

A Woman's Predicament In A Male-Ordered Culture - A Reading In Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* And *That Long Silence*

Dr. S. Sophia Christina
Assistant Professor in English
Sarah Tucker College
Perumalpuram
Tirunelveli 627007
sophiapridgeon@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

*Indian writers' success has reached such a degree that woman writers also break into the field in a big manner and make us proud of their fantastic writings. In the Indian English literature, Shashi Deshpande is well known as a woman writer. Shashi Deshpande is a very severe Indian English woman writer who portrays various elements of the lives of the woman especially the life of the middle-class woman, in her novels. One of the luminous award-winning women novelists is Shashi Deshpande in the literary galaxy of the last quarter of the 20th century. This article focuses on the predicament of educated females in a male dominated society by Shashi Deshpande's **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **That Long Silence**. It also describes a career woman's issues, her struggle to discover and maintain her identity as a spouse, mother, and as a human being.*

KEY WORDS: *Indian writers, Women writers, Shashi Deshpande, Women's issues, Struggle to discover Identity.*

Women's history, as Virgin Woolf said, is that of public life invisibility and silence. Our social mores undermine women's worth when they are considered less important than males. Women's writings are deemed comparatively minor, inferior, and trivial in a similar way. With regard to Shashi Deshpande, it became clear to her that the accusation of triviality had to be ignored. She decided to approach the reality of women's lives through triviality issues and the reality is never trivial. Shashi Deshpande claims to herself:

A writer writes about the slice of life or she knows best. Whether it is large slice or a small one is not important. Ultimately what matters is how much and how well the writer is able to communicate with the reader. (164)

The fact that she is a woman shapes a lot of her writings. She is very concerned about the woman as an artist's predicament. More than anything else, her novels **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **That Long Silence** are about women's world. **That Long Silence**, for instance, took shape from her own bitter personal experiences with a domestic newspaper's Sunday section editor. The novelists says, "Jaya's desperation was mine, some of her ideas about women and their roles, about women's' lives and silences were mine" (In First Person 29).

Referring to Shashi Deshpande's **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **That Long Silence**, this article focuses on the predicament of an educated female in a male dominated society. It also discusses the issues facing a female career, her struggle to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and as a human being.

Male child and girl child discrimination starts right from childhood. The mother of the protagonist Saru is presented in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** as a typical Indian who gives her son undue preference as the propagator of the family lineage. Naturally, she is always neglected and overruled by her daughter Saru. While pomp and splendor celebrate the birthday of her brother, hers goes unnoticed. The mother blames Saru for his death when her brother Dhruva gets drowned accidentally: “You killed him, why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?”(191)

This unreasonable change is dwarfing and haunting Saru night and day. She feels guilty and wondered if she killed him. Realization comes later and she realizes it was accidental. Realization later dawns and she realizes it was accidental. This realization of discrimination drives her away from her home and seeks admission to a college of medicine.

In addition, a female child is strictly raised in a patriarchal society. The mother begins to think about her marriage as the female child grows up, and she is considered only as an attractive commodity on the marriage market. For example, Saru's discussion with her mom is as follows:

Don’t go out in the sun. You will get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.

I don’t want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can’t?

And Dhruva?

He is different. He is a boy. (45)

The mother is always anxious about the marriage of her daughter and continues to impose do's and don'ts on her.

Likewise, in **That Long Silence**, Jaya is driven by the constant prying questions of her mother to distract her: “Why are you so late? Who was that you were talking to? Where are you going now?”(75)

The characters of women are subjected to suppression even after marriage. In Saru's case, she feels that for all her problems marriage would act as a panacea. She was under the control of her parents without autonomy until her marriage. But she has to submit herself as a slave to her husband even in the new environment. Through Saru, the novelists current in a masculine dominated community the predicament of a working upper class female. Male chauvinistic concepts exploit her. Both Saru and Jaya understand that married life is unhappy and unhappy.

They will ruin their lives if they fight for equal rights. Therefore, they should be governed by the whims and fancies of their husband to be happily married.

The man will always dominate and expects to be submissive to his wife. In **That Long Silence**, Shashi Deshpande described Jeya's struggle as a writer and a young wife in the house. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place only for men in society. He assumes that his wife would accompany him when Jaya's husband Mohan is caught in a malpractice and is requested to be unavailable for some time. She's unwilling, but she's forced to go with him. She's not willing, but she's forced to go with him. She tries to maintain a balance between them and finds her own interpretation of marriage survival, "Two bullocks are yoked together,.. It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions will be painful"(11-12).

Even Jaya moulds herself to fit and obey the desires of her husband. Her childhood dreams and her goal of achieving her objectives are broken. She's totally helpless. She becomes a very submissive woman and longs to be called an optimal woman - the picture of her mythological counterparts Sita or Draupati. She has the only weapon with her "silence and surrender".

Her elder brother also recommends that her husband Mohan always be good. She's always trying to follow his advice. Jeya used to be a brief tempered individual as a kid, but she changes after her marriage and her anger disappears. Comments from the novelist: "But after marriage she tolerated her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman 'unwomanly'"(83).

When her colleague Kamat asks Jaya why in her texts she has not expressed the wrath of the woman, the answer is, "Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?"(147). She has thus completely surrendered herself to her husband's power.

In **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, the educated employed married woman shows family conflict with greater poignancy. The married worker plays two roles, a housewife and a woman in the career. Pormilla Kapur's critique points out,

They like wives to take up jobs but dislike them to a change at all as far their attitude towards their roles and statuses at home is concerned and dislike their traditional responsibilities being neglected which results from their pre-occupation with out-of-home vacation. (qtd.in.Sandhu 12)

Saru emerges as a well-known and reputable doctor in **The Dark Holds No Terrors**. She is successful professionally, but her married life begins to crumble. Both the husband and the wife are happy in the beginning until Saru begins to become a doctor. But Saru can't devote her time to the family now, and it causes issues she says "--- he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband"(42).

Most of her husband and children's solemn duties are unattended. This upsets her life as a family. The kids don't get their mother's proper love and care as she gets home late. The husband is sitting waiting "I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face, that made my heart give a painful quivering little jumps" (78).

In the meantime, because of his low status, Manu begins to feel inferior. Manu, the husband of Saru can not allow people to greet her and ignore him. He can't say it publicly, but he says irritatedly, "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon"(42). Saru realizes that he does not love her the way he used to. She understands, "this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage"(42).

Since Saru feels stripped of her independence by being assigned to the dual responsibilities of raising the children and serving her husband's interest, she decides to leave her job. But Manu is not going to want her to leave her work. But Manu doesn't want her to leave her job because with her income they can't keep the same standard. He comments, "On my salary? Come on Saru don't be silly. You know how much I earn"(81).

This burden of double duties and the difficulty to understand each other gradually imbalances their marital balance. For example, Saru's husband tried to exercise his masculinity and domination through sexual assault. He asserts his manhood and potency by being a savage at night and a normal looking Manu during the day. Saru is so terrified and humiliated that she cannot even talk to her husband about these attacks and laments desperately, "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"(96). Separation becomes inevitable with this feeling of disillusionment and imbalance. She has lost through man the female dream of discovering happiness.

Also novelist introduces the image of a dominant husband and a suffering wife in **That Long Silence**. Mohan wants a well-educated, well-cultured wife. He's not thinking about her interests and wishes. When he sees her talking fluently in English, he makes up his mind to marry Jaya. He says to Jaya,

You know, Jaya, the first day I met you at your Kamukaku's house, you were talking to your brother, Dinakar and somehow you sounded so much like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you. (90)

Mohan is just another husband typical of the patriarchal society. For him, the real ' strength ' of a woman is a woman sitting before the fire waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food. But Jaya, who aspires to be a successful writer, interprets it only as desperation.

The protagonist finds the male authority overbearing in this novel too Jaya. Jaya's anger becomes frustration when, owing to her husband's restrictive dictates, she fails to bloom in her career as a writer. Their physical relationship always ends in the question of Mohan if he has hurt her. But Jaya is still silent. She must tolerate it all. "The emotion that governed my behavior to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him that made cruelty to him impossible"(98). The harmonious connection between the two begins to crumble, and a divide between the husband and the wife prevails.

These two novels ' protagonists face the same dilemma of accepting, or questioning, or rebelling. The ultimately yield to the traditional belief - the protection of a man. Although they question the social mores at the beginning because of their emotional pull towards the traditions, they finally try their best to conform to their roles.

The images from these two novels assist us view the true dilemma of educated females in the middle class. Bitter confusion, anxiety, and tension fill them. They have begun to recognize the need for change, but their psychology is still traditionally married.

The pictures from these two novels help us to see the real middle-class dilemma of educated women. They are filled with bitter confusion, anxiety, and tension. They have started to acknowledge the need for change, but they still have traditionally married their psychology.

Saru is preparing to leave the house of her father in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** when she learns about the arrival of Manu. But her father stops telling her, “Let him know from you what’s wrong. Tell him all you told me”(216).She decides to have faith in her own self and to boldly confront reality rather than escape it. She knows that no terror is in the dark.

She decides to join her sadistic husband for another reason “there were the children”(97).She occasionally has spasms of children's longing. Even though when Manu comes, she asks her father not to open the door, she is waiting for someone to help her. Saru feels like that,

If only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life. She had this great desire to go. To put herself in another’s hand. (97)

It's made clear she wants to take her husband back and start a new life.

Jaya also feels neglected by her husband when he walks out of her in the novel **That Long Silence**. When he makes her look like a scapegoat, she is very frustrated. Even Jaya decides to lead a solitary life. But it's her kids that make her change her mind. They refuse to come after the disappearance of their father. Jaya regrets that she has failed as a spouse in her obligation. She makes a resolution that she should no longer be silent and live as the wife of Mohan. Words of her, “Why am I am making myself the heroine of this story?” (193) explain her coming out of the predicament. Therefore she revolves – “I will have to speak, to listen, to erase the silence between us” (192)

In positive terms, too, Jaya interprets Mohan's letter and hopes for the better. These novels ' protagonists resist the social tabous, but finally submit to the traditional way -“a husband is like a sheltering tree” (32)

The voice of the writer is both clear and loud in the portrayal of these two female characters Saru and Jaya by Shashi Deshpande in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **That Long Silence**. Being novels about exploring a woman's self, Shashi Deshpande sheds light on the current predicament of career women in intensively balancing career and home.To raise the question, "Is this issue solved?" We can tell ' yes ' by citing her own phrases,

We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (193)

Works Cited

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd., 1989. Print.
2. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd., 1990. Print.
3. "Writing from the margin". *Writing from the margin and other essays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003. Print.
4. Khan, M.A. *Women and Human Rights*. New Delhi: SBS Publishers and Distributors Private Ltd., 2006. Print.
5. Naikar, Basavaraj. *Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002. Print.
6. Sachar, N.R. Gopal Suman. *Indian English Poetry and Fiction – A Critical Evaluation*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000. Print.
7. Sandhu, K Sarbjit. Introduction. *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991. Print.
8. Sen, Anima. *Problems and Potentials of Women Professionals*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House. 1999. Print.
9. Uma, Alladi. *Women and her family, Indian and Afro American: A Literary Perspective*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd. 1989. Print.

SELF DECLARATION

I, Dr. S. SOPHIA CHRISTINA declare that this paper entitled **A Woman's Predicament in a Male-Ordered Culture - A Reading in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*** has not been published in any journal or book. It's my original work and true to my knowledge.

S.SOPHIA CHRISTINA

ABOUT ME

I am Dr. S. Sophia Christina, working as Assistant Professor at Sarah Tucker College, Tirunelveli. I have 15 years teaching experience in Arts and Science College. I have presented and published research papers in various seminars and journals. I obtained my Ph.D in "Identity Crisis in V.S.Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *The Mimic Men* and *In a Free State*. I am interested in taking classes for competitive exams.