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## **Endemic imbalance in marital relationships: A study of female characters in *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors***

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### **Abstract**

Relationships are true assets of an individual. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most famous and well known Indian writers who closely observes the behavioral patterns of her characters and suggests that interactional agreement and disagreement are responsible for a harmonious relationship. The present paper is a brief study of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*. In both the novels, the female protagonists are highly sensitive and adopt a scientific approach towards disharmony in relationships. Shashi Deshpande has tried to suggest that a woman has to be accorded the same status in society as is bestowed upon his male counterpart.

**Keywords:** identity, protest, status, individual potentialities, relationships, harmony

### **Introduction**

Shashi Deshpande, the winner of Sahitya Academy Award, is one of the living dynamic writers in Indian English literature and has written many novels and collections of short stories. Some of them include *That Long Silence*, *If I Die Today*, *Come up and Be Dead*, *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *The Binding Vine* etc. When we compare and contrast both the novels of Shashi Deshpande, we find that *That Long Silence* is a unique piece of work of Shashi Deshpande which shows and tells the pathetic condition of Indian women while *The Dark Holds No Terrors* deals with the changing position of women in Indian society. Middle class Indian women suffer from many hardships but never express themselves as they do not want to break the harmony of family. It is an irony that the sacrifice made by women is hardly noticed in a patriarchal set-up.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is said to be Shashi Deshpande's masterpiece. It has been hailed as a tremendously compelling portrayal of a woman's strategy for survival in a totally uncongenial atmosphere. Changed modern life style and empowerment of woman has given them a chance to try to release themselves from the social constraints imposed upon them. Interpersonal relationships are deeply conditioned by dependence syndrome. Sarita, the female protagonist of the novel, constantly struggles to understand her relationship with Manohar. Her economic independence and her position as a well-established doctor has made him feel inferior. Sarita becomes a two- in- one woman, who is a successful, popular doctor in the daytime and a terrified, trapped animal in night. Deshpande is of the view that women cannot discover their true identity if they do not transgress these socio- economic limitations. Sarita returns back to her father's house, being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. Sarita retrospects," It is observed in the society that a wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A she should be a B.A. If he's 5'4' tall she shouldn't be more than 5'3' tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, she should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage... No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in the favor of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favor, God help you, both of you." (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 137)

Saru's long hours of introspection make her realize that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems. She gets a new vigor and achieves wholeness. A confident Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other.

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The novelist powerfully brings out the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The novelist's objective is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means that woman should assert and ascertain herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces.

Shashi Deshpande's another novel *That Long Silence* is the story of a convent educated woman Jaya, who is dissatisfied with social and familial norms and feels herself trapped in the flux between tradition and modernity. She is the protagonist of *That Long Silence* who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, a writer and a columnist. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who had socialization in a typical traditional environment. He perceived his wife at par with Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister were very much submissive to his father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters were taken by the male members of the family. So he also wanted his wife to be submissive like them as a homemaker.

In a male-dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. It is pertinent to mention here that love plays a vital role in determining the concept and meaningfulness of interpersonal relationships. Without love, harmony of life gets disturbed and brings disaster in the life of individuals. Women feel insecure when they consider themselves unworthy to their spouses. Jaya realizes that her relationship with Mohan was nothing more than performing her duties towards him. Their relationship is devoid of care and mutual respect because both of them fail to make authentic connection with each other. The novel explores and probes into the interior milieu of Jaya. She finds herself ensnared by wanted and unwanted relationships and feels as if these roles have crushed her individuality as a human being. Her suppressed desires lead to frustration. She sees her relationship with Mohan like:

A pair of bullocks yoked together... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman (8).

Deshpande uses this metaphor "a pair of bullocks yoked together" repeatedly to reveal Jaya's dilemma:

The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together...it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful, and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (12).

Jaya is introduced to her neighbor Kamat, who lends her full attention and appreciates her emotional needs. But his sudden death creates an emotional void in Jaya's life. She moves on to the path of self realization. She interrogates her past and taps her inner resources of happiness and fulfillment. After this self realization, Jaya breaks her seventeen years long silence and decides to write in order to communicate with the world. After the return of her son, she feels safe and secure. Her journey into light has begun. The novel ends with Jaya's effort to survive regardless of conjugal incapability between the couple. She thinks positively, "We do not 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)

### Summing up

This paper is an attempt to study Shashi Deshpande's interest in familial and non-familial relationships and her focus on the marital relationships in *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Through the protagonists of her novels, she presents the picture of modern, educated young women who are crushed under the weight of male-dominated and tradition bound Indian society. It also reveals that after marriage a woman in Indian society loses her identity and has to struggle for survival. Silence is a recurring theme in post-colonial literature. Jaya's silence is her armor against her dominating husband, Mohan. She is unable to speak out her inner turmoil and remains silent. Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, too, undergoes a similar trauma like Jaya. But she boldly confronts reality and realizes that the dark she feared really holds no terrors. Both novels have the same conclusion that it's either Jaya or Sarita or any other woman; the typical Indian society wants to keep women under the male dominance.

The paper reveals how Shashi Deshpande digs deep into the female psyche and goes beyond the skin and flesh to explore the complexity of man-woman relationship. However, Deshpande does not recommend the supremacy of men or women but suggests that women need to be treated with respect as a human being.

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