

# Women Suppression And Exploitation: A Psycho-Socioanalysis Of Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors And Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters

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**Abstract:** *Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee have been the champions of the concerns and struggles of women. Their works, very realistically depicts the various roles of women whose plays in course of their life as a wife, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and so on. Their works can't be called directly feminist since their works are not against man; in fact, their novel portrays the dilemma of the new educated modern working women in the conventional Indian society. This present paper attempts to analyse the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee. The researcher has chosen the two important novels of their works, such as Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors and Bharati Mukherjee's Desirable Daughters. The focus of the paper is presenting why women are no longer afraid of darkness and why women are really oppressed in the society. Women, for ages altogether, have been subjected to exploitation and suppression; their lives have been spent in the darkness and thus, they are not afraid of darkness instead they feel solace in the dark and even they feel alienated from others due to suppression by the patriarchy society. The study also attempts to highlight the fact that women are denied rights not only because of the circumstances but also because women themselves suppress other women and use men as instruments.*

**Keywords:** *Exploitation; Women Empowerment; Women Subjugation; Suppression; Oppression; Dilemma.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A woman is a dawn of light where all the darkness disappears. She is the sun that enlightens everyone and beholds the ability to vanish all the fear that grows in darkness of mind. Women are essentially the origin of life. No one can cast a doubt on the substantiality of women that they are the ultimate creators of this very existence. The woman strengthens the foundation of family as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife embracing everyone with the unconditional love. If allowed to grow their potential they not only enhance a women's world as writers, entrepreneurs, mystics, painters, counselors, scientists but can also provide a better vision to the men's world.

Women make half of humanity and, without any doubt, they are equally important to keep the universe moving. Men and women must be treated alike, nevertheless, the same

hasn't been observed by humanity. The world has never been able to treat the two sexes alike. The creator has created the two sections equal in importance, differing only in the chores these two sections are supposed to perform. However, the male counterparts usurped the power on the basis of physical strength and relegated women to the secondary position. The only jobs assigned to women were child-rearing and household chores. The secondary position of women also led to their exploitation in the society.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published in 1980. The novel depicts the state of Indian women in a very realistic way. It studies the attitude and conduct of women in Indian middle-class families. The novel has been translated into various languages Spanish and other Russian languages. Deshpande has portrayed variety of women characters in the novel and has presented the sufferings these women have gone through. Like Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most prominent writers of Indian diaspora. Being an immigrant, she feels very comfortable in handling the themes of the sufferings of diasporic women and their identities. Most of her protagonists deliberately or violently move to America and live a miserable and unbearable life in their alien land. They make many efforts towards the process of economic, social, and cultural adjustment.

The author, an immigrant herself, tries to reveal the darker side of immigration which is not often portrayed by other immigrant writers too. Her fiction depicts the multicultural society and the progressive adaptations by both immigrants and Americans. The themes of most of her novels exemplify themes like: diasporic female identity, immigrant experience, alienation, assimilation, isolation, migration, self-value, female subjection, oppressions and cross-cultural conflicts etc. according to Geoffrey Kain, "Bharati Mukherjee has established herself as a leading figure in what will certainly prove to be a central and enduring sub-genre in the larger scheme of American literary history: the Asian- American immigrant novel" (Kain: 151).

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) depicts the atrocities inflicted on the 'gendered subaltern', that is, women in the forms of child marriage, imposed arranged marriage, and limited prospects of career for talented girls like Padma, Parvathi and Tara in the novel. Mukherjee seems to generalize the pitiable plight of women when she comments: "A Bengali Girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrows of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her" (Mukherjee, 2002: 4). The main characters in the novel grapple with the challenge of accommodating the American feminist culture into their traditional Indian one. But, as schools of thoughts go, these two concepts are incompatible.

The conventional role assigned to women in India is the very antithesis of what American feminists espouse. She gives space to immigrant consciousness with focus on divulgence of female protagonists that provides a new pattern to her fiction as Victoria Carchidi says about this particular aspect of her stories "when multiple worlds meet, the result can be a glorious freeing leaves of the kaleidoscope, that complexly intermix and produce new pattern" (Carchidi: 98). While discussing the immigrant consciousness Mukherjee to a great extent relies on compromises and assimilation on the part of immigrants and Susan Koshy foregrounds, "Mukherjee's celebration of assimilation is an insufficient confrontation of the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States and of the complexities of diasporic subject-formation" (Koshy: 69).

However, her fictional world is not a simple tale of immigrant's assimilation American cultural values and unproblematic promotion of American multiculturalism rather along with these elements she confronts the historical conditions of ethnicity and race in the United States and foregrounds the complexities of diasporic subject-formation and simultaneously through the inversion of colonizer-colonized dichotomy she fabulizes America, Hinduizes assimilation, and represents the real pleasures and violence of cultural

exchange. According to David Mura her fictional world or rather project based of factionalizing reality involves “a discovery and a creation, as well as a retrieval, of a new set of myths, heroes, and gods, and a history that has been occluded or ignored” (Mura: 204).

Hence, Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* The author portrays modern, career oriented, middle-class women who are sensitive towards the rapidly changing world. These women are aware of the subjugation that they have to suffer at the hands of their male counterparts, and they are ready to protest against them in order to search for their identity, but ultimately, they find themselves inert against the well-trenched conducts of the society.

## 2. DISCUSSION AND OBSERVATIONS

Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the protagonist Sarita and her mother are at variance with each other. Sarita, from the very beginning, has a notion that she is an unwanted child. As a child, she writes in her notebook, “Nobody likes me. Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me.” This feeling becomes still deeper after the death of her young brother, Dhruva. Her mother indicts her for Dhruva’s death and the father fails to rise to support her. She later gets married to a man of her own choice and makes herself alienated from her parents. The alienation is to such an extent that she is not even informed about her mother’s death. When she returns, after fifteen years, to her father’s house, she is afraid lest she should not be allowed to enter the house. She keeps the rickshaw puller waiting and asks her father, “Can I come in, Baba?” Later she complains 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.”

While looking for something, Sarita accidentally opens up her mother’s cupboard and finds some souvenirs which are presented to married women by their mothers on special occasions. She remembers that her friend was invited in the eighth month of pregnancy and several ceremonies were done and her mother gave many gifts to her. However, Sarita realizes that she hasn’t been fortunate enough to get such tokens of love from her mother. She says to herself with tears in her eyes, “I never had this.” She was after all an unforgiven daughter.

Even Bharati Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters* deals with the struggles of young protagonist Tara, it is the story of an extremely traditional girl’s transformation. The traditional aspect of her upbringing is evident from the fact that Tara Lata was first married to a tree in a ceremonious ritual, as a measure to mitigate the malefic aspects of her horoscope. It was earlier predicted by a Hindu astrologer that Tara’s married life would be short lived as a result of this malefic aspect. Such conceptions of marriage are mere superstitions from the point of view of feminism. The American feminist movement, which was informed by scientific, sociological and historical knowledge would never approve of such primitive practices in the name of orthodoxy. This is a typical example of the sorts of conflict that Tara Lata and her sisters confront throughout the narrative text.

Her personality undergoes a drastic change under the influence of American culture and the faithful Indian wife takes on licentious life as evident from her sexual relationship with Andy. She divorces her husband because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled while she knew that divorce was a stigma for woman in Indian society. She wanted to drive and to work, to be economically independent. Husband in Indian conservative society is treated as god, “sheltering tree”, provider and protector, but Tara breaks this myth and chooses another man who suits her temperament and who satisfies her sexual desires. Therefore, she aspires to be loved and respected and does not want to be provided and protected by her husband as is desired in the case of other women. She differs

from other women. She is the protagonist of the novel because she has the indomitable courage to transcend the boundaries, to take initiation on an unknown path which may lead her to ruin.

While her sisters Padma and Parvati lead a complacent and passive life, adopt a middle path, remain suspicious about their new identity, do not feel the need to widen their horizons and are less assertive, Tara emerges as a powerful figure to meet every adverse situation; to march ahead with all her limitations to an unknown and unfathomed path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being. Padma lives in America, but she clings to Indian ways, friends, clothes and food. Padma calls Tara: American meaning self-engrossed. She reminds Tara to follow the models of Sita and Savitri, things are never perfecting marriage; a woman must be prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime-and to model herself on Sita, Savitri and Behula, the virtuous wives of Hindu myths. (Mukherjee, 2002: 134)

But Tara chooses her own way. The instruction of Padma represents the perspective of male chauvinism and by defying it Tara establishes the feminist perspective over phallogentrism. The revelation of her son's different sexual orientation leaves her shell shocked for a moment, but the maturity and readiness with which she accepts the above relation speaks of her modern consciousness and sensibility. Despite moving towards complete freedom from traditional roles, Tara cannot be separated from her roots. She nurtures Indian family norms and feels isolated and incomplete after being divorced. Presence of Bish gives her inner solace which she lacks in Andy's company. She feels emptiness after separation from Bish because in her mind Bish is still her Husband 'the sheltering tree'. The need for a husband in form of Bish shows that it is not easy for an Indian woman to be completely free from 'dependence syndrome'. She could also not avoid motherly duties towards Rabi, her son. Like Virmati of *Difficult Daughters*, Tara, too, is unable to realize complete emancipation.

But, all the women characters presented by Deshpande are unhappy and imbalanced. Deshpande, perhaps, wants to say that women irrespective of their class and caste are living a life of misery and suffering. Even mother in her novel is not mother-like in behaviour and conduct. The difference between Smita, Nalu and Sarita is that while Smita and Nalu contended with their lives, Sarita is a broken woman. She feels that Dhruva would not have died:

"If only I hadn't gone there that day...

If only he hadn't come with me

If only I hadn't left him alone."

About the mother's attitude, Saru comes to know that Prof. Kulkarni had lied to her when he reported her mother's words that she didn't think she had a daughter at all. Her father utters a foul word for Prof. Kulkarni for traducing a mother to her daughter. This revelation charges Saru for having deserted her parents. She thinks that she is suffering because she had wronged her mother. She exclaims, "Look what I did to Dhruva. And to my mother...It's because I wronged her that I am suffering now... why... I... deserted her." Saru is regretful and is not able to pardon herself. She feels that she is alive to live with the gnawing feeling of being disloyal and ungrateful to her mother.

She also feels guilty for the present condition of her husband. She knew that her husband had been suffering from a sense of being inferior to his wife but still she kept spurning his amorous attempts. She finally realizes that this had shocked her husband out of his senses. She knows, "perhaps, there is something in the male...that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination."

Though she has done nothing deliberately to her brother, mother and husband, yet she feels that she is responsible for whatever happened to each of them. She could get acquittal

from any court of law but not from her delicate conscience. She has an innocent mind and delicate conscience which forces her to think,

“Her cruelty to Dhruva, to her mother, to Manu...she would never be rid of it. She would carry this ugly, unbearable burden until she died. The façade of deception had cracked so completely she should never put it together again. Shafts of the truth pierced her, causing her unbearable pain. Atonement...? It was never possible. What had she imagined? What had she thought?”

The story of Sarita or Saru, the protagonist, is heart-rending. Social conditions and fate seem to have conspired against the innocent girl to agonize her. Her parents, like all the common parents, are suspicious and possessive about her. They do not allow her to go with her friend Smita to watch the movie, Rani Ki Jhansi. Smita, in their opinion is “careless, slapdash, believed in enjoyment and therefore suspect.” Saru is completely put off and feeling angry and sullen, she goes away from the house to pester her parents. Dhruva, her younger brother, catches her leaving and insists on going with her. In spite of her best efforts, she is not able to dissuade him from going. There, Dhruva gets drowned and dies. This incident changes the life of Saru completely. Her mother holds her responsible for the death of her son and doesn't forgive her the whole life. Bitterness is reflected in all the matters of the family. The home becomes a kind of prison for Saru, which she wants to escape from.

However, In *Desirable Daughters*: Mukherjee shows a protagonist who withdraws from the stereotyped life, gives up her home country and expresses desires for a third space, oscillates between the double identity, whether to assimilate into an American culture or to live an Americanized life. The novel is all about the psychological journey of the protagonist Tara from America to her cultural roots, that is, India. One can visualize America and India from her perspective. The most avoided topic, that is, sex and Tara's desire for the size of organ and sexual experience with Andy, her lover and Bish have been frankly expressed. The primary issues discussed in the novel are marriage, love, sex, and dowry and woman subjugation.

The three Bengali sisters represent the three different aspects of female experiences. Parvati lives a complacent confined domestic life with her husband Auro, while Tara lives a free life as a divorcee where she is provided with every opportunity to enjoy progress and liberty. Both the sisters exist on two extremes whereas Padma seeks a fine balance between the two; she lives an independent life with her husband Harish Mehta and does not altogether discard her cultural values. Through the three female characters the novelist provides the three choices for an Indian woman to follow. Padma and Parvati stick to the safer zones, but Tara moves to risky and challenging role of life, so she is given more importance than other two. She is bold and assertive. The two sisters they have the strong potentiality for adaptability; they live on the firm ground of reality and accept the bitter truth of their life. In *Desirable Daughters*, all the three sisters, Padma, Parvati and Tara, break with the tradition and clichéd roles in one way or the other to live life in their own way. They try to adjust with the changed scenario.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* also depicts the sad predicament of a girl who suffers bullying by her own mother. Her freedom is curtailed by her own mother and she grows up to be a victim of her mother's gender-based bias. The treatment that this girl receives at the hands of her own mother reduces her life to a mere struggle to survive in the sexist world. In her later life, she keeps struggling to prove that her decisions were not wrong. However, her mother doesn't acknowledge Saru to be her daughter anymore. Saru is seen struggling throughout her life to bring about balance in her varied roles as a mother, a wife, a daughter and a professional. One of the most appealing aspect of the novel is the strange relationship between the mother and the daughter. There are of course many other problems faced by women in this male-chauvinistic world, but problems created by women for women

are equally serious. The mother, representative of a closed-minded conservative society, has inculcated a moral bound to prefer a son while the daughter, irrespective of whether she is younger or older to the son, has to be satisfied with the secondary position in the family.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee are presents the fact that the crisis of identity is the root of all problems in human life and the main cause of the crisis of identity is darkness of one's mind. The chosen novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Desirable Daughters* are depict the quest of educated middle-class ambitious and self-assertive women to search their identity in an alien land. Their efforts led to discover the strength that is needed to lead a joyous life. The protagonists, in the beginning, are a prisoner of their own fear and confusion but gradually, with their mental growth, the women characters attain self-realization. They finally realize that freedom cannot be gained just by changing places. It can be achieved only through self-realization.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Sarita, in the novel, represents middle-class career-oriented women in modern Indian society. She rebels against the conventions set by the society but ultimately compromises with the reality. The end of the novel, unlike the beginning, is full of hope and positivity. Sarita's freedom, which comes from her self-realization, gives her the push and encouragement to do what she wants to and what she believes is right. She has become more determinant and confident. This new realisation and subsequent determination lead her to seemingly harmonious life for herself, and even *Desirable Daughters*, Parvati settles for a traditional, domesticated role of an Indian woman. Taking care of parent's her husband and children, doing domestic chores are the virtues of her way of life. The rebellious streak in her character was her love marriage to Auro. Did Padma represent the way of life of hundreds of immigrants in the United States? Using nostalgia of Indian settlers in the U.S. she gave them relics of India and made them re-live India. This is her cultural mission and her survival strategy. From Parvati, Tara learns confidence and clarity. From her parents she learns the care and concern that are the hallmarks of the family tradition in India. Tara hails from such an elite section of the society, that she does not feel marginalized in any way.

However, it is from these perceptions one should view the contribution of women writers of the nineties like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Uma Vasudev and Arundhati Roy. Undoubtedly, it is understood that they have perceived a good job in exposing the fallacies of the male –dominated society and letting the public beware of the various atrocities heaped upon women who dared to cross the various rigid boundaries that were laid on them by society.

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