

# A Critical Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors"

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**Abstract:** This paper represents the A Critical Study of Shashi Deshpande's novel "The Dark Holds no Terrors".

**Keywords:** Indian society, narrates and violence.

## 1. Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known Indian novelist who writes in English language. She was born in Karnataka and educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She won the Sahitya Academy Award for the novel 'That Long Silence' in 1990[1] and the Padmashree Award in 2009. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978. "The Dark Holds No Terrors" was written and published in 1980[2]. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most widely read Indian novelists of the time. She writes about the true veins of men and women in Indian society. She is the ace delineator of characters. Her characters are life-like taken the common men and women. She writes about the suffering of typical Indian women even when she does her best to support the family as Indian society is patriarchal.

Sarita, the female protagonist narrates the story and through her mouth we come to know about her mother, her dead brother Dhruva, her old teacher Boozie and her husband Manohar. The novel begins with Saru's return to her maternal home after a long gap of fifteen years and it ends with her going back with her husband Manu [3]. Sarita and Manohar are husband and wife but their relationship takes a turn when Saru i.e. Sarita becomes a doctor and starts earning more than her husband. The male ego of Manohar is hurt when their colleagues and neighbours make fun of him.

In an Indian society, women are always supposed to be far behind their husbands in all aspects, doesn't matter they earn more than them. Sarita as a doctor and earns a good deal of money whereas Manohar earns a little as he is a teacher in a college. Manohar suffers a lot and he finds a way to take revenge from Sarita. His sexual sadism hurt Sarita a lot which is inflicted upon her every night intentionally. In Indian society it's not that only the women suffer; the male who is not capable to fulfill the needs of the family or he who earns less than his wife also suffers a lot. Sarita is the female protagonist of this novel. She has all the characteristics to be the central character. She is ambitious, resourceful and pragmatic. She uses Boozie, her old teacher to complete her studies and to become a doctor.

She ignores his touch, hug and playfulness. She even seeks financial help from him to set up her clinic. As soon as she achieves her end, she starts ignoring him and turns her back against him. She bears the physical, mental and emotional suffering done by her husband as she is a typical Indian woman and doesn't want to harm her marital life. The darkness inside her is not inherent but it was imposed on her heart and mind by her own mother who keeps on blaming her for the death of Dhruva, the brother of Sarita. Her mother says:

"...Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead? ..." [4]

Again she experiences the darkness when she is to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. But she thinks of one thing that every cloud has a silver lining that if winter comes can spring is far behind? She goes back to her father's home to review her relationship with her dead mother, the father and the husband Manu. She adopts one thing that acceptance is the rule of life. If one cannot change someone or something, better to accept that as it is.

It's not that women of the past ages suffered at the hands of men. Even modern women are the worst suffers. They at home, at the workplace and so forth. When she is a daughter, she is under the custody of her father; when she becomes adult, she is under the custody of her brother, after marriage, she is under the custody of her husband and when she grows old, she is under the custody of her sons. From the first breath till the last, she is dominated by males. Thus, Sarita is no exception. She is an epitome of a typical Indian woman who remains passive in all the circumstances.

Let's talk about Id, Ego and Superego in this novel. Id signifies the pleasure instinct of human beings. When we try to find pleasure in someone or something, id works fervently. The early days of the marriage of Saru and Manu was based on this id. She revolts against her parents and marries a person of her own choice for she seeks real pleasure in him.

The way Boozie behaves with Saru, the way he touches her and hugs her is completely based on id.

Ego works when Saru faces the harsh reality of life. That earning money is not enough to make the marital life evergreen in India, a woman has to be a true follower of her husband and she should never be superior in intellect, finance and decision making. Male ego of Manu gets hurt when he realizes that Saru is gaining more popularity and prestige than him. Again, the

ego of Saru is badly hurt when Manu adopts sexual sadism every night on the bed not because he is a husband but because he was the romantic hero whom she herself has chosen to spend her life with. When we love someone and he/she hurts us, it is more painful than anything.

Superego works when it comes to realization and morality. Superego acts strongly when one realizes that something is wrong and it should be checked at the touchstone. It is the superego of Saru that she turns her back against Boozie when she fulfills her needs of becoming. She never tries to divorce her husband Manu as her basic instinct doesn't allow her to cross the morality of an Indian woman. Here her basic instinct is filled with superego.

Violence against women in any forms: physical, mental or emotional, it must be eliminated from the society. Women are at least not to be used and treated like commodity. They should have the choice of prospective match, profession and practice. Every woman has the right to be treated on the equal terms and should have the right to earn and to gain name, fame and respect in the society. Sarita is such a woman. Her only fault is that she has been brought up in an Indian society.

Shashi Deshpande has given autobiographical touch to this novel. Mother-daughter relationship, daughter-father relationship and, of course, husband – wife relationship simply describe the status of woman in the society. Women are treated badly not only at the hands of men but women also. It's the mother of Saru who curses her when her son Dhruva drowns accidentally.

We find feministic approach of Saru when she achieves her end by marrying a man of his choice i.e. Manu; by becoming a doctor and by opening her own clinic. She even goes back to her father's home in order to introspect and interrogate her relationship with Manu.

Saru is not a creature of fanciful imagination, living in the ivory tower, far away from the harsh reality of life. She knows how to manage marital life. She bears the torture inflicted upon by her husband and doesn't question her existence as she knows silence is the best criticism.

This novel deals with the feminism which emerges from a male privileged and women's subordinated society. It is an ideology and a movement which could not have spared Indian Writing in English. Shashi Deshpande has made Saru her mouthpiece. When a sufferer narrates a story it has a lasting impact on the mind and heart of the reader. Shashi Deshpande is pro-woman but not an anti-man. We find the myth of man's unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman's martyrdom in this novel.

Search for identity is one of the themes in this novel where not only Saru but Manu is also dying hard for the search of identity. Saru uses her old teacher Boozie to get identity and dignity and Manu suffers mentally. He is the worst sufferer as a male earning less than his wife and is less popular than her, generally suffers a great deal in Indian society. Manu is the victim of inferiority complex. He thinks that he is not fit to eat

and sit with Saru in the daylight. That's why he treats her like animal on the bed at night. It gives him a sort of satisfaction and a way to satiate his male ego. On the other hand, Saru surrenders herself to situation. She accepts the darkness of her life as it comes to her and this darkness holds no terror as she has become habitual to it.

Shashi Deshpande delves into deep of Indian society and she has painted it with the hues of reality and truthfulness. She has waved the flag of feminism as she herself has already gone through the torment and tyranny of women. Saru is tormented by her husband at night and is tyrannized by her own mother throughout her life as her seven year old brother Dhruva drowns and dies accidentally.

The theme of career-woman's predicament can also be found in this novel. In a male-dominated society, career-woman is thought to be an obstacle and the matter of disgrace for male-counterpart. Saru faces the same when she establishes herself as a renowned doctor of the town.

We also find female-female, female-male and male-female exploitation in this novel. Mother exploits her daughter Saru; Saru exploits Boozie and Manu exploits Saru to the utmost. But one thing is to be agreed upon by every reader that each character of the novel is the victim of circumstances.

Saru's mother curses her when she lost her son Dhruva because she thinks that a son is a must for leading a family and for salvation. Saru exploits Boozie for he is the person who may help her in career-making process and last, but not the least, Manu exploits Saru as he thinks that she is the matter of indignity and respect for him in the society as he earns less and is less popular than her.

This novel can also be observed as a psychological novel as the story develops through the mind of the central character. The trauma and suffering of the characters make it a true psychological novel. Sigmund Freud has stated the three states of mind i.e. conscious state, subconscious state and unconscious state. When Saru puts her footsteps in her maternal home she thinks of the relationship between her mother and father and how her mother keeps on cursing her for the death of her only brother Dhruva. Thus the story begins through Saru's mind.

The gap of fifteen years when she comes there and goes back with Manohar, all the actions develop through her mind. Manu suffers a lot but he never speaks anything directly. His action speaks louder than words. His sexual sadism is again the matter of psychoanalysis. This shows that he is mentally unfit. He does it unconsciously as during the day he becomes a normal husband. Boozie, the old teacher of Saru is manipulated by her. She plays with his psychology. Again, Boozie who is actually a gay keeps on putting his attention to Saru in order to hide his shortcomings and weaknesses. He is also the victim of Indian society which does never allow such practice of homosexuality. Both the male and female characters of this novel justify their actions in one way or the other. Saru leaves her parents home and marries a man of her choice but what should one do when one is treated as the other in one's own home. She is tortured

mentally as if she were the murderer of her brother. Saru is ambitious as she keeps on thinking how she can give a boom to her career. Her ambition to become a new woman i.e. a working woman leads her in hot water. Though she becomes a successful medical practitioner yet it comes to her as a traumatic experience when she finds the changing behaviour of Manu on the night bed. Eventually, she decides to save her marriage and doesn't oppose the animal like behaviour of her husband.

Indian Women never try to go ahead of their husbands in any walk of life. Even when some try to do so, they lose their happy family life. And, women like Sarita do some sort of compromise in order to save their marital life. Dissatisfaction in characters works throughout the novel. From the beginning to the end, we find the characters are not satisfied even when they make some achievement. Saru is the best example in this regard. Saru is dissatisfied with her mother's favouritism. She is dissatisfied even when she attains name, fame and money as her husband who is a typical Indian man never accepts his wife to be more earning and famous than him. He develops a type of inferiority complex.

Thus, it can be said without doubt that all the characters of this novel are life like and they suffer. Their suffering makes them real and they win readers' sympathy. We start identifying ourselves with them and feel as if it is the story of our own life. Sarita, the main protagonist of this novel is more sinned against than sinning. Is it her fault that she wants to be an established medical practitioner and to live a dignified life? Why cannot she choose the way she wants to lead her life? Everyone has the right to grow and search his/her identity.

The role of Indian women is very wide and various. They have to play the role of a daughter, a mother and, of course, a wife. And, at each level, they have to suffer too. When they are daughters, they have to sacrifice a lot of things for the male members of the family. When they are wives, they have to look after the needs and wants of the husbands and, when they are mothers, they have to be under the rules of their sons. They cannot breathe freely, take decision on their own and they cannot choose the ways of life.

Sarita is also facing the same music. She is not happy at all even though she is able to pursue higher studies and becomes a famous medical professional. Her only fault lies in the matter that she is a few feet ahead of her husband that she earns more money and respect than him and that she wants to live like a new woman. Here one thing is to be noticed that the orthodox Indian society is not ready to accept the concept of a new woman.

We brag and boast, profess and propagate the concept of feminism. We celebrate International Women's Day every year with great pomp and show but do we really practise it on the personal level. Those who deliver a fiery speech on women empowerment do they really want to empower women? What to talk about males in male-dominated society, even the women leave no juncture to hurt or defame other women. The examples are numerous. The need of introspection is badly needed in

Indian society. There is the need to change the perspective. One should not be judgemental regarding the role of women.

We must not forget the fact that:

"... Women are the special race God sent to earth to take his place. Women are the spiritual name that even saints are proud to claim..."

The power to keep the sanctity of marriage and womanhood that Indian women like the protagonist of this novel Sarita possesses is rarely found in any other society of the world. The power of endurance in Indian women is amazing but it doesn't mean that they are to be treated like the other or like a commodity in a patriarchal society.

Shashi Deshpande's role as a women novelist is par excellence. She has touched the nerve of Indian society. She has put one of the most discussed issues through this novel and that is the issue of the place of women in Indian society as well as the middle-class morality of typical Indian men who may die hungry but don't want their wives to earn for the family. The pride and prejudice of men regarding women in a family show how hollow we are in our thinking, speaking, and action.

## 2. Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande is a feminist novelist though she also writes about the suffering of men in a middle-class Indian society. Through the characters of Sarita, Manohar and Boozie she has established the fact that darkness is always there but one should not be afraid of it. One should look into the bright side of life or one should accept it as it is then happiness will always be around.

Sarita accepts Manohar's sexual sadism and doesn't oppose it in order to save her marital life. She uses Boozie to hike her career and for financial advancement to set up a clinic. There is a search for identity, strive for survival and, of course, mental and physical strife to prove the superiority.

This novel is deeply rooted in Indianness and even an average reader may easily probe it in the characters of the mother of Sarita, Sarita and Manohar. No characters are taken from the world of fantasy and imagination but they are real men and women coming from the middle-class family. Realism hovers throughout the novel. It doesn't make us roar with laughter but it creates a feeling of somberness. From the very opening of the novel, we find an atmosphere of gloom and sadness. The sad death of Dhruva and the continuous cursing of the mother for this simply create sadness and pave the way for the story to develop.

To conclude, we can say that Shashi Deshpande is one of the most potent Indian novelists who has presented the real picture of Indian society and asks us to widen our outlook, overview and notions regarding women in our society.

## References

- [1] Shashi Deshpande, "The Dark Holds no Terrors."
- [2] The Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande- A Critical Study by Binod Kumar Roy