



A reflection of Gender inequality in Shashi Deshpande's 'the Darks Holds No Terrors and Taslima Nasrin's French Lover'

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ABSTRACT

A gender-equal society would be one where the word 'gender' does not exist: where everyone can be themselves." – a quote given by Gloria Steinem, an American activist. Gender inequality is one of the most common problems across the world. This paper is going to focus on this perspective in Shashi Deshpande's The Darks Holds No Terrors and Taslima Nasrin's French Love. These novels represent the perspective of Indian society regarding

how gender of an individual affects their living.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is one of the best know writers from India whom focuses on the gender theme in her novels. Her first novel *The Darks Holds No Terrors* was published in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi for her novel, *That Long Silence* in 1990. She emphasizes on representing the contemporary Indian women's life. In *The Darks Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande's female protagonist, Sarita or also known as Saru suffers from the discrimination within the patriarchal society. Women have been treated differently from men from education to career life.

The inequality is started within the smallest unit of society that is family. Saru's mother treats her different from her brother, Dhruva. Her parent gives all attention and freedom to their only son and this left the scar in the heart of Saru which has huge effect on her life. Son is more preference than daughter as he brought dowry to the family and can raise the family's condition when they grow up. As Saru has her first menstruation period, she does not permit to enter the puja room and kitchen as it is believed that woman is unholy during their period. In addition to this, she also has to eat separate alone. These actions are done without any explanation from her mother who reflects that she their relationship is not close as it should be. After Dhruva's death, Saru's mother put the blame on Saru and this leads to the broken point in their mother-daughter relationship.

Saru married with Manohar or Manu though he belongs to the lower caste despite the disapproval from her parent. Saru graduates from medical college and starts her career as a doctor. On the other hand, Manu is a school teacher. Saru becomes popular in her area; more patients are coming to her and gaining more money than Manohar. By this situation Saru does not concern with the feeling of Manu. The male's pride is trouble by this as the social norm is normally the head of the family i.e. the husband should gain more earning than wife. Manu is known as the husband

of the famous doctor instead of knowing by his own identity. This alters the feeling and behavior of Manu toward Saru. He expresses his superiority over Saru through their sexually molestation.

Deshpande beautifully portrays the gender inequality through the character of Saru. She reflects that woman has been treated as an object of love, marriage and sex. Toward the end of the novel, Saru realizes her identity as a confident woman and be able to face the obstacles that appear in her life. Similarly, Taslima Nasrin (a notable contemporary writer from Bangladesh) concentrated about woman in the society. She receives number of awards from several countries including Ananda literary Award from India (1992), Natyasva Award from Bangladesh (1992), Feminist of the Year from Feminist Majority Foundation from USA (1994), and many more.

Most of Nasrin's work are written in Bengali and have been translated into thirty different languages. Nasrin's *French Lover* is a story about how male characters, her father, husband, Kishanlal, and French Lover, Benoir dominate in the female protagonist, Nilanjana. The novel also reflects how the gender discrimination happens both in the East and West. In this novel, Nilanjana marries with Kishanlal as her father arrange this marriage for her in order to separate her from her lover whom belongs to the lower caste. Nilanjana move to French to live with her husband. Though Kishanlal make enough money to take good care of Nilanjana but he does not care of her feeling. She is trapped inside the apartment that they stay together as she does not permit to work or go outside alone. Moreover she discovers that her husband married with the French woman once in order to get the citizenship before marries with her and this information is not known to her family as well. As a consequence, their relationship does not last long. Nilanjana found a work with the help of her friend and befriends with French people. She learns that woman in the West somehow has more freedom to express themselves as her friend is a homosexual and there is no one to accuse her being.

After the death of Nilanjana's mother, she gets huge amount of inheritance and decides to settle herself in France. During the struggling of starting her life in France, she meets Benoir, the French man during her trip to France. Their relationship is complicated as Benoir already has a wife and daughter. In the novel Nilanjana tries to please Benoir at most that she could including accepting to be in the status of 'mistress'. In this situation Nilanjana would get more accuse as a woman because the word 'mistress' carries negative meaning toward the woman entity. Among the men, having mistress or extra-marital relationship might not consider to be that crime but not for women. This illustrates the attitude of people in the society is differently from man to woman. Nevertheless at the end of the novel she realizes the dignity in herself and refuses to stay with Benoir. She decides to starts living for her not for other. Though it takes time for her to realize this fact yet it gives her a lesson to learn.

The protagonists from both novels of Shashi Deshpande and Taslima Nasrin are struggling for their own identity as an individual in the male-dominant society. The readers can observe that gender inequality existing in the society as it is depicted in both novels.

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