woman' in their fiction, the Woman who is the product of modern mercantile society, one who revolts against the traditional social setup. There is a consistent growth in her behavior and attitude. Thus, the journey of such a Woman becomes a case study of feminism. My paper also explores the role of the new woman presented in the framework of power-politics, construction of family, and womanhood in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur.

Role of power-politics, genealogical tradition, and Womanhood in Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* :

As an Indian writer, Deshpande, who belongs to the saner group, often hesitates to be branded as a feminist. S. Prasanna Sree, in her book *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, has presented the views of the novelist under the title "In Conversation with Shashi Deshpande".

... That is very clear ... I am a feminist, I am a very staunch feminist in my personal life ... I am not telling you what to do, nor am I spelling out the message of feminism. I am not a feminist writer. If you call me a feminist writer, you are wronging me, because I see people as human beings. In my novels, you will not see evil men, but good women. All of us have both the qualities in ourselves, some good and some bad and you know it is all there in my novels and my characters (155).

However, the tenacity with which she makes remarks against the creature called the husband and uses these remarks as some sort of a “Prologue” to *The Dark Holds No Terrors* brands her as a feminist of the top order, which she is not. It reads:

... Now there was no waking. The dream, the nightmare, whatever it was, continued. Changing now, like some protean monster, into the horror of rape. This was not to be death by strangulation; it was a monstrous invasion of my body Now the horror of what was happening to me was lost a fierce desire to end it. I could not, would not, bear it. I began to fight back, helplessly, savagely.

... And then the two came together. I knew where I was and what had happened. Panic and sensation came back simultaneously. I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me, snoring softly—no longer a stranger, but my husband.

Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of a man’s love? For the feel of the body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts? ... (167)

The abhorrence of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has few parallels. The contempt for the creature called the husband has come a full circle; it is complete. Here, the feminist author engaged in a struggle to claim for women the right to sexual sovereignty. Gone is the prudery associated with sex. A woman who demands the right to pleasure is no longer an object of scorn and contempt. We need only to remember Rituporno Ghosh’s film, *Antarmahal*, or Jag Mundhra’s *Provoked*, to realize that purveyors of modern Indian culture do not shy away from depicting the hideousness of marital rape and female protests against grave injustice. However, a cool analysis of the whole episode makes the behavior of the wife absurd. Why should a sensible woman (in her prime) between 15 and 45 resist the amorous advance of a man legally united with her as her husband? True, the novel laments the lack of pleasure or ecstasy in sexual relations after the initial period of euphoria is over. Indeed, it was not like that, as at the beginning of the novel, Saru says:

However, when we got married, it was like nothing I had ever imagined ... I became, in an instant, a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. All the clichés, I discovered, were true; kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved, was an intense joy. It was as if little pleasures had sprung up all over my body. ‘Who said about some place “If there is a heaven on earth, it is this” or something like that?’ (40)

Saru loses herself in the ecstasy of physical pleasure, even though it lasts for a short period. As her statement suggests, she always tried to cling to her faith and confidence by retreating to Manu for a bout of sexual pleasure. In her words:

I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being wanted. If I ever have any doubts, I have only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me. And he would again and again and again (40).

True, Indian women have come across numerous hurdles to attain economic independence. Chaman Nahal, in his essay *"Feminism in English Fiction: Forms and Variations,"* writes:

"I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband of the father, the community, or a religious group, an ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes". (01)

Very appropriately, Deshpande has described the theme of the rise of the status of the wife in society. The sheer anguish with which she views the intolerance of society toward women is a pointer in that direction.

"Listen, girls, she would say, whatever you do, you will not be happy, not really, until you get married and have children. That is what they tell us. Moreover, we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. However, if you want to be happily married, there is one thing you have to remember. Have you girls seen an old-fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important, very important, because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4" tall, you should not be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And I assure you, it is not worth it. He'll suffer, you'll suffer, and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales still in your favour, god help you, both of you" (137).

Saru was a successful doctor and the scales still favored her. However, considered from this perspective, there was nothing unusual about it. Not only is this economic dependence absent among modern educated women, but also in prehistoric Hindu societies, the concept of Stridhan duly solved the problem. Prabhat Mukherjee discusses this in his book, *Hindu Women: Normative Models*:

That the right to hold this bunch of property by a woman was not a formal matter in the *Arthashastra* is also apparent from other indirect sources The property of women thus assumed the character of a separate estate to be owned and enjoyed by them alone. Kautilya respected the separate economic entity of a woman, and that entirely appears to have had a role to play in society. This aspect of a woman's status,

namely, her right to separate property, was considered by Maine to be a unique feature of Hindu Jurisprudence.

Whether dependence or no dependence, the relationship of an average man with his wife is that of the boss and the bossed. This kind of an undesirable attitude is an extension of Saru's childhood accusations against her mother, who was the product of an outdated society, totally callous towards the rights of the girl child:

"Do not go out in the sun. You will get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you do not. We have to get you married.

I do not want to get married.

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruvas?

He is different. He is a boy?. (45)

Waging a war against this kind of discrimination, Saru holds her head high against all sorts of odds. However, that certainly does not give her the license to repulse all physical advances of Manu, or brand is as undesirable. As Saru says: "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). Compare this with the attitude of Saru when she was badly in need of love, even after childbirth:

"The hands that had probed her body while she was in labour had been utterly distasteful. However, this sucking had set up an intensely erotic response within her. So, unable to control herself, she forced Manu to make love to her as soon as possible after she went home. There had been a kind of withholding in Manu then... maybe he had been shocked by her urge, maybe he had been afraid of hurting her. However, it had not worried her. Her desire had been so strong, so purely physical that he could not prevent her from having satisfaction...." (162-163)

The glaring disparity in the attitude of the female protagonist here stands out. Love-making at the behest of the male is hurting the female; it is a monstrous invasion of her body. However, at some other time, the female partner, at her sweet will, may turn so purely physical that her male cannot prevent her from having satisfaction. In this case, the traditional boss, i.e., the husband, becomes the bossed and dances to the tunes of his female partner. So to say that females of the species are the oppressed lot is a misnomer. Instead, as modern research has amply shown, the man-woman relationship has mostly turned sour because females like Saru, who should make their partners' lives livable, fall short of our expectations. Biologically speaking, only intelligent women are capable of deriving satisfaction from a physical relationship. That is why, ordinarily, in nine cases out of ten, women fail to give the desired pleasure to their men and consequently fail to receive any pleasure from the relationship. Hence,

the marriage fails and becomes the subject of discussion by a section of disgruntled and misguided feminists.

Interrogating Womanhood in Manju Kapur's 'A Married Woman' :

This paper is a modest attempt to study the character of Astha, the protagonist of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*, as a fitting model of the concept of the new woman. *A Married Woman* (2002) is the story of a teacher, poet, and artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle-class existence. Astha, an educated, middle-class Delhi woman, "brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear".... enters a traditional Indian arranged marriage with Hemant, a foreign returned MBA, and a bank employee with a good parentage and property. Hemant's competing desires lead him to leave his job and enter a business partnership with his sister, and later on, set up a TV manufacturing unit of his own. He becomes so busy that he gets less time for Astha and his family. Astha begins to feel that she has sacrificed her own identity while striving to fulfill her familial duties and traditional roles. She suffers from loneliness.

The feeling of loneliness and marginalization affects her. Astha turns inward and starts writing and sketching a passion she generated during her school and college days. She felt relieved as she vented out her anguish and alienation through her sketches and poems. Writing alleviated the heaviness within her, and in the struggle to express herself, she found temporary relief. One of her poems, titled 'Changes', expresses her feelings of loneliness and relief. The eventual release from pain in the tearing, relentless separation from those in habit loved can come so slowly that it seems there will never be a day of final peace and tranquility. Hemant finds poems self-indulgent and comments that they would expose her feelings of unhappiness and loneliness to the world. She gives up writing and continues rather sadly to draw. Astha's married life suffers pangs because of the callous treatment of her people. Hemant is a peerless performer in bed, but once the couple becomes parents of a daughter and a son, the imagined mansion of their married life develops cracks. Astha finds it challenging to come out of her imagination.

Her growing dissatisfaction is played out against a background of Indian political and social unrest. Her sinking spirit suddenly bubbles up when Aijaz, a theatre personality, takes interest in her and asks her to write the script of the play to be staged in the school. Her script on Babri Masjid gets immense appreciation from Aijaz, whereas to Hemant, it sounded like a parrot. He says to Astha: "Please, keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching. All does not suit you." (p.116) Astha feels flattered and a sudden touch of Aijaz affects her deeply, "What did it mean, did he want to have an affair with her, why had she been so startled by his hand on her knee, why hadn't she responded, but she was a married woman with two children and those right before her eyes." (p.114) Astha becomes involved in the political movement when Aijaz, the theatre personality and social activist she had admired, is killed in the Hindu-Muslim conflict in Ayodhya. At the center of the unrest is the threatened demolition of Babri Masjid, a mosque that is supposedly built on an ancient Hindu site. It is in this scenario that Astha, as a politically conscious painter, by now of the Sampardayakta

Mukti Manch, goes to Ayodhya where she meets Pipeelika, an NGO, Aijaz's widow, and a lapsed lesbian. Astha finds an admirer in Pipeelika for her oratorical skills. They come closer and share secrets. Astha's tears and her utter disappointment provide Pip with a safe subscriber to her seductive ways. Here, Manju Kapur introduces the lesbian love, Pip-Astha relationship as an important link in the novel.

Pip makes Astha realize that the true union in love meant not only a meeting of bodies but also of souls, sentiments, and ideologies. Pip propels Astha to organize an exhibition of paintings and become self-dependent. Astha feels a new lease of life, and Pip makes her realize the real meaning of marriage. The lines of her diary express her concern about a happy marriage:

"Our room, our bed, on which we spend hours. Maybe this is what a good marriage is like. To be able to express what comes into your head, and know it will be understood as you meant it. To be more yourself because all of you can love in a way the other responds to." (p.260)

Astha's relation with Pip is full of dreams and desire, but this cannot continue forever. Astha realizes that she was becoming unworthy of Pip's demanding nature. The intimacy and comfort she receives from this affair contrast strongly with the distance she feels in her rigidly defined role as wife and mother. She wants to leave Pip and wishes to hate. It is undeniable that Pip provided vibrant moments to Astha. However, she cannot leave her family and children. She grows realistic: "I live my life in fragments; She is the one fragment that makes the rest bearable. But a fragment, however patent, is still a fragment." (p.264) She feels relieved that in a few months, she will not have to talk to Pip anymore. The dawn of realization rejuvenates Astha once Pip takes her flight to Illinois. Astha ultimately decides to stay within the safe and strong bonds of her family rather than the radical and liberating option of following her lesbian lover. She is grateful to her husband, who noticed nothing, with whom, for that very reason, it was soothing to be with. She also feels comfortable with the tools of her trade:

"There she was with the shrouded canvases, bottles of turpentine and linseed oil, tubes of colour lying in baskets around the easel, and grey rags stiff with dried paint. There were the tools of the trade; these were the things that established her separate life, touching them was comfort." (p.299)

Astha devotes herself to painting because 'work' is the only place where she forgets everything. It is tough to where she could rest her mind, her hand, and her vision inside her head. Ultimately, she gets solace in the world of art, epitomized by the painting exhibition organized by her husband. Her exhibition proves to be successful. More than half of the paintings sell, and Astha makes almost two lakhs. Through Astha, Kapur offers a frontal challenge to patriarchal contemplation, social organization, and control mechanisms by her desire and inner potentials as an individual to attain personal recognition. She is progressive and conscious of her rights and potential. However, she quickly compromises to the fact that a woman's absolute position lies within the family unit, which she must sustain and protect, and not ignore or neglect

the false notion of being 'liberated'. In this sense, Astha is not only the face of the new woman of our times, but also the typical Indian woman of our time.

Conclusion :

The Dark Holds No Terrors by Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* are offbeat novels in the sense that they explode the myth of man's superiority and the myth of a woman being a paragon of all virtues. It is based on the problems faced by a career woman, a refreshingly new phenomenon in Indian English fiction. In all articles, Shashi Deshpande states: "A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings". She does not see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is indeed a protest novel primarily in the Indian context in the sense that it reacts against the traditional concept that "everything in a girl's life Is shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male." Saru, a professional woman dislocates the binary of husband as 'provider and protector; versus wife as 'recipient and protected. Sam's employment is acceptable only because it supplements her husband's income. The story of Sam depicts a duality deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian society, which is always determined by societal definitions and expectations of women's public and private roles. Consequently, women are expected to be both traditional and modern in domestic and public jurisdictions. The pathetic state of an Indian middle-class working woman is revealed. Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumption that the employment of the wife can serve as the means of her economic independence and self-actualization. At the same time, the profession of women does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between men and women.

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