

## **The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Woman's Fight to Overcome the Horrors of an Unyielding World**

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### **Abstract-**

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a novel by Shashi Deshpande, an Indian woman novelist which explores the trauma of a middle-class working woman who has become a trap in the male dominated society. Shashi Deshpande picturises her men and women characters as victim of modern society. The novelist portrays a picture of domestic violence and the inferiority complex of men when their women surpass them in education and profession. Deshpande describes visible and invisible, physical, psychological and ideological operation caused by patriarchy in microscopic details in the novel. She celebrates the freedom of women by creating female character Saritha who pays attention to her inner conscience celebrating female emancipation and feminine identity. The patriarchy controls notable proportion of female characters in English literature who remain silent, passive and inactive. Deshpande on the contrary is successful in showing how her female protagonist transforms and become more aware of her place in the society. By this novel, she depicts male dominance and the frustration that women encounter in marital relationships. (In this paper the focus is on to show how the lifelong struggle of women goes to find her identity and a position for herself in family, society and culture.) The study attempts to unravel the true nature of patriarchy which persist in society in different shapes and forms to confine women by despising their inner strength and individuality.

**Keywords-** Patriarchal society, dilemma, women empowerment, man woman relationship, Self-quest as new woman

### **Introduction-**

Shashi Deshpande is one of the eminent novelists of Indian literature in English. Her work centres around women's lives in modern Indian society. Deshpande grew in a family that belonged to the upper middle class. She creates figures that take her readers through the social strata of urban society but her interest comes to centre more and more on women of the middle and upper middle classes; well educate women who fight for their own space, for their place in the family and in their social and their cultural setting. This setting is the backdrop to her stories, action remains private even with rape which is, after all, private only to a certain degree. With her first published novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' (1986), she introduces this painful topic that had already been there as marital rape. Shashi Deshpande's novel 'That Long Silence' (1988) of which she says that it is her most autobiographical one, makes silencing by the family and by the society. It is as she has said, a loud shriek of despair. The main figure, however, manages to break the silence and to speak out.

### **Objectives of the study-**

1. To study the patriarchal conventions prevail in Indian Society.
2. To assess Shashi Deshpande's women characters who rebel against the male dominance in the familial and societal expectations.
3. To analyse Deshpande's female characters journey towards self-empowerment.

4. To examine the psychological and emotional consequences of a woman's success in a patriarchal marriage.
5. To highlight how societal expectations and familial pressures contribute to the suppression of women's individuality and aspirations.

**Hypothesis-**

Shashi Deshpande's novel starkly portrays the societal expectations placed upon woman in India. Sarita's journey in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* illustrates that self-empowerment for women in patriarchal societies begins with self-awareness and the rejection of internalized gender norms.

**Methodology-**

The researcher intends to apply interpretative, analytical and comparative methods in this study.

**The concept of new women-**

The old conventional notions of male dominated society were so rude, unbearable, suppressive, oppressive and depressive that women's discourse takes a shape of movement. Their consciousness seeks to analyse and understand the material conditions through which gender has been constructed within specific languages and bodies of literature. And its outcome is that the strong wave of new women in 1960s and 1970s took a place for women's liberations. The concept of new woman will have justified itself only by bringing about a radical change in public attitude towards man-woman relationship. Shashi Deshpande, in this novel, focuses on feminine sufferings in Indian society. The feminist literary tradition is grown out of the anxieties of woman's life. Deshpande's novels reveal the women's quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and awareness of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Through the novel 'That Long Silence', Deshpande tried to show that the patience of silence and endurance is broken and its outcome is a new-woman with egotistical affirmations and emotional explosions.

A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novel reveals her struggle for female autonomy played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. At the outset, it seems, she is asking a new and different question. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelmingly masculinity of privileged dominant gender. Shashi Deshpande's novel encapsulate her artistic vision of femininity. She has dealt graphically with problems that confront a middle class educated woman in the patriarchal Hindu society. The protagonist of the novel *The Dark Hold No Terrors*, Sarita realises the futility of conventions. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* shows the inability of a husband to come to terms with his wife's superior social and economic status. It also explores the trauma of the middle-class working women who are trapped in the male dominated society. The novel opens with a prologue-

You are your own Refuge;  
there is no other Refuge;  
This Refuge is hard to achieve.

Sarita comes to her father's house after 15 years.

Can I come in, Baba  
He moved aside, composing his face into a normality.  
I didn't expect you.  
No, how could you?  
You didn't write (page 16)

Her father is surprised to see her. He asked her to take rest in the pooja room. She understands that she is an unwelcome guest. Her room is occupied for the past two years by Madhav, a first-year student of accountancy and the son of a priest. Her father says that he has heard that she has two children, a boy and a girl. Then he enquires whether she knows that her mother is dead. She says that she came to know through one of her patients Manda who had come one day along with her parents. When she told her husband Manohar (Mano) about her mother he asked her to ignore it because she was not informed. Sarita recalls her marriage with Mano. When she was away from her parents and studying B.Sc. She met him. She was hungry for love. He was doing his first graduation and was the Literary Association Secretary. Later she did her medicine. She becomes pregnant. Slowly Saro becomes famous and wherever they go, people recognise and greet her. Mano felt neglected and depressed. This made him to attack her rudely in bed at nights to offend her pride and self-respect. Her teacher was Boozi. He taught her and also provided her with a consulting room. She wants to reveal everything to her father. She feels that she is facing all the problems faced by Indian women. She goes to Tata Hospital where her mother was admitted for cancer treatment.

Mano plans to start a magazine with his friend Bindya. But Saro felt that there is no decent income through journals. So, he joins as a lecturer. She remembers that after the death of her brother Druva, her birthday was never celebrated. Her mother had a misunderstanding that she was the reason for her brother Druva's death. Now she explains to her father that her husband Mano is cruel to her in bed. He attacks her in bed at night like an animal with his hands and teeth. But in the morning, he is normal. She receives a letter from her son stating that her husband is coming to bring her back. She has no interest to go back. She packs her belongings to leave an unknown destination but her father stops her. She assures that she will not commit suicide and ask him to forgive her. She feels that she has been blamed for her brother's and mother's death and also for Mano's failure. She heard by this time there is a knock at the door. She thinks Mano has come for her. But there is a small child who says that his mother has fits and needs medical help. Before leaving Saro tells her father that if Mano comes, ask him to wait I will be back soon. She forgets everything while treating.

The novel starkly portrays the societal expectations placed upon women in India, where a woman's identity is often defined by marital status and her ability to fill traditional roles. Sarita's journey is largely an internal one as she grapples with her own suppressed desires. The guilt associated with her marital issues and the need to reconcile her personal ambitions with societal pressures. Deshpande's writing style is known for its realism depicting the everyday struggles of a middle-class Indian woman making the novel powerful social commentary on gender dynamics. The darkness in the title is often interpreted as representing the hidden pain and suppressed emotions that Sarita experiences, while the 'no terror' element suggest her eventual realization of her own strength and resilience. 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. Sarita protests against the oppression silently.

The novelist has addressed sensitive issues like marital rape, a wife earning more than her husband and a preference for a boy over a daughter in the novel. Saru's parents treat her differently just due to her gender. Her husband humiliates her and treats her like a caged animal when she achieves greater social status as a doctor than him, a teacher, and earns less than her. She could not

bear these happenings and began to break the silence and strengthen herself to fight against whatever may come in her way in the future. Hence, she has left the house of her husband and determined to fight against the evils of male dominated society.

**Conclusion-**

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a provocative novel about womanhood and the preservation of self. The novel highlights the protagonist, Sarita, who is a successful doctor, yet struggles with marital issues and societal expectations, ultimately finding her voice and agency through introspection and personal growth. The story critiques the patriarchal structure of Indian society, exposing the complexities of female sexuality, marital dynamics and the power imbalances within the marriage. Despite facing difficulties, Saru's journey emphasises the power of self-awareness and the ability to overcome personal challenges through inner strength. Besides, her journey pointing towards her self-discovery and ultimately overcoming the 'terror' of societal expectations and limitations imposed upon her as a female. Her resilience denotes that the darkness holds no fear for her, it signifies her journey towards self-empowerment.

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