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## **Subaltern Voices: Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* as Representations of Women Labour and Economic Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

Sashi Deshpande belongs to the Anglo-Indian literary world of India. There are many writers who belong to this era. This paper delves into the representation of women's labour and economic empowerment in Sashi Deshpande's seminal novels *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *That Long Silence* through a critical feminist lens. This research explores how Deshpande's narratives magnify the voices of powerless women, spotlighting their struggle against androcentric oppression, economic exploitation and social marginalisation by scrutinizing the intersection of gender and class in these stories. This article tries to analyze and understand the implications of Sashi Deshpande's stories for policy making and social activism aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment and rights in India from the feminist point of view. By analyzing the intersectionality of these factors, this study reveals the ways in which Deshpande's protagonists navigate the constants of patriarchal society to assert their economic independence and autonomy. This research contributes to the existing scholarship on Sashi Deshpande's subaltern studies, offering new insights into the representation of women's labour and economic empowerment in Indian literature. Furthermore, this study highlights the significance of Deshpande's work in understanding the lived experiences of women in India.

**Keywords:** Sashi Deshpande, subaltern voices, Economic Empowerment, feminist theory, Intersectionality, Voiceless to voiceness.

### **Introduction:**

Shashi Deshpande, one of India's most celebrated contemporary authors has secured unique expertise within Indian English literature through her thoughtful analysis, the lives and purposes of women in Indian society. Deshpande's individual perspective of resettling from urban hubs to smaller municipalities have substantially shaped her writing which offers a candid portrayal of women's lives. Her novels have received broad recognition for their genuine portrayal of female emotional awareness. Both readers and critics have answered enthusiastically to her work, which sheds light on the inner turmoil encountered by Indian women. Deshpande's perspective on addressing women's issues is notable, and her female characters are often illustrated as the victims of a patriarchal society. Their language sometimes echoes with the heart as it comes out of anger at the long - position challenges of

Indian women. Her writings are outlined by their in-depth exploration of the feminine psyche, their elaborate portrayal of the multifaceted power of family and relationships, and their subtle nuanced consideration of the social and cultural landscape in India. Deshpande has not only given voice to the women but also portrays how women have been enduring suffering in silence for a long time. The purpose of the study is to dig into the literary worlds created by Sashi Deshpande focusing on specially the representation of women's labour and economic empowerment that inhabits in her novels. Traditionally, Indian women are mostly inclined to follow the state norms of society and do not like to think outside the box. They are afraid of breaking tradition. They think that what society has created for them is right and if they go against it, they will suffer bad consequences. Deshpande showed how this patriarchal society has shaped the minds of women in such a way that they believe that if they break the rules, they will be alienated. She is made to think that protecting customs is the solution to lessen her plight. Deshpande's female protagonist is a victim of the pervasive sexism that affects her both as a daughter and later as a wife. She is part of a cohort of women writers who have risen to prominence bringing unique perspective and voices to the four fronts in a rapidly changing world. Education has brought about some improvements in women's lives but various forms of oppression continue to affect them. Deshpande's writing sheds light on the challenges modern women face in establishing their identities, having been marginalised and silenced for centuries. This prolonged suppression has led to a deep-seated lack of confidence causing women to hesitate in asserting their rights.

### **Subaltern voices:**

The term 'subaltern' is common but in a deeper sense it is varied as it encompasses the diverse experiences of individuals residing in suburban areas, revealing a complex tapestry of stories, struggles and aspirations that often remained overlooked. These voices whisper tales of isolation and connection of homogeneity and diversity. The issue related to women liberation in India is very complex because they are traditionally fixed in a particular set up which varies from family to family, region to region and caste to caste. The Protagonist of the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita's life takes a dramatic turn when she learns of her mother's passing, the same women who had blamed her for her brother's death. Seeking Solace, Sarita returns to her childhood home, hoping for a warm welcome. However, her father's indifferent reception forces her to confront the emotional void in her life. This encounter sets off a journey of introspection, as Sarita becomes increasingly aware of her position within her family and marriage.

In the novel *That Long Silence* the central figure Jaya represents the struggle of females who long to convey themselves, yet are silenced by cultural pressures. As a domestic worker and writer, Jaya pursues stories that amateure the endure of women's lives, but her unique perspective is stifled compelling her into a state of thoughtful quietude. Jaya's adversity to assert herself is an impactful observation on the confined responsibilities mandated on women. Despite her education and nurturing, she is bound by the transmission of a gender biased society where her reality is determined by her connections with others. Her life witnesses an oppressive atmosphere of the conventional norms, where intellectual women like Jaya are an endless loop in a cycle of obedience. Community expectations have historically confined women to inferior positions, limiting their experiences to the realms of progeny. In each of these roles, women are expected to prioritize the needs and desires of

others-fathers, husbands or sons while their own aspirations and emotions are often disregarded. women are frequently marginalized, treated as inferior, and denied agency.

### **Family and Relations:**

Marriage and family are given maximum importance even today but with the education and awareness the relation and domestic life has undergone change. Women are gaining financial Independence Day by day, but so far, the Indian women have not achieved the highest goal. They suffer a lot in their family lives and fight against many inside and outside problems. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a poignant exploration of saritas introspective journey. As a successful doctor, Sarita appears to have it all, a fulfilling career and a loving family. Her husband, Manohar, a lecturer in English and a former poet, was once the object of her affection, and she had defied her parents' wishes to marry him. Together they have two children and Manohar presents himself as a devoted husband and father. However, beneath this facade, a Sinister reality emerges. Manohar's insecurities are fueled by saritas professional triumphs, and he becomes increasingly resentful of her accomplishments. While he publicly flatters his wife's success, privately he unleashes his pent-up envy, subjecting Sarita to physical and emotional abuse. As the darkness of night descends, Manohar's demeanor transforms and Sarita is confronted with a monster's version of her husband. She is trapped in a living nightmare, unable to escape the terror that has become her reality.

In *That Long Silence* the protagonist Jaya navigates the complexities of her marriage to Mohan, she is compelled to confront the disparities in their relationship. While she is expected to be a pillar of support, sharing her joys and sorrows, the same expectations do not apply to Mohan. This imbalance weighs heavily on Jaya who begins to question that very fabric of existence. Her education and sensitivity render her acutely aware of the injustices she faces, yet she is bound by the rules of a society that denies her agency. Women's identities are often erased through the sacrifices they are socialised to make. Jaya's experience is no exception; despite her efforts to meet the expectations of Mohan and his family, she feels a profound sense of disconnection from her own identity. The contrast between her given name Jaya (meaning 'victory') and her married name, Suhasini (meaning 'soft smiling and loving woman'), serves as a powerful metaphor for the fragmented selves that women experience. As long as Jaya remains silent and subservient, conforming to the expectations of an ideal wife, the status quo is maintained. However, when she attempts to assert herself and express her feelings, she is met with resistance. Mohan's ego and sense of supremacy are threatened, and he reacts by abandoning his responsibilities as a husband and father. In contrast, Jaya, embodying the traditional values of an Indian wife, takes on the burden of holding the family together.

### **Women's Empowerment:**

Female empowerment is a revolutionary momentum that aims to break down the rooted societal obstacles. Monetary challenges and traditional values that have typically held women back. By promoting women's opinions and advocating for equal opportunity, we can unleash the maximum capacity of women. Uplifting Women is not only an ethical necessity but also a driver of economic growth, social advancement, and sustainable practices. As women attain self-determination over their lives, they become change makers, promoting positive growth in their households, social networks and societies. By supporting women's empowerment, we can create a more just balanced and flourishing World for all.

The protagonists of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* exhibit notable similarities in their portrayal. Sarita and Jaya's life journeys propel them toward self-discovery, and upon achieving this epiphany, they resolve to redefine their life paths. Sarita, also known as Saru, chooses to rekindle her relationship with her husband, Manohar and strives to strike a balance between her personal and professional aspirations. Meanwhile Jaya's prolonged silence gives way to a new found assertiveness and inquisitiveness. Indu on the other hand recognises the imperative of cultivating courage and sensitivity to navigate her family's challenges. While the outward transformations in these characters' lives may seem subtle, their internal shifts in perspective are profound.

The novel's title *That Long Silence* is a metaphor for the dominating powers that muted female perspectives. Jaya's final choice to break her silence and exercise her autonomy is the powerful declaration about the significance of women's voices being heard. Jaya's journey is a strong affirmation to the value of self-awareness and reclaiming one's identity. Through her encounters Deshpande highlights the need for women to liberate themselves from cultural norms and create their own ways. Joya's character highlights the need for women to interrogate and disrupt these norms in hierarchy to attain through empowerment. Jaya's education and academic endeavours are depicted as key crucial elements in her empowerment. Education is an effective instrument for women's emancipation, empowering them to think critically and challenge cultural standards. Throughout the novel Jaya struggles with the essential to affirm herself and create her independence. This portrayal of Jaya's journey emphasizes the significance of self-expression and self-governance in attaining genuine empowerment. The novel shows how Jaya re-interpreted her connections with her husband, family, and society, establishing edges and asserting her requirements. This re-interpretation is a vital step of female empowerment, as it facilitates women to found positive and fair relationships. Jaya's change from an unspoken affirming housewife to a self-artistic singular is a powerful symbol of female empowerment, this evolution is necessary for women's freedom and self- fulfillment.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Sashi Deshpande's works, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, serve as compelling evidence to the challenges of women's economic empowerment and devoted labour of love that frequently goes overlooked. Through her protagonists, Deshpande skilfully reveals the way in which social pressures and male dominated values sustain the exploration of women's labour. Eventually, these novels underscore the critical requirement for a fundamental change in our insights of women's work and its valuable contribution to the economy. By enhancing the voices of women like Sarita and Jaya, Deshpande's work influenced us to rethink a more balanced society where women's contribution is appreciated and honoured. As we move progress, it is necessary that we persist to showcase the intersections of women's labour and, economic enablement, and human rights, and work towards generating a world where female perspectives are significant and their contributions are acknowledged. The present study aims at Deshpande's viewpoint to women not as men, not competitors to a man but women as a woman with equal sensitivity. Sarita's journey is a powerful exploration of feminist angst as she grapples with the fundamental question of Identity. Torn between her roles as daughter, wife, and individual, Sarita's' experiences reflect the fragmented nature of women's lives. Her transformation from a submissive wife to a confident self- assured

individual is a testament to the human capacity for growth and changes. Through Sarita's story Deshpande challenges the notion that women's identities are defined Solely by their relationships with others. Instead, Sarita images as a strong independent individual, reclaiming her agency and for going a new path forward.

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