

**DEGENERATION AND REGENERATION IN SASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR***

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“We’re not going to fix the sexual harassment epidemic unless we can acknowledge that this is not a women's issue, this is a man's issue.”(Gretchen Carlson, Ted Talk at Ted Woman)

**Abstract**

For quite a few Indian writers in English, gender issues have been an area of great interest. Focussing on gender transfiguration has helped to enhance the status of women and assist them in enabling a better and more cordial relationship within the family. Marriage was looked at and related to, on a more equal basis rather than one of male domination. Until this time women have been either directly or indirectly forced to place themselves between tradition and modernity and as a result of this positioning managed to alienate themselves from both self and society.

The article titled: Degeneration and Regeneration in Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*, discusses man-woman relationship, marital discord, gender discrimination, delineation of self, search for identity, male domination and female subordination, power and sexual politics, subversion, servility and subordination, which are some of the prevalent themes of Sashi Deshpande's fiction. Sashi Deshpande seeks a peaceful solution for all marginalized women and imagines a world in which differences are accepted, celebrated and enjoyed. Like all postcolonial feminists work for social, cultural, economic, and religious freedoms for women, the researcher explores these concepts and traces the journey of the female protagonist Sarita from degeneration to regeneration.

The methodology used to argue the topic is Chandra Talpade Mohanty specific ways in which women are represented in literary discourse as a homogeneous, powerless group and who cannot rise above their status as victims. These instances are— women as victims of male violence, as universal dependents, married women as victims of the colonial process, religious ideologies and finally familial systems.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial, Feminism, Emancipation, Differences, Degeneration Celebration, Regeneration, Social, Cultural, Economic emancipation.

## Introduction

Analyzing women and their depiction in dealing with women's issues has always proved to be a challenging task. The issues of gender and race of the author and her literary subjects, the critic's ethnic background play a very integral role in its interpretation. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991)<sup>1</sup> defines the western understanding of an "average third world woman" as one who "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being poor (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). She further cites specific ways in which women are represented in literary discourse as a homogeneous, powerless group and who cannot rise above their status as victims. These instances are— women as victims of male violence, as universal dependents, married women as victims of the colonial process, religious ideologies and finally familial systems. Mohanty (1991).

## The Objectives

The objective of this article is

- To analyze Sashi Deshpande's attempt to bring in a feminist perspective in this male dominated world that she situates her characters in, successful?
- To explore whether Deshpande through *The Dark Holds No Terrors* attempts to give a voice to the female characters
- Whether the labels of misogyny and anti- women hold true for the novel or not?

## Hypothesis:

The article will discuss and relate Deshpande's representation of women in relation to Mohanty premises which cater to the objectives and arrive at an understanding—if and how Deshpande has translated these gender issues in her thinking and in her depiction of her female protagonist's journey from degeneration to regeneration in *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

## Review of Literature

A review of the critical literature available on Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* highlights that there exists approximately 40 articles and books on Sashi Deshpande fiction and all of them deal with feminist issues, themes and women's concerns. But considering the Literature available, I have chosen to list the review of literature (articles and books) that deal directly with Sashi Deshpande novel under discussion.

BalaSuman (2001) in *Women in the Novels of Sashi Deshpande: An Introduction* deliberates a women's search for self in a male dominated world. Khan A.G (1998) explores whether Sashi Deshpande female protagonists are prisoners by choice in *Sashi Deshpande's Heroines Prisoners by Choice?* And goes on to argue that in the course of self- examination, Sashi Deshpande's heroines are not quite credible, while the male characters are self-composed. Mishra, Cham Chandra. (2001) in *Problematizing Feministic Discourse: A Post*

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Feministic Critique of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, compares Sarita, the stereotyped woman with Leda the mythical woman Malar.R( 1991)Three Great Indian Women Novelists-Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee endeavors to track the journey of the woman protagonists as they evolve from mere objects to protagonists. Palekar Shalmalee (2005) in *Gender, Feminism and Postcoloniality: A Reading of Sashi Deshpande's Novels* attempts to establish the diversity of representations linking Gender issues with postcolonial readings, of Deshpande's work. Pandey, K.M (1998) in *Tearing the Veil: The Dark Holds No Terrors* interprets *The Dark Holds No Terrors* from the feminist perspective. Pandey, K.M (1998) in *The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Call for Confrontation* throws light on how the novel explores man's in contestable supremacy over woman and portrays woman as a paragon of perfection. In AshwiniPurde (2019) article, *Intricate Relationships between the three Generations in Sashi Deshpande's A Matter of Time* the author concludes that Sashi Deshpande's novels generally center on family relationships and is an absolutely unique phenomenon where the women protagonists struggle to strike a balance between family life and career Dominic Savio (2001) in *A Woman's Heritage of Commonwealth: A Study of the Dark Holds No Terrors* portrays Sashi Deshpande, emphasizing the problems met by the Indian woman torn between this East –West encounter.Sashi Deshpande's *Novels: A Feminist Study* seeks to explore the plight of women as portrayed in Sashi Deshpande's novels.

In this article *Degeneration and Regeneration*in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the author deals with the concept of male-female divergence regarding social, psychological and biological framework in the novel. There is an attempt to study Sashi Deshpande's female protagonist with the objective to understand and appreciate her trials and tribulations under the impact of conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and to critically analyze her response to fit herself in contemporary society.

### **Proposed methodology:**

The article will deal with Mohanty's specific ways in which women are represented—as victims of male violence, as universal dependents, married women as victims of subjugation, and finally familial systems. The article will first discuss the feminist discourse from the point of view of the mother-daughter relationship and in the second half of the article the husband-wife relationship and in both these family relationships the protagonist is portrayed as degenerative but towards the end of the novel, Sarita ,after a great deal of suffering and self-introspection, is depicted as the woman who comes to terms with her past and present ,with an understanding and acceptance of her past and is ready now to march ahead with a new acceptance of life—an empowerment all her own described as regenerative. It will also discuss the taboos on women on expressing their sexuality and the consequences of such social self-repression.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

Deshpande's first published novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) pitches her woman protagonists in a dangerous crisis when the narratives and roles by which they have lived no longer serve. After her mother's death Sarita returns to her childhood home. Apparently, her mother's death liberates her from the self-constructions she had go on board to challenge her mother, simultaneously lamenting, ineffectively, maternal credit. But that was not to be. Her mother dies without sympathizing with her abandonment of Sarita as daughter. Sarita has to challenge its fundamental falsity, her supposed success as a doctor, her middle-class life, her material achievements, and a superficially stable marriage shield the despicable and degrading reality of repeated rape by her husband. This fundamental falsity can be seen at two levels...first in the Mother–Daughter relationship and secondly in the Husband-Wife relationship. Let's look at each level individually.

In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sashi Deshpande portrays the woman protagonist as a victim of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as a daughter and later as wife. It may be argued that the mother-daughter relationship here suffers the same penalty as in every other male-dominated society. In Sarita's story, the form of honored masculinity is not represented by her father, who is constantly negated by her mother, but by her brother, Dhruva, who as a boy enjoyed maternal elevation that Sarita did not, and whose inadvertent death only confirms her indulgence.

The disadvantage of being female is a lesson her mother conveys to her by subjecting her daughter to a life of motherless love. Thus she confers on her daughter the legacy of subordination, subversion and servility she had inherited Sarita fights back by resolving to reject her femaleness, which makes her very similar to her mother, a concept she embraces. The inevitable inception of her menstruation, an indisputable sign of her femaleness, carried beyond all the embarrassing social limitations, the greater humiliation of finally being like her mother, a view which Sarita resolutely rejects:

Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn't happen. But there were no miracles. It was torture. Not just the three days when I couldn't enter the kitchen or the puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being a pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed pollution. No, it was something quite different, much worse. A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother.(55)

Though Sarita's rejects her mother, she does not resent her mother because of her poor status. On the contrary, she is dumbstruck by her mother's masculine spirit in banishing her from her traditional home, and the daughter's succeeding activities may be read as refunds for

an original exile. (Doreen Cruz, 1992.)The compensation that Sarita seeks is not one of flagging in male envy, but rather she seeks to appropriate the man for herself. Sarita has only one possibility. If Sarita sought the power and fantasies of submission attributed to the conquering male, then she submits her body to being a text written by another's dictation to fit a pre-existent master fiction. Her mother, the first translator of the corporeal text finds it unworthy even for the subordinate destiny of marriage, sex and reproduction. Sarita is too dark, according to her mother, and may not readily attract a husband:

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker. Who cares? We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married. I don't want to get married. (40)

And again:

She is also ugly, or so her mother says she was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so.I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying

You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that. (54)

As her body becomes womanlier, her mother reads there a distasteful text:

"You're growing up," she would say. And there was something unpleasant in the way she looked at me, so that I longed to run away, to hide whatever part of me she was staring at. (54-5)

The warped text the mother reads in the daughter's body comes apparently from her own sense of having been dishonored and deceived by her body. Thus their impression in inhabiting the female body is precisely what divides mother and daughter as each sees in the other a legacy of shame and negation. Sarita is saved by her lover-husband, Manohar, who saves her from her mother's absurd comments and looks to which the female body was condemned, but again disillusionment was just around the corner because her aspiration for a loving romantic relationship with the man she so desperately fell in love with quickly shattered.

The study of physiology and anatomy eventually displace the negative texts her mother had garnered from her body, establishing in their place an alternative discourse of pure functionality. The female sexed body in this context is relieved of its socially decorated meanings. But this relief from an appropriative discourse does not last, and before long the requirements of romantic love demand that her body display its responsiveness to being the object of male desire:

My breasts which had caused me agonies of self-consciousness earlier, making me feel everyone was staring at them, so that I longed to wear some kind of armor that would hide them from the world . . . now . . . became something to be proud of. I learnt how to dress,

to accept the curve of my hips, the slimness of my waist. To take in male stares and admiration with outward equanimity and secret pride. (.56)

Thus her body, rejected and devalued by her mother, becomes the place of another text containing the language of desire, which displaces the maternally derived text.

Sarita's mother's strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of restlessness and alienation. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene but never rushes to help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother doubts her. She always blames Sarita's for her son's death. She points out, 'You killed your brother' (9). Thus rejection by her mother at the early childhood leads to psychological insecurity in Sarita.

Deshpande seems to subvert the female character of Sarita's mother in such a way that she appears a mere caricature, devoid of any human emotion. Analysing the mother-child relationship in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is one instance where we note the subversion. Indian women's identities in life are determined by their roles as mothers. The power of the Mother is seen on par with that of a Goddesses and it would be unthinkable for a 'traditional' mother to treat her child the way Sarita is treated by her mother. And yet throughout the novel we do not come across a single 'normal' or positive mother-child relationship.

Sarita goes to Bombay to study medicine with her father's approval and her mother's disapproval. At the medical college she meets and falls in love with a post-graduate student, Manohar. In the first flush of her infatuation with Manohar, Sarita considers herself highly privileged to have been chosen by him.

Manohar is a budding writer and a poet of promise. Manohar's mannerisms like pushing his hair back from his forehead stays in Sarita's memory. It is however, not love at the first sight. Sarita meets Manohar when he is directing a play for the college day. Sarita goes to the rehearsal along with Smitha, her friend, who manages to get a minor role. Manohar gets irritated to see Sarita and the latter. However, for Sarita, "he was the only person" she sees and goes home in a daze. She wants to be chosen by that "wonderful man" (53).

Manohar and Sarita start meeting each other quite often. It seems unbelievable to Sarita that she can evoke so strong an emotion in someone and that anyone can care for her romantically. It is the insecurity at her parent's home that leads Sarita to look for love and security outside her home in love and consequent marriage to Manohar. The traditional orthodox mother puts up stiff resistance when Sarita reveals her intention of marrying Manohar who is no Brahmin and is probably of a lower caste.

Sarita decides to marry him. Her mother erases all the traces of Sarita from her mind. Manohar and Sarita marital life seems quite good in the beginning. Sarita has a permanent



break in the relationship with her mother, by marrying Manohar. Sarita feels happy to be detached from her parents. She vows never to return to her parental house. But this happiness soon turns into an illusion. The problem slowly creeps in when she is recognized as a doctor. Sarita is a successful doctor by day and a terrified trapped animal by night. The initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss when she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on earth...until her world falls apart. Sarita's mother had already predicted the fate of Sarita's love marriage when she said: "I know all these love marriages. Its love for a few days, then quarrels all the time" (69). Sarita's marriage has failed but she refuses to admit her defeat. She rebels against her mother by marrying a man outside her cast. Swain S.P (1999) in Sarita's Feminine Sensibility explains her rebellion thus:

She marries to attain autonomy of the self and to secure the lost love in her parental home. Manohar becomes her savior, the ideal romantic hero who rescues her from her insecure, wooden existence in her maternal home. Her marriage with Manohar is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility (35-36).

He satisfied her hunger for love which she lacked in her life. As Sarita implies:

I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. (.40) Sarita feels flattered by Manohar's love: She feels the fisherman's daughter was not so much more surprised when the king asked her to marry him, than I was by Manohar's love for me.(66).

The intensity of Manohar's emotions sometimes makes her to fear. The fear remains in her mind that all this was not real and will soon come to an end:

The secret fear that lay behind each loving word, behind each kiss, lay the enemy, the snake, the monster of rejection. Sometime, someday... the truth will be out and I will know I was never loved (.66).

Sarita is sexually assaulted for her financial independence. As a doctor she is obviously looked upon with greater respect in society and this career and financial success naturally causes Manohar her husband to silently suffer an inferiority complex. Manohar, ego hurt, is reflective of his need to exercise ultimate sexual power, domination and manipulation over the female sex. It becomes his tool of revenge against the material domination he had to go through in the closed surroundings of the family.

Sashi Deshpande, however, proves that in the institution of marriage an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear of damaging the ego of her husband. Frustrated with her role in the family, she questions the subordinate status forced upon her and longs to break free from it. Through the Sarita-Manohar episode, Deshpande makes a major point – that no matter what altitude a woman through her struggle

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and hard work may reach, in this institution of marriage, a woman is always subordinate to the husband irrespective of his aptitude. Sarita's narrative suggests that she was not seeking a fitting fiction of escaping the life her mother lived; and which, unless challenged, would definitely return to be hers as well. Sarita sought desperately to be everything her mother was not, even while yearning for the maternal love and approval she never received.

Doreen Cruz (1992) explains the disaster that drives Sarita home. It has its foundation in the major paradox of an apparently unconventional professional woman enforced to endure secretly the degradation of marital rape from a deceptively benign husband. At the bottom of Sarita being socially liberated while being sexually subjected is the fender-bender of two irreconcilable narratives, one containing the element of female autonomy, the other of male mastery. That Sarita should be the focus of the encounter of these inconsistent fictions is not exclusively accidental. In endeavoring to use skillful and scholarly success in place of the good looks she did not have to escape the same life her mother lived, she presents a strange, slightly feminist plot alongside the romantic plot, devoted to male rescue and female feebleness. When she ultimately conquers the "heart throb" of her peers, the good-looking, alluring Manohar, Sarita is perhaps heedless of how she would examine the romantic myth to which she had contributed in defiance of a caste attuned arranged marriage. Her self-driven determination towards professional success brands the fiction of salvage and subversion to the romantic hero, the conquering male, a sarcastic indulgence in all but name.

Sarita is well aware of the deceptions of her husband. The price of inauthenticity is that each person carries a dark twin, the 'Self' and the 'Other'. A woman is not the 'Other'. 'The strongest metaphor for the converted 'Other' harbored by the 'Self' emerges in the smiling placid woman who, having committed the accidental transgression of dropping her brass tray while applying kumkum to the Devi in the temple, turns into an inhuman gyrating spectacle. Likewise Manohar, Sarita's husband, called by social contract to be the leading partner, finds no authentic context for that role. He is not his wife's professional equal; he does not earn as much as she does; their lifestyle is made possible by her income; and finally she carves out a career for him when she encouraged college lecturing over a precarious future in journalism. Thus expelled from his socially authorized role, he can only control her through rape, or through her pretended exhaustion and powerlessness.

Sarita's vacation with her father is in effect a journey into a particular darkness of her childhood to recover a lost self before it had fallen prey to a compromised discourse. The dark holds no terrors is what she would have liked to have told her frightened little brother who had habitually sought refuge in her bed. But he had gone alone into his darkness when he drowned, while she, ostensibly unafraid of the dark, cannot face the gloom cast by his death and the culpability assigned to her for it, nor the blackness of the recurrent rapes she endures. To walk her particular darkness and exorcise its terrors, she must return to the singular



journey begun early and abandoned when her brother died. Her brother's death subsumed her into a fiction of guilt and culpability woven by her mother, desperately denied in private by her, but the terms of the very denial constituted a susceptibility to the guilt assigned to her:

You killed your brother. I didn't. Truly I didn't. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn't. And I ran away. Yes, I ran away, I admit that. But I didn't kill him. How do you know you didn't kill him? How do you know? (P.132)

Unable to speak about it, she suffers the guilt in silence which becomes a nightmare. This is symbolic of the conflict between one's private space and public self-construction that marked Sarita's relationship with her brother up to his drowning. The refrain that repeats itself when she recalls her brother is her request, ". . . don't call me Sarutai." The honorific "-tai" defined her as older sister with the responsibilities attached to that role, a definition she attempts to shrug off in her quest for autonomy. So she sends back into the darkness her frightened brother the symbol of her inalienable subjectivity. In her nightmares the darkness to which she had repeatedly committed her brother to is probably a suggestion of the fact that she holds herself responsible for his weakness to the loneliness represented similarly by darkness and water:

Sarutai. Go away. Don't trouble me. And don't call me Sarutai.  
But Sarutai, I'm scared. It's so dark. Can I stay here? No, you can't.  
Go away. All right, then. And turning large reproachful eyes on me,  
He turned away No he swam away from me, for we were, for some  
reason in the water. (132)

Kamini Dinesh (1995) comments: "The emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife in the end is, therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife... one who is no longer afraid of the dark." (P.78). Self-realization dawns upon her. There is no terror in her life anymore. She has decided to confront Manohar. Setting out to attend to her patient is an indication of Sarita's assertion of her career, without any compromise. As Prema Nanada kumar (1985) writes in *The Postscript Chapter* in K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English*: "Sarita cannot forget her children. Or the sick needing her expert attention; and so she decides to face her home again" (P.820). This reads slightly beyond the text. Though Sarita has concern for the children, she is not a doting mother. The darkness of the shadow, of the night, of the fear leaves her, and she resolves to face her life, calmly and courageously. From this, it is clear that she will no longer remain as an object for Manohar to endure his frustration on her. The epilogue of the **novel** authentically reflects her self-realization. "You are your own refuge. There is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve." (P. 7).

Deshpande thinks that a woman's life is her own and the time has come when a woman must speak for herself as a woman. Unless she forgets the old traditional role models of sister, daughter, wife and mother, she shall always find herself guilty. Thus, from Sarita's independence the reader is very clear about the intentions of the novelist. As Mala.R (1991) remarks in Indian Women Novelist:

A novelist's credo is to 'take refuge in self which means that the heroines will in future assert themselves: they will no longer allow their 'she' to get deceased. By this assertion of the self, Deshpande certainly takes her heroines to the pole of feminism though she may not have aimed at propounding such as 'ism' (P.56 – 57). From this critical comment, it is clear that Sarita is determined to take control over her life by cracking her passivity. From her self-negation (Darkness) she emerges as a self-assertive women (to Light)

One of the primal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an adjunct of man. A woman is not the 'other'... She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. It prototype of women Sashi Deshpande portrays in her fiction. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Sashi Deshpande explores the inner world of women especially of those who are striving towards self-realization from the male-dominated society. Sarita tries to find meaning in marriage and tries to retain, at the same time, her own individuality, a stripping's of the superfluous narrative she had lived by.

However, Deshpande makes it clear that her journey's destination must be walked alone though its implications are communal. It is a fact that truth is a matter of increasing complexity, where each arrival may be a new beginning. The one who makes this possible for Sarita is her father who is able to identify her right to speak out, just as he did when he supported her decision to study medicine. Moreover, Sarita's father does not play the part of the trouble making father in the mother-daughter feud assigned to him in the male-dominant fiction. Rather the father helps her return to her roots, not as the beloved daughter of her mother, which she was not, a fact he cannot undo, but as the inheritor of her mother's discovery of the loneliness of individual subjectivity. Sarita's father reads the story of Duryodhan to her which established a validity for her mother. In communicating this episode to his daughter, the father rewrites the significance of his wife's refusal to acknowledge their daughter even when threatened by death. If death is the litmus test of genuineness, then obviously the narrative of relationships should dissolve against the lonely journey it requires each to make. But it doesn't and Sarita is moved to ask,

"To be alone? Never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of my husband, my wife, my children, my parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure?" (P.176).

The ultimate futility of relationships and the implicit indulgence of guilt for not falling in line within the necessary inadequate narratives written by others is now thrown open. So father, daughter, and mother, as much as brother and sister are released, at least theoretically, from the master narrative which positions them to play roles resulting from the social constructions imposed upon their sexed bodies, their birth order, or by predecessor.

For Sarita this means that she is permitted to write and speak lines of her devising, instead of being the page on which the texts of desire or violence are written upon. The father endorses this right when he becomes her empathetic listener to the story of her degradation through rape. The silent corporeal text thus speaks, dissolving the gendered opposition between writer and text. She also deconstructs the empire of exclusively male narrations written on the bodies of women, by writing her husband into her narrative.

However, Deshpande seems to recognize that knowledge is one thing, but the active review of narratives to which one has been long familiarized is another. Although Sarita's father's concessions to the existential individuality of the other, Sarita's father still needs Madhav as a cushion from the loneliness he is not yet ready to encounter. Sarita succumbs to the fiction of representational recompense when she allows Madhav to address her as "Sarutai", and when she watches over him in the dark during his delirious fever. But she realizes: "It's not Dhruva. It was never Dhruva, I can never bring him back" (P.193). This recognition is succeeded by self-blame, the fiction of culpability and responsibility: "Her cruelty to Dhruva, to her mother, to Manohar . . . she would never be rid of it . . . Atonement? It was never possible" (p.193). The journey to our separateness is a difficult responsibility. It is triggered for Sarita when she is cornered by the sudden and unexpected announcement of her husband's arrival at her father's house. While all doors close in on her, she sees herself trapped and as good as dead. Their meeting will imply the death of their previous fictive selves and a return to the loneliness she felt in marriage.

Allright, so I'm alone. But so is everyone else. Human beings . . . they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk. (200)

In the accidental use of the metaphor -sinking, Sarita unconsciously releases herself from guilt over her brother, rendering back to him both his willfulness, as well as his probable lack of faith in him which sank him. In deciding to speak of the rape to her husband, she refuses guilt for the texts he has erected on her. So she enters her life finally through the paradoxical encounter with death. The novel concludes poised at the brink of a new discourse between husband and wife. The existential equality, derived from death, on which Deshpande's novel is predicated seems to suggest that in the new narrative, the genders will

be placed at a point beyond gender. The feminist quest for autonomy becomes subsumed within the greater brief of existential individualism.

### Conclusion

The Dark Holds No Terror presents us with women who are still bound within family tradition and honour. Deshpande's women are universal postmodern products of a neutral culture. They behave as women, not as Indian women, they live as women, not as mothers or rebels or creatures who are conscious of their carnal appeal. Sashi's women are more of the cardboard variety than flesh and blood with minds and psyches of their own. Sashi Deshpande denies them of their right to have their own unique, independent minds and personalities, outside those sanctioned by men, religion, society and history. Sashi Deshpande renders her to a state of mythical existence and the readers are aware at all times that her character is too fantastic to be true. She does, in her own way, avenge the wrongs done to the ghosts invading her character but she does not provide a hope for the continued efforts put in by the feminist project.

The position of women in Deshpande's fiction refutes them an effective presence in colonial and postcolonial discourse. The generation of women preceding Sarita has been so totally defined by their domestic roles as to be written out of the colonial construction. For Sarita, colonization, paradoxically, has given access to education and financial liberation and the possibilities for female empowerment. Thus Deshpande becomes a major aspect of the feminist project, which is to transform a predominantly andocentric symbolic order.

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