

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2023

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 12.10.2023

Accepted: 05.12.2023

Published: 14.12.2023

Citation:

Kannan, D., and SV
Narasimhamurthy.
“Feminine Sensibility
and Self-Affirmation
of Woman in Shashi
Deshpande’s ‘The Dark
Holds No Terrors.’”
*Shanlax International
Journal of English*,
vol. 12, no. S1, 2023,
pp. 380–85.

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.34293/
rtdh.v12iS1-Dec.122](https://doi.org/10.34293/rtdh.v12iS1-Dec.122)

Feminine Sensibility and Self-Affirmation of Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s “*The Dark Holds No Terrors*”

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Abstract

*Shashi Deshpande’s novel “The Dark Holds No Terrors” explores themes related to feminine sensibility and self-affirmation in the context of a woman’s life. Fictional works by Shashi Deshpande depict the struggles of Indian women and build a world from the perspective of feminists. Her story presentations in *That Long Silence* are very real, thanks to the emotional identification and validation of self-anguishing via their difficulties. She stands in for the feminist longing for India’s rich cultural heritage and traditional practices that these women feel. She admits her fictitious art world was lacking strength and significance due to a lack of understanding of Indian women’s inner lives. Deshpande disrupts the typical matrix of ‘home and homelessness’ in the galaxy of feminist fiction by creating different narrative patterns that give her feminist protagonists adequate freedom to show their repressed sense for their motherland. Aside from the characters’ sentimentality, she promotes local sensibility via poetry, performances, ethics, and ethnic arts. In her narrative work, she has come to terms with the paradigms and commitments.*

Keywords: Feminine Sensibility, Diasporic Consciousness, Fantasy and Reality

Introduction

“Dark Holds No Terror” was published in 1980, this thought-provoking work of fiction explores the intricate web of societal expectations, gender roles, and a woman’s struggle for independence and self-identity in a patriarchal Indian society. The story revolves around the life of Sarita, the protagonist, and delves into her tumultuous journey as she grapples with the oppressive forces that confine her. Shashi Deshpande’s novel masterfully addresses issues of gender discrimination, female empowerment, and the clash between tradition and modernity. Through Sarita’s story, Deshpande paints a poignant picture of the challenges faced by women in a conservative society and the courage required to confront those challenges head-on.

Feminism and Society

The fantastical and the real blend jointly in Deshpande's fictional universe. In order to build the feminists' inner world, she supports a logical emotional vision and builds the language of exile beyond the romantic idea of nostalgia. She mentions that,

I'm not sure I can claim to be a voice of reason. I am often swayed by my passion, things I believe in strongly. And I think it would be a generalization to say that our society is dominated by shrill rhetoric but there are many sane and wise voices out there. (Deshpande 18)

It implies that Deshpande remains a "dedicated" writer who stays on the path of "seriousness" in her work, even if she is enchanted by fantasy and enchantment. Her motivations are clear since she takes the idea of cross-cultural understanding outside of academic institutions and conveys it in her works. She explicates her position, that she is a listener, a facilitator, a connector to people, to her, the art of dissolving boundaries is what living is all about. (Fallis and Deshpande 12)

As a writer, Deshpande fulfills the role of the 'connector' of cultures. She writes novels with the assumption that women are feminists, have a better sense of cultural identity and they can more successfully work for the assimilation of cultures. Deviating from depressing cultural bouts, she made the incidents and the consequences of violence against women crossing cultural boundaries. The idea of national consciousness, realization of the warmth of the mechanism of personal relationship, innate bonding with geography and culture, and inheriting the heritage of ethnic arts, have been the prime issues integrated into the diasporic consciousness presented by Deshpande in her writings. She mentions,

So much of my writing was a response to imagination and being far away from my culture really made me want to write about India. If I did become a writer in India, surely, I would have written about other things, I do work with Indian women. I have several students right now at the University of Houston who are Indian or Indian or South Asian. (Deshpande 6)

Journey of Self-Discovery and Empowerment

Shashi Deshpande's first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is written with a blend of prose and poetry. Regarding the creation of this novel, she writes, "I wrote it in the spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth-century Indian and timeless myth and magic in my attempts to create a modern fable".(Deshpande21) Sarita, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande, is a young lady from another timeline. "The Dark Holds No Terrors" becomes her well-known name once she gains an enigmatic understanding of the potential of medical knowledge. Time traveler Sarita, now inhabiting the arthritic body of a California doctor, makes her way to Oakland. With her perfect command of medical knowledge, she used to administrate her patients to cure their physical ailments leading to their emotional cures. In India, she encounters a handsome young man, Manu. With the realization of the power of human love, her feminine self-strives to break the self-imposed barriers. Sarita's consciousness turns between her realization of responsibility towards her professional life and the life of personal dreams and desires.

Complexities of Personal Relationships

The American critic Anny Ten appreciates *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as a "dazzling tale of misbegotten dreams and desires, hopes and expectations woven with poetry and storyteller magic". The novel has been transcribed and is presented as a film by Paul Berges and Deshpande highly appreciates the screen presentation of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Two families in *A Matter of Time* by Shashi Deshpande have a same problem: the father has unexpectedly misplaced his cousins, who had lived with him since their father died. They used to dress similarly, share concerns, aspirations,

and arguments in the unhappy matriarchal Chatterjee family. The girls' moms, Charu and Seema, do their utmost to locate good partners for their daughters Aru and Anju as they reach puberty. Gopal, a traditional Bengali youngster, is the one Aru marries. She was compelled to relocate to the rural Bengali house of her in-laws after her marriage.

In contrast, Anju moves to California following her marriage to Sunil, a software developer. Then, just as good wives do, they settle in as best they can to their new houses. But new circumstances bring new hardships, and they fight desperately to establish their own areas. One of the reviewers, in the context of *A Matter of Time*, observes: Throughout the story, there is the sense that all the choices these fathers made will affect the fate of their daughters and that the daughter's own choice will always bring unforeseen consequences. (Askew 7)

Personal Desires and Familial Responsibilities

Though Aru is ensnared by the traditional shackles of her traditional Bengali family against her choice, Anju is frightened and lonely at being away from her own country, family, and culture. Anju writes the book as a means to alleviate her concern with re-creating her history in relation to her cousin Aru. The Final Step *A Matter of Time's* sequel is *Vine*. In 2002, it made its debut. Aru ends her connection with Gopal due of her disgust with her husband and mother-in-law's reprehensible attitude. She intends to take her little daughter Dayita to California at Anju's urging. A surprise abortion had already taken the life of Anju's unborn baby.

Anju is looking forward to seeing her old self again with Aru's arrival. disputes arising from immigration are presented by Shashi Deshpande within the backdrop of interpersonal disputes. Deshpande acknowledges that individuals are unable to escape their history via the Anju and Aru problems. Additionally, she advocates for the view that a woman's agency is insufficient for the conception of her life's fabric. Thus, both internal and exterior conflicts are delicately balanced in *The Binding Vine*. This is made very evident inside the framework of *The Binding Vine*.

An inspiring tale of two ladies who find peace with the tough decisions life has thrown their way is given depth and nuance by the author's poetic depictions of their inner and outer lives. (Deshpande 20) Through the intricate story of *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande showcases her skill at blending seemingly contradictory subjects pertaining to the lives and sensibilities of feminists. A fresh perspective in Indian English literature, she delves into the complicated web of familial ties, homesickness, religious devotion, and cultural and spiritual faithfulness that accompanies the exile and displacement crises. Although the story in *The Binding Vine* seems to be taking two separate paths—the personal and the impersonal—it ultimately takes a more unified approach. Deshpande expands upon her ideas on immigration in her 2004 book *Queen of Dreams*.

Traditional Roles and Expectations

A Bengali feminist family residing in California around the turn of the century is the central theme of the story, which centres on their struggles for survival. The mother has a remarkable ability to decipher the meaning of her patients' dreams, and she hails from a local Calcutta slum region. Just like in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her authorship of the works has been confirmed. To protect her daughter Sarita from hearing about her unique and terrible history, she want to keep quiet about it. Although Sarita was born and raised in India, she has an instinctive connection to Indian life, Indian landscapes, and Indian culture that she keeps hidden from view.

Manohar is another Indianized Indian, and Sarita is married to him. However, they aren't happy together. But they are still connected via their six-year-old daughter Saru. Sarita has a passion for art, but she also helps operate a medical business with her father. This shop happens to be the gathering place for all the notable feminists. Feminists have a natural sense of brotherhood

as a result. Her father strives to preserve the “tea shop” from closure after her mother’s death in a vehicle accident by making ends meet. By helping Sarita translate her mother’s Bengali dream diaries into English, her father is helping her piece together her mother’s life story. As it shifts between the past and the present, the book follows the format of a postmodern meta narrative. Postmodern themes such as racism, terrorism, painting, dreams, and the tension of displacement and relocation impacting feminist sensibilities are explored by Shashi Deshpande in *Queen of Dreams* amongst a magical and fantastical backdrop.

The Shadows of Homeland

Throughout the obstacles they face, the protagonists never give up on their dreams of self-improvement and self-affirmation. It is remarked, “The characters are extremely well developed. You feel Sarita’s frustrated quest for roots, the anguish of mother who is condemned by “vivid imagination”, the kindness of her father, the love of Manohar and Saru and the hatred of racists and bigots”. (Deshpande 24)

A wide range of mysterious situations is presented by Deshpande. The fact that Saru is so eager to find India in her thoughts implies that the memories of home are not limited by geography or time, but rather exist in the depths of one’s own psyche.

In an effort to bring the Indian myth back to life, Deshpande has looked to western ideology for inspiration. Deshpande is making an effort to humanise the mythological figure of the Indian wife, who is said to have been born on fire. A colourful version of the traditional story of an Indian lady being wedded to five royal men is attempted by the author here. The Indian woman did everything she could to help her husband reclaim the throne and honour the family name. But she couldn’t hide her tangled relationship with the mysterious Krishna or her hidden attraction to the guy who was her husband’s dangerous adversary. Deshpande has given new life to its female characters in a male-centered story, according to one review. The result is a captivating, thought-provoking, and suspenseful tale of passion, love, power, weakness, honour, and humiliation. (Deshpande 20)

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande’s dilute collection of short stories *The Binding Vine* (1996) has invited the largest number of tributes for its brilliance and the rare touch of human sentiments against the challenges of multi-cultural society and gender apathetes existing within the social structure. The dexterity of the art of the story telling of Shashi Deshpande is appreciated in the following words. Deshpande’s stories are as irresistible as the impulse that leads her characters to surface into maturity, raising their heads above floods of silver ignorance. In this collection of short stories, Shashi Deshpande, investigates a complex pattern of personal relationship with specific focus on man and woman relationship.

Hence the complexity of personal relationships against the phenomenon of conflicts weaves the pattern of the stories included in the volume *That Long Silence*. It can safely be defined as prism of conflicting values dispersing the struggle of woman against influences emerging in the postmodern social conditions. About the expressive range of these stories, in one of the comments included in *San Francisco Chronicle*, it has been said: “Beautifully told stories of transformed lives and trapped by cultural changes on both sides of the ocean, these women struggle fiercely to carve out an identity of their own”. (Divakaruni8) Most of these stories are the narrative reconstruction of the experiences and dilemmas of the Indian couples settled in the culture society of Indian with the legacy of their national heritage.

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