

Gender Roles and Identity in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terrors

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Abstract: *A wide range of characters may be found throughout Shashi Deshpande's writings. Characters in Deshpande's literary realm are taken from almost every facet of life. They are writers and doctors, housewives with and without education, and maidservants. Apart from the commonplace challenges of poverty and bereavement, women face particular sources of sorrow. Deshpande portrays with empathetic understanding the spectrum of suffering that a woman has to bear. Sometimes women are compelled to undergo torture because they are silenced for the sake of family honor, while other times the anguish is connected to social taboos. Shashi Deshpande often writes about Indian women in her writings. The majority of women live in households in such condition. Shashi Deshpande has shattered the taboo of women's silence, and his sincere efforts have won appreciation from both local and foreign audiences. One was prompted to do study in this field by her perceptive understanding of human connections, her careful observation of the environment, and her detached perspective of movements and dogmas.*

Keywords: Sympathetic understanding, maidservants, dogmas, social taboos

I. INTRODUCTION

As books about women on a journey for self-discovery, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* aims to forward the idea that the women in these works have proven to be independent human beings. Women have arrived to a point where they comprehend the essential truth, which is that each person must discover it for themselves, free from the constraints placed by society, culture, and environment, as well as free from their own worries and shame.

Contradictions and paradoxes abound in our culture. Here, a woman is seen as an inconsequential part of the family, both at her parent's and her husband's homes. She has struggled to identify her ancestry throughout her life, which makes her insecure. Since the daughter and mother are the closest, the daughter likewise experiences this insecurity. The mother-daughter relationship in the book *The Dark Holds No Terrors* revolves with gender prejudice and lovelessness. Sarita, commonly known as Saru, is the family's daughter who has never experienced love or care from her parents.

The heroines of Shashi Deshpande oppose customs that are relics from the past. They abandon the pointless customs like circling the tulsi plant along with their rejection of their mother. Saru refuse to participate in these customs designed to lengthen their husbands' lives. Rejection is a sign of their independence and ability to see their life apart from their mother and the past. These heroines have grown apathetic about their bodies since they were young and cringe at some of the normal biological activities of the female that are connected to the mother. The only solution available to Shashi Deshpande's heroine when faced with the issue of her mother's values is to look for a new setting where her mother is unable to impose her will.

The lady looks to marriage as an escape from the familial bonds that bind her in order to attain her independence. She hates being a daughter and longs to be a wife, believing that her new position would enable her to secure their independence.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saritha experiences a similar trauma, faces reality, and ultimately comes to the realization that the dark no longer frightens her. She makes it through in a society where males rule and there are no simple ways out for women. She faces the task of being her own protégé with remarkable fortitude, instead of giving in to it or trying to run away from it.

Along with Saru, the reader, Saru goes on a difficult trip inside herself, learning how to let go of shame, remorse, and humiliation as well as being introduced into the mystery of human life. The novel's epigraph, "You are your own refuge," There isn't another haven. When Saru understands that his parents' house cannot serve as a refuge, "This refuge is hard to achieve (The Dhammapada)" takes on a whole new meaning. She is aware that she cannot find solace in her spouse Manohar or in her father. She is a haven for herself. She must defeat herself, drive out the demons who torment her, and figure out how to go to heaven on her own.

Notably, Saru has realized by the book's conclusion that her career as a doctor is her own, and she will choose how to use it. "My life is my own." She's going to stop being a puppet. Her union is a mirage. She refused to prove her mother incorrect, so she stayed in the marriage. Her only sanctuary is in her. Everyone is alone, and there's no reason to give up. In summary, Shashi Deshpande's literary works almost always center on the tragic and melancholy state of women in a society where males predominate. The novelist's contribution is found in the acute awareness and new perspectives she applies to the familiar forms and circumstances. A problem in a middle-class household sets off the events in the book.

The inner workings of Saru's mind throughout her seemingly routine life at her father's house provide the real core of the book. She ponders. She examines every crevice in her soul. She takes stock. She assesses relationships and life. As she unravels the layers of memories and visions in her head, we discover the real her. The method requires significant work. She works very hard to regain the respect she once had for herself. She makes a lot of effort to face her psychological anxieties. Our fears are always there inside us. We carry them inside us, and like traitors, they emerge to scratch and maul when we least expect them to.

adored Between a man and a woman, there was nothing like that. There was just one need, which they both tried in vain to fulfill, and that effort ultimately resulted in the phenomenon they called "love." It's only a word, she reasoned. The notion will fade away if the term is removed (72).

Saru's character can only be fully comprehended in the context of psychological principles. She is first and foremost a victim of the depressing consequences of gender inequality. The preconceptions about the two genders are the subject of social psychology. Saru's feminism emerges as a response to her parents in particular and the discriminating psychological framework of society as a whole. Second, Saru has the ingrained mindset of an unloved kid. The psychological composition of an undesired kid has been extensively studied by psychologists. Thirdly, and perhaps most cruelly, Saru's mental health is marred by a horrific physical trauma. She basically leads a spiritual life while living at her father's home. It's a response to her unclean bodily sensations. Everything tangible is dirty in her eyes. She loses her fantasies of feeling and love forever as a result of her femininity being ruthlessly shattered. She was all too aware that romance and love were unreal and unrelated to this existence. It is possible to discuss Saru's dual existence. She is a terrified, pained lady to the outside world. Her life is following a strange and calm routine. During the day, she exudes confidence and knowledge, wearing a white coat, but at night, she transforms into a caged animal, frozen in time. What makes a fictional character ubiquitous is included in Saru's persona. Despite all of her flaws and struggles, she manages to achieve a high level of self-actualization. She quickly reaches a point when she is no longer defeated by conflict, worry, or the rejection of others. The idea is that a person will continue on the path to self-actualization if they continue to grow as an open, adaptable, and expanding self.

Saru is shown as a woman and as an individual at the same time. Her situation runs counter to the feminist claim that women get security when they become financially independent. Saru longs for emotional closeness and safety. She feels uplifted by Manu's cruelty and wants her father to stand with her.

As a result, Shashi Deshpande's books make plain how the author feels about the pervasive gender disparity. Nonetheless, it is clear that the author does not attempt to address this discrepancy. Many of the novel's supporting characters suffer in quiet or accept their lot in life with resignation, but they never do anything to endanger their marriages or their social standing. It is noteworthy, although, that the heroine of each of her books decides to take control of her life at the conclusion of the book.

After some philosophical reflection, she decides that it is absurd to try to flee. Other than oneself, there is nowhere to hide. She comes to the realization that no one else—not a spouse, parent, or child—can bring her pleasure. She is capable of achieving mental serenity on her own. Nobody offers harmony. It must originate from inside. The last image

of Saru, when she is fearless and pain-free and boldly waits for her husband—the object of her biggest fear—is rather alluring. She's prepared to confront him. She's prepared to take on life.

I felt eyes glancing at me. All of them, except Manu. who refused to give us a glance. And I ought to have despised him then—not Manu, because he had nothing to hate at the time, but this gorgeous, very manly guy who was doing this on purpose. bringing focus on the two of us. Strangely enough, however, I didn't detest him. Manu was to blame for his inaction. This man—no, knowing what I did to him, I could not detest him. that there was nothing at all behind the exterior of angry, macho masculinity (94).

The main goal of Shashi Deshpande's work is to portray the agony and tension experienced by contemporary, educated Indian women who are torn between adhering to tradition and patriarchy and expressing their uniqueness, dependency, and self-expression. Her writing examines women's quests for personal fulfillment outside of their conventional roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. She has looked at a number of typical household crises that set off the investigation. Deshpande is mostly sympathetic and worried about the lady. In the process of exposing the woman's battle for self-identity and self-respect, the author delicately exposes the many forms of oppression that women face in society, including sexual oppression.

Shashi Deshpande was tasked with assigning the female characters specific roles that would align with the socio-cultural norms and values of the evolving post-colonial Indian society, which witnessed a collision between old and newly imported ideals. A new generation of women came into being, welcoming the altered ideals that gave women the voice they had been denied for decades. The books written by contemporary women authors represent these women as capable of making independent decisions and not relying on the preferences of males. These new female personalities are not the same everywhere, however, and problems are revealed as a result. Her books explore the topic of impoverished, industrious, quiet, genuine, and animal-loving Indian women who endure unspeakable hardships in order to survive and still hold out hope for a brighter future while ultimately meeting their demise. All they experience in life is a string of setbacks, humiliation, suffering, and frequent relocation. In addition to the majority of rural women, middle class women also exist in India's many towns and cities, although they often cannot take use of the legal standing granted to them. Nowadays, women are afforded equal rights under the law with regard to property inheritance and employment prospects. However, in terms of society, these women, who have long struggled for recognition, are nonetheless ridiculed by their male peers and compelled to keep quiet. In Shashi Deshpande's works, the voice of this newly emerging class of women—who possess the same level of education as males and sometimes have the chance to support themselves financially—is heard. Her paintings also bear a protesting voice against the oppressed status of women as a class. The meek and subservient heroines who were considered as the traditional women characters are replaced by the courageous heroines who possess the moral strength required for self-assertion.

Characters in Deshpande's literary universe come from almost every walk of life. They are authors and medical professionals, educated and illiterate housewives, and maidservants. In addition to typical difficulties like poverty and grief, there are specific causes of suffering that are unique to women. Deshpande depicts the range of agony that a woman must endure with compassionate comprehension. Sometimes the pain is linked to societal taboos, and other times women are forced to endure torture because they are silenced in the sake of family honor.

Shashi Deshpande has received much praise both domestically and internationally for his earnest efforts to shatter women's silences. Her astute grasp of human relationships, her keen observation of how people live, and her dispassionate view of movement and dogmas compelled me to make the current effort in this regard. She has bravely avoided the need to create powerful, idealized female heroines and instead has shown Indian women as having to make the difficult decision to choose between tradition and modernity. Deshpande exposes the hidden mechanisms of gender inequality and oppression that are present in Indian society's male-centric structure of the family.

Instead of removing a woman from her upbringing, Deshpande's feminism seeks to highlight the many ideological components that have shaped her. These include social and psychological components (such a woman's submissive role in the family and her limited libido) as well as religious and cultural elements (including myths, tales, rituals, and rites). In Shashi Deshpande's works, contemporary, educated, independent women, usually in their thirties or forties, are the protagonists. One common element is their quest for independence and self-identity in their marriage. At first, it is evident that each of her protagonists is confused. They gradually go through a process of reflection, self-analysis, and

self-realization as the story progresses. By the conclusion, they are noticeably more optimistic, self-assured, and in control of themselves.

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