

## From Voiceless to Voiced: Analyzing Gender Troubles in Shashi Deshpande's

### *The Dark Holds No Terror*

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**Abstract:** - Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent Indian writers in the emerging field of Indian Writing in English. Her works reveal that she is a highly sensitive writer who is acutely aware of imbalances of power between males and females in Indian society. It is evident that she understands the mood of India and has made an effort to incorporate the changing culture of the country in her novels. Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists and their struggle for identity in society are analyzed in this paper. In her works, she portrays the challenges of balancing traditional values and modern aspirations and negotiating the conflict between idealism and pragmatism.

**Key Words:** - Female identity, Man-woman Relationship, and Self-Realization.

**Introduction:** - Indian families have been undergoing a process of social change over the last few decades, resulting in substantial changes in husband-wife relationships. A social transformation has taken place in Indian society at large - it has touched the fringes of the family as well, affecting the structure and relationship within the family at the same time. In the light of the progress of enlightenment and the emancipation movement for woman, the spheres of roles and values have undergone a crucial change. As a result literary works have played a major role in forming the reader's perception. Women's experiences are explored in various forms and offer insight into the female psyche.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most influential modern writers in India who has consistently tried to discuss the problems of Indian women in the post-independent era. She is a well known contemporary Indian English novelist who began her literary career in 1970 with the publication of a collection of short stories. She was born in Dharwad (Karnataka) in 1938 and received her graduation degree from Bombay and then she moved to Bangalore to obtain a degree in Law. Her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* appeared in the year 1980 and she won

the Sahitya Akademi award in 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence* and then Padma Shri award in 2009. Her other novels are *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Binding Vine* (1992), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000) *The Moving On* (2005), *In the Country of Deceit* (2008), *Shadow Play* (2013) and *Strangers to Ourselves* (2015).

A major concern of Shashi Deshpande's works is to illustrate the difficulties faced by contemporary educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition, as well as their need for independence and individuality. In her fiction, she investigates the search for fulfillment that women have for themselves in spite of their traditional roles as daughters, wives and mothers. In her investigation, she has looked into a variety of common domestic issues. She awakens her readers' consciousness by illustrating the miserable lives of females in the families and in society as a whole in her writings.

The paper is intended to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by educated middle class women in their families, as most of the time; they feel confined in their lives. Her novels reveal the plight of women in patriarchal society through the prism of women's silence as a way to preserve their family lives. However, when they break their silence, everything within the family gets disturbed. All her women protagonists are always conscious of gender inequality that has been perpetrated against them, first as daughters, then as wives. As a means to search for their identity, they struggle against the oppressive traditions of their families, but in the end they compromise with it.

Shashi Deshpande's first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) depicts the struggle of women within a patriarchal society that discourages the development of women. The plight of women is the subject matter of a variety of novels written in Indian English. Such novels often portray women with patience, devotion, and acceptance of suffering in an extremely powerful way, and at the end, the women are glorified. But the present novel portrays a completely different picture of Indian woman, as it is rooted in an alternate world based on the experiences of career woman. The novel is a refreshing new development in the Indian English fiction field. Throughout the story, we see Sarita, the protagonist, trying to make a place for herself as an ambitious and self-reliant woman.

The novel begins when Sarita returns to her father's house for the first time in fifteen years, a place she has vowed never to return to since she married against her parents' wishes. She later confesses to her father about her sufferings and the rest of the novel is about her memories. There is a flurry of action between the past and the present throughout the novel, but the fundamental theme is Saru's mental journey during her father's house. Here she gets a chance to look back at her relationships with her deceased mother, her deceased brother Dhruva, and her living children Renu and Adhi. She discovers how significant family is to her. Her life remains unchanged until the end of the novel, which gives her the confidence to face reality with a better understanding of herself and others.

Through the character of Sarita, Shashi Deshpande demonstrates how a family-centered and male-oriented society works to oppress and discriminate women. Sarita represents a typical girl child that never feels appreciated. She is always blamed for everything that goes wrong, and who is never treated like a child, but always treated as a woman. It is believed that childhood is one of the most influential periods for character development, but patriarchy crushes this period of her. Her earliest memories are those that highlight her mother's love for her brother over her. It is given top priority to celebrate his birthday and other religious rituals, while her birthdays are barely acknowledged. As Saru recalls later, she wonders whether mother might have been displeased with her birth:

*Birthdays were not then the tremendous occasions they are made out to be now; but the excitement of having one, of being the centre of attraction never, palled. It was always a fascinating thought...I was born. But of my birth, my mother had said to me once... 'It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible'. And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rain. (169)*

Throughout her childhood, Sarita lives in a world of bias as a result of her mother's preference to have male children. In addition, she was constantly told that her brother didn't need to leave the family home since she was a girl born to get married. Her mother was concerned about Saru's appearance and her skin tone as it would be difficult for Saru to get married if her color of skin changed dark. As the mother speaks for the male viewpoint and her daughter rebels, it is clear from their conversation:

*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. (45)*

An accident that resulted in the drowning death of her brother marks a turning point in her life. It haunts her all the time that her mother accused her of inadvertently drowning Dhruva: “you did it, you did this, you killed him” (173). As a mute witness to the death of her younger brother, she feels guilty and cannot refute her mother’s allegations against her.

Having rebelled against her parents, Saru runs away from home and marries a man of her choice. The lower caste of Manu makes Saru’s mother disapprove of their match, reinforcing a traditional difficulty in her life. The caste and profession differences between Saru and Manu are ignored as Saru gets married to Manu despite her mother’s warning. Whenever she is at her parents’ house, she feels insecure. The house of Manohar was once a safe and loving environment for her after she married him. She considers him to be the ideal romantic hero who satisfied her longing for love: “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was triumphant assertion of our love of being loved – of my being a wanted. (40)”

Despite Manu’s low income from his job and they are living in a chawl, their bliss remains uninterrupted. She feels happy with her married life. She considers herself lucky to have found him. But eventually, she realizes that Manu is inferior to her. Her neighbors make her aware of her professional identity. She gains instant superiority to Manu as a result of her profession. In the traditional system, a superior husband and an inferior wife have an equal partnership, but Saru’s respect disturbs the balance. In retrospect, she recalls her marital relations:

*But now I know it was there it began ... this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too ... that the human personality has an infinite capacity*

*for growth. 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 lady doctor and he was my husband. (42)*

In response to her popularity, she suffers from a decline in her family life and happiness. Because of the ascribed position of her husband and her achieved position, she experienced a conflict in her mind. In the light of Saru's financial ascendancy, Manohar appears insignificant and powerless. Manu keeps his position as lecturer in a third grade college while Saru finds a way to accomplish her dreams. Despite her professional success and satisfaction, she is not happy at home. Most feminists believe that economic independence will lead to fulfillment for women, but her predicament contradicts this view. Despite their economic independence, Shashi Deshpande demonstrates that economic independent women are still shackled in marriage, bound to live in fear of hurting their husband's ego. As Saru observes bitterly:

a + b they told us in mathematics is equal to b + a. But here a + b was not, definitely not equal to b + a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. (42)

She became her own most insidious enemy as a result of being economic independent. In addition to her marriage, what was once beautiful had become ugly? It happened again when Manu was reminded by his colleagues that he was married to a successful woman. Both Manu and Saru, in their conversation with Manu's colleague, mentioned that they were going on a trip to Ooty and other places. When Manu's colleagues make fun of him for his helplessness to afford such an expansive trip, Saru replied tartly that if he had married a doctor, he might have been able to afford it. It was enough to turn Manu into a beast and Saru into a victim as it hurts Manu's ego.

Saru learns of her mother's death in the midst of a difficult time and goes to her parent's house. While she pretends to leave to see her father, she is actually taking advantage of the opportunity to escape her nightly tortures. At this point, she thinks about her relationship with her mother. She tells her father that she has come to see him as her mother had passed away. But in reality, she comes to understand that she is to blame for the disaster that her marriage has been.

Saru's father advises her that she must learn to deal with the problem instead of escaping from it. Saru realizes that she cannot run away from the reality of her life, so she decides to face the difficulties and challenges in her life alone. Her realization of this gives her a sense of self-determination and allows her to handle upcoming events on her own terms. By keeping this in her mind she is ready for the confrontation with her husband. In this way, her father strengthens her courage to face her husband and the situation:

*My life is my own. Somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because, I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of. (220)*

According to Indian tradition, a married woman should not return to her parents' house without her husband or have quarrels or divorces. It is customary for her to remain in her husband's house until she dies. Saru's father gets angry at her decision to leave her husband's house, just like an Indian father. When Saru tells her father about her husband torturing her sexually, his reaction is hardly surprising because the relationship between the father and the daughter has always been distant and reserved. Therefore this problem also seems to be rooted in social attitudes. Saru's father has never shown his love towards her but always shown his anger instead. For the first time in her life, Saru is now aware of his softness of heart and kind attitude towards her.

A disturbance in the mother- daughter relationship is present in Saru's story, as well as indifference and helplessness on the part of her father. As far as her father is concerned, he is a non-entity in the house. There is a possibility that things could have turned out differently if the father intervened; the mother-daughter relationship could have been saved from disintegration. Throughout the story, Shashi Deshpande effectively depicts the trials, tribulations and plights of father-daughter relationships.

Despite Saru's reluctance to face her husband, after receiving a letter about Manu's arrival, she tells her father, "Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can"

(39). She eventually reconciles herself with life's harsh realities by passing from illustration to reality, from frustration to submission. In modern India, this is an issue not just connected to Saru, but also to all the middle class working women. There is no question that Indian English fiction expresses the human spirit in its most explicit form. Thus, by linking our existence to imaginative experience, the essence of our existence becomes paramount. In creative writing, a writer provides an accurate illusion of human nature, society, and social organizations.

**Conclusion:** - Shashi Deshpande presents a realistic depiction of the existence's dilemma in the life of an Indian educated middle class woman even though she is financially independent. In her novel, she explores the suffering, frustration, and social anxiety of the woman, as well as how stillness is a form of communication. A woman's world filled with conflicting demands of selfhood, marriage, motherhood and the fulfillment of self is the theme of her novels. In her novels, Shashi Deshpande depicts Indian women whose lives are filled with a variety of responsibilities. The visual depiction of gender bias in society is depicted in the novel. According to her, women in traditional, chauvinistic societies have an inferior status. In such an environment, women struggle to redefine their status beyond predefined definitions and strict rules. The Indian woman is portrayed in a new light in which she continues to demonstrate her will power and determination despite the sufferings that her husband inflicts on her. Despite her refusal to identify as a feminist, she has revealed the barrier that the traditional male dominated society constructed around a woman's life from childhood to womanhood.

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