

**“Colonial Compromise”: Modus Vivendi to Feminist Dystopia in Shashi
Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror***

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Abstract

Colonial study reflects upon the plight and voice of those suppressed at the hands of the one’s in power. Not only the territorial, cultural or linguistic colonialism has taken over the earth with the persecution of the weak, but also the inexorable are steered to stoop before the colonial rule. Women, however resolute, successful and efficacious have forever been a victim of the colonization by men/women in their life. Not just a change in their living space, but also psychologically women are bent to withdraw their belief system. However, with the advent of Eurocentric Universe, the colonized have developed a hybrid zone of asserting themselves under the colonial supremacy. A response to the colonial suppression and a passive temptation towards the Eurocentrism is not unlike the adaptability of women round the globe towards the patriarchal dividends. Globally, women have conditioned themselves to be in a hybrid state, where instead of decolonizing themselves, they settle for a place where they compromise with the colonial power and find a comfort zone. The current study demarks the idiosyncrasy of ‘colonial-compromise’ customed by Shashi Deshpande’s protagonist in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*, wherein she compromises and accepts her position though unwilling, drawing a parallel between the third world citizens who even after being free, are willing slaves to Eurocentric narratives.

Keywords: Feminism, Oppression, ‘tyrannophilia’, ‘hybridity’, ‘pseudo-liberation’, ‘colonial-compromise’

Rewriting of Feminine canon and its upsurge has taken on the feminine world theoretically to multiple dimensions. The ‘women-question’ remains backed by the male force, deterring her of an absolute position unhindered by intrusive forces. The win-win situation for a woman stays within the marital status however the subjugation. Inequality, disrespect, violation

of privacy and personal space are frivolous affairs impending resignation. While the global approach to an accomplished life for women has forever been the hitched status, the consequences of patriarchal onset preside the marital life. Not only the now glorified designation of ‘the home-makers’ have had the brunt of patriarchy on their faces, the working wives winning butter for their family are doomed with the same fate.

The colonial power revolving left and right the globe not only had assured their supremacy but also had fated a defeat in the very foundation of the ‘Third World’. However, the acceptance of defeat is a bitter pill to swallow. For females around the world, just as we pseudo-Indians are, acceptance of defeat or a complete retaliation seems disconcerted. Veteran Actress Neetu Kapoor in an interview talks of her husband Rishi Kapoor’s extra marital affairs and her knowledge of it. She says,

I have caught him flirting hundreds of times. I always seem to be the first to hear about his affairs on outdoor locations. But I know they are just one-night stands. Two years ago, I used to fight with him about it but now I have adopted the attitude-go ahead, let’s see how long will you do it. (India.com)

The elite actresses’ acceptance of her husband’s infidelity validates the volunteered acceptance of patriarchy that hits our faces every now and then.

The present paper highlights the imbedded and deep rootedness of submission and compromise that entails the life of women and the suppression of resistant instincts to keep the colonised world of women harmonized, through Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Colonialism as we know refers to “the process of settlement” (Nayar 3). This refers to the intrusion of a person or a group of individuals in a foreign territory, depriving them of their privacy and right over their own land, settling in a foreign world and forcing themselves on the others. When we talk of colonialism in a feminine context, it is one’s intrusion in an external mind, navigating its ways into an established ideology and forcing a change. This change that women mostly seem to accept without any resistance is what we call a “colonial-compromise”. The act of complete submission to the ideologies, perception, tyranny and a volunteered acceptance of the patriarchal force which is similar to the submission of the colonised nations to the Eurocentric temptations.

The novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror* throws light upon the bitter life of the protagonist Saru who becomes a prey to her husband Manu’s insecurities. As the novel begins, we come across clichéd statements like, “She had died before her husband. Wasn’t that what all women prayed to the tulsi for? (Deshpande 15) or Saru’s mother’s instructions to her when she says, Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker. Who cares?

We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married. I don’t want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life? Why not?

You can’t.

And Dhruva?

He’s different. He’s a boy. (Deshpande 15)

Here, the writer airs the traditional disposition of women regarding marriage and life.

The suppression that women are subjected to at the hands of patriarchy is similar to the ones that the colonized nations have had for ages at the hands of the European domination. However, it is the politics of power that defines the extent of the suppression. Women who lack any form of power, in context of class, caste or economic status do fall victim of patriarchal oppression, not necessarily by men but also by women with patriarchal upbringing. Saru's mother, who always detested her own daughter for being too dark or women who prefer male child over female confirm their massive contribution to the patriarchal loop. Nevertheless, if a woman is economically independent, the brunt of patriarchy is controlled. However, in both the cases, woman must not hold a position equal to man, leave alone superior. In one of the episodes Saru's friend commented on Saru, being a doctor, earning more than her husband. She asks Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well?" (Deshpande 35). The statement was a gut-wrenching experience for Manu. The social construct does not allow a man to be inferior to his wife. Saru faces the aftermath of the conversation which humiliated Manu for being incompetent, through sexual assaults at the hands of her husband. This reaction of Manu was only a retaliation of his insult and comes from a deep-rooted psyche of man to be superior to his wife. The social construct prohibits woman a leading position. Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*, "The Married Woman", puts it, "she is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife" (Beauvoir 280). This situation resonates a woman's life to that of 'compromise'. Manu's envy and his retaliation to Saru's success comes in the form of sexual sadism when he repeatedly assaults his wife. The weaker has no choice but to adjust.

A complete get away from situations where a woman faces humiliation and violence, where she is insignificant just as the colonised Indian and African nations had been, can be attained through the act of complete revolt and self-assertion. Saru, even after having attained a greater social and economic status is under constant introspection, finds herself constantly reading her husband's mind and terrified by his assumed reactions. The only failure she finds in herself is the failure of being successful. She says,

"And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same 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." (Deshpande 42)

While women in today's world are as well educated as men are and with more exposure and awareness, have better opportunities at bigger careers yet, when it comes to the reward of the hard work, women voluntarily prefer an inferior position. In a lecture that Saru delivers she tells her students the ways of being happily married. For Saru, surrendering and compromising with the 'self' seems a harmonious way for a woman to be. She says,

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. 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 isn't worth it. (Deshpande 137)

With the colonial compromise is related harmony. With revolt and self-assertion, is related only a woman's esteem and pride. For women, as they are conditioned, a harmonious life holds a bigger stature than an esteemed and harmonious self. Not that we have not had literature of revolt or resistance. There are various writers who have defied the idea of living under a colonial shadow like Namita Gokhale, Taslima Nasreen, Kamila Shamsie, Kamala Das and many more.

Kamala Das, in her poem "The Stone Age", vividly narrates the bewilderment she had had at the hands of her husband where she felt like a colonized slave, subjected to unwilling obedience. She writes,

Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind

Old fat spider, weaving webs of bewilderment, Be kind. (Nayar 149)

The plight of women who are subjected to endurance seems similar of the colonial slave's plight and a feeling of self-realization and liberation from the external force.

Historically, the condition of a woman's inferior position regardless of her class, race, economic or political background goes back to the traditional allocation of power. Simon De Beauvoir, writes,

She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose. She was a conscious being but naturally submissive. And therein lies the wondrous hope that man has often put in women: he hopes to fulfil himself as a being by carnally possessing a being, but at the same time confirming his sense of freedom through the docility of a free person. (Beauvoir 149)

Saru, who is financially independent and seems to have by no means the reasons to feel inferior to her husband Manu, is a threat to him. She unknowingly challenges her husband's masculinity by not being naturally submissive. As Simon de Beauvoir claims that the only way a man fulfils himself and finds himself in a powerful position is by controlling and possessing his wife. Thereby, Manu's reaction to his wife's 'in-dependence' on him and her superior financial stature shattering his masculine ideology, makes him vent out his frustration through the means of 'sexual sadism' towards his wife.

This idea of control and subjugation resonates with the concept of colonialism, which is "an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a larger power". (Nayar 2). With women, the idea of weak, frail, dependent and much more has been used to keep them in a submissive loop. However, in case of Saru, where she is educated and powerful, yet a victim of patriarchy, powerlessness or being an inferior being does not call for her perplexity. Saru who had had a traumatized childhood grows up to be a confident, independent and a self-sufficient woman who manoeuvres her life through her choices. Yet as she moves on in her life with a

perfect family, her life seems dis-eased to her because of her husband's irreparable feeling of incompetence.

Saru decides to leave her house and go back to her father's place. She wished to get away from the constant oppression and savagery. She says, "Yes, that's why I am going. To get away from this house. This paradise of matching curtains and handloom bedspreads. This hell of savagery and submission." (Deshpande 28)

Resistance to colonial rule or the colonial power lies in a complete 'decolonization' of the 'self' from the imposed power, ideology, dependence and hegemonizing one's own self. In the political context 'decolonization' "seeks freedom from colonial forms of thinking, a freedom to revive and rejuvenate native forms of knowledge" (Nayar 6). This process in a feminine perspective would enable women to resist and revolt against any form of patriarchal tyranny, injustice, discrimination and allow women to lead a life of equality, free from subjugation and tyranny.

Tehmina Durrani in her autobiography *My Feudal Lord* exposes to the world the excruciating pain incurred upon her by her husband Mustafa Khar. His rage towards her, supported by the misinterpreted Islamic ideology of a submissive wife intensified his savagery towards Tehmina. It was after a rigorous journey of submission, adaptation, frustration, confrontation, resistance and finally assertion that she casts her way out of the identity disruptive relationship. Towards the end of the novel, she reminisces, sitting alone with my scattered thoughts, I conjectured that fate had placed me on this torturous path for a purpose. Our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets, but would not silence be a greater crime? Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other feudal lords thrive and multiply on silence. (Durrani 375)

Although, the idea of 'complete-freedom' through the means of revolt and assertion seems wondrous, yet, for women, freedom or the maximum limit to which they can assert themselves comes at the cost of 'compromise', 'adjustment' and an effort to 'fit-in'. For it is the woman who is given. The place does not belong to her. She is the 'Other' as Simon de Beauvoir calls it. Saru's dire will to break free and get away from her husband's disrespectful gaze, his humiliating behaviour and his act of assaulting her, subsides when towards the end of the novel we find Saru giving another chance to her husband. Her reassurance to her father when she agrees on meeting Manu towards the end of the novel, states the condition of 'forget and forgive' ideology, asserting the compromised state.

This idea, as I call it, the concept of 'pseudo-liberation' where one claims to be free yet seems dependent of the approval of the powerful other.

Saru, too seems to be a victim of the traditional acceptance and approval of 'man' as the supreme power. She recalls her college days when Manu could sweep her off her feet. As she puts it, "After that day, he was the figure I fantasized about, the person round whom I wove my

foolish dreams. No, not dreams; just one dream really. Always the age-old feminine dream of a superior conquering male.” (Deshpande 53)

Her imagination of her husband to be a powerful, conquering man seemed so similar to every woman’s dream of an ‘angry young man’. With women, the idea of ‘tyrannophilia’ seems much accepted and comfortable concept also at social level. Tyrannophilia as defined by Mark Lilla refers to “the interrelationships between theoretical discourse and political support of tyranny”. (“On Tyranny and the Global Legal Order”). The age old concept of masculinity indoctrinates a powerful and dominating image of man and accepts social tyrannophilia as a nominal behaviour.

Chinua Achebe’s representation of ‘men’ in his celebrated novel Things Fall Apart synchronises with the ideology of tyrannophilia where a dominating man like ‘Okonkwo’ who is a ruthless wife beater is respected. Men who are soft or polite are considered effeminate. For instance, Saru considered her father, who was a calm and composed man, respectful of his wife’s decisions, a weak human. She says, “she had known even then that he was feeble. No, worse than that, that he was a nonentity and didn’t matter” (Deshpande 29)

Saru’s aspiration to be held by a man stronger and conquering turned out to be a nightmare for her. The basic aspiration to be the best, to achieve, want, compete, all turned saturated. She recalls, “I had it too once, this desire to win, to excel, to be better than the others. When did I lose it?” (Deshpande 46)

‘Colonial Compromise’ or the necessity to ‘fit-in’ provides a social acceptance that forms the basis of human living. Women, for centuries, and throughout the world have survived in adverse conditions, with inequality, injustice, violation of basic human rights, sexual and physical abuse and innumerable social prejudices without fail. Simon De Beauvoir’s statement, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, confirms the surrendering capacity of women which encourages for her a position of rejection and posteriority. While there have been several instances of complete decolonization of patriarchal ideologies and evidences of assertion by various writers like Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Tehmina Durrani and many more, the aspect of Saru’s weakness embodies the dilemma in every woman’s mind. To ‘fit-in’ and accept the destined, women have forever faced seems the only convenient way to a harmonious life. However, a total emancipation from colonial power is through a complete revolt and assertion of self. This is where the novel lacks in providing a complete liberation and rather focuses on the hybrid state of ‘compromise’ which is the age-old explication to feminine conflicts. Liberation of women from the obsessive enforcement of patriarchal ruling cannot be attained through the act of ‘adjustment’ or ‘compromise’. This leads to a hybrid individual, deprived of self and a product of a faulty social structure. However, without the oppressive presence of the patriarchal force, woman is her complete self. In the words of Shashi Deshpande, “Women without men, then I realised, are totally different creatures.” (Women’s Web)

Thus, the woman question of individuality, assertion, recognition and equality stands parallel to the condition of the colonized third world that through ‘compromise’ would never have gotten their deserved liberation and the right to self-assertion.

Unless the oppressed learn to hegemonize their own self, unless the culture and consciousness of the oppressed is put forward visibly in public debate, unless this culture is prepared to clash with the culture and consciousness of the enemy in public, a society of equals will remain an illusion. (Nayar 11)

Saru’s battle with her childhood memories and her angst towards her husband and mother both keeps mounting for her inability to let go off what was hurting her. She constantly holds on to her mother’s criticism and also keeps living and adjusting with her husband’s inadmissible advances, reinforcing the idea of ‘colonial-compromise’ which in a wider perspective surrogates a feminine dystopian world.

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