

SARITA'S JOURNEY TOWARD AUTONOMY AND SELF-DISCOVERY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS* IN THE CONTEXT OF A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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Back Ground of the study:

'The Dark Holds No Terrors' is a novel by Shashi Deshpande. The novel was published in 1980 and is an important work in the Indian literary landscape. The story revolves around the protagonist, Sarita, who is a talented and intelligent woman trying to find her identity and freedom in a traditional Indian society that often stifles women's aspirations and desires. Sarita wants to establish her identity to breach the taboos of society and wants to prove her worth by being a reputed doctor. However, while doing so, she becomes alienated from her husband and her family. Thus, Deshpande portrays the restrictions and hardships of a woman's journey toward maturity quite effectively. The protagonist Sarita is a successful lady doctor. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound 'Indian Society' is the theme of the novel. This novel explores the trauma of a middleclass working women who has become a trap in the male dominated society. Deshpande picturises her men and women characters as the victim of modern society.

The novel exposes the complexities of Sarita's life as she struggles to break free from the societal norms and expectations that restrict her. It explores themes of gender, identity, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Sarita's journey is marked by a stormy relationship with her mother and her quest for self-discovery and independence. This is a thought-provoking and emotionally charged novel that sheds light on the inner world of its characters and the societal forces that shape their lives. It has been praised for its compelling narrative and its exploration of the complexities of women's roles in Indian society.

This research paper focuses the character of Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' and explores her transformative journey towards autonomy within the confines of a deeply patriarchal society. The novel, set against the backdrop of 20th-century India, provides a poignant narrative that mirrors the struggles and aspirations of countless women seeking self-realization and independence.

The central focus of this paper is on Sarita's pursuit of autonomy, encompassing themes of gender, identity, family dynamics, and societal expectations. Through a comprehensive character analysis, we dissect Sarita's evolution from a constrained daughter to a woman willing to challenge the status quo. Her yearning for education and personal fulfillment symbolizes the broader struggle of women against oppressive norms.

In the context of a patriarchal society, Sarita's journey is full of internal conflicts and external challenges. Her mother's traditional beliefs and societal pressures weigh heavily on her aspirations, creating a complex mother-daughter dynamic that shapes her path. Her marriage to Manohar introduces



additional complexities, as her desires clash with societal expectations of wifely duties. Through a close examination of key scenes and character interactions, this paper illuminates Sarita's moments of self-doubt and isolation, as well as her acts of courage and determination. It highlights how Sarita's choices, including leaving her husband and child, represent her unwavering commitment to attaining autonomy and self-fulfillment.

This research paper also places Sarita's journey within the broader context of Indian literature, feminism, and the changing landscape of 20th-century India. By analyzing the challenges she faces and the growth she experiences, it aims to shed light on the enduring struggle of women against patriarchy and their relentless pursuit of autonomy.

In conclusion, this study offers an exploration of Sarita's character and her journey toward autonomy and self-identity in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terrors.' By dissecting the themes and conflicts within the novel, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of women's lives in a patriarchal society and their relentless quest for self-realization.

Feminist Perspective: Shashi Deshpande's novel is analyzed from a feminist perspective. The researcher examined how her works highlight the challenges faced by women in India, including issues related to gender roles, patriarchy, and societal expectations. Her characters often grapple with the tension between tradition and modernity.

The novel highlights the traditional gender roles and societal expectations imposed on women. Sarita, the protagonist, struggles with the pressure to conform to these roles as a wife and mother, which leads to her inner turmoil and desire for independence. Sarita's journey is a quest for her own identity and autonomy. She strives to break free from the constraints of her marital life and oppressive family dynamics to find her own voice and sense of self. The novel explores the conflict between a woman's desire to pursue a career and her societal role as a mother. Sarita's husband, Manohar, believes that her primary duty is to be a mother, while Sarita wants to pursue her academic ambitions. The story reflects the dominance of patriarchal structures, where men often exert control over women's lives. Sarita's husband, father, and even her brother-in-law represent different facets of this patriarchal control. Throughout the novel, Sarita finds support and solidarity with other women who have faced similar struggles. Her interactions with her friend Neela and her encounters with other women who have challenged societal norms showcase the importance of female bonds in the feminist struggle. Sarita's journey towards independence and self-realization is a central theme. She seeks to break free from her past and society's expectations to lead a life that aligns with her own aspirations.

The novel exposes the double standards that exist in society regarding men and women's behavior and expectations. Sarita's husband is allowed to pursue his career without hindrance. The novel offers a feminist perspective by exploring the challenges and constraints faced by women in a patriarchal society. It underscores the importance of women's autonomy, the struggle for identity, and the need to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

Identity and Self-discovery: Many of Shashi Deshpande's novels delve into themes of identity and self-discovery. Her characters, especially female protagonists, undergo journeys of self-realization and transformation. The researcher explores how Shashi Deshpande's writing reflects the quest for identity in the context of a changing India. The story revolves around the life and struggles of the protagonist,



Sarita, as she grapples with issues of identity and self-discovery. Sarita's journey throughout the novel is marked by her efforts to break free from societal expectations and establish her own identity.

Sarita is born into a traditional Indian family where gender roles are strictly defined. Her father, a conservative and patriarchal figure, favors her brother, while Sarita faces discrimination and neglect from her family from a young age. This early experience sets the stage for her quest for identity. Sarita's thirst for knowledge and a desire to rise above her circumstances drive her to excel academically. She becomes a brilliant student and pursues higher education, an unusual path for women in her society at that time. Her education becomes a crucial part of her self-discovery as she breaks away from traditional roles. Sarita's marriage to Manohar is initially seen as a way to escape her family's oppressive environment. However, her husband's traditional views and expectations conflict with her aspirations. Sarita experiences marital strife and realizes that even marriage cannot fully define her identity. Sarita becomes a mother, but she grapples with indecision towards motherhood. She feels trapped by societal expectations of being the perfect mother and wife, which further adds to her internal conflict about identity. As Sarita matures, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery. She recognizes her individual desires and ambitions apart from societal norms and familial expectations. Her pursuit of self-actualization leads her to consider her own identity outside the roles prescribed by society.

Sarita's journey aligns with the feminist movement of the time, and she begins to question the patriarchal norms deeply established in Indian society. She seeks empowerment and autonomy, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. Sarita pursues a career in academics, which grants her a sense of independence and self-worth. Her professional success becomes a significant aspect of her identity, further differentiating her from traditional gender roles. Her path to self-discovery and independence causes conflict with her mother, who represents the conservative values that Sarita is trying to break free from. This conflict highlights the generational gap and changing dynamics within Indian families.

Sarita's journey towards self-discovery and identity is not without its challenges and sacrifices. The novel explores her evolution as a woman who strives to define herself on her own terms, ultimately finding a balance between her personal aspirations and societal expectations. In "The Dark Holds No Terrors," Sarita's character serves as a symbol of the evolving role of women in Indian society, highlighting the struggle for identity and self-discovery faced by many women during that era. Her story is a reflection of the broader societal changes and feminist awakening in India during the late 20th century.

Mother-Daughter Relationships: Shashi Deshpande's novels often depict complex mother-daughter relationships. The novel explores complex themes related to family dynamics, feminism, and individual identity. One of the central themes in the novel is the mother-daughter relationship, which is portrayed through the interactions between the protagonist, Sarita, and her mother, Shashikala. The relationship between Sarita and her mother, Sarita initially obeys her mother's wishes and expectations without question. She complies with the traditional role of a dutiful daughter, fulfilling her mother's desires for her marriage and domestic life. Shashikala, is marked by conflict and misunderstanding. Sarita feels that her mother never truly understood her or supported her choices in life. Shashikala, on the other hand, is



deeply traditional and conservative, which creates a rift between them as Sarita seeks independence and a more modern way of life.

The novel highlights the generational gap between Sarita and her mother. Sarita represents the younger generation of educated, independent women who question traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Shashikala, on the other hand, adheres to traditional values and believes that a woman's primary role is to be a dutiful wife and mother. This generational divide leads to conflicts and differing worldviews. Shashikala has certain expectations of Sarita, expecting her to conform to the traditional role of a wife and mother. She cannot understand why Sarita is dissatisfied with her marriage and wants more out of life. Sarita's desire for self-fulfillment and independence clashes with her mother's expectations, leading to tension in their relationship.

Sarita's struggle for her own identity and independence is a central theme of the novel. She wants to break free from the constraints imposed by her mother's generation and societal norms. Her mother's inability to understand her aspirations adds to her sense of isolation and alienation. As the novel progresses, Sarita and her mother go through a journey of self-discovery and reflection. They begin to understand each other better, and there is a gradual reconciliation between them. Shashikala, though initially portrayed as rigid and unsupportive, also undergoes a transformation in her thinking.

Shashi Deshpande has depicted the status of women in the contemporary Indian society, marriage and family through her novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'. The woes and suffering of a woman derive from gender bias, patriarchy, male dominance, suppression and alienation gives them a feeling of pain and sense of loss.

In "The Dark Holds No Terrors," Shashi Deshpande explores the complexities of mother-daughter relationships in the context of changing societal norms and women's aspirations in India. The novel delves into the evolving roles of women in a traditional society and the challenges they face in asserting their individuality while trying to maintain familial bonds. Through the journey of Sarita and Shashikala, the author highlights the need for empathy, understanding, and open communication within families as they navigate the shifting dynamics of gender and generational change.

Social and Cultural Context: Shashi Deshpande's novels provide a window into the socio-cultural milieu of India. Her works reflect the changing landscape of Indian society, including issues related to urbanization, education, and the impact of westernization. This novel delves into the complex social and cultural contexts of contemporary Indian society, particularly focusing on the roles and expectations placed upon women.

The novel explores a highly patriarchal society in India and the traditional gender roles and expectations placed on women, emphasizing the restrictions and limitations these roles impose. The protagonist, Sarita, grapples with societal norms that demand she conform to the ideal image of a dutiful wife and mother. The institution of marriage is a central theme in the novel. Sarita's marriage is characterized by the patriarchal structure and the submissive role expected of wives. The novel critiques the traditional Indian family system, where women are often expected to prioritize the needs of their husbands and children over their own aspirations.

Sarita's pursuit of education and her desire for independence challenge the prevailing cultural norms of her time. Her aspirations to be a writer and her quest for self-realization are seen as threats to



the traditional family structure. The novel reflects the tension between women's desire for personal growth and the societal pressure to conform. The novel also examines the clash between traditional Indian values and the influence of Western ideas and lifestyles. Sarita's education and exposure to Western literature and thought contribute to her desire for autonomy and self-expression. This theme reflects broader changes happening in Indian society during the late 20th century. The novel, "The Dark Holds No Terrors," hints at the psychological aspects of the story. Sarita's inner struggles with her identity, self-worth, and the impact of her upbringing on her mental health are central to the narrative.

"The Dark Holds No Terrors" by Shashi Deshpande explores the social and cultural context of women's lives in contemporary India. It sheds light on the challenges women face in reconciling traditional roles with their desire for personal growth and self-realization. The novel also touches upon broader themes of patriarchy, family dynamics, education, and the impact of Western influences on Indian society during the late 20th century.

Language and Narrative Style: Shashi Deshpande's narrative style and her use of language is noted for its simplicity and clarity.

Methodology: The methodology for researching Sarita's journey toward autonomy in Shashi Deshpande's novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' in the context of a patriarchal society should be systematic. Begin by conducting a close reading of the novel, paying particular attention to the passages and dialogues that reveal Sarita's thoughts, emotions, and struggles on her journey toward autonomy.

The researcher identify and analyze the key themes related to autonomy, gender, identity, family, and patriarchy that are prevalent throughout the novel. The researcher analyzes the development of Sarita's character from the beginning of the novel to its conclusion. Look for moments of transformation and self-discovery and examine how Sarita's interactions with other characters, such as her mother and husband, influence her journey and decisions.

References:

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