

**WOMEN CHARACTERS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL,  
THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR.**

**Research Guide :**

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Shashi Deshpande has presented a variety of women characters to show how they have to suffer for being women. The novel opens with the portraits of Sarita and her mother. The two women were at variance with each other. Sarita had the notion from the beginning that she was an unwanted child. She wrote in a note book even when she was a child, "Nobody likes me. Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me". Perhaps it was the feeling of female children in all the middle class families and unfortunately the same feeling went deeper in Sarita after her brother, Dhruva, had drowned in a pool and she was held responsible for the death of the child. Her mother said straight to her, "you did it. You did this. You killed him.....Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" this indictment was not just. She had no desire to take her brother with her. She asked him to go back to home but he was a self-willed, obstinate and pampered child. He went into the pond and drowned sarita made efforts to retrieve him but she being a child herself failed in her efforts to retrieve him but she being a child herself failed in her effort.

She became a wronged and unwanted daughter. Mother had indicted her directly and father failed to rise to support her. She remained alienated from her parents to such an extent that she was not informed even about the death of her mother. When she returned even about the death of her mother, When she returned to her father after fifteen years, she had the fear that she would not be allowed to enter the house. She kept the rickshaw driver waiting and asked her

father Can I come in, Baba?” Later, she complained to her father, That’s your way, isn’t it, Baba? All these years I suppose it was....Let’s forget about Saru. It was as if there was no Saru at all. No there was no Saru, you never had a daughter, because she was an inconvenience, a nuisance and it suited you not to have her there”. It was indeed unfortunate of her that her parents didn’t even try to know whether she was happy after marriage and how many children she had. Her children never knew that they had grand-parents from mother’s side. After all she was an unwanted daughter.

She had regrets for being alienated and estranged from her parents. As she opened the cupboard of her mother, she found such tokens of love as are given to married women on auspicious occasions. She found squares of cotton and silk, just enough for a choli. It was a token gift given to married women. She knew that her friend was invited in the eighth month of pregnancy and several ceremonies were done and gifts were given by her mother. But Sarita realised that she was not of fortunate as to get blessings and gifts of her parents. She said to herself with tears in her eyes “I never had this”. She was after all an unforgiven daughter.

Sarita was a girl of great determination. She saw a woman, sober and graceful in an assemblage of common sort. Sarita came to know that the woman was a doctor. She determined instantly that she would also become a doctor. She worked hard though love crossed her way as it happens with adolescent, but she determined not to lose sight of the target. She got first division in Intermediate which was a passport to the Medical College. She succeeded in joining the Medical College in spite of the opposition of her mother. She could resist her emotions of love when Manohar, the ideal man of her dreams appeared before her and made the proposal. It was none her fault if she continued to rise in her profession and rose inches taller than her husband in status. The consequent depression made Manohar a psychopath. At one stage, she left her husband because she found it impossible to live with a psychopath

who inflicted wounds on her every night with his nails, hands and teeth. But good sense prevented in the end as she realised, that she should get him treated for his fits of insanity instead of leaving him to languish and suffer the whole life.

Saritha's mother was an old fashioned housewife. She remained in kitchen for most of the time and would go to her bed-room like an overnight guest. She didn't have a room of her own as Virginia Woolf had desired that every woman should have. She was shocked intolerably when her son, Dhruva, drowned into the pool. Like an illiterate and uneducated woman, she indicated her daughter for the death of her son and alienated herself from her daughter for the whole of her life. There was so much of antagonism between the mother and daughter that neither spoke kindly about the other when Sarita proposed to go to the Medical College. Sarita's mother opposed the idea on several counts. Her oft-repeated arguments were that a girl would not be able to live alone in Bombay, that they were not rich enough to find money for both her education and marriage for a conservative and reactionary mother, as she was, marriage of the daughter was far more important than education. In spite of being uneducated, she was the premium mobile in her family, perhaps because of her husband was pusillanimous, a non-interfering husband, but a devoted bank employee . Sarita's Mother remained an unsatisfied woman all her life. When her husband was given a tray as a retirement gift, she moaned that it was nothing for a long service.

Sarita's mother was in a way indifferent to women's cause. She was told by a neighbour that a woman was tied to a peg in stable for ten years. Instead of expressing her anger against such a tyranny, she said that the woman might have deserved such a treatment. Perhaps it was due to her lack of sensibility that she failed to make up with her daughter.

Sudhir Dikshit's mother, Sarita's Mavshi was an affectionate mother. She had full quota of five children of her own, yet she was very kind and affectionate to Sarita in her childhood. After death of Dhruva, she took Sarita to her house lest she should feel lonely and neglected. She combed her hair with great care and treated her like her own children. Sarita grew so fond of her that she was reluctant to go to her house even after several day's stay with Mavshi.

When Sarita met her after the death of Mavshi's husband, she found that she was altogether a different woman. Her affection, concern, interest, curiosity – all had disappeared. She was fat, old and unwanted woman, complaining against the apathy of her son and daughter-in-law. She had become diabetic and obese but would not listen to her son who advised her to restrict her diet. She was forsaken, defeated and lonely. She was typical of such women as are neglected by children in old age because they were rendered useless by age and disease. She wished for death for herself. Sarita felt pity for her Mavshi.

Sarita, Smita and Nalu were very intimate school friends. They were called. Three Musketeers by the school mates Sarita became a doctor, Nalu became a college lecturer, but Smita became a typical housewife, 'a tag on her husband, a small boat towed by a larger ship'. In her college days, Smita was a slim, frail-looking girl, with large, vulnerable eyes, but after marriage she became a fat woman, mother of three children. She looked not ugly, but obscene. Her husband had changed her name from Smita to Gitanjali, and called her 'Anju', to signify the change in her total identity. Smita in her mother gave her for books. But after marriage her husband would not give any extra money. She wanted to give a sari to her sister-in-law with whom she had been staying for over a month with her children, but her husband had given her money only to purchase a toy for the child. But Smita had no complaint to make. On the contrary she spoke of her husband's audacity without compunction. She asked Sarita to lend her one hundred rupees with the assurance that she would return the money after some time when she would be able to save from the household

expenses. She further disclosed that she purchased clothes for her daughters out of her savings without bringing it to the knowledge of her husband. In spite of being under so much of restraint and pressure she had retained her joviality habit of nudging punching giggling and clutching, as if nothing had happened to her. She proudly referred to her husband as 'he' and would not pronounce his name. Nalu was right to say that marriage and men had degraded Smita.

In Smita's case, wife had lost her identity. She was just a means to satisfy the sex urge of her husband. But in the case of Sarita, husband had been reduced to a nullity and the broken fellow lost his equilibrium. Sarita was scared of her husband not because what he had done to her but because what she had done to him. Not only this, Sarita never allowed herself to be used by her husband as a means to satisfy his sex. She rather repulsed his advances when she returned exhausted after a hectic day in the hospital or the clinic, though at times she forced him to make love to her. "If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him to prove his love for me. And he would.....again and again and again", though she had determined that she would not dominate over her husband as her mother had done. Nevertheless, Smita was happy while Sarita was a broken woman, feeling guilty for what she had done to her brother, mother and husband.

Nalu was typical of the middle aged spinsters. She was teaching at a college, well off financially, but she lacked in the sweetness and composure perhaps because she was devoid of love of husband and children – "There was a whole world of bitterness within her ready to spring to the surface any moment. She complained about her brother and his family with whom she lived, her students and colleagues, the administration of the college, politicians, the government, everything. Remembering the Nalu of old with her endearing enthusiasm, she wondered at the bitterness" Perhaps she was bitter because she had never tasted love of husband and children.

None of the women characters that Deshpande has presented is happy and balanced. Perhaps Deshpande has got too far in saying that women irrespective of their class and caste are living a life of misery and suffering. Even mothers in her novel are not mother-like in behaviour and conduct. Saritha's mother remained alienated from her daughter all her life. And the novelist seems to have so much of bitterness in her own mind that she has shown Sarita's father equally antagonistic to his daughter. He did not like to inform Sarita about her mother's death. It is something very unusual and unexpected of a father. Sarita's father, she thought, did not welcome her to his house because he considered it 'treachery to the dead'. Deshpande has for her own reasons did not show the natural inherent qualities of love and sympathy in the characters of her women characters. Sarita, however, is one woman character, who stands acquitted of all the charges that her mother had levelled against her. She presented her case before her father and succeeded in getting his word that he never blamed her for Dhruva's death. She had a delicate and sensitive soul. Though she had done nothing deliberately to her brother, mother and husband, yet she felt that she was responsible for what had happened to each one of them.

Reference's :

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