

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: READING SHASHI DESHPANDE'S

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande (1938–) is one of the prominent Indian English writers of the present time having numerous literary books, mainly novels, short stories and children's fiction to her name. In her writings, she has addressed issues mainly related to women. In her first published novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), she has boldly addressed sensitive issues like marital rape, a woman earning more than her husband, mother's preference for a son over daughter through the protagonist, Sarita (Saru), of the story. Sarita is an ambitious, well-educated, economically independent, modern middle-class married woman. She faces discriminatory treatment over her brother, Dhruva, by her mother only because of her gender in her childhood. Later, she becomes a successful doctor but she lives like a trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar, who earns less than her. These incidents compel her to her agonising search for her own true self. At the end, she realises that her life is her own and the dark really holds no terrors for her. Terror doesn't come from outside rather it comes from inside. She overcomes her fear and decides to face her life and her husband with confidence. Sarita has to undergo a troublesome journey to reach this end. This paper aims at analyzing the central character, Sarita, from various perspectives in relation to the other characters of the novel. It will also examine the struggles which Sarita has gone through and eventually her emergence from darkness to light as an empowered and confident individual.

KEY WORDS: Love, Marriage, Sex, Patriarchy, Terror, Identity.

Feminism is generally known as an organised movement which advocates equal rights of women to those of men in all spheres of their lives. This movement started long ago but got its full force in the West in the 1960s. Though it was mostly limited to politics, in the beginning, it, later on, gradually started to influence other spheres including the literary world. A major concern of most of the post-modern literature is to deal with issues or representation of women. Basically, women writers around the globe have taken the task of articulating women's issues which were so far overlooked in the "traditional approaches to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine-perspective"¹ and creating a body of literature to emancipate themselves from their age-old confinement and oppression. Indian English literature is also influenced by this wave or approach of viewing or interpreting and presenting issues related to women with a new perspective that was not so far treated with so much importance in this part of the world. Like Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Bronte sisters and Virginia Woolf in the West, Indian women novelists Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy and Shashi Deshpande have presented different problems which women in liberated India face every single day.

In the writings of these modern educated Indian novelists, it is found how "Indian women are caught in the flux of

tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and aspirations of the future. A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the 'self' have become the prime features of women in literature under the sway of feminismⁱⁱ. They have even "surpassed their male counterparts outnumbering them quantitatively as well as by maintaining a high standard of literary writing, equally applauded in India and abroad, experimenting boldly with not only technique but also the subject matters in their writing"ⁱⁱⁱ. Almost all of these writers are highly educated and this has greatly helped them in sharpening their intellectual faculty to observe life from close quarter. In portraying the female characters of the novels, they have succeeded in dealing with the characters' inner turmoil or psychological conflicts. The main focus of the writers is to present the plight of the Indian women, their exploitation of various kinds in their families and in the patriarchal society in which they live and to show a way to break free from this age-old shackles of tradition which have so far confined them and, at the same time, to help them search their identity as individuals. Shashi Deshpande is one of these pioneer Indian women novelists. She has shown acute sensitivity in presenting the condition, both social and psychological, in which the modern educated middle-class women, roughly between the age group of 30 to 35, are in. Before going to start discussing issues of the selected text for the present study critically, a brief overview of the life of its author is necessary. Brought up in the very culture which has prepared the background for her novels will certainly help analysing things easily.

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. She is the second daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangacharya. While she was receiving her school education in a protestant mission school in Karnataka, she read the great British classical novels in English. Jane Austen was her favourite. She graduated in Economics from the University of Bombay^{iv} in 1956 and after that, she gained a degree in Law from the University of Mysore, Karnataka in 1959. Later, she took a course in journalism at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine *Onlooker*. She has also earned an M.A. in English Literature. Her husband is a pathologist. Deshpande started her literary career with writing short stories while she was in England. *The Legacy* (1978) is the first collection of short stories by her. That was her beginning. Later on, five other collections of short stories, eleven novels including two crime novels and four books for children have got published. Her novel *That Long Silence* (1989) has received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. Two of her other novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983) have also received major awards like Raugammal Prize and Nanjangud Tirumalamba Award. She has also got the Padma Shri Award in 2009. Her novel *Shadow Play* (2013) was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize in 2014. Her work has been translated into various Indian and European languages.

Shashi Deshpande's writing is based on the delineation of women's inner world. In her work, the diversity of female experience is captured as she delves deep into the complex phenomena of women. Her oeuvre reads like an exploration of the female psyche. She has written a number of novels and short stories which have got serious critical attention because of her "detailed, sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle-class women in the domestic sphere"^v. Her endeavour in her writings is to present everyday India and the complexities faced by the people of this country in which they live. In an interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom Deshpande states,

My novels do not have any Westerners, for example. They are first about Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them.^{vi}

Mainly women's issues in the Indian context occupy the canvas of her work. Generally, one who writes about women issues is labelled as feminist but Deshpande does not think of her as a feminist in its terminological sense. In an interview

with Gita Viswanatha, she denies it very clearly by saying,

And as far as readers are concerned, I would like them to read me as a novelist, not as a feminist novelist or woman writer or whatever. That's one part, the second part is that when I write, I don't write as a feminist. I keep saying this over and over again and somehow I need to say it again and again. I do not write as a feminist novelist. But my ideology is going to permeate my writings; and my feelings, thoughts and ideas about women are very important parts of my ideology.^{vii}

Though women are at the centre of her work, it is the human being that concerns her the most. In an interview with Pallavi Thakur, Deshpande mentions that her writings are for all human beings. It would be improper to confine her to any particular group. She says,

Once you say I am a feminist writer, you are putting some sort of a boundary, an edge around my writing which means that there is nothing else. I deny it very strongly. My writings are not limited in that way. It is all about human beings and it is ultimately universal. You know human beings are the same everywhere. Like I said, feminism has given me a certain perspective, a vision which to some extent is bound to come into my novels.^{viii}

Deshpande's first published novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) presents the story of an educated, economically independent middle-aged Indian woman, Sarita (Saru), the protagonist of the novel, her relationship with her parents and husband Manohar and her quest for her true self. In it, Deshpande has touched upon issues like marital rape, wife earning more than her husband, preference for the son over daughter and relationship of various kinds. Saru is treated differently by her parents only because of her gender. She gets humiliated and treated like a trapped animal by Manohar when she gets more social importance as a doctor over Manohar, a teacher, who earns less than her. These incidents force her to search for her true identity. She contemplates on her relationship of different types on her stay at her parents' house, a place where she never wanted to return, after her mother's death. At the end, she gets the better understanding of her own self and realises that the dark really holds no terrors. Terror comes from inside, not from outside. This gives her the courage to face the problems of her life boldly. To reach this end, she has to undergo a troublesome journey. This paper aims at presenting and analyzing Sarita's crisis of identity from various perspectives. It will also focus on the journey which Sarita has undergone and finally her emergence, from darkness to light, as a self-assured individual.

By definition, research is a diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts and it is also a continuation to the existing knowledge in that particular area. The purpose of this study is also the same. Though a significant amount of research has been conducted on Shashi Deshpande, there is, to the best of my knowledge, no in-depth analysis, so far, on this topic, has been conducted. This paper intends to explore the psychic depths of Deshpande's female protagonist's inner and outer worlds. Because, this exploration will present not only Deshpande's concern of the socio-cultural, political and economic realities of women of her time but also an alternative vision of reality. This vision will help to view the condition of the women in India in general and the urban-educated modern middle-class women in particular, their helplessness, suffering, inner turmoil, existential or identity crisis and make help to reach out for a broader self-definition.

For the convenience of a systematic exploration, the discussion has been divided into three sections. The first section discusses the family environment or Sarita's parents' house in which she was brought up. This is very crucial in

this sense that it is her family set up which has formed the foundation of her psychology when she was a girl. It is in there where she has been made aware of her gender as a child. The second section deals with the world outside her family which has participated in her socio-cultural and intellectual growth. This section mainly discusses her relation with her husband Manohar who has gradually made Sarita's life unbearable. The final section attempts a critical analysis of Saru's journey from darkness to light and, at the same time, the socio-cultural condition of Indian women presented by Shashi Deshpande in this novel. In the discussion of all these sections, it will be demonstrated how Deshpande's heroine Sarita emerges as a confident, self-assured individual and how she overcomes her identity crisis and how she gets out of the darkness she was in.

I

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is divided into four parts and the first part starts with Saru's visit to her parents' house, a place from where she went away with a vow never to return, after fifteen years of marriage to meet her father when she comes to know that her mother has died. It seems initially that her mother's death has made her visit her father but it is not the reality. Saru is not here for her father; rather, she is here for herself. She has come here to find an escape from her sadist husband, to flee from the reality of her married life, to seek refuge, to find comfort. Away from her husband, children, work as a doctor, daily routine, Saru's stay at her father's house gives her a chance to contemplate on her so far lived life and the individuals with whom she had any kind of relationship. In this section, Saru's relationship with her parents, brother and the family environment in which she was brought up will be analysed. It is the attitude of her family members, mainly that of her mother, which has formed the foundation of her psychology when she was a girl. It is in her family that she has been made aware of her gender. Her childhood reveals the origin of her identity crisis.

Saru doesn't enjoy a good childhood. She faces strong discrimination on the basis of her gender. Her younger brother, Dhruva, has always enjoyed superior treatment over her and it is her mother, Kamala, who is behind it. In her childhood, Saru's mother has made her realise that as a girl she is inferior to her brother in all respect. That's why Saru never experiences a good relation with her mother. She doesn't like her mother at all for her mother's discriminatory behaviour towards her. She reminds Saru not to go in the sun because her dark complexion will get darker and it should not happen but her mother never forbids anything for Dhruva. Saru recalls a conversation with her mother:

Don't go out in the sun. You will 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.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can't.
And Dhruva?
He's different. He's a boy.^{ix}

This differentiation hurts Saru very much and the conflict, the crisis of identity, starts there. To her mother, Saru was an ugly girl. Once her mother said to her, ".you will never be good-looking. You are too dark for that" (71). How can a mother say anything like that directly to her own daughter! But this is a common feature among Indian mothers. They

remain very worried regarding their daughters' complexion. If it is fair, they don't have to worry about their daughters' future. But if it is, by any chance, dark, they will be in perpetual tension regarding their girls' marriage. Girls with a dark complexion have little prospect in the field of marriage and parents are always concerned regarding how they will get their daughters married. It seems, marriage is the ultimate destination for girls and there is nothing after that.

Saru's mother's biased attitude is also noticed on the occasion of observing the birthdays. In Saru's words,

There was always a *puja* on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an *aarti*^x in the evening... My birthdays were almost the same... a festive lunch, with whatever I asked for... an *aarti* in the evening; but there was no *puja*. (199)

Birthdays are very exciting to Saru. It is "a fascinating thought" (199) to her that she has a birthday, she is born on that day. But Saru thinks that may be because of this discriminatory treatment on her birthdays, her birth was not welcome by her mother and her mother wanted a son instead of her. She mentions,

But of my birth, my mother had said to me once... "it rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible." And somehow, *it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her*, not the rains. (199, emphasis mine)

Saru is so sure about her mother's preference for Dhruva over her that she thinks if she and Dhruva remain absent in house, her mother "would look for us, first for Dhruva, then for me [Saru]" (222). Dhruva is allowed to do anything. There is no bar on him but it is not the same with Saru. Saru says, "He was always allowed to have his way. And I had to give in, go on giving in..."(215). It is Saru's mother who is to blame for developing a sense of jealousy or rivalry in Saru against Dhruva. Dhruva is always preferred and Saru is always neglected by her. It is because of this sibling jealousy in Saru that she is very much eager to attract her father's attention to her. She recollects,

It had been Dhruva. Sitting on Baba's lap and talking to him. And I had thought... I must show Baba something, anything, to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting on his lap. I must make him listen to me, not to Dhruva. I must make him ignore Dhruva. (38)

Though the mother-daughter relationship is not well from the beginning, it starts deteriorating fast after Dhruva's sudden death. Dhruva's death was an accident. While climbing up the sleepy steps of the pond Saru gets worried about how Dhruva will climb these steps. When she looks back, "she saw him fall into the water" (223). She goes into the water, shouts, panics and tries her best to get hold of him but fails. Saru's failure to rescue Dhruva haunts her throughout her life. Her mother blames her for Dhruva's death. A psychologically shocked sister whose younger brother died in front of her own eyes needed emotional support from her parents but she doesn't get it. Rather, she has been held guilty of killing her brother. Her mother instantly declares her a killer saying, "*You did it. You did this. You killed him*" (226). Her mother goes on saying, "*You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?*" (226). Saru's mother gets out of her mind when she finds her only son dead and it is natural that she will make someone a scapegoat to get over her suffering and it is Saru who becomes the scapegoat. But for how long can she torture Saru for that? How can she believe that Saru can really do that? How can she want her only daughter's death when she can't accept her son's death? It is total double-standard behaviour. Later on, she could normalise the situation by drawing Saru near to share her sorrow too but she doesn't do that. As a mother, she could not understand her daughter; could not reach out to her. This makes her a failure as

a mother. She doesn't even get her father's sympathy. Saru was a ten-year-old child then and, at that age, she is declared a murderer and she is made to live with the stamp of a killer, a killer of her own younger brother. She has no one on her side and she could never share it with anyone because of the fear of being abandoned, unwanted and unloved. She has to bear the agony, the suffering, the guilt alone, all alone.

After Dhruva's death, ceremonies like celebrating the birthday of Saru, celebrating Ganpati stop at their house. Though on her fifteenth birthday her mother gives her "a pair of earrings" (200), it is not to please her or to make her happy but it is because she "should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear" (202). Both the parents now can do fasting on the occasion of their dead son's birthday but they have forgotten their living daughter. Saru does not fast on the very day and her mother can't believe the matter. Every year on the same day she intentionally, may be to punish, asks the same question to Saru, "*You will be eating, I suppose?* (213)". When Saru replies, "*Of course. Why should I fast?* (213)", She says, "*Yes, why should you?* (213)". Dhruva's death makes Saru's mother more careless towards her life, towards her studies, towards everything as if life ended for Saru's mother. She says, "And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva's death. I just didn't exist for her" (37).

Saru begins to grow up physically and her growing up becomes something shameful to herself because of her mother's unpleasant way of staring at her. Her mother cautions her saying,

You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around. (72)

After that, her period begins. She has become a woman and her mother informs her that. And instantly she starts hating being a woman. She doesn't want to be like her mother. She hates her mother so much that she declares, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one" (73). Though Saru knew menstruation happens to every girl, she didn't want it. It becomes a torture for her. She says,

Not just the three days^{xi} 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. (73)

It is a socially made up thing that women can't do this, do that during their menstruation and it is this which makes them untouchable, which makes the thing shameful. After receiving her medical education, Saru realises that these things are natural to every woman. It happens to the female body. The system is like that and, so, it is not a matter of shame at all.

Saru hates her mother and doesn't want to end up playing the role like her mother. She got influenced by a lady doctor who once visited them in her parents' house. She looked superior to all other women who were present there at that time. Saru knows she is not beautiful and she cannot be one but she can be a doctor. She follows her ambition, studies hard, secures a first class and expresses her wish to her father. She knew instinctively that her mother would not allow it and yes, her mother utters a clear "No" (167, emphasis mine). Then Saru angrily replies to her mother,

I'm not talking to you. I'm not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No, forever a 'no' to anything I want. You don't want me to have anything, you don't want me to do anything. You

don't even want me to live. (167)

Saru wants her Baba's help and for the first time, she gets it. He is on her side. He wants Saru to go for what she wants but her mother is not ready to allow that. She is worried about the expense it will involve, her wedding cost, their cost for the future. To her, Saru is a responsibility. Her proposal is: "Let her go for a B.Sc... you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over" (170). And then it comes again. When Saru says that her mother doesn't care about her, her mother, after eight long years, brings up the issue again saying,

"That's what you think. What do you know of others' feelings? When have you ever cared about anyone's feelings but your own? As long as you can have your own way, you aren't bothered about anything at all. Your own brother..."

"No," he [father] said loudly.

"... She let him drown..."

"I said no!"

"She killed him." (171)

And that was that. Saru hates her mother for this so much so that she "wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer (168)". When her mother comes to know about her feeling for Manu, she doesn't approve it only because Manu is not from the same caste. She recalls a conversation with her mother,

What caste is he?

I don't know.

A Brahmin?

Of course not.

Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low caste people, are they? (113)

This caste system is followed very strongly in India. As an educated woman, Saru doesn't have this kind of century old prejudice and she couldn't but hate her mother for having such kind of a point of view. She becomes so enraged with her mother that she replies to her mother by saying, "*I hope so*" (113, emphasis mine).

Generally, father plays an important and influential role in forming the psychology of a girl child. It is through the attachment with him, a girl child becomes aware of male existence in the society. Her idea of manhood comes through him. But Saru doesn't enjoy a close relationship with her father. Her father was just there in the house but couldn't leave a strong imprint on her mind. There was always a kind of distance between them. She was suffering from the beginning of her life in the hand of her mother but her father wasn't there to rescue her. Generally, a father is a hero in the eyes of a daughter but Saru's Baba couldn't play the role of a hero. He is just the earning man and nothing else. To Saru he has "always been a negative man, incapable of strong feelings" (36), "Faint-hearted" (169), "always avoided things" (234) and has "always been so much a man, the 'master of the house,' not to be bothered by any of the trivialities of daily routine" (23). The only time he played a strong role was when Saru wanted to go to Bombay^{xiii} for her medical education. The only time she felt her father's true existence in her life. She felt she "was not alone then" (164). She says, "he helped me, my

father” (164) and “Without him, I [Saru] would never have succeeded” (164). That was the only time Saru’s father played a strong role. If he could play roles like this in his family affairs and in the life of his children, things could have been different for Saru. Though his father was “the master of the house” (23), it was her mother who played the role and it was one-sided. A balance was needed but Saru’s father fails to do it. He remains silent all through his life and this very silence makes the imbalance in the house and it has done the harm. He raised his voice once and it changed Saru’s life.

Saru’s relation with Dhruva is not also that intimate. Sibling jealousy is there. This jealousy is nothing but the outcome of her mother’s favouritism for Dhruva. It stems from there. Dhruva always tries to get near his *Sarutai*, but it is she who keeps a psychological distance with him and it happens because of her mother’s discriminatory attitude to her. Saru admits,

But he had been loyal. Completely loyal. He had never given her away to their parents. Not once. Their bond, their pact, had been secure against treachery. It was she, on the contrary, who had often been treacherous. Running away from him. Avoiding him. (41)

It is to punish her mother that Saru goes to that pond area to hide herself. Dhruva follows her and the fatal accident happens. So, it is mainly Saru’s mother in her childhood who plays the role behind the formation of her psychology and the events that happened in her childhood led her to her present position. She is always haunted by the nightmare of Dhruva’s death of which she has been held guilty by her mother ever since her childhood. Her father’s silence is also, to some extent, responsible for that.

II

The atmosphere of her parents’ house, “its rigidly regulated way of living” (113), her consciousness regarding leading her life unconsciously “by her mother’s standards” (113), her feeling of being unwanted and unloved and specially the last battle against her mother compel her to take the decision to run away from her parental house to marry Manu who was waiting for Saru with a heart that is full of love which Saru was denied so far. This section deals with Saru’s world outside her parents’ house which has contributed to her intellectual growth. This section mainly brings to surface Saru’s relation with her husband Manohar who has gradually made Sarita’s life a hell.

Manu was a postgraduate student when Saru entered college for her higher secondary studies in science. He was “one of the Known Names” (58) inside the college. He was a good student, the secretary of the Literary Association, active member of the Debating Union, “soul of Dramatic Society” (58), “a budding writer and a poet of promise, with some poems already published in magazines” (58). When Saru sees Manu for the first time, she becomes just overwhelmed by his sight. His image gets imprinted on her mind. She describes,

Straight dark thick eyebrows. A firm chin. Full lips, almost as full as a woman’s. And that mannerism of his, of pushing the hair back from his forehead with one hand, showing off his slender, long fingers. Yes, they stayed with me,... (59)

During the rehearsal of a play directed by Manu on the occasion of the College Day, Saru meets him. Though she was there to watch the rehearsal, she was busy observing Manu. She says,

Once again, the others [other persons in the rehearsal room] were... are... faceless, nameless non-

entities to me. He was the only person I saw. His effortless control over the others, his anger at their mistakes, his smiles that came and went in a flash... these were the things I memorised this time. (61-62)

Saru's adolescent dream was to be "adored and chosen by a superior, superhuman male" (62) and to her, Manu was the one. But Saru becomes busy with her studies and the probability of a relationship died there though for a short time. When she goes to Bombay for her medical studies, she meets Manu again and this time it goes to another level. They start spending time with one another and, gradually, fall in love. They are in deep love. Saru is in love and she couldn't believe it. She wonders,

. . . how could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without. It was impossible for anyone to want me, love me, need me. (77)

Saru opens herself up fully to Manu's love. She loved him wholeheartedly and got back the same. Though they were in deep love, Saru's middle-class morality didn't allow her to go beyond a kiss. She would wait for her marriage. Then, all of a sudden, the marriage proposal comes from Manu and Saru leaves her paternal home in search of a new home that is full of love. In "a fever of excitement" (43) she comes away from her parents' home to get married. Manu manages a one-room home and they start their married life there. As a medical student, Saru knew "all there is to know of male and female and what goes on between them" but when she got married it was a different and wonderful experience for her. Saru expresses,

. . . there was never any withholding in me. I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. All the clichés, I discovered, were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved, was an intense joy. (46-47)

She was "insatiable, not for sex, but *for love*" (47, emphasis mine). The one-room house with staircase stained by *paan*, toilets having a bad smell, corridors smelling urine, neighbours' rooms with their damp odours, "women with inquisitive, unfriendly eyes, men with lascivious stares" (47) becomes a heaven for Saru. They were happy. She was happy.

This happiness does not last long for Saru. Soon she descends from her romantic world to the real world. Saru discovers that Manu is no longer the Shelley and she is not her Harriet. Manu's talent, ambition, and prospect have reached nowhere. All of his ventures, his writing, journalism, the amateur theatre, have failed. The reality is, now he is a lecturer in "a third rate college" (181). It becomes very tough for Saru to maintain her family with Manu's salary and she is not earning yet. Saru couldn't accept the reality she was facing. She mentions,

I had begun to wonder at his acceptance of our shabby way of living. For me, things now began to hurt... a frayed sari I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable. (109)

There grows a gradual dislike for Manu in Saru. She doesn't want to go on living a life like this. She wants to fulfil her "middle class dream" (109), that is, "a house of her own" (109). She knows for sure that Manu will not be able to turn her dream into reality. She will have to play the role. She will have to go for specialisation. And to get her plans

executed, she uses Boozie. Boozie is Saru's teacher in the medical college. He is an attractive personality especially among girls. In Saru's words,

He was perilously close to a women's-magazine hero... dark, rugged, handsome and masterful. Everything about him... his language, his accent, his stride, his pipe, his swift progress through the wards, his banter with his patients, the caustic humour with which he flayed his staff and students, the masculine perfume that hung in the air around in with him, his very cloths he wore, and has that of slightly greying hair contributed to the aura that surrounded him. (104)

Saru goes on saying that, "He looked as if he had been born to all things that surrounded him when I saw him. The best of everything. Yes, girls too" (104). He is very skilled in his work. In a nutshell, he is a perfect man to Saru. Manu had the similar qualities when he was in his college and Saru got attracted then to Manu. The only difference between Manu and Boozie now is in their economic and social status. Manu lacks the capability of fulfilling Saru's middle-class dream. To become economically solvent, she turns to Boozie. If she can please Boozie, things will get easier for her and she pleases him. She pleases him and gets her expected results. She accepts,

Within a few months he gave me work in a research scheme that brought in some badly needed extra money every month... A year later I was his Registrar. In less than two years I passed my M.D. Four years later I was an Assistant Honorary at a suburban hospital. With a consulting room of my own in the midst of other well known busy consultants. (109-110)

She knows that Manu doesn't like it. He sulks but says nothing. He remains silent for seven long years regarding Saru's relationship with Boozie. When he comes to know from Saru that Boozie has given the money to set her consulting room, he doesn't ask the question, "why?"(110). He never asks anything. Even when, Boozie flirts with her wife in front of everyone in his presence, he ignores it. Perhaps he knows his inability of providing a comfortable life to his family members. Perhaps he has accepted the truth that it is not possible without Boozie. Manu ignores the relation between Saru and Boozie and Saru has also ignored Manu. Saru knew what she was doing. She doesn't try to find any fault with Boozie. She says, if "he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back or hugged me... that was just his mannerism and meant nothing" (108). She has used Boozie and Boozie has used her and that is that. She accepts, "I've got the money. Boozie is giving it to me. And he had, a little later, tried to possess me and failed. And I had turned my back on him." (110). After getting things done she turns her back not only on Boozie but also on Manu. Now they are of no use to her. She got what she wanted. She got love from Manu and, now, money from Boozie. Though Boozie had economic power, he was sexually impotent. Saru doesn't reveal it to Manu and Manu doesn't ask anything. There is only growing silence between them.

Things between Manu and Saru become more complex when Saru's fame as a doctor starts spreading. She starts earning more than Manu also. Because of Saru's newly got fame and economic power, Manu was gradually going away from the centre to the peripheral position in the family and this makes things difficult for him. He didn't question Saru about her activities but inwardly he was hurt. He couldn't accept his present status as a lecturer in a college. He couldn't turn his dreams into reality. Even he has failed to play the role of husband, to earn enough to run the family well. All these failures have made him suffer inwardly and he had nothing to say. Because he had no answer to the questions of life, he remained silent. He had nothing to say. He had nothing to say when Saru was in an open relation with Boozie. He

consciously ignored it but psychologically he couldn't accept it. His manhood was hurt. He was losing his identity as the master, the man of the family and it was tough for him to accept but he remained silent. His behaviour was changing gradually but Saru didn't notice it initially. When neighbours came regularly to their house looking not for him but for the "lady doctor" (48) Saru, Manu feels unimportant and ignored. The roles get reversed. So far, "He had been the young man and I [Saru] his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (49). All these suppressed sufferings of him needed an outlet and he finds a way. In his unconscious mind, he wanted to assert his authority over Saru and he starts doing it by trying to get control over Saru's body. Saru mentions Manu's different attitude to her after knowing that Boozie is going to give the money to Saru. She says,

And he began what was then for them a peculiar kind of lovemaking, with something in it that set it apart from all their other times together. It was not just that he was more intense, with nibbling little kisses interspersed with long devouring ones so that she could hardly breathe. It was the feeling that he was whipping himself on, trying to arouse himself to some pitch of excitement that remained beyond him. (101)

But Manu fails here in his attempt also. Saru mentions, "For the first time in their years together, he couldn't go on. At last he gave up and fell back in his place" (101). Nevertheless, it was, so far, a normal husband-wife relationship to Saru. She doesn't find anything serious to be concerned of regarding Manu's behaviour. She comes to realise about Manu's present mental condition clearly when a girl comes to interview her. After knowing about Manu's profession, the interviewer asks Manu a question which changes everything. It brings the subject into open which was so far only understood but not uttered. It hits the thing on its head. The question was, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (238). On being asked a direct question like that, Manu couldn't hold him up anymore. Though he laughed when the question was asked, he attacked Saru at night. Saru recalls,

He attacked me *like an animal* at night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this... this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body. (238, emphasis mine)

She goes on adding that,

I could do nothing against him. I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry; I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure. (239)

Saru is raped. She is raped by her own husband. Saru couldn't believe whether it was a dream or reality. When she finds marks of the attack on her, she couldn't but believe it. The same thing happens when they are on their first holiday tour after marriage to Ooty, Bangalore and Mysore. One of their neighbours' wives said to her own husband, on knowing that Saru's family is going on a holiday, he could also afford a holiday like this if he married a doctor. Manu listened but remained silent. And it happened again for the second time and "*again and again and again and yet again*" (239, emphasis mine). She couldn't even ask Manu the reason for it because he was normal in his behaviour with Saru as if nothing happened. In the next morning, Manu would say with a smiling face, "Morning, Saru. Slept well?" (133). She couldn't understand the divided Manu— "the violent stranger of the night" (118) and "the rather pathetic Manu of other times" (114). Saru becomes so much scared of this two-in-one Manu. She doesn't ask Manu for the reason of it because she is not sure whether her known Manu-of-the-day is conscious of the presence of Manu-of-the-night in him or not and she remains silent by putting "another brick on the wall of silence" (114) between them and, at the same time, fears that one day she

“will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death” (114). Saru now becomes afraid of Manu’s presence near her. She says,

We were in the bedroom, he on the bed, I on the stool in front of the dressing table, plaiting my hair. He spoke to my reflection and my reflection answered his. This way it was easy. Safer. (31)

She is no more enjoying her so far colourful married life and successful professional career. Her profession seems to her the cause of this disease. To find a cure to the disease, she even decides to quit her work though Manu doesn’t allow it because he knows well that without her earnings it is not possible to maintain their lifestyle. She even thinks of divorcing Manu to get rid of this unbearable torturous situation. Once she starts “to sob” (135) and the sobbing was beyond her control. Though each day she tries to keep her busy with her daily work so that, at least, she can feel her existence but each day she thinks, she “can’t go on” (27). She realises saying, “I can’t, I won’t endure this any more. I’d rather die. I can’t go on.” (117). She often thinks, “If only I could get away. Get out.” (117). She needs an escape but she has no place to go; no one to share her sorrow with. She feels being trapped. Being unable to find a way out, Saru decides to visit her father when she hears the news of her mother’s death.

III

Though it seems initially that Sarita’s return to her father’s house after long fifteen years is to visit her father after her mother’s death but it is not. She comes here to find herself. She comes here as a refugee who is looking for a shelter. She needs an escape from her husband, from the trap, from the unbearable everyday torturous routine she is in. She wants a way out from the present tumultuous condition of her life but she has no one to help her out except Baba. That is why she is here. She is here to “have him [Baba] declare himself on her side as he had once done” (236). He is her last hope. She wants to say to him, “Baba, I’m unhappy. Help me, Baba, I’m in trouble. Tell me what to do” (51).

On her stay at her father’s house, Saru gets a kind of recess to meditate on her so far lived life. Her present distance from everything is giving her a chance to look at things in a more “reasonable and rational” (117) way. Now she can try to “find out why what happened to their marriage had happened” (117). The man who comforted her once from her nightmares, from her “mother’s anger and hatred and the burden of being rejected” (117), and who was like a “movie star” (63) to her, now, has turned into such a nightmare himself to Saru that she does not want him anymore. She wants to go away from his touch. Now, at her father’s house, the nights are soothing and Saru “could go to bed without fear and wake up, not fragmented and torn, but whole” (97). Now she enjoys being a normal person and not that “two-in-one woman who, in the day-time wore a white coat and an air of confidence and knowing, and at night became a *terrified, trapped animal*” (158, emphasis mine). At present, her father’s house has become “a fortress” (86) to her.

It is not that Saru didn’t try herself to solve her problem before coming to her father’s place. She tried every possible way to seek comfort from the tumultuous condition of her life. She was ready to do anything to get peace, to get out of the situation she was in. She went to Boozie to look for comfort but failed. She met Padmakar Rao thinking “it would give me [Saru] an escape route, something that would lead me out of my loveless trap” (157) but failed there too. She wanted love but Rao wanted sex and for Saru “sex was now a dirty word” (157). Saru even tried religion. She had “feverishly clutched the thought of god to herself. She had gone in for *pujas*, fasts, rituals and mumbled prayers. But there was no comfort in it at all” (51). She became so helpless that she wanted to get help from god though she didn’t really have

any faith in religion. She even thought of committing suicide to get rid of this situation but couldn't do it because of her thought that people would then label her "a coward" (258). When she turns to her Baba, he also has nothing to comfort her. She wanted to be pitied, to be sympathized but there was none.

Being psychologically very weak she becomes absent-minded very often. Unconsciously she keeps drawing circle after circle in papers as if she is trying to solve the equation of her life but each time she fails. When she hears from her father that her mother died in peace, she couldn't simply believe it. She wanted to prove her mother wrong but she couldn't. Her mother hated Saru all through her life and died also hating her. There was no forgiveness for Saru. Her mother hated her so much that she hated every doctor and during her illness, when Mai-kaki suggests her to go to Saru, she declares, "I have no daughter" (130). She cursed Saru when Professor Kulkarni went to meet her after Saru's marriage saying, "I will pray to god for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me" (233) and her curse comes true and Saru is now "Unhappy. Destroyed." (234) while her mother died peacefully. She now holds her mother responsible for her marriage to Manu. She thinks, "If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him" (114). Even Saru holds Professor Kulkarni and Baba, to some extent, responsible for her marriage to Manu. But this, accusing others, doesn't help her to get peace, to get a solution to the problems. After a deep contemplation on things she finds that it is she who is to blame; who is responsible for her present condition; who is responsible for everything. Now she has understood that Manu was frustrated with his life and, because of this, he hates himself. He tortures Saru out of that frustration. Saru's analysis is, "What he does to me, he does it not so much because he hates me, but because he hates himself" (116-117) and she holds herself liable for letting Manu torture her. She says, "I hate myself more for letting him do it to me than I hate him for doing it to me" (117). She takes all the responsibilities behind the calamities happened in the novel on her shoulder. She admits to her father,

My brother died *I heedlessly turned my back* on him. My mother died because *I deserted her*. My husband is a failure because *I destroyed his manhood*. (258, emphasis mine)

In this novel, a kind of reversed domination system is observed. The main male characters are shown dominated by the chief female characters but the result of it becomes "lethal" (100). It leaves the male characters in terror. They couldn't accept it and suffer and because of their suffering, they make the females suffer and this suffering is acuter. Dhruva has been "dominated by two females" (100), Saru and her mother, "making him a creature full of terrors" (100). Baba has been dominated by his wife and because of this he remained in the shadow having no strength at all to take any decision and it did a great hamper for Saru's life. Then, there is Manu. Saru dominated him. Once she thought, "I [Saru] will never dominate. I will never make my husband nothing as she [her mother] did." (101) but "it had happened to them" (101). He couldn't accept this reality; this reversal of the role of the age-old tradition and made Saru's life hell. After brooding over the reality of the patriarchal domination system, Saru realises that man and woman cannot be treated equally. She says,

$A+b$ they told us in mathematics is equal. But here $a+b$ was not, definitely not, equal to $b+a$. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. (49)

And then, Deshpande, through Saru, brings forth and presents the naked reality of the patriarchal society in plain and simple words which was so far understood but not uttered. Deshpande unfolds the formula to get happiness in married life for Indian women, no matter how modern, educated, self-conscious and economically independent a woman is, and

presents through Saru saying,

. . . whatever you do, you won't be happy, not really, until you get married and have children. That's what they tell us. And we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. But if you want to be happily married, there's one thing you have to remember. Have you girls seen an old-fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important, very important, because 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's five foot four, you shouldn't be more than five three. If he's earning Rs 500, you should never earn more than Rs 499. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher relationship. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn't worth it. He'll suffer, you'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, god help you, both of you. (161-162)

Saru realises also that though she is educated, economically independent and a member of the modern civilization with all the amenities of life but there is no difference between her and her tradition-bound mother. Both are same at the end of the day. They are incomplete in a way and dominated by the patriarchal society. She identifies herself with her mother when she comes to know about Virginia Woolf's famous phrase "room of her own" (160). She says,

. . . my mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in this dingy room to comb her hair and apply her *kumkum*^{xiii}, she slept in her bed like an overnight guest in a strange place. And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing, a room of our own. (160)

It is because of the patriarchal authority that Smita, Saru's college friend, has to accept a new name, Geetanjali, for her chosen by her husband just after her marriage. Smita says, "... he hates anyone calling me Smita now. He gets very annoyed if anyone does that" (140). Then, Vidya, Manu's friend who was very passionate about acting when she was in college, has to give up acting after her marriage because Ashwin, her husband, "doesn't like the idea of my [Vidya's] going on the stage. His family disapproves too" (185). This is the reality presented by Deshpande in her novel. The number of girls getting educated is increasing day by day. They are becoming conscious about their rights and roles. They are getting ready for a new tomorrow, for a new dream where they will get equal treatment and where they will be valued according to their contribution, both economically and intellectually. But the reality is, at the end, they are compelled to surrender to the patriarchal design which is present here in India for centuries and nobody knows for how long it will continue; for how long women like Saru, Smita, Nalu, Vidya have to surrender or to go on suffering.

Saru is now totally hopeless about getting any solution to her crisis. She feels deserted by her mother, her father, her husband and everyone. She is all alone now. Sometimes she cannot but think that "If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them [her mother and father] to arrange my life" (259), perhaps she would not be alone like this. At least she could get the sympathy of them but there is no chance to get it now. She feels a kind of guilt in her for ruining her life and the lives of others. She is now suffering from the guilt of the wrongs she thinks she has done to her mother, her

brother and to her husband. In the last chapter of the last part of the novel, when she comes to know that Manu is coming to meet her, she becomes scared not because what Manu has done to her but what she has done to him. She doesn't want to meet him. She wants to run away to avoid meeting Manu. Her father plays an important role here by telling her not to turn her back on things again like she did when Dhruva died. He wants her to face the situation, to face life, to face Manu, to meet him, to talk to him but she is not ready to do that because she is so terrified within herself. She is terrified of many things but she is alone "in the dark like Dhruva and her mother who had died alone in the middle of the night" (260). She is terrified of the nightmare of her brother's death which comes to her almost every night because of her guilt that she is responsible for the accident. She always keeps thinking,

If only I hadn't gone there that day...

If only he hadn't come with me...

If only I hadn't left him alone... (217)

She doesn't find peace in her mind because her mother has died without forgiving her and she has died alone because Saru has deserted her. She holds herself responsible for Manu's failure. When Saru tells her father about the nightmare, in which Dhruva accuses her of his death, she goes through every night, her father tries to soothe her by saying, "Sometimes I used to think you took your mother seriously and blamed yourself for Dhruva's death. You know she was not herself when she said that. She was... hysterical" (214) and "Can't you let the dead go?" (258). He goes on saying, "I told you... they're dead. They can do nothing. Why do you torture yourself with others? Are you not enough for yourself? It's your life, isn't it?" (258). Yes, it's her own life and in her life she is alone. She craves for sympathy but fails to get it. She expresses her so far unuttered words towards her father crying,

. . . both of you found me guilty without really knowing what had happened. Did you ask me once, just once... What happened, Saru? Did you say just once... Don't think of it. It wasn't your fault. Don't blame yourself. (215-216).

It's her life. So what about Manu? Her father requests her to face Manu, who is coming to meet her, saying, "Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong. Tell him all that you told me"(256) and he goes on to add that, "Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at him" (257) and then the decision is "up to you [Saru]" (257). But she is not still convinced. She requests her father, who has said his last words to her, saying, "Don't open the door when he comes" (259).

Now Saru's last resort, her father, has also left her alone. She feels "cornered" (260) and "There was nothing and nobody left" (260). This is what "she had always dreaded" (260)— utter loneliness. But then a kind of understanding comes to her that everyone in this world is alone. Everyone comes to this world alone and goes out of it alone and perhaps "the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone" (260) and that means, to Saru, "she had to relinquish all hope forever" (260). Then Saru gets overcome by a feeling that everything is unreal and nothing matters and this feeling becomes very comforting to her. She comes to realise that the only reality or the only thing that matters is "*to go on*" (261, emphasis mine). This knowledge brings a consolation for her. She accepts the newly found truth of life. She says,

All right, 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. (261)

Saru comes to realise her potentials and accepts her past as part of her life. She embraces the “guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... all persons spiked with guilt” (261). She admits that “she was all of them” (261) and so accepts these parts of her “to become whole again” (261) and also comes to realise that she is much more than that having other parts, other possibilities, other dimensions, other potentialities which are yet to be explored. Now she can analyse and explore herself in a lot more ways. She has realised that she is responsible for her present suffering. She says, “If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated, because I have been afraid of proving my mother right” (262). Now she knows that her mother is dead and she is dead for real and she, her mother, has now nothing to do with her life. So far she, not others, has been her own enemy. When Saru comes to realise this truth, she becomes self-assured as if she has found herself. Now she knows her real self. She is aware of her weaknesses and strengths and is hopeful about her potentialities. As she now gets assured of her existence, she is ready to face life as it is. She is not afraid anymore. She knows now about who she was, who she is and who she can be. She is now ready to face Manu, to face reality. She tells her father, “... Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait” (263). After delving deep into her inner world, Saru comes to know that there is no terror or darkness inside rather it comes from outside and she also realises that, according to B.K. Roy, “the parental home cannot be a refuge. She understands that neither her father nor her husband Manohar can be her refuge. She is her own refuge. She has to overcome herself; she has to kill the ghosts that haunt her; she has to find her way to salvation”^{xiv}. In this way, the terror, the fear, the darkness in Saru get vanished and instead of darkness, there is light. After reading this novel the readers get a message that, “the fear of losing oneself in the dark labyrinthine passages of this mysterious world is dispelled, if a woman understands that she will have no refuge in any relationship unless she believes in her own self and accepts the responsibilities of her own life”^{xv}. Sarita goes through this journey all alone and discovers herself. But she does not, like Nora of *A Doll's House*, walk out of her married life also. Deshpande here presents a new kind of solution where a kind of compromise is noticed by the narrative. There is a possibility of Saru's going back to her children but no matter what happens, Saru will from now on do everything keeping her individuality intact. She will not remain silent anymore. She will be heard. K R S Iyengar analyses Saru in this way, “She strips herself of her self-deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive elusions, and Shashi Deshpande's language itself flickers like a candle, and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children, or the seek needing her expert attention; and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self-confidence”^{xvi}. With this newly got confidence through the process of self-exploration, she discovers a new Saru within her who is a self-assured and confident individual.

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- ix. Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (New York: Europa Editions, 2009), 53. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition and indicated in the paper only by respective page numbers within brackets. The novel was first published in 1980 by Penguin Books, India.
- x. A Hindu religious ceremony performed with lighted oil lamps.

- xi. In orthodox Hindu households, women are regarded as untouchable and segregated during their periods (explanatory note provided by the author, p. 266).
- xii. Now Mumbai
- xiii. A red powder with which Hindu women dot their foreheads (explanatory note provided by the author, p. 265).
- xiv. Binod Kumar Roy, *The Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Study*, (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2015), 43.
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- xvi. K R Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), 75

