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Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers, Vol. 14 (3)

<https://jett.labosfor.com/>

Date of reception: 15 Feb 2023

Date of revision: 24 Mar 2023

Date of acceptance: 01 Apr 2023

**T. Vijayasanthi, Dr. S. Syed Shaw (2023). Anti-Demeter Motherhood in Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors and Margret Atwood's Lady Oracle. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, Vol. 14(3). 34-37.**

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## **Anti-Demeter Motherhood in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Margret Atwood's *Lady Oracle***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate how Shashi Deshpande's and Margret Atwood's works about parenting depict feminist viewpoints on motherhood. It is essential because, in contrast to other discourses, fictional writing is in fact able to reach the broad public and, as a result, may stimulate fresh discussions with far-reaching implications on the topic of motherhood at all levels of society. This is why it is important. Analysing how motherhood is portrayed in *Lady Oracle* and *The Dark Holds No Horror*, as well as how much they support or contradict a feminist stance on motherhood, can help determine whether or not they are feminist works. Feminist theories' central concepts of motherhood and mothering have been highly debated, contested, and changed throughout the last several decades. Several of these authors have found the courage and inspiration to deviate from standard patriarchal patterns in order to show how women have been mistreated, taken advantage of, and oppressed due to the women's movement. While Mary Wollstonecraft voiced the first doubts about parenting in her 1792 essay "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," a more significant movement wasn't founded until the 1960s.

**Keywords:** Parental Relationship, Demeter Myth, Feminist Sensibility, Gender discrimination, Depravity, Motherhood.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A perfect image of motherhood that demonstrates protection and nurturing is represented in the Mythical-Demeter and Persephone bonding. Motherhood culture all around the world accords everlasting guilt inducing obligation and responsibilities towards their children. Both Margaret Atwood and Shashi Deshpande challenge the notion of patriarchy and male's control over female body either denounce or endorse the mythologies whatever benefit their feminist agenda in their novels. Both Atwood and Deshpande parallelly engage in a nun conscious revision of the Demeter Myth in novels *The Lady Oracle* and *The Dark Holds No Terror* respectively. These novelists have sailed in the same boat depicting the mother characters as an Anti-Demeter image who have an uneasy bonding with their daughters. At the same time these prominent novelists have revealed the unnatural truth that women not only are suppressed and dominated by opposite gender but by the same gender too. Both the novelists Margret Atwood and Shashi Deshpande have portrayed the characters 'Joan' in *Lady Oracle* and 'Sarita' in *The Dark Holds No Terror* suffering the negligence and torments of their mothers. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Deshpande presents a picture of domestic disharmony. She seems to renounce the larger world in favour of the inner world of the women. She is an outstanding novelist of the human predicament. She has brought out in her novels the inner crisis of the modern women. Among the women novelists of the era of national awakening Shashi Deshpande made wonderful contribution to the development of Indian English novel in its formative years. All her stories are social studies and deal with the life of women and their condition in Indian houses.

Canadian fiction has witnessed a transition from exposition, inventory and catalogue to more varied analytical and interpretative directions. As a Canadian novelist, Margret Atwood is a versatile and prominent figure in national and international cultural politics. Atwood's writings belong to the postmodern literary genre of feminist protest. In her novel she challenges traditional image of women presented by patriarchy and exposes the silent and hidden operations of gender and confronts its politics there by recommending for rewriting of women's history. Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) is a gothic romance, raises its voice against the imposition of sexual and gender roles upon women in a matrilineage society as those role models subjugate women and thereby distort and problematize their self-perception. It is a feminist writer's frontal attack on the dominant pattern of gender relations in contemporary society.

### Statement of Objective

This article seeks to explore the Anti-Demeter image of mothers in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* and Margret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* possessing the elements of contradictory and bitter bond between mothers and daughters.

### Anti-Demeter Mother image in the novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'

Shashi Deshpande has tried to present a vision of life that is based on contemporary reality. She is a talented and most prolific, versatile, popular Indian novelist. She deals with a wide variety of themes which have universal appeal and an inherent purpose. Her novel is noticeable for valuable social and political documentation. *The Dark Holds No Terror* deals with a young woman's crisis set against the patriarchal social set up in India. Her novel describes the rising tide of female defiance against traditional roles for women in society as well as the authority of parents. Anti-Demeter, lack of emotion bindings of Shashi Deshpande's Mother and daughter characters in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the focus of this paper. In this novel, the mother and daughter relationship occupies the center stage. Deshpande's novel is mainly concerned with the self-assertion and loneliness of a woman. Her chief claim is that the human relationships are not the rationalization but felt, perceived and real phenomenon. Especially, the relationship between mother and daughter is a complex social construct.

Sarita's narrative is told in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and even after her marriage, her mother has blamed her for the death of her brother since she was a little kid. In Saru's personal life, there is no consolation. She gets the impression that she is in a foreign country. The only brother Sarita has is Dhruva, and they all live together. Since her mother loved him more than she does, she hates her brother while yet loving him. Old-fashioned Indian mother Sarita has a boy named Dhruva who she loves more than a daughter. She often makes excuses for him and spoils him. Despite the fact that Sarita is a young girl, she offers her kid additional attention. This kind of behavior makes Sarita's siblings envious. Deshpande revises the concept of mother, which is often seen as a representation of love and devotion, and instead of focusing on Sarita's comfort and kindness, reveals the dark side of a mother's responsibilities. She receives constant abuse and mistreatment. Every girl enjoys having a mother and daughter connection, but Sarita has to deal with cruelty in it.

The dilemma is whether one should renounce one's own mother out of fear and panic. In the book *The Dark Holds No terror*, the mother-daughter relationship is built on gender bias and a lack of affection. Character-wise, Sarita's mother takes centre stage. Sarita is a dark-haired girl. Sarita's mother detests her first for being a female and second for being dark. Dark-skinned girls are less esteemed at the time of marriage in Indian custom. Parents should offer more dowries to girls who are darker. Sarita's mother forbids her from being seen with the son. Sarita also had to put up with her mother's continual nagging that because of her dark skin tone. At every chance, Sarita's mother ignores her.

One day, Saru's friend Smita invites her family to attend the film "Ravi of Jhaus" with her. Sarita's mother, however, has told her not to go today and to go another day. Sarita becomes furious. Her parents will be harassed, she decides. Mother patting Dhruva as he falls asleep. Sarita intends to abruptly go. When Dhruva stops her, she agrees to accompany him to a hidden location, and they eventually get there. That is a lovely location in Dhruva's opinion. "Look at the water, Sarita, isn't it a river?" demanded Dhruva. (187) While she hates her brother for some reason, Saru is frightened that she is returning, expecting he will follow and look down again. In Indian culture, the older sister always acts as the children's "second mother". Dhruva unfortunately drowned in the river despite Saru's care. Saru's mother, however, holds her responsible for Dhruva's abduction. Her mother's advice to her has resounded in her head ever since.

"You did it,  
You did this,  
You killed him,  
Why are you alive when?  
He's dead" (TDHT191).

As an Indian woman, who is obsessed with her love for son, deprives her daughter the care. Saru's mother never thinks of Saur's innocence but directly spews venom over Saru vehemently. When Saru celebrates her 15th birthday, it is the traditional ceremony wearing ear-rings offered by mother who reflects affection, kind, love, mutual understandings between mother and daughter. But her mother gives her present (earrings) without any cordial emotions but just for her duty as all mothers are in condition to do so. After all this, and unutterable words by mother about a daughter are mentioned when Saru's mother was in discussion with a neighbor named Kulkarni, Mother said "I am childless" (DHNT;169).

It was rainy heavily at the time of Sarita's birth and her mother hurt her daughter uttering the cursed and unbearable words. My mother said to me once...

"Your birth day saw significant rainfall. This was terrible. And for some reason, I didn't think the rain was the cause of her suffering; I thought it was my birth" (DHNT;196).

### **Anti-Demeter mother image in the novel Lady Oracle by Margret Atwood**

Every one of us are strongly influenced by the connections and bonds we form with other individuals throughout our lives. We may define who we are and the quality of our lives by the love and affection we have for one another. Although a difficult relationship may lead to stress and dissatisfaction, a strong, loving relationship can provide comfort and support. In Margret Atwood's "Lady Oracle," Joan Foster, the protagonist, is a multifaceted lady with a tumultuous connection with her mother. As a person, Joan has definitely been impacted by her relationship with her mother since she was a little child.

Margret Atwood's Lady Oracle consist similarities in the revisioning of nurturing mother image of the mythical Demeter, the lack of cordial relationship between mother and daughter. The two novels are about the constant conflict between mother and daughter. The main character Joan's youth in Lady Oracle is unpleasant since her neurotic, distant mother publicly hates her because she is overweight. It also perpetuates Joan's obsession with her obesity. She wants to take part in the "Butterfly Frolic" at one of the stage performances as a butterfly. Joan is eager to wear colored cellophane wings while performing the group dance but she is compelled to be Mothball. She embraces her fat as she gets older and starts overeating expressly to retaliate against her mother once she realizes how others see her. Other kids bully and torment her, but she gradually learns to make friends by being the unassuming "Fat Friend," who is neither aggressive or intimidating.

Atwood has vividly pictured the Anti-Demeter mother image by depicting the unloved and unkind mother of Joan. In this particular novel, the first relationship of the protagonist's life is together with her mother Because of her obesity, Joan's mother treats her coldly, leaving Joan to feel unwanted and unloved. Joan first finds it difficult to live up to her mother's idealized expectations. Joan resents her mother's "unbearable" attitude and becomes "Antagonistic" against her when she fails at this. The ambitious selfhood of Joan mother can be expounded as the "Anti-Demeter mother image". Joan sees how her mother in the terms of 'wicked' older women verified in patriarchal fairy tales. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs is the particular fairy tale that Joan associates with her mother. The princess is banished by a difficult and cruel stepmother, and when the wicked queen attempts to kill her, she flees into a forest. She is soon saved by seven dwarfs, who become her pals. Likewise, the Aunt Lou's character in the novel Lady Oracle compared to the seven dwarfs, Lou who was only comfort to Joan from her childhood.

### **CONCLUSION**

Unlike other feminist writers, Shashi Deshpande and Margret Atwood are exceptional and quite strange in displaying creative and innovative characters. Here, the research article aspires to compare and contrast the 'Anti-Demeter Mother images 'in Sarita's mother in Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terror and Joan's mother in Margret Atwood's Lady Oracle Joan develops hatred towards mother who always comes in the way of her progress. The writer has shown the gap in the mother – daughter relationship. In other words, it is a conflict between old and young, the traditional and the modern. Throughout the second part of her novel, there was a flashback of the protagonist's past. The anti-Demeter Motherhood has a common expression in both the cases of Sarita and Joan. Both the protagonists feel 'rejected, unwanted, unloved' by their mothers who treat them coldly for base reasons. At first, Joan struggle to adopt herself with her mother's ideal vision. Her mother's cruel and suicidal remarks about her weight reinforce her feelings low-esteem. Feelings of shame about her body are implanted in her. The negative self-images hinge on her mother's rejection of her body and consequently lead to self-abuse which is manifested in her eating disorder. The Anti-Demeter functioning of motherhood in both novels firmly implanted in Sarita and Joan's mind paving the way for their rebellious attitude in future.

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