

Feminine Sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's debut novel, **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, published in 1980, provides a powerful critique of educated middle class women and the problematic lives of Indian working women. The novel depicts the conflicts and convulsions of the protagonist Sarita who tries to strike a balance between a successful career and a rewarding home life. The Sarita – Manohar relationship offers a smarting commentary on the Indian culture, which is basically male dominated, and where the woman is expected to obey his commands and surrender to his whims and fancies.

Key Words: Women empowerment, Freedom and choice

The Dark Holds No Terrors shows how the fear of darkness develops in the psyche of the protagonist and, towards the end, how she overcomes that fear and there she gets real freedom. The story begins with Sarita's arrival at her father's house after her mother's death and a long gap. She is doubtful whether her father would like her staying there or not and for that reason, "She hadn't paid the man (rickshaw – puller) as yet, as if keeping a route open for retreat." (1) She thinks so because she had followed her own path, inspite of objections from her parents, by marrying Manohar (Manu), who was not considered a suitable groom for her by her mother as he belonged to a lower caste. To clear her doubt, she asks her father after some time, "Baba, does it trouble you to have me here? Tell me if it does. I can go to a hotel." (18) And after getting the reply, "No, no, nothing like that. ...What hotel? No, you stay here." (19) She gets relaxed.

She does not notice any change at her father's house even after so long a gap. "Inside here, though, there were no changes. The same seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she had played hopscotch as a child.

The yard was bare as always, ..." (15) But there is one change. She notices that the tulsi plant had dried and thinks that it had served its purpose as she remarks, "She died before her husband. Wasn't that what all women prayed to the tulsi for?" (15) And for a traditional woman like her mother, it was enough. When she goes into the room that had been hers, she is filled with the feeling of never having gone away. But when she sees male clothes there and is informed that it is Madhav's room now, she feels deserted. "She knelt down in front of her suitcase which, like a homeless refugee, still lay desolately in the hall ...which is my room? I have none..." (32)

When she asks her father who looks after him, he replies, "No one. Madhav and I... We manage very well." (20) She feels a distance between herself and her father and a closeness between Madhav and him. She thinks, "Madhav. How easily he said the name. ...And he had not said her name as yet." (20) She often feels a different type of nearness between her father and Madhav that reminds her of Dhruva (her brother who had died young) and she feels as if he has taken Dhruva's place by

catching all the attention of her father. The childish grief of being unwanted swamped her once again and she felt stricken anew.

She is reminded how she had written once in a notebook, “Nobody likes me. Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me ...” (83) It is due to lack of parental love and affection that she suffers emotionally. She and her father rarely spoke to each other. Perhaps he thought that she was her mother’s business. But her mother had nothing for her either. So, she thinks in despair, “Whose business was I then?” (105)

Once she had thought with a guilty conscience that she had deserted her parents without thinking that they might need her in their old age. But the next moment her other self had retorted, “But can you desert a person who doesn’t need you?” (83) There is a feeling of being neglected because they never took any interest in her affairs, she never felt loved by them: “He never took any interest in my school or college. He left it all to her. And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva’s death. I just didn’t exist for her. I died long before I left home.” (32) On the contrary, Dhruva had each and every advantage of being a boy even after his death: “And yet he had his revenges. Moments of triumph. Of cruel gloating. Of the knowledge that he could do anything he wanted with their mother. That even Baba would come out of his shell for him.” (35)

Her mother could never realize that her daughter also needed love, affection, care, freedom, and a separate identity. She never showed her motherly quality even once to her daughter. There are so many instances in the novel to show the gender – based bias of Sarita’s mother. For her mother, she is just a responsibility, and nothing

more than that. If she cares at all for her, it is just for her marriage. Her mother made her realize that she would never be good – looking because she was too dark for that. That is why, she says, “Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker.” (45) Because she had to get her daughter married, she had to take care of that. When Sarita says that she does not want to get married, her mother makes her realize that she cannot live with them all her life because she is a girl. On the contrary, Dhruva can do so because “He’s different. He’s a boy.” (45)

“Shashi Deshpande’s short stories and novels primarily explore experiences of oppression of Indian women in the domestic set-up, experiences which are rooted in “the presumption that (a woman) is an inferior being, of carrying the burden of being an unwanted female child, of having to battle an ingrained, deeply entrenched patriarchal system — all of which give rise to problems specific to their sex.”⁽²⁾

Being a neglected child she had enclosed herself behind the walls of negation. She is also aware of the importance of a boy as having the qualification to lit the pyre. The first thought, when she gets the news of her mother’s death is “...who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died.” (21) Sarita was ten years old when he drowned in a pond. Her mother blamed her for his death, and even she herself could not realize then the accidental nature of her brother’s death. She was often haunted by the nightmares of Dhruva, and her mother’s anger and hatred, throughout her life. “You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (191) She had to stand against the oppressive forces of patriarchy,

symbolized by the mother – figure, if she had to survive and make her own identity.

It is under the influence of a young woman, who had come to her place on a short visit, that she takes a vow to become a doctor. She seemed to be different and somehow superior to all other women there. Later she comes to know that she was a doctor and thinks that since she was a doctor, she was like that. At that moment the thought comes to her mind that good – looking girls too had that same air of superiority.

For her to be beautiful was not possible, but to become a doctor was the key to her success that would unlock the door out of this dull and dreary life that she hated most. She hates the idea of getting married and ending up doing just what her mother did because she does not want to be the replica of her mother.

Some of her readers do not consider her portrayal of mother – daughter conflict to be natural. So, she makes it clear and says that it is because we have this stereotypical image of what a loving mother is like that we find any variation to be lacking in motherly feelings? It seems to that we need to get rid of these images to be able to release ourselves from guilt. ...We had to wait for women to write to bring out the truth of this relationship.

She further says at another place,

“It’s necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don’t agree with is the idealization of motherhood — the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.”⁽³⁾

By dint of hard labour Sarita obtains a first class in her Inter Science that was the passport to a medical college. At this juncture also, when she discloses her ambition near her father and asks for his permission to get admission in a medical college, her mother had an objection because she is a girl, and she openly objects to that. Though she had decided to ignore her mother yet she bursts out: “No, forever a “no” to anything I want. You don’t want me to have anything; you don’t want me to do anything. You don’t even want me to live.” (142) When her father taking her side says that plenty of girls go in for medicine, her mother replies, “Yes, but they’re girls whose fathers have lots of money. You don’t belong to that class. And don’t forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. ...Will she look after you in your old age? ...You can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over.” (144) When her father tells her mother to let her go ahead and do what she wants, she questions her right to choose. Had she been Dhruva (a male child), she would have got full freedom to choose whatever she liked. But, being a girl, she had no right at all to choose anything for herself, opines her mother. How paradoxical it seems that she is discriminated and treated in a biased manner because of her sex by her mother and not by her father!

There is a feeling of revolt to get herself free from her mother who denies her right to freedom and choice. Finally, she gets success in getting admission in the medical college, and she wins here due to her father’s support. It was for the first time that she felt autonomy and enjoyed the freedom that she had longed for, and the ache in her heart lessened a bit. “It had

been not just relief but a kind of rebirth to get away from home to the hostel, so different with its cheerful feminine jangle. She had never known the kind of effortless, casual intimacy that living in the hostel allowed.” (95)

During her Inter Science she had never wasted her time in trivial things. As a devoted student, she was always busy in her lectures, practicals, and preparation of exams that were held every six months, because she had to get a first class to enter a medical college. It was her firm decision that she “had to work hard, to be a success, to show them ... her ... something. ...But I had to make myself secure so that no one would ever say to me again ...why are you alive?” (50)

But one day, being persuaded by her friend Smita, she goes to the inauguration of the Literary Society, and there she meets Manohar. And it was ‘something being written on her forehead’ (50) that, in dire need of love and affection, she feels attracted towards Manohar. Though she thinks that it happens only to girls in movies and books, she could not doubt his love because she feels that he cared for her feelings as no one had ever done. Even after thinking again and again realistically that it was impossible that she could mean so much to any human being that she should marry him, she resolves to marry him even against her parents’ wish.

When Manohar tells her that it would be painful for her to cut herself off from her parents, and assures that he will try to make it up, she responds instantly and brusquely that it was not so. “Have you seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from mother? ...No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding.” (39) She thinks that

the words like suffering and pain meant nothing to her in relation to her parents: “After my last confrontation with my parents, I had already detached myself from them. For me, they were already the past and meant nothing.” (39) In search of love and security that she had always lacked in her life, she elopes with Manohar and marries him. Here Shashi Deshpande is perhaps trying to emphasize the fact that emotions like love know no barriers of class and caste.

In the beginning, she finds him loving and caring, just like an ideal romantic hero, always ready to prove his true love for her. They managed to live somehow, with only Manu’s salary that barely covered their expenses, in the single little room in the chawl, in its dirty surroundings. Even that place was heaven on earth for them. But even this long – cherished phase of content and happiness in her life proved very short – lived and eventually, marriage to the man of her choice seemed to be no triumph either. Because soon things started changing.

This change came because Manohar developed an inferiority complex as her popularity started increasing after she treated the victims of the explosion in the factory. She reflects, “But why is happiness always so unreal? Why does it always seem an illusion? It is grief that has a bulk, a weight, a substance and stays real even after years.” (40-41) People there started giving importance to her but it was not for him. And it was the reason behind his statement “I’m sick of this place. Let’s get out of here soon.” (42)

It is from this point that a sudden change comes in Manohar’s behaviour and her nightmares start with the fall of darkness. But she could not notice it then that in this way he was asserting his masculinity to

show his significance. Sarita was tortured physically and mentally.

Later on, she realizes that her rising importance, and his almost totally ignored status, was responsible for this change in his behaviour. "But now I know that it was there it began... this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too... 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." (42)

His behaviour at night shows how brutal he is for his own wife but in the morning when she tries to tell him about that, he changes his colour, perhaps unknowingly and seems to be completely innocent and normal human being, and she fails to say anything. But her grief grows, soul revolts and sufferings increase after each and every night. At times she regrets why did she not tell him about it when it began, why is she tolerating it till now. "I should have spoken about it the very first day. But I didn't. And each time it happens and I don't speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death. Perhaps the process has already begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself." (96)

Out of utter frustration and strain of daily life she wants to divorce her husband, to get rid of her problem. But she was unable to do so. She feels helpless, floundering and confused, and does not know what to do. She raises a million dollar question through her endurance and passive suffering. She wishes someone to show her

any solution, and is ready to follow anybody's advice without any hesitation. "It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another's hands." (97) It seems as if she is ready to surrender completely.

When she is groping in the dark for the solution, she suddenly gets the information of her mother's death from professor Kulkarni and decides to meet her father at once. When she tells Manu about it, he does not want to let her go. He says ironically that she wants to be forgiven. This is the time when she thinks, "My wants are simpler. To sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension. Not to think, not to dream. Just to live." (27) Manu says mockingly that she was rushing home to comfort her afflicted father. But the real situation was something different from that. There was an urge in her to confide in someone. There was a feeling of loneliness and cold hopelessness at night in her that there was no one, not even God, to comfort her. Yet in the daytime, when her nightmares were over, with the end of darkness and the start of daylight, she hoped that there would be someone because one could never be so totally deserted, after all. She feels, "As if I was isolated from everyone, from the whole world, by what was happening to me; that I was doomed to sit and watch happiness, watch it recede from me, doomed never to participate in it, never experience it myself." (112) She thinks that she herself had separated herself into an isolated, lonely suffering. She decides that after reaching home she will break out of it, she will talk to her father. It seems that actually she wanted to take refuge near her father from all the burdens she carried till now.

She was leading a routine life, doing everything without any interest, just like a robot, a lifeless object. She had lost the peace of her mind and felt emptiness within her. She feared that one day there would be just a white coat containing nothing instead of a lady doctor. In her, “There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing. No, worse. Of being just a ventriloquist’s dummy, that smiles, laughs, and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face.” (22)

She realizes that the pride in her professional status had faded. She thought that it was because she was something more than his wife that Manu behaved that way. She feels that due to her job she is unable to give enough time to her children, husband and home. Torn between her professional and family life, she expresses her desire near Manu to ‘stop working’. But Manu too realizes that it was impossible for them to manage with only his salary. The dream that was growing in her, the kind of life she wanted to lead was impossible without her own job. She had a dream about her future, “I would not stay in a dingy two-room flat in a far-off drab suburb all my life. I would not bring up any child to a life of deprivations. I wanted it soon ... that finale of a middle-class dream ... a house of our own. Furnished with all the gee-gaws that are an indispensable part of the dream.” (92) And she knew it well that, “...it was I and not Manu who would get us out of the morass we were in.” (92)

While thinking about her father and brother she had felt that both of them were dominated by the female. Dhruva by both Saru and her mother, and her father by her

mother. To her, it seemed as if her father’s personality was overpowered by her mother’s, and so she had decided not to dominate her husband. Yet it happened so, as she had grown higher than her husband in her career: “When she got married she had sworn ...I will never dominate. I will never make my husband nothing as she did. And yet it happened to them.” (86)

Here we see the female character overpowering male unintentionally, yet it is important to notice whether, “...the sword of domination becomes lethal only when a woman holds it over a man?” (86) The thought of Dhruva’s death and before that the way she treated him made her feel guilty. She considers female to be stronger than male, who can tolerate more than a male. “Perhaps there is something in the male, she now thought, that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve. As if there is something in her that prevents erosion and self – destruction.” (85) But the next moment she feels as if her other self was retorting — had she not been destroyed then?

Often she feels that she has completely changed herself and there is nothing of her old self left. She is reminded of an old woman of her neighbourhood who used to say about her fingers and palms which were greased, soft and smooth due to butter, “Do this everyday and your hands will be so soft and smooth, your husband will never let go of them.” (163) As if the sole purpose of a girl’s life is to please a male! She had stopped using make – up at her father’s house and did not care to look nice. “Her abnegation to his tastes had seemed wholly natural first. Now, for the first time, she found herself, wavering,

hesitantly, making her way back to her real self.” (124)

Earlier she had dreamt of ‘a superior conquering male’ (53), then she had craved for recognition and satisfaction. But now she realizes that ‘she had lost forever... the eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man’. (124) Neither she wants recognition and satisfaction through her job now. All that she wants now is a change from her old life and a chance to do something more useful because it is not easy for her to take it as ‘something written on her forehead’. She is reminded of her grandmother who was deserted by her husband with her two daughters. Her grandmother’s father had taken them to his house, brought them up and got the granddaughters married, one of whom was her mother. There had been a feeling of being a burden, unwanted and dependent. They always had to remember that they did not really belong, they were only tolerated. Yet she never complained and accepted it as her luck, fate. It was so much easier for women in those days to accept, not to struggle; because they believed there was nothing else for them. And they called that fate. In those days, in a traditional society, the frame of mind of a traditional woman, her way of thinking, was shaped by the age in which she lived. They had no choice but to go on, there was no way out.

But she goes to her father’s house to avoid and escape from her problems. It is there that she feels leisurely how exhausted she was! “It was a kind of accumulated fatigue, and later, when she thought of it, she wondered how she had gone on for so long with her relentless routine ...hospital, teaching, rooms, visits, home, children. And the nightmares.” (29) Though time passed very slowly and seemed to stretch

into infinity there, yet she did not get bored. Instead, she wondered how she had endured the hectic pace of her life so long. When a patient comes to her at her father’s house she becomes uncomfortable and does not want to revert to her professional role.

It seems as if she had lost all her interest in her profession. Earlier it was not so. Once she was badly scolded and called ‘incompetent, clumsy, uninterested female’, and advised to ‘play with rolling pins and knitting needles’, at her work place. She had felt humiliated and betrayed and thought, “I had imagined, I had thought, that here, in this place, I was accepted for what I was. Instead, it seemed I had been admitted on sufferance, tolerated as long as I hid my essential female qualities.” (89) It seems as if the word ‘female’ also has been used here as an epithet. Actually, she was not a disinterested female, on the contrary, she was curious to learn the skill, the proficiency, the perfection for which she was humiliated.

Earlier it had become shameful for her to grow up and be a woman due to the way her mother made it interpret her. There was a revolt in her against her mother and she hated to be a woman, if her mother was one. Later, when she studied medical science, she took it as normal.

“It was only when I began to study anatomy and physiology in my first year of medicine that I was suddenly released from a prison of fears and shames. Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that!” (63)

But for a traditional woman like her mother it was not so. Her way of thinking was different that did not match with the thinking of Sarita, an educated and rather modern girl. She is reminded of a conversation between her mother and a neighbouring lady who told her about a woman who had been grotesquely ill-treated, just like an animal, by her in-laws and, after ten years of suffering, died. And her mother's reply, "May be, she deserved what she got!" (87) She felt, "... something so hard, so cruel, so merciless in that judgement that she had shuddered and hated her mother for it." (87) It is really amazing to notice how a woman can be so unsympathetic to the condition of another woman.

We observe a different kind of mind-set in Sarita's mother that is not only traditional but something even more than that. She is extremely hard-hearted towards her own daughter throughout her life, even till death. Sarita had hoped that one day her mother would realize her fault, she would regret for blaming her for Dhruva's death but even that hope died within her when she learnt that her mother was unforgiving and cursed her even on her death bed. "I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me." (197)

She herself realizes that there was no sign of grief or sorrow on her face or in her action when she got the news of her mother's death. Instead, there was a feeling of anger, because she had firmly determined to 'show her', and for that purpose she had got admission in the medical college, and married Manu, against her mother's wish. Yet, "She had gone, leaving the battle unfinished, taking victory away with herself." (60) How contradictory it seems that unlike other

mother-daughter relationships, there is no bond of love; instead there is a perennial conflict in Sarita and her mother's relationship.

It had a great impact on her life and relationship with her children. "She had sworn that she would never fail her children in love and understanding as her own mother had done. That she would be to her children all that her own mother had not been to her." (161) Yet she was doubtful after the birth of her daughter, Renu. "Could she measure up to all that this being, so wholly dependent on her, would expect of her? Would she not fail her as her own mother had failed her?" (162) Later, when she grows up a little, she often reminds her of her mother by her looks, activities and 'quiet watchfulness'. The feeling she gave her of 'being weighed up, criticized, possibly rejected.' (34) But when she shows the photographs of her children to her father and Madhav, and Madhav comments that her daughter Renuka resembled her mother, she wholly rejects his comment by saying that she is not like her at all.

Even when she is present there and talking to them, she feels that "...she was only a fleeting interruption, that she would have to go away, leaving him and Baba to continue their conversation." (32) She gets irritated when her father asks her how do her children manage without her. She thinks that both of her parents managed when she left them. She wanted to be important. "I want to be needed, to know that they will find existence impossible, insupportable without me." (71)

People start coming to her at her father's house also. Women who came to visit her there provided her a world of data for a treatise on the condition of women. "Backache, headache, leucorrhoea,

menorrhagea, dysmenorrhea, loss of appetite, burning feet ... all the indignities of a woman's life, ... because 'how do you tell anyone about these things? Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them... Their unconscious, unmeaning heroism, born out of the myth of the self-sacrificing martyred woman, ...' (107) But she neither admires nor pities over their condition. Instead, she became angry for keeping silence, neglecting and not taking proper care of themselves. She starts taking interest in her patients once again, just like a fresher, and decides to stay there because she thinks that she would be more useful for them at that place. But the next moment she realizes that she could not adjust herself there. She is unable to change her course of life to that extent. Her thinking was also influenced by her readings. She was reminded of Betty Friedan saying that 'it was easier for her to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life.' (107)

She remembers Vidya, who was an 'incipient women's libber' and also absorbed in the theatre then with Manu, and her comments on Shakespeare that he had a very limited vision and his was a typical man's view of life — the man at the centre and the woman always on the periphery — and she feels as if she had spoken those words for her and her alone. Vidya's argument was, "... it's not just their roles. It's the way he made the woman's personality merge into the stronger colours of a man's personality. Look at Hamlet, Lear, Othello. And look at Ophelia, Cordelia, Desdemona. Poor, feeble shadows. And when you come to a conflict or a climax, the woman recedes into the background." (156) The same Vidya met her after a long time, married and a mother. She was changed so much

that she had given up acting because her husband and his family did not like her to do so. She was allowed to do neither acting, nor directing, nor anything like that. And she surrendered totally by leaving it all according to their wish.

There is another example of Sarita's friend Smita, who changed both her names that identified her for so many years till her marriage, according to her husband's wish. Sarita finds it a drastic change of identity. Smita cannot even meet her friends even when she comes there. She has 'always time to do all the things "he" (her husband) wants to do', but never any time for doing things she herself wants to do. Here Vidya's and Smita's total submission to male domination is praiseworthy! On the other hand, one can wonder at Sarita's spinster friend, Nalu's bitterness for everything. Sarita thinks, "It's easy to generalize and say she is bitter because she never married, never bore a child. But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because I got married and I have borne two children." (121) Though outwardly she had got married and had two children, yet inwardly, she was as lonely as Nalu.

She is reminded of an incident when she went to deliver a speech for Nalu's students, on her request. Though she had prepared her talk and rehearsed it at home, at the crucial moment she failed to deliver what she had prepared for the occasion and realized with an honest astonishment that what she had spoken was completely different from the topic suggested by the girls, 'Medicine as a profession for women.' Though the whole speech is worth quoting:

"... A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he is 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. 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... Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. ...No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you.

And so you must pretend that you're not as smart as you really are, not as competent as you are, not as rational as you are, and not as strong either. ...They will tell you about economic independence and an independent identity. Forget these words. If Draupadi had been economically independent, if Sita had an independent identity, you think their stories would have been different? No, these are things that have been voluntarily surrendered, consciously abandoned, because that is the only way to survive. And what, in the long run matters more than survival?" (137-138)

It seems as if each and every word of her speech is a blow of hammer on the face of the tradition – bound Indian society, that always supports male supremacy. How ironical it is that even most of the female, whether they are educated or uneducated, dependent on their male counterparts or self – dependent, support such practices in one way or the other!!! Somehow they are themselves responsible for their pathetic condition. Saru had wondered once, "...who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we, each of us, both?" (159)

At her father's house she compares her mother's and her own status as a woman.

Under the influence of Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own', "She immediately related the phrase to her own life and thought ... my mother had no room of her own. ...And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing 'a room of our own'." (135-136)

She is reminded of a Sanskrit story in which the female character doesn't disturb her husband's sleep even to save her child from the fire. At this, god Agni becomes so happy that he blesses her by himself saving her child. She thinks, who wrote this story? No doubt, it was written by a man to perpetuate the myth of male superiority.

The forbearance of an Indian woman is also to be noted in this context. But towards the end, when Sarita comes to know that Manu is coming, she tries to go away to avoid him. Here she shows a totally changed temperament. The girl, who had rarely spoken to her father earlier, bursts out like a volcanic eruption and tells everything, each and every detail, to her father. When her father consoles her that it was her quite wrong imagination that she was blamed for her brother's death, she complains and blames her father also, "It's not because of my marriage that you cast me off. It's this. You think I killed him." (181)

Shashi Deshpande herself explains about the protagonist of the novel: "What we want to reach at finally is the telling, the breaking of silence."⁽⁴⁾ It is further exemplified in 'That Long Silence' and all other novels. As in case of the present novel, the protagonist, Sarita explains, revolts and complains for the first time that she did not take him out that day; she was not guilty; rather he himself was a spoilt child. "All the grievances of an old but

monumental injustice was in her words. She was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat.” (182) She gets the opportunity for which she had waited impatiently till now and starts in a sudden flurry, “Can’t you understand, Baba, that it’s because she cursed me that I am like this?” (197) When he asks her to tell what it meant. She asks him in a challenging way, ‘Shall I tell you?’ She thinks, “You’ve always avoided things. The truth. Facts. Life. Confrontation. Can you now take this from a daughter you thought you’d got rid of?” (198)

Towards the end her father looks concerned about her life and problems. He tells her that she should not turn her back on things. The traumatic experiences of life and sufferings lead her to a state of self – introspection and later self – discovery which indicates clearly a fresh perception of life. While indulging in self – introspection she thinks that she had expected too much out of marriage, and as a working woman is unable to devote sufficient time to her home, husband and children. Ultimately, she emerges out of the crisis as a strong woman, willing to compromise with life as it comes, and it symbolizes her true emancipation.

Notes and References:

1. Deshpande, Shashi, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, (Penguin Books, New Delhi 1990) p-15. All further textual references are from this book, from this edition.
2. Deshpande, Shashi, “Demythifying Womanhood, talks to Veena Mathews, “The Times of India, (Ahmedabad, 25th Sep., 1995) p-8.
3. Deshpande, Shashi, an interview by Malini Nair, “The Message is Incidental”, The Times of India, No. 25, Nov. 1989.
4. Deshpande, Shashi, an interview with Romita Chaudhary, *World Literature Written in English*, 1995.