

**SARU'S JOURNEY TO ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR BY
SHASHI DESHPANDE**

Anita Darsena, PhD Scholar, Department of English, Bharti Vishwavidyalaya, Durg, CG, India
Dr. Rajshree Naidu Associate professor, HoD, Bharti Vishwavidyalaya, Durg, CG, India

Abstract

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, the author delves into Saru's complicated mental and emotional turmoil as she faces her anxieties and fights to escape the darkness of her past, especially her mother's stifling influence. The novel by Shashi Deshpande explores themes of coming-of-age, individuality, and independence, illuminating how one's family dynamics and cultural expectations shape their path to enlightenment.

After close analysis of the novel one understands that Deshpande mixes conventional and modern beliefs to engage readers and majestically portray the dilemma of her characters. She sees feminism as an idea that supports women's writing creation and self-discovery. Her writings try to impart that to live a tranquil life efforts should be made from both ends and the relation should be sustained but not by sacrificing one's identity.

Keywords: *Enlightenment, Identity, Feminist, Patriarchal, The Dark Holds No Terrors, Shashi Deshpande*

Introduction

In the novel Shashi Deshpande wants to talk about the masculine vanity that won't let men be second fiddle in a marriage. The novel tells the enlightening story of Saru, whose social and economic standing is higher than that of her husband Manohar. Deshpande's writing portrays how society treats the wife more highly than the husband in a marriage which leads to the husband experiencing a sense of self-deprecation. Saru frees herself from grief and shame to take charge of her life after being denied parental love and being a victim of gender bias. The point of this study is to emphasise how important it is for women to look for respect, honour, and decency for themselves in both public and private spheres. Aside from that, it wants to show that women haven't really been freed yet. The emotional and spiritual strength of men and women come from each other, not from being different.

Discussion

Among the current wave of female novelists, Shashi Deshpande stands out as a master storyteller. The search for identity in the conventional gender norm for women is central to her works. Deshpande is a relatively recent figure in the literary arena, following in the footsteps of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and others who chronicled this feminine rebellion against a patriarchally-dominated Indian culture. The self-assured and forceful "New Woman" is the ideal she aspires to portray. By challenging herself intellectually, she hopes to develop her own unique way of thinking. Consequently, she delves into the characters' inner lives, the dynamics of their social and interpersonal interactions, and their responsibilities.

In the fiction, the lead character, Sarita, also known as Saru, seeks a way out of her mundane existence. Shashi Deshpande depicts a tragic tale of a tortured wife, a young, intelligent lady who is a brilliant doctor and whose husband, a college lecturer is not so successful. This novel is a welcome departure from the norm in Indian English fiction; it centres on the struggles of a professional lady caught in an unhappy marriage.

The novel's core is the psychological analysis of Saru while staying at her father's home. Here she has the opportunity to reflect on her relationships with her parents, husband, brother Dhruva, and children Renuka and Abhi. She has gained a deeper comprehension of herself and those around her. Because of this, she is able to face reality without fear of the dark anymore. A poignant portrayal of a woman's endeavour to endure in an inhospitable environment devoid of a discernible trajectory. This novel stands out for its in-depth examination of the subconscious. Deshpande portrays the subtle process of gender disparity and subjugation in the family in a patriarchal society through Sarita's character. Saru

exemplifies the stereotypical feminine child, unappreciated, blamed for everything that goes wrong and treated more like an adult than a child. According to Simone de Beauvoir,

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”
(The Second Sex, 295)

Gender is not only a biological reality but also has a social construction. Recollections from Sarita’s youth highlight the prejudice her mother displayed towards her. Her birthdays were barely noticed, in contrast to her brother, who received top importance and is fêted with great fervour during his religious ceremonies and celebrations. A sense of estrangement and loneliness sets for Saru as her mother’s prejudiced actions make her feel unloved and undesired. She feels trapped by her insecurities. As Saru remembers later in life her mother had told her once that it poured fiercely the day she was born.

“It was awful. It seems to me, for some reason, that my birth was the horrible thing for her, not the rain”

(The Dark Holds No Terrors, 169).

When Saru’s brother Dhruva drowns in an accident, it changes her life. The events surrounding his drowning continue to torment her to this day. Even after her brother drowned, her mother continued to blame her for the catastrophe and never forgave her for being alive.

“Your survival is mysterious. You did this, you killed him.... Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive when he’s dead.”

(The Dark Holds No Terrors, 191)

The trauma and mental instability that Saru endured as a result of her traumatic experiences gave rise to her desire for autonomy and the reclamation of her own identity. She felt so bad about herself for being unable to save her brother from death that she was unable to even appreciate life as it was. Because of her parents’ stringent curfews, she was unable to go to the movies, play outside, or even visit her friends’ houses. Internally and externally, she was deeply distressed by all of this. After repressing herself and the pain for a long time, she scoured the world seeking joy, affection, caring, self-discovery. She overcame her parents’ wishes and enrolled in medical college because of her indomitable spirit. Society will recognise her, she reasoned, if she had a good education and a successful career. In her desire to flee her home, she has come across a stream—an unplanned current of life. Saru married Manohar, a man she chose for herself. After an uprising against her parents, she flees the house to marry Manohar.

She seeks solace at her father’s house after being unable to endure her husband’s sexual sadism. Throughout, she keeps quiet about her pain. Anxieties and horror are represented by darkness. It represents Manu’s mistreatment of Saru and his autocratic attitude. Saru, is profoundly impacted by terror, which calms, pains, and influences one’s emotions. Manu is saddened by her increasing fame, she doesn’t tell Saru anything about it. Saru says,

“And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller”
(The Dark Holds No Terror, 42)

describing how their marital bliss is ruined by their inability to communicate. Saru realises that the wedding was a catch designed to turn her into her sadistic spouse's slave after learning the truth about him. She says,

“I’m tired”
(Dark Holds No Terrors, 80)

accidentally because she is so drained from her work that she disregards Manu’s affection. Manu is unable to accept Saru’s indifference towards him and her increasing fame. When Manu is unable to physically console Saru, she just turns her back on him and goes to sleep, telling herself,

“It was his failure”
(Dark Holds No Terrors, 87)

which only serves to fuel his anger. Because Saru denies having a conjugal relationship, Manu views Saru as more of a doctor than a loving wife. As a result of his disappointment, Manu becomes a sadist and acts violently towards Saru during the night. Though she, too, stays mute, she is traumatised by her husband's brutal deed. Every time she tries to tell Manu this, she ends up blurting it out, and then there's quiet. She says, taking full responsibility for the muted expression of her issues.

"I should have spoken about it the very first day, I, however, did not. And every time it occurs and I remain silent, I add another stone to the wall of separation between us"

(Dark Holds No Terrors, 96).

Their marital harmony suffer a powerlessness as a result of their silence. Her husband's demonic character, who is fine during the day but transforms into a violent stranger at night, is also leaving her bewildered. Saru never talks about how her spouse's behaviour turns her into a scared animal and she never gets a divorce. As her husband's brutality gets intolerable she announces her intention to leave her employment, but Manu has a different reaction. But he adds firmly,

"No, Saru, there is no turning back, going forward is essential"

(Dark Holds No Terrors, 81).

He tells her to rest for a day and then go back to work, since he thinks they can't pay their bills on his wage and won't even care to listen to her. The mental and physical burdens that Saru is carrying are too much for her to bear. After experiencing a rough marriage and a loveless connection with her parents, Saru becomes self-aware of her identity and sets out to discover who she is. As a doctor, Saru is proud of her responsibility and never forgets it. She feels like *"Just a white coat containing nothing"* due to her unhappy marriage. Because of his insecurities, Manu interprets Saru's achievement as a reflection of his own shortcomings. He takes great offence when people compliment his doctor-wife for her altruistic work, but he doesn't enjoy it when people praise her for her noble service. Manu once smiles off a journalist's question about how he deals with the fact that his wife is clearly better than him. But the blow to his masculine ego is so great that he believes rape in the marital bed is his only option for dominating her. Saru realises that Manu was secretly angry and resentful due of her increasing prominence. The tranquil marriage life of Saru is complicated by her status as a doctor in society. Furthermore, Manu finds it irritating when his friend's wife says things like,

"You would have gone to Ooty too if you had married a doctor"

(Dark Holds No Terror, 111)

When others refer to Manu as the husband of the doctor, he feels unappreciated. The author reveals Manu's evil character in this way: He resorts to sexual molestation of Saru at night while pretending to be a loving husband during the day, because he is unable to establish his "manliness" over her like a typical male, economically speaking.

"His unconscious goal is to physically abuse her in order to prove his dominance and power, and to punish her for assuming the male role."

(Kirpal Atrey and Viney).

Experiencing Manu's touch and coming to the following conclusion:

"And so once again, silence was the only answer"

(Dark Holds No Terror, 121)

In addition, she harbours fear that he may accuse her of insanity, therefore choosing to remain silent.

"Her feeling that as long as she did not speak, the thing that happened between them remained unreal"

(Dark Holds No Terror, 203)

She argues to herself that for Manu she has become a woman doctor instead of a bride for her spouse. Saru thought she could escape her mother's wrath and rejection through her marriage, which she

believes will offer her happiness. When she realises that she can never be happy in her marriage, she goes into a tailspin. Despite the marital mismatch and role reversal, Saru struggles to let go of the marriage's shaky foundation. Instead of letting this discourage her, she takes a daring step—she leaves home—to put an end to this façade. Over time, Manu and Saru both become more silent, and a lot of things go unspoken between them.

“My husband is a sadist”
(Dark Holds No Terror, 199)

Saru says when introducing her husband to her father, revealing her disdain for him. It doesn't take long for Saru to figure out that there was no point to leaving her children, husband, and career behind and returning to her parents' house. To regain her status as Manu's wife, she is willing to sacrifice anything on the inside. She accepts her inarticulacy as the reason for her silence when her father asks why she left her home. She has never discussed the matter with him. She says,

“Maybe I deserve it after all,”
(Dark Holds No Terror, 201)

“Because I was scared of proving my mother wrong, I clung to a marriage that had long since crumbled, even though its content had long since vanished”
(Dark Holds No Terror, 220)

For all Indian women living in patriarchal societies, Saru's plight is a universal one. One more home that represents recovery in Deshpande's works. After coming to terms with her current situation, she learns that she must find solace in herself, rather than relying on anyone. One of the benefits of the narrative framework of homecoming, according to Ravendra Prakash is that,

“It provides circumstances that enable the main character to go through time to relive their formative years, speak about their hidden fears and shame, and draw connections between their present and past”
(186)

She learns to trust herself after achieving self-confidence and asserting her will. Earlier, she had requested that her father refrain from hosting her spouse at their place. She now tells her father to let Manu back inside and keep him waiting if he comes back. She is adamant about speaking out this time since she has decided on her course of action. She knows that if she stays quiet, she will never be free. She now seems much more prepared to confront Manu and stand up for herself, which explains her attitude shift. One way a woman might triumph over adversity, according to the author, is by speaking out for herself. The establishment of personal conversation that would have strengthened the marital relationship was hindered by Saru's quiet. She remained mired in hopelessness and depression due to her inherent reticence to speak. Before this, she had never bothered to talk to her husband about her issues. Saru finds a solution to all her problems when she resolves to rebuild her family life meaningfully. Our journey through this world begins and ends with solitude, she realises

“And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop”
(Dark Holds No Terrors, 208)

Sarita resolves to return to her house since she cannot stop thinking about her ailing loved ones or her children who require her care. Even complete hopelessness can give birth to a fresh will of fundamental self-assurance in this volatile environment. After some time apart, Saru returns to her husband as a confident wife, ready to confront life's challenges with renewed optimism and resolve. Reconciling her life's pieces is something she knows she must do on her own. She is aware that this is going to be a challenging procedure, but she must do it because no one else can. As time goes on, she realises that she is just as much to blame as the outside world. In the past, she singled out Manu's shortcomings. She finally sees her shortcomings as a person who can't keep relationships together or be a good wife, mother, sister or daughter. She finds the strength to face the difficulties head-on after having a

revelation about herself. She finally reconciles with her family after experimenting with life, facing hardships, and seemingly succeeding and failing.

Conclusion:

The novels written by Shashi Deshpande convey the message that women should stand up against oppression and rise up as independent thinkers who aren't afraid to tackle problems head-on and not run away. She blames the female dependency syndrome for one's victimisation, and her works' themes and characters reflect this attitude. However, a note of reconciliation is struck at the end. Efforts are made by both spouses to comprehend one another. In an effort to begin a new life, the woman breaks her silence and returns to her husband's home, she refuses to leave her husband. That she does not abandon her family but rather brings them back together is a recurring theme in her works. Saru overcomes her emotional trauma via reflection and self-realization. It is only after passing through some tough times that she comes to this realization.

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