

A Feminist Study on the Multifaceted Roles and Experiences of Women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*

A.ANUSUYA¹, DR.S.BHARATHI RAJA(GUIDE)²

¹Reg. No:MKU21PFOL10188, Ph.D. Scholar in English (PT)

Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai-625021(TN), India.

²Assistant Professor & Head(i/c), Department of English, Vivekananda College, Thiruvudakam West, Madurai-625234.

ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is one of India's foremost contemporary authors who have carved a unique place for herself within Indian English literature through her profound exploration of the lives, experiences, and aspirations of women in Indian society. Shashi Deshpande's writing style is distinguished by its clarity, simplicity, and the depth with which it explores the human condition, particularly concerning women. A central theme in Deshpande's novels is the intricate portrayal of family and relationships, offering a lens through which to examine the complex roles that women are expected to play within familial contexts.

One of Deshpande's most significant contributions lies in her commitment to giving voice to marginalized women and addressing issues often neglected in mainstream literature. Her novels tackle topics such as domestic violence, patriarchal structures, and societal expectations, shedding light on the often-muted experiences of women.

This research paper highlights the profound and enduring impact of her work in addressing the intricacies of women's lives and experiences in a rapidly changing India. Shashi Deshpande's writings not only offer an empathetic window into the emotional realities women often grapple with but also stand as a catalyst for discussions on women's roles in contemporary Indian society, making her a pivotal figure in Indian English literature.

Keywords: Feminist Literature, Family Dynamics, Emotional Realism, Societal Norms, Gender Dynamics.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are characterized by their profound exploration of the female psyche, their intricate portrayal of the complex dynamics of family and relationships, and their nuanced reflection of the evolving socio-cultural landscape in India. Through her masterful storytelling and empathetic narratives, Deshpande has not only given voice to the women whose stories often remain untold but has also carved a distinctive niche within the realm of Indian English literature. The purpose of this study is to delve deeper into the literary world created by Shashi Deshpande, focusing specifically on the women characters that inhabit her novels.

It aims to scrutinize and analyse the multifaceted roles and experiences of these women, their struggles for independence and identity, their navigation of societal constraints, and their resilience in the face of challenges. Through a comprehensive exploration of Deshpande's novels, this study seeks to unearth the complexities of her women characters and their

significance in the broader context of Indian literature and feminist discourse. As we embark on this literary journey, we will traverse the landscapes of Deshpande's literary imagination and immerse ourselves in the lives of the women characters in her writings.

Deshpande's writing often revolves around the inner lives and experiences of her characters. She is adept at creating well-developed and relatable characters, and her narratives are driven by their thoughts, emotions, and interactions. Social and Cultural Commentary: Deshpande's novels often serve as a lens through which readers can view and understand the social and cultural milieu of contemporary India. She subtly critiques societal norms, customs, and expectations, raising important questions about the roles and status of women in the country. Deshpande uses subtle symbolism and metaphor in her writing to add depth to her narratives. Symbolic elements often help convey themes and emotions in a non-didactic manner, allowing readers to interpret and engage with the text on multiple levels. Deshpande's writing focuses on the exploration of human relationships, particularly within the family. Her novels delve into the complexities of familial bonds, the tensions and tenderness between spouses, parent-child relationships, and sibling dynamics.

Deshpande is adept at delving into the psychology of her characters, often exploring their inner conflicts, anxieties, and emotional landscapes. This psychological realism adds depth to her narratives and makes her characters more relatable. Many of Deshpande's characters undergo journeys of introspection and self-discovery. Her novels often depict characters who grapple with questions of identity and personal growth, offering readers an opportunity for introspection as well.

Shashi Deshpande's writing style is marked by its emotional depth, social commentary, and an acute understanding of the human condition, particularly as it pertains to women. Her works continue to resonate with readers who appreciate her ability to craft compelling narratives that tackle profound themes with simplicity and grace. Study of Women Characters and the experiences Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of women characters in her writings is characterized by depth, authenticity, and a keen understanding of the challenges, aspirations, and complexities that women face in contemporary Indian society. Her novels often feature women from various backgrounds and age groups, and she presents them in ways that are both relatable and thought-provoking.

Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is also a story of Sarita as Saru, an urban working woman belonging to the middle class who is oppressed at all levels including domestic, professional, and marital levels and she seems to have lost her control over her own life. During childhood, she is told that she is an amma of the other house and thus she grows up with the feeling that she will own her own house when she gets married. There are four members in her family including her. Sarita is the protagonist and narrator of the story. Her mother, Kamala Tai, is a typical traditional Indian woman, who has a gender-based discriminating tendency in her nature. She offers less importance to her daughter than her son, Dhruva. Her daughter faces many problems because of her gender. From her childhood, she started a fight against the male dominance mind set. She bears all the domestic responsibilities along with taking care of her career-oriented growth. She married, as a runaway girl against the wishes of her parents.

Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a story of the introspection of the protagonist, Sarita. She is a successful medical practitioner. In the beginning, she is happy with her husband, Manohar, who is a Lecturer in English and once was a promising poet. She was in love with him and marries him against the will of her parents. She becomes mother of two children. Manohar is also a loving husband and caring father. But gradually the success and popularity of Saru as a doctor makes him uncomfortable. He becomes jealous of her wife's achievement. During the day, he shows off his wife to his friends, but shows severe reaction of her envy at the night. He turns monster in bed, abuses her, bruising her and creates such terror that she cannot even scream for help.

Saru realizes dual personality in her husband; during the day he shows no sign of brutality, but in the night, she experiences his terror. Initially, she cannot understand what is wrong, and hence she tolerates it. One day she comes to know that her mother who has been disgusting her all these years, for the death of her brother, died. She thinks that she can find her place at her father's house. She goes back there with a hope of warm welcome. But her father welcomes her without showing pain or pleasure. She comes here as an option to escape from the brutality and sadist nature of Manohar. Saru undergoes a process of introspection and becomes conscious of her position in the house of her parents and her husband. The lack of emotional attachment leads her to self-realization. The process of introspection happens on both the sides Saru and Manu. As part of that he writes a number of letters of apology to her which she does not reply. She remains obdurate till the end of the novel. Finally, he personally comes to her father's house to bring her back with the promise of a fresh start. Deshpande gives a suggestive end to the novel that Saru, who has determined not to open the door, rushes to open it.

This symbolic act of Saru exhibits the emotional characteristic of an Indian woman. She accepts to go with him, but this time with the commitment of not bearing any torture from her husband. So, in the end there seems a radical change in her temperament. Thus, the change is psychological. Shashi Deshpande delineates predicament of the middle class educated woman in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Her preference for the portrayal of educated middle-class woman is appropriate for her subject matter because she herself belongs to that class and hence can realize their inner aspirations and angst, and secondly, it is the middle-class women that experience the suffocation of socio-cultural bondage more compare to the rich and the poor class women.

It perfectly exhibits the feminist angst by the character of Saru. She is obsessed with the fundamental question of her identity. She cannot be a good daughter to her parents, and therefore, she tries to make her identity as a good wife. The failure of her marriage makes her more disappointed. She expects love from her mother but cannot have it; she expects love from her husband and fails again. This twice failure makes her think about her own identity.

Saru is in search of her own identity. She does not want the dominance of other over her. She wants to make her own identity. In the end her trust on human relation is shaken. She finds herself in a vacuum. ...it's true. We come into this world alone and go out of it alone. The period in between is short. And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop (DHNT 208).

A woman is either a daughter, or mother or a wife. A woman has to adjust herself twice in her life: First as a daughter in father's house and then as a wife in husband's house. She has to mould her personality according to the need of other, especially male. From postcolonial point of view, she is a subaltern and she cannot have her own voice or her own identity as well.

Her identity is reduced to somebody's wife or daughter. Saru reverses this concept and becomes a reputed doctor. She is not wife of a lecturer, but she was a lady doctor and he (Manohar) is her husband. She finds, $a + b$ they told us in mathematics is equal to $b + a$. But here $a + b$ was not, definitely not equal to $b + a$. It becomes monstrously unbalanced equation (*DHNT* 42)

Deshpande aims at showing the difficulties of modern women in building their identity. They have been exploited and suppressed for centuries, and hence, they have lost the courage to raise their demands. Because of this mental powerlessness, they are unable to change the condition of society which may be conducive enough to their freedom. Jaya also belongs to the group of such women who is desperate to come up but ultimately succumbs to her circumstances.

Sarabjit Sandhu observes, In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man whether it be a love-marriage or an arranged one the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or the wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice and is supposed to be unavailable for certain period, he assumes Jaya would accompany him. Though she is unwilling to follow the example of Sita and Savitri, paradoxically, she is compelled by the situations and circumstances... (Sandhu, 2010:38)

Sarita defies her parents by studying medicine and becoming a doctor. But she receives a heart breaking jolt when she gets married and goes to her husband's house and finally, realizes that she has no place of her own. She only learns about Sita and Savitri when she is young, and she is instructed to imitate them in order to make the perfect wife. She only has an identity as a wife and a mother. Her entire being is focused on pleasing her spouse and getting pregnant for him.

According to Alison M. Jagger; with the partial exception of mothers, the male culture defines women as sexual objects for male pleasure... As a daughter and as a wife, a woman's sexuality is carefully controlled so that she may not bring dishonour to her family. (Alison M. Jagger 1983).

Sarita narrates a man-woman relationship from a feminine point of view. She tells how her husband. Manohar feels jealous to see her increasing popularity as a good doctor. He becomes a patient with an inferiority complex. He starts to exploit her physically, mentally, and socially to represent himself as a superior husband. Sarita finds that she is unable to face such heinous behaviour of her husband. And finally, she let her husband and took shelter in her father's house and started a fight against patriarchy.

Shashi Deshpande understands and lives within the Indian socio cultural milieu, and has projected the feelings and emotions of Indian women in universal colours. She universalizes certain basic feelings irrespective of national characters and makes it plain that a

woman must develop the thinking because she is an individual who is capable enough of withstanding trials and tribulations in life all alone. A modern Indian woman should be evaluated more than a mother, sister, or daughter. A woman needs a strong mind, individual will, and identity. She opines that there is a great need for economic capability and education for women to achieve values, money, power, and social identity. In short, the new woman has to accept the responsibility for her children, her husband, and the duties of the lady of the house.

This vision also was in the mind of the central character, Sarita who arrives at a point of realization wherein nothing either becomes a problem or reveals any darkness. Her search for identity leads to revealing the power of individuality. Therefore, she brings out emphatically psychological and emotional problems as Indian working women to solve them. When we read Shashi Deshpande's work *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, we discover that it has a strong plot and that it supports Simone de Beauvoir's claim that a woman is not born but rather is transformed into one. Beauvoir thinks that this feminine described creature, the woman, is a product of society.

However, Shashi Deshpande's novel is different from the feminist works of the West which present male protagonists providing secondary roles to women. However, Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are women who ponder over their situations and their relation to others. She saw that women in every social class had to put up with abuse and humiliation. She feared that she might experience the same result. Even though she was aware that her father had helped her despite her mother's desires, she struggled with the question of whether he was fighting for her or against her, or whether he was using her as a weapon against her.

If he used her as a weapon, everything would be different. Instead of being aided, a woman would be used by a man, and a daughter would take advantage of her mother. Instead of being helped, it would mean a woman's exploitation by a man and a daughter's exploitation of her mother. If that were the case, she would feel resentment toward her father since he had taken advantage of her daughter. In her work, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande has addressed gender-based issues. She has demonstrated how marriage and men cause women to suffer. In addition to outlining her own experiences as a woman, she thoroughly examines society. She has demonstrated that even though she has economic independence and education. Away from reality, women are perceived to be denied legal protections outside the home and to be victims of domestic abuse. The entire book tackles the gender-based issue that is pervasive in our culture.

References:

1. Deshpande, Shashi, *The Darks Holds No Terrors*, New Delhi; Penguin Books, 1990
2. Deshpande, Shashi, *That Long Silence*, New Delhi; Disha books, 1992
3. Deshpande, Shashi, *Binding Vine*, New Delhi; Penguin Books, 1993
4. Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*. Translation, H.M. Harshley. London; Vintage Renganathan, Mala. "Indian women at the Cross Road:
5. Shashi Deshpande's Heroines". *Journal of Literature, Culture and media Studies*, 2009
6. Shailaja.T. "Various Dimensions of Women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande". *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management Studies*, 2015.

7. Hemalatha.J and Chandraan.M.R “Sashi Deshpande and Her Women Protagonists- An Analysis”,Quest Journals. 2015. Vol.3.