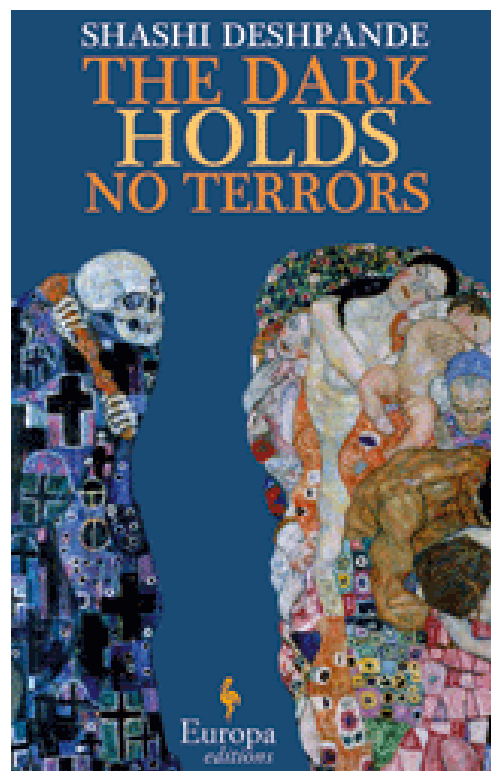


Aspects of Gender Conflict in English Literature

Sarita–
Master of Her own Survival in Shashi Deshpande's
The Dark Holds No Terror

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Abstract

The *Dark Holds No Terrors* is an absolutely magnificent and unique story. It deals about the journey of women, consisting of all the phases in her life: childhood, youth and adulthood, which the protagonist embraces with high spirit. *The Dark Holds No Terror* presents the story of a woman who defies the dark side of her religion and castes of the wrong belief, creates a new world of her own where she is not subdued to any patriarchal rule.

When she discards the believable customs of her religion, she adopts only those in which she thinks there is no discrimination. She is typical, submissive and stereotype domesticated Indian women who bound to their submissive fate. She turns the tide in the way of thinking of the society where woman is no longer objectified. Now she not belongs to her father or her husband. She becomes her own master. This book is an inspiration to young women who could now seek rights to ask and question.

Key Words: Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, women's struggle, educated, opposition, relationship, successful, terrified women.

Introduction

The Dark Holds No Terror, a novel of Shashi Deshpande, was published in 1980. This novel has been translated into German and Russian. It was Shashi Deshpande's favorite work as she told an interviewer: "It was a simple theme and fewer characters. It gripped me so much that I whipped through the writing the wife had a better job and there was a very obvious tension between them. He was aggressive and surly. That set it off" (1).

And again when an interviewer asked her about the 'Dark' she said: "As I told you, it started with this unequal couple that I saw. And then I wrote the short story 'The Liberated Woman' I was very ill at the time and I re-wrote the story about 17 times. Somehow I have that figure still in my mind. And I still know that I hadn't got it right. It went on to get a prize but I still wasn't happy with it at all. I knew it had to be a novel. But I didn't have the confidence to do it. So I waited a long time. I wrote a number of short stories, longer short stories, serials and Roots and Shadows. But once I began on it I wrote it from beginning to end. I am not saying that every single word came that way, but there was no time when I was actually stuck. Whereas there were points both with *Silence* and the new book when I was stuck badly, when it seemed all wrong. But when I finished *The Dark*, I knew it was a good novel. I was never sure in that way about the other novels. But about *The Dark* I never had any doubts" (2).

Sarita

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P. Pavithra, M.A.

Sarita – Master of Her own Survival in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* 72

Sarita is the central figure in the novel. The story starts with Sarita's returning to her father's house after fifteen years. She heard from someone about her mother's death, so she decided to see her father. But her father start avoid her, perhaps he was loyal to the dead woman. She found no changes there. Seven sets of large stone were leading to the front door. The traditional and religious plant *tulsi* had been only the spot of green. The plant has a great significance in Hindu culture. The belief of Indian woman who worships *tulsi* before her husband woke up early in the morning. And here of course, it served the purpose. Sarita's mother died before her father. When Sarita did not find any changes when she entered in her house. But she found changes in the behaviour of her father as she says : `` And yet there were alterations. An ashtray full of stubs. (since when had he started smoking). It was as if he had become an apostate revolting against the pattern of living in which to leave a cup unwashed even for a minute had been a crime''(3). Her father's welcomes her like unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. When Sarita left her father's house she was unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. So she came back to her father's house.

Representing a Large Part of the Indian Society

Shashi Deshpande represents a larger part of the contemporary Indian society. Through her novels she has presented the problems and conflicts of educated middle class women who to prove their individual identity in the society. Shashi Deshpande, realizes the values of the Indian culture, tradition and society, does not deny the necessity of the existence of man in woman's life, but she does not accept the total subjugation of woman before man. In her novels practical woman and they do not believe in traditional. In traditional countries like India marriage is not based on love. So a loveless married life causes the wife. Now a day's educated women and professional women are compromise their career for their family in order to save their marriage. Individualistic women are suffering today by broken relationship. Nevertheless, there is no dearth of progressive women who are striving to achieve fulfilment against the defiance of male chauvinism.''(4)

A New Woman

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Sarita – Master of Her own Survival in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* 73

Shashi Deshpande creates a new woman in this novel. The new woman's role in the story proves that she can survive in all kinds of situation. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* Sarita is the new woman who is confined to the family tradition, but she asserts her identity, struggles for her rights and ultimately reaches her goals. She proves herself as a role model for middle class educated Indian woman. Every girl has the right to live their life, to develop their qualities, to take their own decision, to be independent in their freedom and to take charge of their own destiny'' (6).

The Dark Holds No Terror is a story of Sarita, who is a successful medical doctor but is unsuccessful in life. Sarita in the hands of her husband felt extreme fear. She came back to her father's house and stayed there.

Inspiration in Life, Decisive – Breaking Bondage

Once there came a lady at Sarita's place. She was looking nice and superior to all other women. Sarita was much impressed by her personality and later on she came to know that she was a doctor and so she was different. Impressed by the personality of that lady, Sarita decided that she could be a doctor and that would be the key which would unlock the door out of this life. She was an intelligent girl. She worked hard and got first class in intermediate and that was the passport to medical college. When her father asked her what subject she wanted to take up for her B.Sc., she boldly said that she wanted to do medicine. Her mother raised several questions to her about Sarita's life. She said: 'I am not talking to you. I'm not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No forever a 'no' to anything I want. You don't want me to have anything. You don't ever want me to live.' (8) Sarita's mother was a rival to her. Her mother considered her daughter someone who had to fulfil certain family responsibilities, having no choice of her own and supposed to follow the tradition and rule which had been already prepared for her by her mother. Her mother starts hating Sarita. Her mother forced her to stay inside the room. Her mother held her responsible for Dhruva's death and refused to be reconciled with her till her death. Sarita hated her mother. She wanted to hurt her, wound her and make her suffer.

Females against Female Aspirations

In fact, in our society structures females are in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender. Sarita is always tormented by her mother. Her mother disliked her and was always against her. One day Sarita recalled her mother words how strongly she opposed during her admission to medical college. Contrary to her expectations, it was her father who supported her. Sarita wanted to be friendly with her children, otherwise there was a fear to lose them. She desired to be a good wife and a good mother although she had failed as a good daughter.

According to tradition and culture girls cannot live with their parents after a certain age. Parents regard them as something or someone to be handed over to the rightful owner through marriage. Girls are not allowed to choose their own way; they are compelled to depend on others.

After she got admission in medical college Sarita enjoyed her college life and so soon she fell in love with Manohar. He was academically good and was a creative student. Manohar was the dream person for Sarita who met him in real life. He became the only dream for Sarita. But that was not the real part of her life. She did not enter in college for love and dreams. She had to study and to be a successful doctor. That was the reality of her life – to achieve a destination.

Family's Opposition

Sarita decided upon her own life partner by her own choice. But her family was against her decision. Manohar was her ideal romantic hero who had come to rescue her from the insecure and loveless existence. She was hungry for love, as she said: "I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted. If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me."

Famous Doctor Now – Crumbling Marriage

Sarita became popular as a doctor in her locality. Now Sarita started to long for her parents advice and she longed to listen to their advice. But neither Sarita noticed it nor Manu

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P. Pavithra, M.A.

Sarita – Master of Her own Survival in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* 75

revealed it but Manu took a very serious concern of it. She was always busy in her work and she ignored the physical and mental desires of Manu. So he became abrupt and rough to her. Sarita succeeded in her life and became well-known, reputed doctor but at the same time, her marriage began to crumble. The situation started changing, as Sarita says: And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller but perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. Manu's character is rude with Sarita. Thus bed was the only place where he could assert his animal power over her. He became a mean and loathsome person when he enjoyed in her glory at day and ill-treated her at night. So Sarita became two-in-one woman, in day time she was a successful doctor and during night a terrified trapped animal in the hands of her husband. Sarita became too depressed and she decided to resign her job, but Manu's thought was against it for fear of becoming a middle class family. Sarita's attitude gradually changed towards Manu and marriage. Now Sarita's life became like an empty vessel, all relationship and neighbours started to blame her father. After a few years she came to her home and she felt sorry for what all happened in her life and she thought about what all mistaken she had done. The relationship gave encouragement and shows the courage to face reality happening in day to day life in the society. She realised that the dark no longer holds any Terrors to her. At last, Sarita learn to compromise with all her situations in her life. She received a letter from Manu of his arrival. The bitter emotions strengthened the future.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's women characters revolt against social taboos and old traditions. They struggle for their freedom, completeness and their identity. They fight against the existing system and tradition of society and express their feelings, their anger, and their resentment against the social taboos. But these do not bring them any satisfaction. Shashi Deshpande reflects upon the grass root reality and woman's plight in India. Her focus is on the domestic affairs rather than on the political affairs of modern life. She successfully portrays a complex vision of compromised happiness and withered dreams of middle class women's life.

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P. Pavithra, M.A.
Sarita – Master of Her own Survival in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* 76

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