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## The Spirit and Reality of Indian Women: A Critical Perspective of Shashi Deshpande's the Dark Holds No Terror

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**Abstract:**

*Shashi Deshpande is one of the veteran literary figures encompassing the field of Indian writing in English. The present article has been prepared keeping in view the spirit of the middle class Indian women who speak out their internal ideologies and expectations that are long dominated by the patriarchal framework of the contemporary conventional society. The novel, The Dark Holds No Terror has been brought into the analytical ground for proper justification of the spirit of the Indian women. Sarita, the protagonist of the novel has been taken as the central representative figure who raises her voice in favour of the common Indian women facing the same traumatic life. The life sketch of Sarita has really inspired and encouraged the other women who also have prepared themselves for struggling against the male dominance. Shashi Deshpande has tried to project a new identity for the women beings in lieu of their status in the household arena. She has also tried to show that women should not be confined inside the four walls of the house; rather they should be provided proper facilities to empower their potentialities both in the private as well as in the public spheres.*

**Keywords:** Discrimination, domination, patriarchal framework, femininity, women spirit, society

### 1. Introduction

*The Dark Holds No Terror* is an analytical treatment upon the condition of Indian women residing inside the perplexed societal framework of patriarchy. Having a female identity Shashi Deshpande has offered a lucid presentation about the realistic attitude and behaviour of women in Indian families having middle class origins. The protagonist, Sarita is the centre of discussion for the novelist under whom the entire story of the novel has been formed. In the novel, Sarita's first identity has come into the forefront of the general public as the daughter of an employee in a bank. The nature of her father is very silent and gentle whereas her mother is presented as a rapid fire. Dhruva, the brother of Sarita has been given a major place in the family because of his being a male figure. He is all the time preferred by his parents more in comparison to Sarita. Whatever Sarita does is counted by her mother with closer observations. But, if Dhruva does any illogical activities, then he is freed instantly. The amount of kindness and benevolence is paid in support of Dhruva as he is regarded as the saviour of the generational lineage of the family. After the death of his parents, Dhruva has to handle the entire property of his parents as inherited by the patriarchal conditioning of the society. In the middle part of the novel, Sarita is pressurised and tortured by her mother because of the accidental death of Dhruva. In real terms, Dhruva had died by drowning in a pool while playing with Sarita in a deserted location, an area nearby their house. Before the death of Dhruva, Sarita has been ill-treated by her mother inside the four walls of her house. But, after Dhruva's death, Sarita is blamed for killing her brother which is not suited for any other person in realistic terms. The bad intensions of her mother towards the girl child are the cause of dejection and negligence of Sarita by her mother in every field. While drowning inside the pool, Sarita had tried her best to rescue Dhruva, but it was too late then. The reaction of Dhruva's death has lasted for a long time which resulted the alienation of Sarita from her mother forever. In the process of admitting in the medical college, Sarita has also found several problems from her mother. According to her mother, marriage is the destiny of a girl whether she is educated or not. Though a girl touches the peak of educational destiny, yet she is not abstained from or she cannot keep herself away from the institutional bondage of marriage. The arranged system of marriage is brought into the centre of discussion by Deshpande in relevance to the psychological perspective of Sarita's mother. When Sarita had fixed her mind to proceed towards the medical college, then her father was left in a fix whether Sarita would be provided money for her marriage or for her medical admission. The goal around which Sarita's psychology revolves has been found in an instant order for which Sarita has chosen the path of being a doctor in her future times.

The controversy of her admission in the medical college has farther enlarged the gap between Sarita and her mother. Deshpande has commented that such type of a situation quickly reminds the typical attitude of an Indian woman who possesses partiality to her sons and who at all times considers the birth of her daughter as the cause of the past happenings. Sarita's mother thinks her as the obstacle

in her life for which her entire life has been problematized and filled up with heavy burden. The process of alienation is typically internalised as the female beings in the society are represented by the character of Sarita's mother.

Sarita has been attracted towards a male being named Manohar in her pursuing the medical classes. Deshpande has created the character of Manohar for verifying the qualities of a woman in the context of women empowerment. Since the society is patriarchal in its structure so it is obvious that the male beings would overpower the female beings in rabbit running. The comparative outlook of qualities between Sarita and Manohar is brought into the plight of analysis in the realistic platform. In spite of having different types of obstacles in life and career, Sarita has come forward for establishing her own life in her standing alone in the individual prowess. In her adolescent stage, she has fallen in love with Manohar at the first sight. Smita, the intimate friend of Sarita has washed out her mindset and has spoken about the personality of Manohar in her falling in love in a speedy way. The poetic achievements that Manohar has earned in his life have contributed him towards formulating his life structure as a renowned literary figure. The popularity of Manohar is so strong that he has never expected any negative ideologies in his life and career. Sarita is attracted towards Manohar not only as the impact of his physical attire, but also for his personality as well as his qualities of being a reputed literary figure of that area. The concept of fair sex has been brought into light by Deshpande as she regards Sarita as meek and soft-hearted medical student. Sarita has fallen in love with Manohar because of her nature of kindness and benevolence. Generally, the figure of a woman is presented in the medium of a typically soft cornered human being. A woman always becomes easily sentimental while facing pain and critical situations. At the same time, a man can tolerate his feelings and can grasp the entire situation in his own hand with logic and understanding. The personality of Manohar is rooted in the psyche of Sarita in such a way that she becomes uncontrollable in spite of having a firm determination in her establishment of a sophisticated life style. Deshpande has tried to show up the echo-adjustment of a woman in both the private as well as the public spheres. On one hand, Sarita has regulated her familial activities in her household and on the other hand she has determined her mind in her centralised attitude to serve the humanity with her medical knowledge of being a lady doctor. The qualities that both Sarita and Manohar possess can be contrasted with a view to salute the adjustment of Sarita in her individualistic temperament. Despite her tragic life structure, Sarita has prepared herself to fight against the society which supports only the male power at every nook and corner. Manohar is a male being, but being a literate figure, he is away from the controversial matters of female suppression in the patriarchal framework. It is not like that Sarita loves him alone, but the case is that Manohar has also equal love attitude towards Sarita because of her expectations to become a successful lady. The contrasting qualities between them result in a suitable proposition that unites both of them spiritually in the first phase.

Sarita has been warned by her mother that she is a girl of having ugly attitude and unattractive appearance. At any point of her life she cannot become a fair lady because of her complexion. It is the view of her mother that she always tries to suppress her daughter towards progressing in the public platform. When Sarita falls in love with Manohar, she instantly receives equal response from him. Manohar has regarded her as a beautiful and heart touching lady. That is, both the two observations, one is of Sarita's mother and other is of Manohar, are not identical in any angle. Her mother's heart is full of evil spirits and feelings for her which result in his longing her as his incredible wife. The treatment of love comes from the core of the heart which is transformed with the help of the external objects lurking around the societal atmosphere. In ideological terms, Sarita is always made the victim of male hypocrisy under which the ill-treatments upon her are framed and structured. Deshpande has wanted to point out the enmity of a woman against her identical counterpart. A woman is the prime enemy for another woman. The male beings cannot be changed at all times for the dominating processes of the female identity. Though the society is patriarchal, yet it is the women beings who have indicated the traumatic life structure of a middle class woman. The theme of love is one of the significant subject matters under which the actual reality of the society can be determined. Manohar has accepted Sarita in spite of her background with realistic attitude. It is another matter that Manohar's love for Sarita has decreased as she loses her interest to offer enough time to her husband because of her busy schedule. The major point behind this subject is Sarita's great aspirations for her life of becoming a successful lady in spite of having a troublesome family backdrop. In logical terms, it can be argued that the treatment of love is well evidenced by the relationship between Manohar and Sarita as compared to her early life spent with her mother.

## **2. Establishment of Femininity in the Patriarchal Society**

Femininity is a concept which is concerned with the suppressive analyses of women issues in the midst of patriarchal hierarchy. Shashi Deshpande is one of the supportive literary figures of India who has created Sarita as a leading protagonist to fight for the rights of women beings facing traumatic life structure. Through the character of Sarita, Deshpande has tried to project the elements of femininity in the society. In the conventional structure of the Indian middle class society, a woman is always kept inside the confinement of the four walls or the household activities. Though women have desires, expectations, opinions of their own, yet they are away from those aspects as society does not permit them to perform those rules. Deshpande has examined the society around her where she has noticed the illogical nourishment of women by the patriarchal framework. The amount of labour that women perform inside the private sphere can make them billionaire in a couple of days. Sarita has come forward for fulfilling her desires in spite of having strict conventional rules in front of her. She has destroyed all types of bondages that come in her way to succeed in life. She even breaks the relationship with her mother being unnatural to her. Because of Dhruva's accidental death, she has been all the time pressurised with inhuman treatments which are logically unbearable for a lady who wants to be independent in life. The turning point of Sarita meeting her husband Manohar has further strengthened her determination towards becoming a lady doctor. The treatment that Sarita has faced in her public sphere has significantly reflected her satisfaction in life despite being tragic in her earlier days. The family that dejects her now sees her as a successful human being having huge amount of honour and respect in the social atmosphere. Everyday people come to her for seeking better treatment about their diseases which are curable only with her educational

nourishments. If she restrained herself within the four walls of her home, she could never come forward for becoming a significant and reputed figure in the society. Manohar has also equal contributions towards her standard life status. In the starting stage, Manohar has supported her from every corner. But in the middle section of her conjugal life, he is found dissatisfied with her popularity in the public sphere. It is because of his egotistical nature that divides them in diverse sections. Though Manohar has interrupted Sarita in her duties, yet her feminine potentialities are never stopped at any point of time. She is always found determined in her individualistic ideologies of life.

### 3. Discussion

Shashi Deshpande has analysed the character of Sarita in her famous novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*. The novel tells the theme of marriage in terms of its complex societal realities and the treatment of the female self as otherness. The protagonist Sarita is projected as a successful lady doctor, but she is all the time thrown into the complexities of the society for being the other human being. The patriarchal framework is so strong in the societal outlook that not a single female being can come forward to disclose her own identity in front of the general public. The story of the novel tells the critical conditions of Sarita in relation to her conflicts with both the private and the public spheres. During the daytime she is a popular lady doctor and in the night time she is trapped in the hands of her husband Manohar who is an English teacher in a small college. The novel starts with the returning of Sarita to her father's origin home after a gap of fifteen years. Actually, she had decided not to come to her father's home in any case, but the societal as well as the family situations were so much bore some that she could not control herself to return to her own home for having a peaceful state of mind. Sarita returns specially being unable to bear the sexual atrocities done upon her by her husband. The narrative of the story of the novel is formed with the juxtaposition of both the past and the present. After coming to her father's house Sarita has understood the techniques through which she has prepared herself to face the realities regarding her ill-treatment projected upon her by the male dominated society. Sarita's ambitions in her life have been justified after she has come into the realities of the society as well as her individual identity. She realizes that her passions and ambitions can only be fulfilled by the medium of having a routine education in her desired field. This is evident that Sarita is found seeking for college education after she finishes the school educational processes. When Sarita becomes a doctor, she has taken that profession very honestly which at the same time brings her both respect and a proper identity. Her neighbours become aware of her professional identity from the day she walks back in a blood stained coat after serving the victims of an accident. This profession has lifted her up a little bit in comparison to her husband Manohar. The positions that both Sarita and Manohar preserve are not identical for Manohar. Actually the impact of the patriarchal society is so strong that Manohar has suffered from a complexity to live with his wife systematically as before. He has faced lots of problems to establish his own egotistical position in the society. A kind of separation has come between them since Sarita becomes a doctor. The marital relationship is also deformed as Sarita has become the centre of attraction for the public. The respects that Sarita has received from her well wishers can be understood in the following lines-

“And now, when we walked out of our room; there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored.”

(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, P. 42)

From traditional point of view, the relationship between husband and wife is based on some mutual strategies which are loyal and conservative. Whoever a wife is or whatever a wife does, she should follow those rules and regulations which are mandatory in the society. But, the relationship between Sarita and Manohar is significantly different from the conventional perspectives of the society. The feminine potentialities are seemed to arise up in case of Sarita. It is due to her profession that she has become able to cover up her troublesome life with a vision of perfection and sincerity. In the society, Sarita is recognised and respected by the common neighbours who have come frequently to visit her. Manohar is found disturbed in his complexities arisen from the gradual improvement of Sarita's life style in the public sphere. In this context, Sarita has put forward the following significant sentences which would verify the complex relationship between Manohar and herself. The lines are-

“But now I know that it was there it began.....this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this two.....that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. 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. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband.”

(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, P.42)

Shashi Deshpande has analysed the rigid societal rules and regulations fixed for the suppression of women beings in the private sphere. The novelist has observed the realities of the society which are not acceptable for an educated lady like Sarita. But she is also confined to mobilise her personal life in front of the complex scenario of the society. In the novel, Sarita is seen writing to the young students of her friend Nalu like –

“A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3". If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage.”

(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, P.137)

These lines have greater significance in relation to the determination of the identity of a woman in the society. The patriarchal society is so much rooted in the blood of each individual being that if at times it is attempted to reform some illogical ideologies from the mind and psyche, some barriers come into the forefront and then interrupt the whole process of women's independence. In the novel, Sarita has warned the young generation like this-

“Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it, and if you drown never the less, well, that’s an easier death after all.”

(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, P.137)

#### 4. Conclusion

Deshpande has proclaimed that the novel is a treatise on the state of Indian women. Being a woman herself, the novelist has presented a realistic study of the attitude and conduct of women in Indian middle class families. If it is observed the real base of the family of Sarita, it can be said that the father of the protagonist is a silent man while her mother is excessively critical in every subject. Deshpande has brought out powerfully the psychological problems of a career woman and has discussed it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The novelist has tried to project the conceptual framework of an independent lady in the midst of utter complexities. Sarita has stood upon her own feet and thereby she has realized the actual identity of a woman in the patriarchal society. Sarita has also realised that,

“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.”

(*The Dark Holds No Terror*, P. 208)

Deshpande’s portrayal of the female characters like Sarita can be compared to the moral implications of women identity in the societal framework as evident in *The Feminine Mystique* written by Betty Friedan who points out, divides and systematically indicts one of the most extensive local concepts of post-war American life and society which is the myth of suburban women's individualistic fulfilment, that is ‘the feminine mystique’. Both the two books have identical issues relating to the projection of women in the patriarchal platform. On one hand, Betty Friedan has discussed about the female self by referring to the women beings of the American society and on the other hand, Shashi Deshpande has talked about the conditions of the women in Indian purview by documenting on the post colonial ideologies. The concept of otherness has occupied a greater place in both the two books and the identity of the female self has been perfectly structured in terms of the justification of the feminine potentialities arisen from the psyche of each single woman in the present society. It can be argued that the entire article has larger importance towards the empowerment of women not in the American societal platform, but also around the entire world including the arena of Indian literary platform.

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