

**The Representation of Women as Strugglers in Anita Desai's
novel Clear Light of Day and Shashi Deshpande's novel The Dark
Holds No Terrors**

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Abstract:

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande portray the sociological effect on the psyche of women. Through their fiction they provide a wealth of understanding in women's issues, such as psychological, emotional and spiritual crisis experienced by the Indian woman folk. The traumatic psychic experiences faced by women in the conservative male-dominated society and their survival are the main focus of the novels of Desai and Deshpande. They seek liberty at least in the house itself not from outside, without showing their artificial sentiments. She portrays the interior landscape of the mind and psychic elements completely. Her later novels show a sharp shift in her themes. The protagonists try to escape from convulsions and tensions. The Women characters are trying to come to a new understanding and reinstate themselves in the society. Like Desai's novels Deshpande's are also dealt with the problems and personal agonies of women in our patriarchal society. Deshpande's protagonists set out in search of self-expression and self-fulfillment. The women characters crave for freedom from oppressive bonds exercised by the patriarchal society. They try to face the challenges of contemporary life imposed upon them and reconstruct the norms and patterns of womanhood. They want to find out their identities. Her novels dealt with various forms of suppression faced by women in our society. Deshpande wants to establish a new dimension of presentation. Deshpande presents women who prove themselves adaptable.

Keywords: Stereotyping, neurotic, trendsetter, natal, individuality, struggle.

The stereotyping, the patriarchal power and particularly the religion in our Indian society play a vital role in developing conflicts in man-woman relationship. They make stark distinctions between the roles of women and men. The traditional value system tries to victimize and oppress women. The inequalities and discriminations suppress women and their freedom. The patriarchal power reduces Indian women to the lower level than themselves. The thwarted family life and the unalterable life situations make women to sacrifice their potentialities. Our society denies their identity and freedom. When the women, the home bound creatures are empowered, the internal thrust of them never accepts the constraints and restrictions of our patriarchal society. They engender potential oppositions when they aware that they are suppressed by the patriarchal system. They execute their objections quietly. The quietness and silence are powerful weapons to fight against their suppression. How they struggle hard to overcome the inequalities, imminent defeatism and socio-cultural believes is a key concern in many of the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. Both talk about the status of women in andocentric society.

In the beginning Desai presents the neurotic females who are unwilling to adjust with the reality and remain unsatisfied with their emotional needs. They are not able to withstand conflicting dilemmas and sufferings. The loss of values and meaninglessness in life make them to feel alienated in the unalterable life situations. The protagonists of Desai rebel against the demand of society. They are all introspective about their state. Their remonstrations are not for equality but for the right to be recognized as human beings capable of astuteness and feeling. They yearn for their psychological fulfilment.

An attempt has been made here to analyse Desai's character Bim in Clear Light of Day (1980). This novel is an investigation of the mind of a spinster who runs a dull life looking after her retarded brother and family house. The novel Clear Light of Day indicates a noticeable shift in the mode of Desai's fiction.

Bim attains self-identity not in self-insulation but in self-actualization brought out by the metaphor of awakening. All dualities vanish and Bim attains self-fulfillment and the wholeness of 'being'.

The title is very much suggestive of clarity. The light here signifies the light of liberation, of deliverance for all the Indian women to remove the shadows of ignorance of oneself and the society of fallen value. No better character than Bim can be portrayed out to

convey it more virtually. Though highly sensitive, she separated from the rest, moves apart to secure a place of her own choice, within a circle containing all time, past and future in it. Time constructs it dull as well as rich upsetting the earnest selves within reach. She, torn, between acceptance and resentment, love and hostility, understanding and misunderstanding of all those who become a part of her, weighs down with exhaustion. She carries the consequences every deed, good or bad with her.

After a long time, the two important characters – Bim and Tara recollects their reminiscence of their disturbed family life. Tara's return to the house of her past childhood, where all of her family's past remains dormant, awaken the urge to remember. Tara considers her childhood recollections are a source of pensive pleasure whereas for Bim they give only sign of forthcoming sorrow. With an intention to visiting her elder brother Raja in Hyderabad for the wedding of his eldest daughter Moyna, Tara, the younger sister comes home to old Delhi after a long period abroad in Washington, along with her husband Bakul who is a diplomat posted abroad for many years. But after this very long break, her home seems unchanged. The apparent sameness and monotony, still prevailing in her home surprises her.

Bim is not a highly anxious and disturbed character. The present does not torment her. She neither suffers from the strains of a devastated childhood nor a mismatched marriage. Her sister Tara presents a sharp contrast to her. Tara's only objective was to be a good mother, parting herself from a gathering of malevolent forces at school, teasing all the time at her frailty. Bim is more interesting character than Tara. She, who dreams of becoming a superwoman, envisions a life full of exciting adventures. She desires to be a revolutionary but it is she who resides in the same city undertaking the boring routine and does not go outside Old Delhi. She lives in the house she is born in, teaches in the college where she has been taught. She is a helpless quester who fails in her attempt to conquer the world. In the process she conquers herself.

The two brothers and sisters grow up there in the old house. The childhood intimacy of the four children- Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba is slowly vanished as they grown-up and become conscious of their variegated ideas and ambitions. It is 'time' which brings about a change in the lives of the characters. Her parents are indifferent personalities. They have no time to spend with their children. They are always busy with playing bridge at home or at the

club and do not think of the emotional needs of their growing up children. The family atmosphere is very dull and gloomy. The mother always keeps a distance from her children. From the childhood itself the children are distanced from their parents. They are totally disturbed by the stifling conditions of the broken home. They only remember them as the fashionable master and mistress fully in command of the house.

Bim's brother Raja is a poet. He derives more pleasure from reading Urdu poetry. Bim has very close emotional attachment with her brother Raja. Bimla and Raja are alike. They both are bold and independent. She identifies herself with Raja and proves herself to be nothing less than her brother. Bimla contradicts all feminine values and often wears Raja's clothes. She believes that her brother will give moral support to the family and take his father's place. So she always encourages him. She sacrifices so much for educating her brother. Bim always remembers their pleasant childhood spent together treasures the pieces from the past like the Urdu poems he has written and also the memories of their pleasant childhood spent together. She loves, admires and idealizes Raja. She views herself in a critical way. She sacrifices her life for the sake of her family. By doing so she feels that the world around her functions because of her best efforts. Suppressing her own feelings and whispering under agony are become her habits.

Bim has self confidence that she could endure the distress of the unexpected death of her parents. With more courage she looks after the alcoholic aunt Mira Masi, the tubercular Raja and the mentally retarded Baba. She never draws back at any level and is left alone to carry the family away from its per turned atmosphere. She accepts the role of a father, care of her sister and brothers. She can't get any help from Tara because she is meek and weak willed. Tara doesn't have guts to face the countless problems that the family unexpectedly starts to encounter. The family's situation, her feeling of insecurity and fear move her towards Bakul. After her matrimony with Bakul, she succeeds in getting away from the family which had suddenly gone out of control. So Bim has to attend to all these people and continue her survival. She faces the problem with courage and persistence. She is presented as an emblem of sacrifice and devotion.

The novel clearly represents the transition of Bim from childhood to maturity. She sacrifices all her pleasures and needs for her family's well-being. She gives up lot for getting her sister married. She shoulders all alone the responsibility of looking after her mentally-

retarded brother Baba and widowed alcoholic aunt. Bim faces problems like Raja's long illness, parents' death, taking over family's responsibility, difficulty in handling Mira Masi and above all, her own career and Baba, cannot be dismissed as ordinary ones but the challenges of the changing time. She remains unmarried and tries to fulfill all the others' wishes. Like other protagonists of Desai, Bim also can't look on the past with pleasure. She doesn't want to preserve her childhood memories. Bim assumes the role of god-mother to the family. She never thinks about herself. She is fully occupied with the responsibilities of her family. Literally she becomes the care-taker of the family. She is an economically self-dependent woman and not at all selfish. She places herself in the position of mother and takes care of her younger brothers and sisters.

In this novel Desai portrays her central character Bim as a trendsetter and as an iron-willed personality. She deals with long conventional issues that confine women. Bim does not accept to restrict herself to her role as a conventional woman, showing an inconsequential sufferer or entity for other uses and gratification. It happens only because she has educated herself to unusual that the much praiseworthy distinctiveness of women i.e. weak will, reliance and timidity are strange to her observation. Her childhood experiences and her present family situation make her a struggling selfhood. She feels very happy about her job as a lecturer in a college. An innovative female self gradually, but steadily emerge from the oppressed, painful life fragmented experiences.

The novel Clear Light of Day ends with positive note. She realizes that love alone saves all from disaster. Bim gets success in filling the gap between ambition and actuality. The protagonist understands that love is used as a only weapon to win each and everyone and this understanding preserves her from ruin. Here one can find an optimistic growth in the fictional technique of Anita Desai. Bim is more noticeable character than any other woman protagonist in Anita Desai's novels. The legitimacy and potential of Desai's women characters' struggle against the andocentric culture and society has created great impact on later Indian English women novelists, especially on Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande, a contemporary of Anita Desai deals with the similar problem of existential dilemma experienced by her women protagonists in today's

androcentric society in her novels. Her creations exhibit the women's quest for self identity, an investigation into the female psyche and a realization of the unknown mysteries of life. She explores deep into an inside view of a woman's world and depicts the suffering of these females who struggle to maintain a balance between the roles the society expects them to take part in and the role that they aspire to play. Her heroines try to overcome the conflict they face between wifehood and motherhood on the one hand, and their careers and accomplishment of the wishes of their soul on the other. The anxiety occurring out of the conflict is further highlighted by the perplexity that prevails within the protagonists themselves. They are courageous enough to discover the solutions to the questions of identity and their psychological predicaments. They struggle hard to find their own voice in the patriarchal society. In their aspiration to be more of themselves, they struggle constantly to define themselves by means of self exploration.

Deshpande's novel The Dark Holds No Terrors portrays the inner struggle of the protagonist Saritha known by the diminutive Saru against the hazards of love, marriage, sex, settlement and assertion of individuality. In this novel every helpless woman's experience in our Indian society is exhibited through the horrible experience of the protagonist Saru. The disintegration of the cultural modes of modern India is the main basis for the conflict in the husband-wife relationship. So each and every middle-class Indian woman faces the conflicts in their married lives. The very roots of the tradition-bound society are shaken by the new socio-economic forces. This transform has vastly influenced the family that is the core of the Indian society.

In this novel Deshpande has very elegantly uttered the new class Indian woman's inner struggle, effacing fears and sufferings in the post modern era. A humble, modest very sensitive woman character Saru emerge as determined, strong, independent woman who could voice her conscious freely after experiencing all kind of trauma in her life. She is well aware of her own limitations. Yet, she longs to triumph over the strict cultural and social norms and adopts to be anti-Matriarch. She overpowers her worries and fears. She strongly

struggles to achieve harmony in her marital life. At last she explores that the dark no longer holds any terrors.

Saritha's parents treat her as an unwanted child. She experiences the partisan attitude of her parents. She grows up as a victim of sexist and gender-based bias. She is conscious of her mother's strong partiality for her brother Dhruva. The hatred and disgust baffle her. She has fear of rejection ingrained all over her psychic self. It leads her to a sense of uneasiness and alienation. The warmth, affection and importance given to the male child Dhruva are denied to the girl child Saru. The attitude of her parents makes her depressed and rebellious. It has a distressing effect on her. Saru recollects the grand birthday celebration of her brother by her parents. They do pooja, offer the festive lunch in the afternoon and take aarti in the evening. She feels her birthdays were always the same. They didn't do any pooja.

The worst experiences of her childhood days construct her marital life into a distressed struggle. She struggles hard to overcome the earlier victimization. She tries to justify her decisions to her mother who no longer accepts her as a daughter. In order to develop and nurture a balanced perspective towards her diversified roles as a mother, as a wife, and as a career woman, she has to find out a meaning to her life. Her mother's uncaring attitude makes Saru think that her birth was a terrible experience for her mother. There are no celebrations in the family after Dhruva's death. The parents take up an unending mourning. So Saru's birthdays pass off in silence every year both at school and at home. Saru's experiences at home have made her to suffer from psychological insecurity.

Saru is so jealous of the impartiality of her mother, as she deliberately breaks the ego of the caste of Brahmin and all the rituals related to Brahminism. Saru craves for a new life where the mother cannot force her will on her. Saru is denied of all her rights as the daughter of the house. The constant denial of her mother erodes her identity. Even though they are related by blood, they are estranged from each other. The mother and daughter live like strangers in the same house. In this close-minded conservative society a daughter receives only secondary status in the family. Our patriarchal society gives importance to male

off spring as an ultimate remedy to all problems, at the same time it treats the female-child as an unnecessary trouble. It thinks the male child can gratify the parental needs or unsatisfied ambitions within the given social calculus.

Living under the same roof with her mother becomes curse for her and she becomes conscious that in order not to be like her she has to obtain a medical degree. Saru wishes to plan a life for herself which would be unlike her mother's. Her hatred for her parental home leads her to discover her hidden strength which carves her life to enjoyable and achievable one. As a result she determines to join in a medical college. Saru thinks that education is a panacea to her emancipation from the conventional mode of life. She never fails to remember her exams and is relentlessly worried about getting a first class. So she states her decision to go to Bombay and to seek admission in the medical college. Her mother drastically opposes the idea.

Saru's mother doesn't understand the importance of girl's education. She feels that spending on girl's education is utter waste instead one can spend the same money on her marriage. However, she is in the condition to seek her father's support for her higher education. Fortunately her father for the first time determinedly on her side and encourages her. Saru is not able to find out whether her father's is the fight for her or against her mother. But for the first time in her life, she fulfils her ambition with the support of her father. She wants to keep away from her orthodox family. She aspires to assert her individuality. In the exploration process of the existence, an unresolved conflict is aroused between the mother and the daughter.

The conflict between Saru and her mother is observed as a conflict between the new generation and the old generation. It is the mother becomes a sign of custom and ancestry, causing immeasurable obstacles in her daughter's life on the way to autonomy. Her mother's approaches make her not only to regret but also to revolt. The image of a lady doctor she has seen in her childhood inspires her very much. She desires for the similar superiority. Without her mother's permission Saru studies medicine.

Saru's mother always condemns Saru for her brother Druva's death. Her brother's death has occurred accidentally. He dies by drowning in the pond. But without rushing to his help, Saru mutely watches the whole scene. The mother never excuses her daughter for being alive after her son has drowned. Since then, she is disturbed by the thought and she feels guilty about his death. She assumes that she is responsible for her brother's death. Always Saru is haunted by the hysterical outburst of her mother: "you did it. You did this. You killed him...you killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" The traumatizing effect of these words disturbs her for days, months, years all her life. At every stage in her life she looks back to this very moment. She weighs up her thoughts and achievements up to the total loss of inner peacefulness so insolently underline by her mother's words. After her brother's death, life turns out to be more distressed for Saru. Her mind is filled with deep and the ineradicable blemishes as her mother continuously criticizes Saru for her dead son. She disgusts her daughter's very presence at home. In each and every minute she rebukes Saru. This feeling of denunciation by her mother makes the adolescent Saru's psyche with the sense of extreme dislike towards her mother.

Saru's experiences at home make her to feel herself inferior. The feeling of inferiority in her becomes preordained essence and fixed. Her relationship with her mother encloses and subjugates her. In her young age her mother treats her as an adult rival. Her mother wants to show that she still has upper hand and authority. The daughter's cheerfulness or inquisitiveness, outside her domain, shall not be put up with her.

Soon after her entering into medical college she falls in love with Manu. In the first blush of her passion with Manohar, however Saru believes that she is highly fortunate to have been preferred by him. Thereafter Saru always yearns for Manu's affection and love in her dreams. She starts daydreaming about Manu. She feels as if his love gives her protection, satisfaction and encompassment. Saru who longs for love in her life, finds himself as a saviour. So she is very crazy about him. As they move close with each other, he also shows more interest in her. When Manu conveys his love for her, she feels grateful.

The parents oppose her marriage with a low caste man. Against their wish, Saru marries Manohar. Particularly, her altercation with her mother reaches its peak. Her rebellion attitude compels her to marry Manu. For marrying Manu, Saru faces a permanent break in the relationship with her family especially with her mother. As mentally withdrawn into her own shell, hardly she has any remorse at this disconnection. Even at some times Manu feels that the separation will be painful for Saru. But she, on the other hand, hates the traditional ways which her orthodox mother sticks on. And also she feels fairly detached from her mother. So she wants to show her rejection through marrying a boy from a lower caste. The mother too lucratively wipes away from her mind every remembrance of Saru and even she severely curses her. In this moment Saru determines in her mind that she will never see her parents. For her turn, the mother revengefully eliminates Saru from her family and life. The only thing that shows Saru's relationship with her family is the photograph in her home. The mother spares it only because her brother is also in it.

Saru anticipates her marital life will be happy and fruitful. In the beginning it gives her joy and happiness. They live in a grimy one-room apartment. Saru likes it and even lives comfortably. Though she is happy with Manu, the harrowing childhood memories still harass her. She feels very proud about her husband since the very beginning of their marital life. She doesn't know the fact that all the happiness and her realized dreams are going to be scattered by her traditional male chauvinistic spouse. Shortly the cheerfulness becomes only a delusion. As long as Saru depends on Manu for monetary benefit, they have harmony at home despite its dirt and stink. But slowly the problems begin when Saru gets the recognition as a doctor. Manu feels threatened. Her recognition makes him to think immensely unconfident. He suffers from the pain of Professional egoism. This casts a shadow on their happy marital life. Saru totally ignores him as she gets busy with her profession. He is not at all able to endure his wife's social status. He doesn't want her to enjoy better societal reputation. Gradually Manu's inferiority complex spoils their marriage. Her economic

independence thoroughly disturbs him. She becomes aware of the change in Manu's attitude.

For the society she is a reputed lady doctor with a caring husband and two lovely children. But truthfully, she is a silent sufferer endures all kind of insults. This fraudulence of her life assassinates and chocks her real self. The meanness behaviour of her husband is known by her clearly. Here Shashi Deshpande points out the prominent truth that an archetypal Indian husband always wishes to be at the midpoint and his wife on the fringe. Under the name of marriage, man thinks he inherits all the rights on his wife's life and behaves with her, in any manner of his life.

Saru's childhood rapport with her mother has patterned her mind to admit slavery and self negation as customs of daily survival and to think herself as an unwanted personality in an unconscious manner. Saru yet dreadfully tries to save her marital relationship with Manu. Saru is well aware of the truth that she is better than Manu in her credentials, social prestige, competence and in all other respects. Yet in her heart of hearts she resists against it. She psychologically inherits the habit that it won't allow her to displease anyone.

After a long struggle she gets comfort from her father. He counsels her to forge about her role in the death incidents of her brother and her mother. He guides her to relieve herself from the childhood memories of her brother's death and she gets success in it. So she is now capable to tackle deeper problems. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter hardships as they come along in one's life, and she must be prepared to meet the present problem of facing her husband Manu. Previously the disappointment in her family life makes her look for other possibilities.

The exact essence of the novel lies in the psychological progression that the protagonist Saru goes through during her apparently eventless existence at her natal home. She examines and discovers all the dark and shady corners of her own self. She introspects and judges her life, relationships. We find her true self while she is unwavering her mind through reminiscences and thoughts. The process

demands real effort. She endeavours really hard to gain what she had lost-her self-respect. She struggles hard to triumph over her psychological fears.

Conclusion

So Desai in Clear Light of Day and Deshpande in Dark Holds No Terror portray the crisis and predicaments of middle-class women and the way in which they struggle and come to terms with their marginalized status. The protagonists of these two novels are portrayed to be in a condition of bewilderment at the beginning, but they go through a process of introspection and self- analysis and at last attain self-realization.

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