



**IDENTITY CRISIS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS**

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ABSTRACT

Indian fiction in English has been enriched by several highly talented women novelists. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Toru Dutt, Rajalakshmi Debi, Krupa Bai Sathyanathan, Swarnakumari Debi Ghoshal, Cornelia Sorabji have taken writing in all seriousness. In contemporary Indian English writing we can see women writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anitha Nair, Shoba De etc writing about, and for women. These women writers aimed at communicating their experiences as women as well as conveying their views on social reforms. They tried to reveal the obstacles women faced, and the disadvantages they suffered in orthodox Indian society. They have analysed the socio-cultural modes, and values that have given Indian woman their image and role in society and also concentrated upon what they owe to themselves as women striving for equality in a gender-based world.

The characters they portray show very often as being torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition, and modernity. Problem of marital adjustment, and the quest for an assertion of identity make the predicament of working woman still worse .In the Indian context, the emancipation of woman has certainly brought woman far along the road of self-expression. But it has not gone to the extreme as in the case of the women's Liberation Movement in the West. There is no militant feminism in India .In India there is a genuine, sacred feeling for the family. The novels of Shashi Deshpande have portrayed the evolution of this new Indian woman, especially during the last decades of twentieth century. The weight of the long silence imposed on women folk has, it would see, made the learned heroines of Deshpande's novels uneasy, and they try to cast off the shackles of restrictions habitually clamped on woman. The educated earning wife, and her adjustment, and sometimes maladjustment within the family has been a recent phenomenon in India. In the context of contemporary Indian society Deshpande has her own independent views on woman, her position, predicament, her trials and tribulations. Her major concern has been woman's struggle to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as human being. Shashi Deshpande's fiction is woman-centred. In the novels of all the women novelists there have been the authentic, poignant tale of the middle class educated woman, and her exploitation in a conventional male-dominated society .In all human relationships, that between a mother and a daughter, between a father and a daughter, a brother and a sister, a husband and a wife the



central stage has been occupied by the woman. Deshpande's heroine can be only a daughter, sister, wife, mother, woman, or professional, but never the real "she".

Deshpande's heroines are modern, educated, married women. Years of slavery, suffering, suppression and protected life have made them timid and diffident. But after fifteen, seventeen or ten years of married life they want to be self-reliant and free from the socio-cultural shackles, without disrupting the bonds of marriage. Deshpande suggests a balance between the traditional respect for family and the western idea of self-identity and self-expression breaking the habit of silence. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the heroine Saru (Saritha) attempts to break her silence in order to attain self-identity. Her attempt to free herself from the dark experiences of her childhood days and marriage life is praise worthy. Shashi Deshpande is interested in human relationships especially the relationship between husband and wife." Most of the husbands are passive, yet aggressive-They neither attack their wives nor say even a single angry word to them". But by their "actions, words and sly comments make them (wives) feel guilt ridden and censured". (Deshpande, *If I Die Today*). Through the tender trap, their married life is filled with silences and barriers. The attitude of the middle class Indian man is to deprivilege the woman against the man, the moment she becomes a wife. The Indian male comes out as the villain and burdens the Indian woman. To him a wife is only an object, possession, not an individual, or a human being. Deshpande depicts the condition of woman before and after marriage. On the surface, everything goes on well with the Indian middle class woman. Saritha is no exception. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* Deshpande clearly defines middle class, educated, employed, married, Indian woman's fundamental issues. Indian woman is sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

Deshpande knows their inner urge "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield" (Tennyson, *Ulysses/70*). Saru is a "two-in-one woman" who in daytime is a doctor and at night a trapped animal" (215) in the hands of her husband Manohar (Manu), who is a English teacher in a third-rate college. Saru is searching for balance between her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother and her new role as doctor. Saru is sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative and longs for peace, freedom and success. There is professional jealousy between Manu and Saru. She is ready to resign her job when his "affected indifference" (36) towards her increases. But then he wants to enjoy life with her money and status. She has been only a prized possession to show off to his friends Manu's simmering inferiority complex explodes when a girl interviews Saru for a magazine "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well"?(182) changes him into a sadist from that day onwards. Since then Manu teases Saru in bed and behaves normally during daytime. She has to suffer the rape mutely. At first she thinks that it is only a nightmare. But the bruises reveal the reality. She is not sure whether it was a 'blackout'. Anyway in order to have a peaceful sleep (life) she has to abandon her husband and her children Renuka and Abijith. She leaves everything, her profession and family. She reaches her home in the pretext, of looking after



her lonely father. There analyses her life and realizes, with definite clarity, that there is nothing to be afraid of. She decides to have a reunion with Manu and determine to continue her job. She does not want to run away from life, on the other hand, dares to face life courageously. In Indian society marriage and motherhood remain the main goal of a girl's life however liberated she may be. But a woman like Saru does not like this marginalization of woman. Another aspect of this novel is the demolition of the ideal wife, ideal mother image of woman.

From time immemorial the role of sacrificing, loving mother and wife is assigned to woman. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru's mother curses her own daughter. Saru herself is unable to look after her kids and Manu. Even the modern woman who treats her own son and daughter equally is not a successful mother. Like other heroines of Deshpande Jaya, Indu, Sumi etc Saru also at first subdues her independence to the pleasure of her husband Manu. Saru is a doctor of financially more independent. But when she was unable to escape from her sadist husband, she feels that "a wife must be a few feet behind her husband" in every field. That is why she decides to warn her audience of girls that "If he is an M.A, you should only be a B.A" and so on (137). Deshpande is not a militant feminist. She does not find the male as the cause of all trouble. The female, who surrenders to the males' sense of superiority also contributes to trouble. Deshpande reminds us that in a patriarchal society, like the Indian society, women have to try hard to find their identities. Saru, is a representative of modern Indian women, who is working hard towards the goal. Her quest for identity lead her from self-abnegation to self-realization. Saru herself find out her own inner world. The turmoil in the mind of her leads to the discovery of her own identity. She do not wish to blame or judge anybody. She broke her ugly silence. Today's women are totally different from conventional women who accept everything as their fate or destiny.

Now they realize their individual destiny and equality with men. They had tried to unveil the potential of women in India. They discard the idea of their secondary position to men. They undergo a metamorphosis. They began to hope for the best. They become emancipated and mature. They gather strength to turn round and face the barriers. They give us a new image of the Indian woman, who can stand on her own. The epitaph from the Dhammapada is apt:

*You are your own refugee
There is no other refuge
This refuge is hard to achieve.*

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