



## **Review of The central character of the story Sarita fights against the traditional patriarchal society in The Dark Holds No Terror**

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**Abstract :** ‘The Dark Holds No Terror’ Published in 1980, is a book that narrates the story of a woman trapped in a violent marriage. It is a powerful portrayal of a woman’s assertion to survive in a male dominated society. The story line is mainly about the awareness of self that there is more to life than depending on husband or parents and social acceptance. The woman is self- sufficient in all aspects and in this story the protagonist is in the process of searching the identity of her own.

The central character of the story Sarita fights against the traditional patriarchal society. The darkness, the nothingness, the blackness therefore is no more a terror for the protagonist as she is enlightened by the journey for the search of her own self. The marital discord and the disillusionment of an educated woman in a tradition bound ‘Indian Society’ and her quest for self identity is the main theme of the novel. It is a totally different novel in the sense that it explodes the myth of man’s unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues.”

It portrays the post-modern dilemma of a woman who gets annoyed on the way her identity and individuality is attacked. The protagonist’s desire for isolation, she wants to escape from any relation that gives her trouble. The novel deals with the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in the novel, is a successful lady doctor who is struggling hard for freedom and selfhood. In her quest of integrated self lies the reason of her suffering and anguish .She is caught between the dichotomy of modern trends and traditional practices. Saru wonders and often questions; ‘But why is happiness so unreal ? Why does it always seem an illusion? Happiness is so evacant that nothing is left.

When Saru hears about the news of her mother’s death, she goes back to her parents’ house which she had decided not to return ever. Returning to her father’s house after fifteen years, Sarita gets an opportunity to observe her relationship with her father, husband, her dead mother and her dead brother Dhruv. She is filled in by the events of her childhood memories. In this process of self analysis and self realization, Saru gains strength and courage to face reality. The sorrow of alienation has a therapeutic value, for it eventually leads to self awareness. Her association with her father is tinged with inbred sense of duty, honour and concern which now seems to be baseless. A brief confession to her father about her trauma and her courage to confront reality helps her to regain strength and mental stability. Her father’s indifference makes her feel awkward and unwanted,” if mine had been arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like



this.(Dark.P199).Her place has been taken by a stranger Madhav, and his presence makes her father more comfortable than his own daughter. Saru recollects incidents instrumental in transforming her marital bliss to a monstrous invasion of her body. It all started with the explosion in the factory near their first residence. Together with the mutilation of human bodies it brought forth an explosion in their marital bond too.

Theme of male supremacy is highlighted, and shown. Because of the preferential treatment given to a male child in the family Saru is always neglected, and her longing for love and compassion is never fulfilled. After the accidental death of her brother Dhruv, Saru is no more wanted by her mother as she is held responsible for her brother's death and is cursed everytime.The strained mother-daughter relationship is the significant element in the understanding of this novel.Her relation with her mother is bitter and haunting. She remember the grand birthday celebration of her brother "always a Puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an Arti in the evening my birthdays were almost the same - but there was no Puja"(Dark.p168-169)

Two Deaths in the novel one of Saru's brother Dhruv and the other her mother, that changes the personality of the protagonist Saru's mother refuses to accept her as a daughter,' Daughter! I don't have any daughter .I had a son who died .Now I am Childless.'(Dark.p146). Her mother's attitude has given rise to a revolt. The socio-cultural rituals and customs meant for a girl to follow is still a part of Indian culture; Saru is always made to feel ugly, unwanted and undesirable. She is always instructed by her mother for her restricted behavior as a girl, and is also asked to strictly follow rituals and traditions. She hates the customs and rituals .Her mother's anger, hatred, and the burden of rejection makes Saru rebels against her family and decides to study medicine in Mumbai.,which she could do only with her father's approval. A victory against her mother's will. Her first escape from her parental home .

Social security is seen in marriage particularly for a woman and so is for Saru who enters matrimony thinking that this new role of wife will give her love and compassion which she lacked in her childhood. She marries Manohar, against her parents' wishes, her mother doesn't want her to marry a boy from lower caste.

Manohar had a happy childhood unlike Saru's, he is a good-looking man; a poet, an orator, director of plays and an important figure.Marriages make the wives subordinate to the husbands. A career-minded woman always finds herself alone, success in marriage means sacrifice, adjustment and silence. But Manohar's disgusting behavior in the night- had made all the difference.She looks upon her marriage a failure as a whole. Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure, (Dark.p.176) Saru says of her mother "It's because she cursed me that I am like this. (Dark.p.179).



In her marriage love is replaced by brutal force. Saru`s status in the society is of a reputed lady doctor which is not accepted by Manohar, as it hurts his male ego. Her pain, her suffering, cannot be spoken off in public but she feels her body as a burden, which her husband would not feel even if he had thought that body may pain. Her personal experiences compel her to disbelieve the existence of love

Love ....there was Such thing ...Only a need which both (man and woman )fought against, futilely,the very futile turning into thng called “love”( Dark.p.65)

Beliefs of the tradition bound society affect the husband wife relationship. She thinks over her strained marital relationship and tries to find the reason, “but now I know it was there it began this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage.....But perhaps, the sane thing that made me. Inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (Dark.p.42).

Saru has learnt that necessary condition for a successful marriage: “A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4” tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees” (Dark.p.137).She despairs but has no emotional or moral support. Its only on her return to her father`s house that she unfolds her life.

Saru`s affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes as she attempts to seek emotional support outside unfulfilled marital life. Boozie`s interest was that of a woman and a man. She tries to justify her relation to self “I told myself my relationship with this man couldn't, wouldn't hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relation-ship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me... that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with Manu and me” (Dark.p.91).

Another affair is with her old classmate Padmakar Rao a medical practitioner, whom she meets years later, who forces to have deeper relationship with Saru, but after a few incidents, Saru refuses and the affair comes to an end. This shows the typical male thoughts for those women who claim for freedom, dare to make a move against existing tradition, fails to get social security, has to suffer losing their sanctity. Fear is induced,

Sarita is not a traditional woman, the one to disapprove of sex, but to her sex is in fact an expression of love. “Fulfillment and happiness come, not through love alone, but sex” (Dark.p.133) “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love; each act of love was a triumphant assertion of our love.”( Dark.p.133)

Physical suffering and mental traumas become a means of self-discovery and gives strength to Sarita to take the decisive step of leaving her house, children and husband.



Sarita a well-established doctor and a mother of two children having a look of passive suffering on face, when She comes to her parental house waiting outside her old home, like the old friend of lord Krishna. Sudama waiting outside the palace gates of lord Krishna and his queen Rukmini. Saru regrets her visit initially because of her father`s indifference.

“Why had it second so important to come here, and, at once?”( Dark.p.17)Manu’s brutality and her helplessness she says – she wants to tell her father, that“Baba, I’m unhappy, Help me Baba, I’m in trouble. Tell me what to do” (Dark.p.44)

Her father advises her to forget the accidental death of her brother and her mother and helps her to come out of burden of the guilt she carried since her childhood. She remembers her children, her practice and her patients. Her father`s words give Saru a vision of her own that helps her to come out of her turmoil:

‘I told you once Saru..... your mother is dead, so is your brother. Can`t you let the dead go? Why do you torture yourself with others? Are you not sufficient for yourself?’(Dark.p.198)

The moment Saru overcomes the fear and becomes confident, her trust in own self brings her back in the world .and now she has courage to face the world her husband, her children, the novel ends up with Saru taking pride in her profession as a Doctor.

On one hand Saru’s friend Nalu is a spinster, dedicated to her job, Smita, on the other hand wholly is a wife, mother and house keeper. Smita has surrendered so much that she has given up her name also. She has readily accepted the name Geetanjali, chosen by her husband when she got married. Male character of Manohar her husband and her dead brother Dhruv are responsible for her suffering. In her childhood she is blamed for her brother’s death for which her mother had stopped talking to her. Manohar`s selfish nature makes her work whole day to maintain the status they have achieved about her mother’s deeply religious attitude:

#### References :

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2. Paul Premila, “The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Woman’s Search for Refuge.” Indian Women
3. Novelists. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. Set I. Vol. V. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991. pp-30);
4. Deshpande. Shashi, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Penguin Books, India, 1990 pp 134(Further references of the text are shown in parenthesis abbreviated as Dark).