

**Analyzing Marital Rape in Shashi Deshpande's novel  
*The Dark Holds No Terrors***

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**ABSTRACT-** 'To consent or not to consent' is the situation of many married women in the Indian household who are subjected to marital rape. Due to the male dominated society, the recessive group faces loss of identity within the matrimonial circle. People in India believe in a common notion that once the girl/women are involved in marital vows, she becomes the property of her husband, losing her individual identity. When a woman leads a life in a patriarchal community, she is victimized in the name of tradition, religion and culture. This can be noticed from the point of changing the surname to the financial, social dependence on the male members of the family. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century this issue of violence within marriage has gained international attention. In the novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', the protagonist Dr. Sarita endures marital rape for a long time and eventually and returns to her parental home from where she had walked out to marry Manu amidst severe family opposition. This paper focuses on marital rape, repercussions and possible solutions.

**Keywords:** Dependence, Domestic violence, Identity crisis, Marital vow, Patriarchal

*'In a husband there is only a man, in a married woman there is a man, a father, a mother, and a women'* states Honore De Balzac, a renowned French writer. Sociologists perceive marriage as an arrangement of rules for a guy and women whose accord as a husband and wife has been granted social approval. The system balance needs adjustment between the two partners so that one partner's role fulfilment response to the other partners role expectation. Most people of South Asian Studies explain marriage in Hinduism as three parts namely Dharma, Rati and Praja completion of religious duties, sexual gratification and spiritual creation respectively. In the matrimonial circle especially women are considered to be recessive than the male counterparts. Married women entwined in the net of holy Matrimony as she is expected to tolerate all the problem she faces be it from her husband or from the children. Violence against females has numerous types and some of them originate from

within the household such as dowry, compulsory labour, early wedding and honour killing. Marital rape is also one of them which have not come into the spotlight. Dharmik marriages are accepted whereas Adharmik marriages are overlooked.

Marital rape is a disagreed act of inescapable violence by husband against the wife in which there is physical as well as mental abuse. Certain men proclaim to have become the major shareholders of their wives' body forgetting that the women are equal owners of their own self and have the total freedom to restrict from the needs. Certain categories of men tend to dominate in a relationship which leads to violence when they fail. The victims suffer from panic attacks, nightmares, self-doubt and trust issues.

Novels are a great source of Information and a kind of reassurance for the people you can relate to it. Shashi Deshpande is one such novelist who has the ability to fabricate the perfect words to make a complete clothing of exciting stories. Her name is synonymous with Indian writing in English. She is the author of eight novels, two novellas and four books for children. She has also done translation works from Kannada and Marathi into English. Her novels, with their assertive and modern themes, are fast moving even now as when were first published. She is a predominant feminist writer who focuses on the condition of women in the society. Through literature she hopes to bring spotlight on the crisis faced by women every day. In her biography '*Listen To Me*' she notes, "*So there it was, Dwarfed and Diminished – symbolic, I think now, of the place allotted to women's writing in the literary world*" (254). Sahitya Akademy Award has been given to her novel "*That Long Silence*". She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2009. She points at the novel "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" is her personal favourite. Some of a notable works are "*Roots and Shadows*" (1983), "*The Binding Vine*" (1993), "*Small Remedies*" (2000) and a few more. The novel "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" mainly focuses on the life of the protagonist Sarita usually known as 'Saru'. She faces discrimination right from her childhood by her orthodox and traditional mother, Kamala. She is always neglected and also blamed for her brother Dhruva's death. Her desire to achieve and prove her capability to her mother as well as the society makes her a doctor. Things start to change after she gets married to a man who is in a lower position than her in the society. Her husband Manu feels insecure and tries to overcome it through sexually torturing Saru.

The association in patriarchal society mutilates a woman's body as well as her feelings and her mind. Here, predominantly it is clear that Manu, unable to digest the fact that his wife is the highest bread earner for the family, tends to make it up by showing dominance in their physical relationship. Saru being the recessive factor surrenders to it. Throughout the novel this can be seen whenever Saru recollects her family life which she left behind and came to her parental home. Shashi Deshpande is a bold feminist writer who writes against the adversity and frustration of women in patriarchal community. She writes on behalf of all those who are suffering silently in the nightly terrors faced by them: *"I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that!"* (63)

McKnight University Professor Jill Elaine Hasday, in her *Contest and Content: A Legal History of Marital Rape*, states that, *"In defining what the right to one's own person meant, articulate feminists did not focus on gender-neutral rights to the public sphere or freedom from coercion by the state. They were concerned about married women who submitted to their husband's sexual demands as the result of force, or threats, or because they lacked palatable alternative."* (1416, Vol: 1373) The protagonist Saru even though had a tendency to free from the torture she faced, was not able to do so as she was entrapped in the family duties.

Even though she escapes from her home and tells father about her husband, her father does not understand the problem; rather he fails to accept it. *"It was not to comfort her father that she had come. It was for herself"* (43). Sarita is portrayed as a victim in the society who undergoes humiliation and degradation. By looking at the life of Saru it can be said that even though women have equal education and jobs as men, they fail to stay equal in a patriarchal society. Due to the traumatic experiences, she escapes and comes, but after hearing the words of Madhav *"I can't spoil my life because of that boy .It's my life after all"* her confidence rises up and makes her able to reunite with her husband. If women experiencing these kinds of trauma are provided with a hearing ear or a supporting figure their voice can be put out and the issue can be solved.

Feminism's general goal is to recognize inequality and injustice in handling women and girls in varied communities, and their disadvantages and differences which creates from these. Shashi Deshpande suggests the idea that women have yet to accept the 'power' in which they will not be just a lamenting victim. In her biography Shashi states that "*Hopefully, men will now be more careful and women will no longer remain silent*" (258). Saru the protagonist, during her childhood, who was being continuously degraded in front of her brother for being a girl child, carried the same ideology that women are always lower than men till her marriage. There were more restrictions given to her than her brother by Kamala, her mother. In one instance Saru recollects her mother saying, "You can't. And Dhruva? He's different, He's a boy" (45)

In India, marital rape was extensively discussed. India has yet to criminalize marital rape unlike other developed nations. Activists and Indian media support the view that it is essential and imperative for the patriarchal society of India to criminalize marital rape. On the other hand, there remains a more orthodox view that marital rape cannot be criminalized due to the sacred nature of marriage in Hinduism and how criminalizing marital rape would destabilize the marriage institution. Deshpande depicts the society in making the unnatural into natural. Certain facts or ideas are considered natural even though it is not right. But most of them think it is natural and is accepted by all. In the circle of society, men are in the gist, i.e. they are dominant. Similar occurrences is seen in the society where Saru lives in. If a certain group occupies the axis, they marginalize all other groups. For this problem to be solved, no group must occupy the centre. Each individual group plays a specific role without any other group taking control of it.

The psychological effects experienced by the victims revolve around the "trust" one has on the better half. There is a feel of betrayal of love and trust they had in that person. When these elements are not balanced, the basic foundation of marriage is disrupted.

The end of the novel is the beginning of Saru's new life. She sees through the darkness and knows how to live in it by removing it from the equation and compromising with reality. She understands that there is no one to come for her rescue. Instead of running from the disease, she plans on curing it. She does not want to leave her husband. Deshpande portrays the life of married women through Saru, who never leave their husband.

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