



SUFFERINGS OF FEMALE CHARACTER IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR*

A. THIRUMANI AARTHILAXMI

M. Phil. English,
Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science,
Theni. (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

*Women in the Indian society are facing lot of problems and troubles inside the home. Through they are educated, they are easily affected psychologically. Women are suppressed in male dominated society and face many problems such as loss of identity, male domination, martial disharmony, etc. She was unable to take her own decision. She is imprisoned in the four walls of the house where there is no one else to share her grief. Even if she is provided with the material comforts, she tries hard to let others listen to her agony. Among the recent women novelists, Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English and writes about the situation of women and their failures in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. In her novel *The Dark Holds no Terror*, the female character Sarita, undergoes lot of sufferings, loss her identity and finally she was empowered.*

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is very much conscious of the vulnerable conditions as well as secondary status of the Indian women. She concentrates about the situation and their fate in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. She portrays the inner world of the Indian women and her heroines are shown in the realistic manner. All her novels reflect the views of Virginia Woolf about women in her novels. According to Woolf, a woman should have 'a right to a room of her own'. In all the spheres of life, woman is the presiding deity. But Deshpande sights that women play a second fiddle to men in real life. Shashi Deshpande has many avatars and shows her strong voice against the male dominated Indian society.

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In our Indian society, a woman is put under restraints right from the day a girl becomes a woman. At home, a girl enjoys the full freedom and gets the unconditional love for her family members. The condition becomes worse after their marriage because they are under the victims of men. All their small freedom is driven out and the irony is most women accept this with pleasure. Most of the novels of Shashi Deshpande tell the story of women who are the victims of exploitation, separation, negligence and even rape by their own family members. Shashi Deshpande is against the roles prescribed by the religious scriptures and orthodox traditions for Indian women. She is aware of the rise of women in modern society where education has made them more assertive, more liberated in their views and more articulate in their expression.

The chief thematic concern of Shashi Deshpande's novels is based on woman's struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society. Shashi Deshpande feels happy to be called a woman writer and she is not enthusiastic about the label feminist. She considers herself as a feminist in personal life but not a feminist writer. "I write as a writer but am identified as a woman writer. I am nothing more than a novelist and a short-story writer but people seek more glorified titles to elevate you to stardom." "If critics and reviewers insist on Calling me a woman writer, then 'man' should be prefixed to male writers as well".

Shashi Deshpande is regarded as one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Her output is by no means inconsiderable — Eight novels viz., *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980); *If I Die Today*; *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983); *Roots and Shadows* (1986); *That Long Silence* (1987); *The Binding Vine* (1993); *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000). Shashi Deshpande has written four volumes of short stories, viz., *The Legacy* (1978); *The Miracle* (1986); *It was Dark* (1986), and *It was the Nightingale* (1986), and books for children too.

Suffering means the act of distress, pain, endured. In most of her novels, she shows the woman characters who are belonging to Indian middle class and they seek for their self-identity and brought up in a traditional, environment and one struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence in her novels. The Indian women has for years been a silent suffers. In the novel *The darks holds no terror*, the whole situation in which Sarita has placed herself is rather unwanted. The lack of perfect understanding emotions between husband and wife causes of domestic life, there should be a blend of acceptance and rejections, flexibility and rigidity and above all revolt if the occasion demands and compromise for peaceful life.

Deshpande writes mainly about "everyday India. A society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our

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immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives." She does not simplify India but presents India as it is to her readers. Deshpande herself says, "They (my novels) are just About Indian people and the complexities of our lives." Thus her works, particularly novels, demand undivided attention from the readers, demand that they understand the world that is being presented to them without any embellishment. In her novel *the darks holds no terror*, Deshpande is of the view that women suffer mostly due to male chauvinism.

Due to the simple and small situation in their married life, women are facing many problems and troubles. Man is always tries to dominate over women in the Indian life. Most of the Indian women are suffering from many physical disabilities and diseases like backache, headache, and loss of appetite and burning feet. Shashi Deshpande is a feminist who creates her women characters that are contemporary. Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. The novelist being a woman herself has presented a realistic study of the attitude and conduct of women in Indian middle class families.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle-class educated women. She always had in her mind people from the real India to write about, but as she proceeded, spontaneously and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. When interviewed by Vanamala Vishwanatha, Shashi Deshpande makes it clear by saying: "It all starts with people. For example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* came to me when I saw a couple." She is uniquely Indian and her use of Marathi words very evidently presents the customs and traditions of the people belonging to Maharashtra and Karnataka.

She does not see males as the cause of all, troubles as some feminists do, and she deals with the inner mind of women. Education and experience in foreign countries sets women writers apart from traditional Indian women. The traditional Indian women suffer, submit and adjust themselves to the circumstances. The women novelists like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala have, in their novels, portrayed this aspect of women's life without having the firsthand experience of it. Shashi Deshpande has projected this aspect of Indian women with more sensitivity and instinctive understanding as she belongs to this category. Unlike other women writers, she is born and brought up on this soil, gained her education in India itself and wrote about India. The projection of the woman's world in her novels is more authentic, credible and realistic. She knows what Indian women feel. Shashi Deshpande does not want to be categorized with other Indian writers writing in English. She has a unique place among the novelists writing in English. She declares that she is just like any other regional writer but her medium of writing happens to be English, as it is the only language she knows well. Explaining her position, Shashi Deshpande says:

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*I'm isolated — I'm not part of any movement and not
Conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition
here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places
like that with the right contacts. I'm an ordinary woman who
writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my
Reach. This has, I believe, done me good. It has given me
great freedom. I'm happy with this anonymity. Once you get
Publicity-conscious, your writing becomes affected. I'm truly
Happy with this freedom.*

Sarita is the central character in the novel *The dark holds no terror*. She is the victim of circumstances and conventions of an orthodox and reactionary society. She undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protégé. Shashi Deshpande's six novels have been critically analyzed with a view to understand and appreciate the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and the responses to the emerging situations in life in the contemporary society.

Sarita, the female protagonist undergoes several sufferings and tied up under male chauvinism. She is a rebel of sorts in a custom ridden society. When Sarita is rejected by the chance of going with her friend, Smita to a cinema, she gets angry because her right is curbed and so she wants to badger her parents by going away from home. She wants to be free and have an identity of her own. She hates her parental home, yet the novel begins with Saru (Sarita) visiting her father after a gap of fifteen years.

Many women are treated like animals. They are beaten and tortured inside the house as well as in the society. Even the ill-laws ill treat them in a horrible and grotesque manner. But there is no punishment in the penal code of the world for such inhuman atrocities against women. Defying her parents to marry the man Manohar, whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well-established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of life she is passing through. She appears to be confused, hopeless, dull almost thoughtless and a recluse.

Years gone, still Sarita remembers her mother's bitter words uttered when as a little Girl because she was unable to save her younger brother from drowning. Now, her mother is dead and Sarita returns to the family home, to take care of her father, but in reality to escape the nightmarish brutality her husband inflicts during night. In the quiet of her old father's company Sarita reflects on the events of her life. As she struggles with her emotions and anxieties, Sarita gradually realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage,

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parents and other such institutions — and she resolves to use her new found truths to make a better life for herself. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a tremendously powerful portrayal of one woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs. Talking about marriage problem in India Deshpande says:

*A marriage you start of expecting so many things.
And bit by bit, like dead leaves the expectations fall
Out. But... two people who have shut themselves in
two separate jars. Who can see each other, but
cannot communicate. Is this a marriage?*

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has childhood scars. She hates her mother to such an extent that she says, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." Saru's mother shows gender difference in her treatment of her son Dhruva and daughter. "He's different. He's a boy" — these words establish the traditional Indian mother against whom Saru has to rebel all her life. During her childhood, she has experienced with the sense of guilt because she thought that she is the responsible for the death of her brother. It is enhanced by her mother's words, "You killed your brother...why didn't you die?" which *drive* Saru to hate her mother.

The issue that has major concern in the writings of Deshpande is how to get honorable adjustment of women in the society within the framework of marriage system. Swine observes:

*The tragic predicament of Deshpande's protagonists
is the outcome of male-domination in a patriarchal
culture. Their silent suffering is socio-psyche in
nature. In her quest for identity, the Deshpande's
protagonists move from despair to hope, from self
to self-assertion. Her struggle throughout
is to attain wholeness, completeness and authentic
self-hood. (Swain 2005: 125)*

The marriage without the consent of the groom destroys and disintegrates female self. Motherhood is spoiled because of emergence of husband as a villain. Like other Indian women English novelists like Anita Desai, Kamala Das etc. who are worried about the problems of adjustment of the women, Deshpande has shown the efforts to adjust them keeping in view the ground reality. Earlier the problems of women were more emotional nature due to their attachment to their family. Today, the educated women being conscious of their significance are much more ambitious of having a life style of their own parallel to men.

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In the opinion of Deshpande they have such ambition, but they lack efforts and supports. Their emotional attachment to home and family is a fetter to fulfill their ambition. It becomes difficult or rather impossible for them to break up the established ideal wife-husband relationship. Despite torture and troubles, they lack the courage to revolt against the traditions and live without the support of the husband. They are to honour the Scriptures that teach them:

*Day and night, women must be kept in
Subordination to the males of the family: in
childhood to the father, in youth to her
husband, in old age to her sons.... Even
though her husband be destitute of virtue
and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must
be worshiped as God.*

Marriage in the Indian society is such a sacred bond for women that even the educated women belonging to middle class become submissive only to protect their marriage because the consequences of a divorced or left wife is well known to them. That is why they all are submissive and obedient to their husbands even though they are cruel and inhuman in behaviours. The belief among them still exists that husband is the sole most of the wife and sacred duty of the women is to be ideal wife and ideal mother.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror* deals with the traumatic experience. She undergoes as her husband (Manu) refuses to play a second fiddle role. After marriage she becomes a doctor due to her sincere efforts while her husband remains far behind in profession career. He has no guts to appreciate wife's advancement and assist her. Rather she dislikes her with the result that Saru becomes the subject of exploitation by her own husband only because he is not ready to tolerate his wife's superiority in profession. The husband whom she submits her entire self, tortures her because he is the victim of inferiority complex. Her husband vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism. She does not dare to oppose excessiveness's of her husband. Rather she tolerates it silently and feels bad inside. The novelist admitting the existing vulnerable and pathetic conditions of Indian women thinks that "The women had no choice but to submit to accept, and I had often wondered... have they been born without wills of life-time of disuse?"

In the novel *The darks holds no terror*, the woman character Saru while enters into her room, she finds male clothes hanging on the wall and realizes that she has no room of her own. The feeling of being enclosed is associated with the mother's house and the protagonist wants to escape from the enclosure, as revealed in Indu's dreams. The image of the enclosed walls

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suggests the suffocation these women undergo not only in their parental homes but the homes they have chosen as refuge.

The real strength of Sarita is her self-evaluation and her awareness of her guilt. Though she is not responsible for the death of her brother Dhruva and the broken mental condition of Manohar, she has the feeling of being guilty. She is repentant. She feels in her heart of hearts the unwanted and unhappy situations in her life. This self-analysis purifies her mind and helps her take clear-cut decisions at times of trouble and staggering.

The plots of Shashi Deshpande's novels revolve is a middle-class educated woman caught between the modern trends and the traditional practices. In her novels, it is notable that the men characters are not very expressive. Perhaps Shashi Deshpande wanted to highlight the problems of women more than the attitude of the men folk. These men keep silent about the issues and, at the same time, they expect submissiveness from their spouses. Without mentioning and discussing the matters, they take for granted that the women will follow them.

In all the novels, shifts from present to the past covering the whole life span of the protagonists. All the time they are brooding over their fate, questioning them what they really are and ultimately trying to adapt themselves to the surroundings. The novels end with an optimistic note with the hope of some positive action in the future. For example, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* waits for her husband to come to take her back and start their life afresh.

At Intellectual discussions, she champions the cause of English as an India language, and fights for the recognition of woman as individual. She speaks truth gently but firmly, her words lingering, long after her exit. The present paper projects the fact tale about women, who speaking for herself or for the whole of womankind is quite different from a man telling a women's tale also it brings out of the idea of women explicating her and emerging out of the cocoon of self petty to spread her wings of self-confidence. In Indian society women play a very important role in their life. They fly out with various colors though they were suppressed under male domination. Shashi Deshpande has performed her role as a protagonist of the oppressed woman. She feels that a woman, not only in India but also in other countries, is not treated at par with man in any sphere of human activity. Thus woman in the current scenario faces many problems and sufferings inside the house and tries to come out from that and become an empowered woman in the society.



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