

Women's Chain Have Been Forged by Men, Not by Anatomy-Shashi Deshpande's Character Sarita in the Dark Holds No Terrors

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in middle class society. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationship specially in the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles-as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relation she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. Shashi Deshpande uses this point of view of present social reality as at is experienced by women. To present the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also to present indirectly the fathers, sons and husbands the relation between men and woman, and between women themselves. Her young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are, self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. As in the 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored.

Keywords: conflict, individuality, identity, patriarchal, traditions, subservient, self-denial sacrifice, suffering.

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande has joined the growing number of women writers from India on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. Born in Dharwad to a renowned Kannada dramatist, Shashi Deshpande was educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She pursued her degree in Economics and Law. She went ahead and studied journalism in Bombay and worked as a journalist for a magazine The Onlooker. She first published a collection of short stories in 1978 and her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors in 1980.

In the research Article, "Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: An Introduction" the author Bala Suman discusses the typical stories of Indian women in search of identity in a patriarchal world. Women's quest for identity is the central theme of all the novels written by Shashi Deshpande. According to the author after a great deal of suffering and self-introspection, the women come to terms with their present with an understanding and acceptance of their past and are ready now to march ahead with new acceptance of life. In her novels, the male characters

husbands, lovers, fathers and other relations- display different aspects of patriarchy and oppression. While the majority of husbands are patriarchal in their approach, the older men particularly the fathers are broad-minded.

The Dark Holds No Terrors

The Dark Holds No Terrors is about the struggle of an educated and professional woman Sarita. After fifteen years she returns to her father's house as she has heard about the death of her mother. Sarita or Saru got the opportunity to review her relationship with her father, mother, brother, husband and her children.

The Dark Holds No Terrors, Shashi Deshpande's second novel, is about Saru, the protagonistan educated, economically independent, middle-class wife who is made conscious of her gender as a child and whose loveless relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her agonizing search for herself. The novel opens with Saru's return to her parents' house fifteen years after she left homewith a vow never to return. Her relations with her husband becomes unbearingly strained and she returns for some solace. And she gets a chance to think over her relationship with her husband, her children, her parents and her dead brother Dhruva.

Saru is ignored in favour of her brother, Dhruva. No parental love is showered on her and she is not given any importance. Her brother's birthdays are celebrated with much fanfare and performance of religious rites, whereas her birthdays are not even acknowledged. Her mother constantly reminds her that she should not go out in the sun as it would worsen her already dark complexion. Saru recalls her conversation with her mother.

Mother: Don't go out in the sun, you will get darker.

Saru: Who cares?

Mother: We have to get you married. Will you live with us, your whole life?

Saru: Why not?

Mother: You can't.

Saru: And Dhruva?

Mother: He's different. He's a boy.

(The Dark Holds No Terrors 45).

The finite dimension of the relationship between man and woman has been prescribed by man and not by woman. Man who is ruled by the mastery-motive has imposed her limits on her. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons. Very often, this acceptance is not congruent with the reality that lies underneath. Modern women prefer to exercise—her choice and break away from her traumatic experiences. Women are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view, and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in words. Whether it is Devi of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*, or Sarita of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, or Lucy of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the women have established a coherent class structure—one of assertion of identity and defiance of male supremacy, and protest at being subordinated by man.

Surprisingly the male friends are 'feminist' in their approach and sympathize with the protagonists a lot. Deshpande's male characters only serve to enable the protagonists to define their identities more fully. Shashi Deshpande states that she does not "believe in a simple opposition of bad men, I don't believe the world is like that at all" (Prasad 78).

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande shifts the narrative from the first person to the third person narrative in every alternative chapter. The double narrative helps to lend great authenticity to the portrayal of Sarita's inner self. Deshpande has commendably accomplished the task of giving a realistic portrayal of the mental trauma Sarita undergoes.

In an interview, she tells how she hit upon the idea of using double narrative: The present is in the third

person and the past is in the first person. I was doing it, throughout in the first. But that's often a perspective I use in short stories – I wanted to be more objective. So, then I did it in the third. But it wouldn't work at all, yet I really need not distance myself from the narrative in the present, otherwise it was going to be far too intense. And then I read an American novel by Lisa Alther where she uses this method. And the minute I came across her novel I thought let me admit it freely – Oh god, this is how I am going to do my novel (Prasad 111).

Thus, Deshpande succeeds in the portrayal of Sarita's mental state with remarkable objectivity. Besides, her art lies amalgamating the past with the present seamlessly through dreams, nightmares, flashback, reminiscences and the simple third person narration.

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande's commendably realistic depiction of the contemporary Indian women's situation and the pragmatic solution she puts forward accord her novels, an imperishable importance for their affirmative eloquent marriage for women and the whole humanity as well.

Deshpande feels that the woman must venture out of the familial framework to give full expression to her individuality and identity. Shashi Deshpande's novels are realistic depiction of the anguish and the conflict of the modern educated middle class women. Caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality independence on the other, her protagonists feel lost and confused and explore way to fulfill themselves as a human being. Shashi Deshpande's concern and sympathy are essentially for the woman. She has given an honest portrayal of her fears, sufferings, disappointments and frustrations. Besides revealing the woman's struggle to

secure self-respect and self-identity, the author lays bare the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression.

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