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## **Rootlessness of Women: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors***

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### **Abstract**

This research paper is a study of two novels by two different woman writers belonging to two different nations, cultures, life styles, traditions, though they throw light on the same topic how women live under the burden of conservatism of tradition, empowered not by a male but by themselves to create a society where they are valued for who they are. The first novel is *Dark Holds No Terrors* (1990) by Shashi Deshpande, an Indian writer, and the second novel is *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee, an Indo-Canadian Diasporic writer. The aim of this research paper is to illustrate how both writers deal with the sensibility of women migrating from their place which is indeed their evacuation from their feelings, existence, space, recognition, etc.

### **Keywords**

Feminism; Subjugation; Patriarchy; Shashi Deshpande; *Dark Holds No Terrors*; Bharati Mukherjee; *Jasmine*.

Shashi Deshpande, an Indian writer and Bharati Mukherjee, an Indo-Canadian writer are engaged with the rights, responsibilities, prospects and problems of woman, which is the prime focus of their writings. A palpable reflection of them are seen in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande and *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee. Canadian women writers' female protagonists articulate themselves to achieve authentic identity. Moreover, Indian women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women to confident female characters searching for space and identity of their own.

Even in the postcolonial period, when it is believed that women have equal rights and opportunities as men, marriage and motherhood remain the main goals of a woman's life, however liberated she may be. Marriage is the most powerful means that society uses to ensure female subjugation and the institution of marriage, is cleverly camouflaged by sanctity only to ensure male domination and to prevent questioning by women. Marriage marks a palpable shift not only in the life of women, but also in the way they view their priorities. The image of woman in Indo-English novels are based on the traditional ancient literature of India, which treat woman as a devoted wife or a devoted mother. The post-colonial writers of Indo-English novels equipped with a new education and sensibility, have portrayed new women. The woman novelists were responsible for the new images of women struggling against the oppressive social norms of the male dominated society. Patriarchy has always tried to uproot the foundation of women's identities and transformed them into patriarchal objects but ultimately women have tried to make efforts and attempts for re-creating and re-constructing themselves in the context of the Other.

Acclaimed as brilliantly written and superbly crafted, *Jasmine* grew out of a short story of the same title in *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), which won Mukherjee the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award. In *Jasmine*, the author successfully employs a number of narrative strategies, a first-person

point of view, singular and plural narrative voices, flashbacks, introspective asides, and cross-cutting, which allow the reader to roam in time, within a chapter, even within a paragraph, from one continent to another. *Jasmine* is basically a story of transformation. Like Mukherjee's first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975), and her first collection of short stories, *Darkness* (1985), it deals primarily with the South Asian immigrant experience.

Jasmine is a complex, resourceful, and dynamic character that undergoes dramatic changes throughout the novel. A young, daring woman from India, she represents Bharati Mukherjee's concept of "the new breed" of Americans from non-European countries who are invisibly changing the face of America. With her remarkable willpower, she fights with her undesirable fate as she resists the hold of a feudal and patriarchal family. Her marriage to Prakash Vihh allows her to break the moulds of the traditional female role in Indian society and strengthens her hopes for a bright future. When Prakash decides to go to school in America, she sees this as a possible way to subvert the fate predicted by an astrologer. Even her husband's death does not deter her from realizing her American Dream. Her arduous voyage to America helps her stubborn will to survive and her determination to re-create her destiny. She goes through several rebirths to become an American. Her adaptability and readiness to reinvent herself aids her assimilation into the American society.

Jasmine Vihh, later called Jane Ripplemeyer, the narrator was born in Hasnapur, India, and was given the name Jyoti. An astrologer predicts that she is doomed to widowhood and exile. She marries Prakash Vihh at the age of fourteen. He liberates Jyoti from her feudal past and transforms her into a new kind of modern woman, capable of independent thought. He renames her Jasmine and stirs her mind with new desires and hopes. After he is murdered by a fanatic, Jasmine fulfils Prakash's wish and goes to the United States, illegally. She first works as a caregiver for Taylor Hayes, a college professor in New York City then flees from Sukhwinder, the man who killed her husband,

and moves to Baden, Iowa, where she falls in love with Bud Ripplemeyer and becomes his common-law wife, living as Jane Ripplemeyer. Jasmine has several identities, changes from person to person. To Prakash, she is Jasmine; to Half-Face, the man who raped her, she is the goddess Kali; to Lillian Gordon, who helped her to find a job in New York City, she is Jazzy; to Taylor, she is Jase; to Bud, she is Jane. Jasmine's various identities finally make her realize that she is now the one who she wants to be. She uproots herself from her life in India and re-roots herself in search of a new life and the image in America as well. With each new move, the protagonist reinvents herself with a new name—Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, Jane—and with each new name she moves closer to her dream of being an American, belonging to the New World. Jasmine's ongoing journey is an effective device which highlights her rootless position and her search for identity. So each novel of hers can be considered as the voyage of discovery, wherein survival and identity crisis stand at the core of it. Her diasporic characters are caught up in the conflict between two countries and its codes. This living between two cultures creates a need and urge to fashion new identities.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1990) by Shashi Deshpande is a story of a woman, searching herself, leaving behind all her social shortcomings. It deals with the problems of a career woman and her martial constraints. Deshpande shows marriage as a patriarchal institution enslaving women for lifetime in this world of male domination. While revealing the travails of the educated married woman in the contemporary Indian society, Deshpande wants to expose the educated men who are snobs and chauvinistic. Jayant in *Roots and Shadows*, Manu in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and Mohan in *That Long Silence* are all examples to cite. They cannot see their wives as equals and expect them to be always docile, obliging and submissive. It is this tension between tradition and modernity that Deshpande deals with in her novels. As Simone De Beauvoir

observes “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine” (146).

Deshpande’s novels show this socialization and the stultifying effects of culturally determined ideas of marriage and wifehood on Indian women. “Indu, Saru and Jaya all desperately try to fit themselves to the prescribed image before they learn to question the image itself” (Roy 50). Our society visualizes “Women as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives who care for others, never as individuals” (Adhikari 114). The woman accepts this because the models given to her to emulate are mythological women like Sita, Draupadi and Gandhari who never framed a question regarding their individuality. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the story of Saru, with whom her mother never reconciled, especially after the death of her younger brother, Dhruva. Saru defies her mother, goes to a city, studies to become a doctor and marries Manohar, the man she chooses herself. A loving father and a caring husband during the day who, with evident pride shows off his doctor-wife to his colleagues, turns into a monster in bed, abusing her and bruising her, creating such terror in her that she finds no voice to scream for help. During the day, there is no evidence in his behavior to suggest anything that should be a cause for anxiety. There are only bruises which show that the night has been real.

Saru goes back to her father’s house after many years because her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. It is here, living with her father and Madhav, the young student who stays with her father that she tries to come to terms with the various events in her life. It is here that all the tortuous introspection goes on. Saru, the protagonist, who is looking for someone with whom she could share her fears, finally tells her father everything. The emotions of love and the recognition of the demands of sexuality should be always within the social institution of marriage. Hence, a woman should and must occupy some social space to be identified as a wife, mother, daughter and a sister. *Manusmriti* says that a woman should be under the control of her father,

husband or son and should never be independent. Sarita has been fed with all these norms; her mother accused her of her brother's Dhruva's death "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he is dead" (34-35).

To a mother, a boy child is all the more important, but not a girl child. Her father, too, takes least interest in her studies or development; he shows no love, anger nor dislike towards Sarita. His indifference can be analyzed as an indirect expression of patriarchy that is emotionally injurious. Physically and socially there are different measures that patriarchy employs in placing woman and marking their space. Shashi Deshpande writes:

Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important very important, balance it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A, you should be a B.A. If he is 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage..." (137).

The novelist, Shashi Deshpande deals with the universally relevant problems, which encounter in man-woman relationships. Sarita realizes that everyone in life encounters problems and undergoes suffering at one stage or another. To an extent - this novel is a postcolonialist affirmation of woman's strength. Her feeling of loneliness is her inner disintegration. This disintegration is due to her ego and will, to dominate others. Economic freedom and Education based on money, power and social status have set in a new set of values in her life. Her disintegration has to become integration in order to have a family life. She has to accept her life as it is along with her children, her husband and her duties. The real solution to the darkness in her life is not escapism or cursing the darkness but Sarita has to light a candle and declare to herself that *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The real darkness is in her mind, and when this darkness lifts from her mind, she will see the reality clearly.

Thus, Jasmine and Sarita, the spokespersons of author's own experiences always try to analyze the deep rooted female sensibilities in characters and their constant quest for the identity. Through the evacuation from her roots, the protagonists of both novels endeavor to re-establish their place and attempt to re-root themselves.

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