CHAPTER II

Search for Refuge: The Dark Holds No Terrors

All authors, like most parents, have their favorite children; but unlike parents, authors can, without any compunction, declare their partiality. The Dark Holds No Terrors is, of all my novels, the one dearest to me. Perhaps this is because it is the one that came closest to the vision I had of it when I conceived it. (Deshpande, “Note from the author” The Dark Holds No Terrors 6).

As per Shashi Deshpande’s honest confession in many interviews and the above note by her at the beginning of The Dark Holds No Terrors, the novel is dearest to her. Undoubtedly, the statement by the author can serve as an appetizer to the main course, as it prompts and motivates the prospective reader to make a curious and amazing reading of this novel. Nonetheless, the amazement is certainly compounded when one makes a voyage into The Dark Holds No Terrors, reading text as well as reading between the lines. Reading between the lines makes one realize that the novel is not just another addition to the growing corpus of problematic relationships; but it is certainly a masterpiece of Deshpande which reveals her deep commitment to the nurturance and sustenance of positive relationships. In fact, the novel seems to emerge from Deshpande’s own experiences as a daughter, a wife and a mother and above all as a woman- a fact which makes it the most realistic and the most lovable of her all works.

Against the background of major psychological issues and to some extent social issues; the novel pictures the marital relationship between Saru and Manu, as a relationship of silence and loneliness. There is a plethora of relationships like a relationship of silence between the father and the daughter (Saru and her father), the most negative relationship one could ever come across between the mother and the daughter (Saru and her mother), a relationship of inevitable psychological conflict between the husband and the wife (Saru and Manohar), fleeting relationship of use
and throw between the other man and the married woman (Saru and Boozie) and sibling relationship of jealousy (Saru and her brother). Shashi Deshpande shows marvelous dexterity in juxtaposing the personal world of Saru and Manu with a variety of all these relationships.

Many Indian novelists have dealt with intricacies of human relationships, but their treatment of this theme is often peripheral. However, Shashi Deshpande probes deeper and deeper into the minds of her characters and scoops out incredible debris of positive and negative emotions, thereby making on every page of her novels resonant noises of relationships. The rubble of deep-buried emotions in the minds of the central characters Saru and Manu is on account of Saru’s peculiar and unhappy childhood experiences which subsequently become instruments for building a stifling silence between the two. There is no glorification of the traditional virtues of a woman or a denunciation of the exploitation by her partner. Emphasis is more on the delineation of mental landscape of the protagonist and her husband Manohar, and less on the sociological factors responsible for their traumatic married life. Premila Paul, in her article “The Dark Holds No Terrors: A Woman’s Search for Refuge,” says in this connection:

Shashi Deshpande does not betray any inclination or ulterior motive to sell India abroad by liberal doses of oriental mysticism or sociological data. For her, the psychological milieu of the individual is quite an empirical canvas to work on. The novel is a fascinating study of male psychology by a woman, which in turn becomes an exposition of the female psyche too (Dhawan, Indian Women Novelists 61).

The Dark Holds No Terrors like the other works of Shashi Deshpande, reveals the author’s fetish for psychological probing into the subconscious and even the unconscious mind of her female protagonists. The novel, like the other novels of Deshpande, explicitly portrays the intricacies of marital relationships. In the context of relationships, some sort of thematic parallelism can be established between Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai, as in the works of both the authors there is a resistance to
cater to the literary needs of Western readers and an inclination to explore the psyche of the protagonists belonging to a select section of Indian society. Whereas Anita Desai talks of the pain, trauma and loneliness in relationships, relational aspect in Shashi Deshpande is more convincing, authentic and positive. To quote Anita Desai, "All human relationships are inadequate...Basically everyone is solitary. I think involvement in human relationship in this world invariably leads to disaster" (Desai as qtd. in Jain, Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai 11-12). In The Dark Holds No Terrors, the author is actually interested in nurturing relationships and in every small detail which eventually causes them to fall apart. In fact, the novel can be called appropriately ‘a relationship novel,’ which is a very appropriate way of defining it. The delineation of all kinds of relationships involves no reference to Western feminism or any other kind of theory. Rather Deshpande believes that every relationship is unique and the individuals involved in any relationship have to find solutions to any problems deep within. The famous psychologist Carl Jung’s quote is very pertinent in this connection, “The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases” (Jung, as qtd. in “Quotable Quotes” The Times Of India 7).

One of the major generalizations that emerge from this research is that the quality and intensity of an individual’s relationship with others is a relative term and there’s no theory which can actually teach anyone how to grapple with the problematical relationships. The novel also underlies a valuable message that individuals are more satisfied with their lives when they are needed by others and their well-being is closely related to their satisfying relationships with others. The Dark Holds No Terrors simply focuses on projecting the traumatic relationships of Saru with her parents which subsequently become one of the reasons for her dissatisfaction with her husband.

As in Shashi Deshpande’s other novels, The Dark Holds No Terrors too, has flat men characters like Manohar and Saru’s father. Men are rarely seen verbalizing their pains and sorrows and it is only through the lens of Saru and her cinematic vision that we get glimpses of Manohar’s complex but pitiable nature. The novel is
not just a saga of Sara’s sufferings at the hands of her sadistic husband; it is also an untold story of Manohar who suffers mental cruelty at the hands of his doctor wife. It is a story of the inflated ego of a career woman Sara, who subconsciously or unconsciously kills the self-esteem of her husband Manohar, consequently making him seek revenge from her at night through sexual sadism. Stretching far and wide and basking in the glory of her economic independence during day time; Sara becomes “a terrified animal” in the darkness of every night. That is the crux of the novel around which the whole plot spins.

Marital clashes resulting from the awareness by the women of their rights and their economic independence is not a new or unique theme in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In fact there have been a lot of feminist studies related to this theme. Marital balance is lopsided when a wife has to perform the double roles of managing the house as well as the job. Deshpande successfully captures how Indian marriages disintegrate due to the success of women in their profession. Sara’s married life was going on smooth till she became a famous doctor. But the imbalance came when people ignored her husband and welcomed her. Sara realizes, “He had been the young man and I his Bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (37). The author captures the picture of a middle-class woman striving to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity. Through the character of Sara, she highlights the predicament of the modern woman who wants to fulfill her dreams of a career but is tired of patriarchal norms which still acknowledge very reluctantly the concept of a woman earning bread and butter. This is what exactly makes Sara a rebel against traditions and finally cry out in anguish, “Manu, I want to stop working, I want to give it all up… my practice, the hospital, everything” (72). Sarabjit Sandhu, in her book *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, analyses this conflict between tradition and modernity very well. Sandhu says:

The position of woman, that is underscored by the author, appears to be a blend of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; and above all revolt and compromise. All these characteristics are inextricably blended in Sara who represents a
section of society which can be termed as middle class in the modern industrial social structure (25).

The aim of this research is not to just establish the prevalence of painful relationships or to be contented with the above-mentioned reason for the so; but to move more toward an attempt to uncover the other reasons behind this pain and anguish occurring in the first place. Control in relationships which is a significant issue behind all kind of painful relationships is not exclusively a domain of the male. Women appear to be just as prone to control as men, which may be due to the increasing independence of women, or due to women taking a more active role within the relationships. A scrutiny of the writings of many Indian writers in English by Meena Shirwadkar reveals that this change in expectations and thinking of women though dealt with by many critics; has not been explored in depth. Meena Shirwadkar seems to have analyzed the works of Indian writers in English very well when she says in this context, “Writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family” (Shirwadkar as qtd. in Sandhu, The Novels of Shashi Deshpande 15-16). But Deshpande’s novels, predominantly The Dark Holds No Terrors, focus on this theme of control in a very detailed manner. She needs to be credited for ending her novels on a positive note of educated women striving hard to make adjustments with the traditional world. Her women are no longer content to remain silent partners and Saru, too, has such a need. Exactly how this control affects the psyche of Manu needs to be explored further. Saru and Manu’s relationship is more a relationship of controlling each other than complementing each other. One possible explanation of the causes of Manohar’s sexual sadism is a control motive in his personality. This control is directed toward his partner Saru, in an attempt to shield his own inferiority complex. Their relationship becomes a vehicle for Manu through which his needs for control and affection can be met. Manu’s failure in fulfilling his interpersonal needs leads to anxiety and manifestation in the form of brutality and aggression at night. Frustration makes Manu react with his strange behavior on the bed. Instead of finding ways to confront reality, he tries to ignore Saru’s existence during day and focuses only on satisfying his loss of self-esteem in an extreme manner by engaging in rough
and hurting acts in the darkness of nights. There is an astonishing dichotomy between
his under-striving during the day and over-striving at night which gradually corrodes
their relationship. He wishes to avoid interaction with Saru, thus avoiding any
possible rejection by her, whereas actually, there is a strong craving in his heart, a
craving to be loved, cared and pampered.

Maslow, as contended in the first chapter of this study was interested in the
‘self.’ At another level, it is interesting to approach the relationships between Saru
and Manu with regard to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Throughout the novel, Manu
stands at the second level in Maslow’s pyramid. The root cause of his all sorts of
frustration is that his need for safety is not fulfilled in his marital relationships. Saru
earning more than Manu is the major cause of his disappointment or insecurity.
According to Maslow, it is difficult for an individual to bypass the need for safety and
climb to the third level of needs for love and belongingness which entail the needs for
friendship, family and sexual intimacy. Failure to meet his needs for love and
belongingness, consequently leads to failure in meeting the needs for self-esteem and
self-actualization which figure at the fourth and fifth level in Maslow’s pyramid.
Through the character of Manu, Deshpande contends the necessity of accomplishment
of safety needs for every individual.

Examining the interpersonal relationship between Saru and Manohar on a
large scale; it is not inconceivable to see the various dynamics behind their frustration.
Various multilayered issues contribute to the agony of this couple and the author
reveals all the issues in a stream of consciousness technique; thereby overlapping and
going back and forth from one relationship to another, ultimately concluding that no
relationship can be viewed in isolation. Though the novel is divided into six chapters
but there are no neat thematic divisions and Saru’s relationships with her parents, her
husband, short-lived relationship with the other man Boozie and most importantly her
relationship with her own self, are not dealt with in separate sections. Through the
psychic malaise of the protagonist, the author makes an attempt at giving a very
valuable point that human happiness is not a by-product of one relationship; rather it
is through a variety of interpersonal relationships that an individual gains meaning, self-esteem, harmony and positive identity.

The most important dynamic affecting the interpersonal relationship between Saru and her husband Manu is their relationships with their respective parents in their childhood. While Manu had a very deprived kind of childhood with a father who rarely bothered to fulfill the needs of his children and did nothing to help them grow into secure and stable individuals; the seeds of marital disharmony were also sown deep during the strangely insecure and unusual childhood of Saru. It has been well-established in psychological studies that insecure relationships in childhood are a likely precursor to unhealthy marital relationships and this fact has been validated by the psychologists Lehner and Kube in their book *Dynamics of Personal Adjustment*. They state:

All psychologically oriented clinicians more or less agree that a clash between the individual and his social environment, as first embodied in the parent-child relationship, may be instrumental in preparing the ground for later psychotic reactions. The defense mechanisms evolved in the various forms of psychoses may be different, but their origin can often be traced to early childhood and to the consequence of parental rejection of one kind or another. The child who is rejected, feels inferior, insecure, and is unable to get along well with other people. His emotional starvation is a serious psychological handicap that may lead to exaggerated maladjusted behavior (181).

Lehner and Kube point out that if an individual remains insecure in his early years due to lack of love, warmth and proper upbringing; it is likely that this pattern will continue or rather magnify in his adult life affecting even his marital life, as he or she may not know how to give and receive unconditional love in intimate relationships. This is the key-theme of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and one of the most poignant concerns of the author.
The novel begins with Saru standing at the threshold of her parents’ house after fifteen years of her marriage and still indecisive of entering it or not. A girl’s visit to her parents after such a long is quite unusual and one senses some kind of abnormality in their relationship right on the first page of the novel; the layers of which are unfolded slowly and slowly. Saru’s relations with her parents are interspersed with the relationships with her husband in the narrative and the events swing to and fro. Juggling these two diametrically opposite interpersonal themes is not easy, but Shashi Deshpande balances the two with her matter-of-fact attitude and language. Saru had proclaimed that she would never visit her parents’ home; but this visit has some peculiar and odd reasons. Though the apparent reason is the death of her mother and sharing the grief of her father; but actually she is unable to lead a ‘terrified and trapped life’ with her sexually sadist husband. Like the protagonists of other novels of Shashi Deshpande, Saru too stays in her father’s house and gets a chance to review her relationship with her father and her dead mother. This painful retrospection ultimately leads to catharsis and a better understanding of her self. Therefore the novel can be called “a story of introspection”. The rest of the novel is about her mother’s biased attitude towards Saru, sibling rivalry between Saru and her brother, a brief confession to her father about her trauma and her courage to confront reality.

The Dark Holds No Terrors exhibits the traumatic experiences of a girl child who suffered unusual treatment at the hands of her mother. There is a strange kind of gender-bias in the upbringing of Saru and that of her brother by their mother. This gender-bias between a male child and a female child is not very uncommon in Indian society, but a mother asking her daughter justification for all her simple activities and even refusing to acknowledge her as her daughter is certainly unusual. The strange mother-daughter relationship is a significant component in the understanding of this novel. This mother always gave a secondary status to her daughter and showered all the love on her son. She blamed and cursed her daughter after the drowning tragedy of Saru’s brother. Throughout her life, Saru is traumatized by the hysterical outbursts of her mother: “You did it, you did this, you killed him... you killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (62). These words haunt poor Saru day and night, for days, months, years and all her life and Saru relates the unhappiness in
her marriage to the curses of her mother. The relentless mother refuses to see her daughter till her death and says “What daughter? I have no daughter” (109).

The complex and negative relationship between the mother and the daughter is woven into the subtle and intricate pattern of the relationship between Saru and Manu. An equation generally presumed to be a very loving, warm and close relationship with one’s mother, considering her daughter a reflection of her, takes on a negative pattern in the novel. Very rarely does this relationship lose its sweetness and the mother becomes jealous of her growing daughter, considering her a rival. But in The Dark Holds No Terrors, this is precisely what happens in the relationship between the protagonist and her mother. Conditioned to live the traditional life of a woman; a mother may treat her daughter with vengeance to make her an object of her persecution. Whereas a son is considered a propagator of the family-lineage and therefore pampered unduly for his whims and fancies; the girl child is considered an unwanted burden and is saddled with all the training to be tolerant, submissive and unquestioning. With globalization changing the economic structure of Indian society and consequently ushering many changes in the societal roles of both the sexes, the tradition bound life for the she-sex is giving place to a career woman who is well-aware of her rights. Nevertheless, looking at the warmth and the plentitude given to a girl child in urban settings in the changing scenario; the attitude of Saru’s mother towards her daughter seems astonishingly negative and destructive. As a child, the denial of love and care of her parents makes Saru most of the time rebellious and sometime even frustrated, resulting in a bitter attitude towards life at a later stage. Her mother’s emotional outbursts and mood-swings crush the personality of Saru all the more, acting as a strong impediment in the way of her harmonious development. Preferential treatment to her brother Dhruva but neglect towards her by her mother is a strong deterrent in the way of making her a balanced and mature woman at a later stage. Need for love remains an obsessive concern in the life of Saru. Past continues to haunt and trouble her psyche throughout her life; disturbing her present and coming in the way of new relations. There is a painful recollection of her birthdays in her childhood: “always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday and festive lunch in the afternoon and
an arti in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same—but there was no puja”
(168-169).

After the death of Saru’s brother, the atmosphere in the family becomes all the more depressing and perpetually mournful. On her 15th birthday, Saru’s friend Smita gave her a pair of earrings as a gift, but Saru being well aware of her mother’s jealous nature, wears these only secretly when she is away from her. Surprisingly, her mother too, gives her a pair of earrings which fail to arise any excitement or positive feelings in Saru’s mind, “So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear. I don’t want them. I don’t want to eat. I don’t want anything” (171).

As the narrative moves forward, it becomes all the more difficult to analyze the reasons behind the failure of mother-daughter relationship thriving on rivalry and dominance. Saru’s mother always tries to clip her wings and keep Saru under her control suppressing her vivacity and suffusing her with anger, bitterness and contradiction. This mother is less of a mother but more of a rival to Saru; and it becomes incredibly easy to deny her having any soft feelings towards her growing daughter. The need to know about her daughter’s emotional turmoil, the need to stop blaming her for Dhruva’s death, the need to clarify the facts by talking to Saru and the need to provide her a shoulder to cry and give vent to her feelings of guilt; is never realized on the part of the mother. That way the onus of developing Saru into an insecure, vulnerable and bewildered creature lies largely on her mother. Shashi Deshpande is very successful in giving us a pathetic picture of an insecure girl who is always hungry for the love and acceptance of her mother and slowly builds an impenetrable wall of hostility around her. Beneath this thick wall of silence and defiant exterior, she is lonely and craving for love and understanding. It is on account of this unhappy relationship with her mother in childhood that the subsequent relationships in her youth and later on married life is marred. Insecure relations in childhood sap every enjoyment and every success of Saru; and past always casts its shadows on the future. Even though Saru climbs up the professional ladder; her heart always longs to be loved and forgiven by her mother. She secretly yearns for the
curses to be withdrawn and relates her incompatible relations with Manu as the consequences of her mother’s curses which ring in her ears “You won’t be happy with him. I know you won’t” (98).

Yearning for love from every quarter, Saru grows apprehensive about rejection. Even in the initial years of her married life, the fear of rejection looms large in her mind and therefore her relations with Manu never concretize in deep love, emotional bonding or togetherness, “… and still, for long the fear was there; the secret fear that, behind each kiss, lay the enemy, the snake, the monster of rejection. Some time, some day, I thought, the truth will out and I will know I was never loved” (66).

Shashi Deshpande skillfully weaves the two relationships: the relationship between Saru and her mother and the relationship between Saru and her husband Manohar. The two strands twist and the plot reveals Saru’s mental landscape as a network of this mish-mash. Saru’s choice of Manohar as her life partner is more like an act of hurting her mother and signifying her victory than a genuine love for Manohar. It was an assertion of her worth and value as if she is an object which could be loved, which could be desired by anyone. Her whole personality is an intricate web of multiple complexes and after her marriage with Manohar, her problems are all the more compounded. The mother, who demoralizes her daughter through such acrimonious statements, reflects her own failure to strike a harmonious coexistence and also her incapacity to establish positive relations with herself and her daughter.

Saru is obviously a loser on the security or stability of a happy family life. If her mother fails to provide a role model or emotional security to Saru; Saru’s relations with her father are also devoid of any emotional warmth or paternal support. While the children generally enjoy cuddles and hugs from their mother or father, and also expect them to provide a rock-like support to them; Saru witnessed their detachment and non-concern. Saru’s father is a weak personality who appears to be helpless by nature and also in front of his wife. He is a complacent man who fails to provide any security to his daughter; thereby making her an emotional wreck for the whole life. Without any guidance and support from him, Saru is like a boat without oars in the
storm. The only time, he shows some concern and love for Saru is when she wants admission in medical college and her mother as ever comes in her way. This time, her father takes her side and Saru’s admission to medical college and her father’s support is symbolic of Saru’s victory in the battle between the mother and the daughter. The hatred and bitterness cultivated towards her mother for years becomes apparent when she bursts out, “I am not talking to you, I’m not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No, forever “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” (142). Undoubtedly, the absence of any role model in her childhood becomes one of the pertinent causes of Saru’s growth into a disintegrated personality in the subsequent life.

Saru-Manu relationships are apparently complex and unusual. But Deshpande does not evaluate her men and women with the same yardstick. Her attempt to unknot the complexities of their relationship is an extension of her quest to understand the psychology of a male and a female mind. She feels that this inborn difference in their temperament and habits leads to different responses by a male and a female, consequently bringing complexity in man-woman relationships which culminates into their conflicting co-existence. She views her men and women as human beings possessing different social identities. Sociologists and psychologists too, assign different identities to men and women. As John Gray writes in his bestseller’s Introduction, “Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different language and needing different nourishment (Gray, Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus 4).

Human Psychology and Sociology cannot be studied in isolation from each other as it is imperative to study an individual in society as well as when he is alone. No individual can operate in isolation. His behavior, attitudes and his bonding with others cannot be analyzed without taking into account the society of which he is an inhabitant. A study of the sociological context of Indian society may also provide some insights into the hatred of Saru and her mother. In Indian society, a mother’s
preference for her son to her daughter is not a rarity, as a son is considered a medium
to continue the family lineage and a daughter is to leave the parents’ house ultimately.
Therefore, the sociological perspective also gives some explanation for Manu’s
sadistic behavior. Economic independence of the women is a boon to the women as
well as to the men. But a woman earning more than her husband is a fact that cannot
be accepted easily or appreciated by men till date. Economic independence sometime
makes women egoistic and they tend to ignore or overlook points of contention in the
relationships, doing nothing or little to resolve psychological issues and confrontation.
Saru’s rapid professional growth and inflated ego on the one hand and Manu’s career
graph not showing any progress on the other hand prove to be stumbling blocks in
their relationship. Saru seems to be well aware of the growing rift between the two:

... when we walked out of our room, there were nods and smiles,
murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for
me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored...And
so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But
perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches
shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. But now I was the
lady doctor and he was my husband (42).

At the superficial level, Manu is to be blamed for making Saru’s life a living
hell. But looking at his behavior from the psychoanalytic perspective of Freud; one
has to take a dynamic view of all aspects of his life, conscious and the unconscious,
with special emphasis upon the phenomenon of the unconscious. In the initial few
months of their marriage, Manu has an extraordinary adoration for Saru. But being
unable to accept the fact that his career is static and his wife is a great success; his ego
was wounded and insecurity manifests itself in the form of sexual aggression. It is
only at night that he asserts his male-power by becoming an animal whereas during
day time he behaves like a normal person.

Before passing any judgment on the right or the wrong of Manu’s behavior,
it is better to understand his sadistic behavior not only in terms of visualizing his acts
of brutality, but also in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting the undercurrents of brutality. Manu’s aggression is not an act of physical hurt to Saru; but an unconscious expression of his jealousy and desire to overpower his wife who enjoys better social and financial status. It is his sense of inferiority which makes him an animal at bed and finds an outlet to his unexpressed desires by hurting his wife sexually. Manu’s behavior needs to be analyzed in the context of male-dominance in Indian society. Marriages in India are often used as a license by men to subordinate their wives. An Indian woman is expected to be self-sacrificing, adjusting and taking the responsibility of maintaining and sustaining marital relationships. A career woman juggles all her time to strike a balance between her career and her home. However, if she grows higher than her husband in professional sphere; her marital life is often on rocks. This is what happened to the protagonist Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Saru enjoys her married life in the beginning, and has a feeling of being loved and being wanted:

I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me. And he would... again and again. It was heaven, in spite of the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dank sealed-in odors, women with unfriendly eyes, men with lascivious stares. And we were happy (40).

After becoming a lady doctor, Saru gets more fame and respect in the neighborhood. Rising high on the professional ladder; Saru hurts the ego of her husband many a time unconsciously and some time consciously:

And there came a day when, hearing a knock at the door, Manu said, ‘Open it, Saru, It must be for you.’ I could not see his face, I was washing up the tea things then, but his tone was certainly odd. An affected indifference... yes, now I know that is what was in his tone then. But I did not stop at that time to ponder over his tone. I was too
busy, I was too tired, and I was too exhilarated with the dignity and importance that my status as a doctor seemed to have given me. I was young and callow, and so unused to my profession still, that to have patients come to me gave me a thrill I could scarcely hide” (41-42).

Saru’s mind was always in some kind of euphoria on this new earned fame and recognition and of being useful to others. According to her mother, she was an ugly and good for nothing girl, but the importance of being useful to others elevates her self-esteem to such a high level that in her ignorance or feigned ignorance about the mental state of her husband; she becomes blind to see her crumbling marriage. In retrospect, she realizes that while she achieved a tremendous growth in her personality; she at the same time overlooked the fact that her husband wallowed in self-pity and inferiority complex. She never realizes that healthy mutual relations are characterized by care, warmth and affection; which she has been denying to her husband in the intoxication of her own journey from a non-entity at her mother’s place to a full-fledged entity on becoming a successful doctor. Therefore, in order to understand Manu’s sexually aggressive behavior; there is an acute need to examine Saru’s attitude and behavior towards him and analyze how powerfully it affects the way he behaves with her.

Saru’s visit to her father’s house provides her a chance to do some serious introspection. Introspection at the parental house is a dominant feature in many of Deshpande’s novels. It makes the protagonist sense an urgent need to achieve some understanding of her past before marriage and after marriage and ultimately understanding both in cohesion. Stephen R. Covey, a writer who has written powerful lessons which made a real difference in many people’s life, gives a very valuable advice in this context:

We could spend weeks, months, even years laboring with the Personality Ethic trying to change our attitudes and behaviors and not even begin to approach the phenomenon of change that occurs spontaneously when we see things. It becomes obvious that if we want
to make relatively minor changes in our lives, we can perhaps appropriately focus on our attitudes and behaviors. But if we want to make significant, quantum change, we need to work on our basic paradigms (Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* 31).

Saru realizes that she had been a worst victim of loneliness both prior to her marriage and after her marriage. Introspection enables her to juxtapose her past relations with her mother and her present relations with her husband and there is a new awareness as to how she has been assimilating past and present grudges so far. Her yearning to attain a kind of passionate salvation has never been satisfied and:

The urge to confide in someone, to talk to someone, was growing in her. Often she had found herself staring at people, weighing them up, thinking... are you on my side? Are you? And, even more often, waking at night with a start, thinking... I am alone. Knowing, with a kind of cold hopelessness, that it was not a dream, but real. That she was awake, not dreaming, and was truly alone. That there was no one who could comfort her. That, perhaps, there never would be anyone (43).

Loneliness is one of the dominant concerns in all the fiction of Shashi Deshpande. Saru too, was under the spell of loneliness that paralyzed her powers of defense. But after giving an explosive vent to the grudges nourished against her mother, her husband and her own self; she feels somewhat light and clear-hearted. There is a self-realization that she is still strong enough in spite of her vulnerability. She finds herself capable of struggling, compromising and solving her marital problems. There comes awareness that detachment or running away from her problems won’t set her free or offer any freedom to her. Rather she has to take initiative of talking and discussing with Manu about her desires, feelings, emotions and her real and imaginary fears; making him realize that despite her professional excellence she still values her relationship with him. Curtains of life started unfolding
and flashing all episodes on the screen of her inner mind. She could see very clearly how she has destroyed the self-hood of her husband:

And it isn't just because his chin is no more sharp, but rounded, or that his hair is perceptibly thinning on top. No, it's something more than that. Something missing in the eyes, in the face, in the man himself.
And, oh god, maybe I'm the one who's taken it away from him! (48).

Wounded by her mother; Sara has never been able to get over the terrors she has seen and gone through. Through introspection, she learns that she has forgotten to salvage her present and never made any serious efforts to assure Manu of her love and understanding, by trying to forge a meaningful relationship through a dialogue and shared moments. There is a realization that she is unconsciously becoming like her mother in being the same kind of nagging, criticizing and aloof mother to her children, “And yet she knew how often Renu reminded her of her mother. Her quiet watchfulness. The feeling she gave you of being weighed up, criticized, possibly rejected” (34). There comes an understanding that somehow the ‘life is to go” and she accepts the coming of Manu.

Viewed from a sociological angle, the ending seems quite simple like the happy ending of a typical Hindi movie with a suggestion that a woman can never be confident and complete without a man. There is a hint to assess the extent to which patriarchal values still condition, control and regulate the evolution of women. Looking from a psychological perspective, the author also raises a very relevant issue of Indian marriages legitimizing male-desire, irrespective of women’s emotions and feelings. Sara is not merely a character but a representative of Indian women who despite of their economic independence; are still not at par with their counterparts. Society wants them to earn but not to earn more than their husbands. Society also expects them to own the responsibility of maintaining and nurturing the relationships and considers that the failure in relationships is all on account of carelessness and casual approach of women.
Women in all the fiction of Shashi Deshpande form the nerve centre of relationships. Their instrumental role in pushing the story to a proper denouement cannot be underestimated. The protagonists of other novels like Jaya, Indu and Manjari are also expected to bear the greater burden of sustaining and restoring their relationships. The intricate web of relationships in Deshpande’s novels is a projection of the author’s sensitive, perceptive and analytical mind. All protagonists, towards the end of almost every novel under study realize the need to maintain their individuality only by living in their families. Towards the final analysis, Deshpande wants her women to maintain a loving relationship with their husbands and learn to face the realities of life. Maria Mies has analysed the novel very precisely when she says, “The whole development of the novel can be observed in four phrases i.e., flight from reality, frustration, submission, and ultimately an attempt to reconsolidate (Mies, Indian Woman and Patriarchy 26).

No person can disburden himself from his past. Saru realizes that she has not merely to learn self-maintenance, but also self-transformation. She has to go down deep into her mind and discover the root causes of her loneliness and rejection. She has to strive hard to disburden herself from her traumatic past. In the words of famous philosopher Thoreau, one cannot change one’s circumstances or the attitude of others; but one can certainly take some steps to change oneself, for no person can live alone in this world:

For every thousand hacking at the leaves of evil, there is one striking at the root. We can only achieve quantum improvements in our lives as we quit hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior and to get to work on the root, the paradigms from which our attitudes and behaviors flow (Thoreau as qtd. in Covey 31).

Saru realizes that every individual looks at his life in his own way and the interactions of different individuals vary in terms of perceptions emerging out of his experiences and conditioning. Saru had indeed very peculiar circumstances, but again it is only she, who has to find a way out as no one else can help her out. There is also
a realization that relations are based on subjective experiences, and no individual can develop bonding by following some objective or general principles. Relations involve interplay of emotions and not the use of intellect. Heart rules over head in developing and maintaining relations and as every individual lives in a peculiar environment and circumstances; therefore he has to strive in his own way to get rid of loneliness and isolation. Saru comprehends that for maintaining perfect bonding and associations with others, she has to strive really hard to nurture a positive relation with her own self. She has to start accepting her own self for making others accept her as she is. The psychologists Villard Kenneth L. and others propound the same theory, “Our world view both shapes our experience and is shaped by our experience. (Villard & others, Beginnings in Relational Communication 176).

Shashi Deshpande is not concerned with the rhetoric of equality between men and women. Rather she goes one step farther and sees that “the right to an individual’s life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives” (Mies 130). She does not advocate forging the family bonds but believes in remaining in the institution of marriage, compromising and confirming, essentially after gaining peace with one’s own self. Living a fast paced life, everyone needs a “retreat” from his routine life, in order to reflect upon his or her own mind and attitudes. That is the reason that most of Deshpande’s protagonists “retreat” to their parents, a “retreat” which cannot be termed a “revolt” as they just need some time to reflect upon their scattered lives and change these with compromise and accord. Therefore, it is the psychological struggle within her, which impels Saru to be introspective, ultimately making everything go well in the novel.

Titles of Shashi Deshpande’s novels are explicit of their themes. These are revelations of the meanings, the texts want to generate. The term “darkness” in the title The Dark Holds No Terrors, is not used in the literal sense; rather it has metaphorical connotations. Saru remembers her brother Dhruva’s fear of darkness in childhood and compares the physical darkness with the darkness in her own mind; fear in her own mind in her adult life. She realizes that there is no point in running away from reality; rather she has to ultimately grapple with the realities of life. Every
individual has to fight his or her own battle against darkness, that is, fear to confront reality, and there is no one in this world who is absolutely problem free. She has to carve her own destiny and overcome her childhood fears by forgetting her unpleasant experiences with her mother. Realization dawns upon Saru that earlier too, she has tried to relinquish some of her fears, by opposing her mother’s authority; by taking admission in a medical college and by marrying a person much below her mother’s expectations. There is an objective self-analysis that if she has confronted the darkness to realize her dreams, she can still do more by accepting her loneliness and taking steps to save her marriage, “All right, so I’m alone. But so’s 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.”

Silence is a prominent symbol in most of the fiction of Shashi Deshpande. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, it encompasses another meaning which is essentially not peace or tranquility. Here, it means a deafening silence which is difficult to bear. Silence in this novel means the death of communication but without any quiet inside the minds. For a few years after her marriage; Sarita and Manu enjoyed a normal sexual life of fulfillment but when the sexual act became sadistic and nightmarish, the “silence” became a counteract. Manohar’s complexes crushed the sensitive feelings of Saru and made her shrink away from his advances. Life became stressful for the couple. Manohar expresses his dissatisfaction from their relationship in an aggressive way and Saru internalizes this overwhelming pain and stress. Physical rape, though enormously painful for Saru, transforms into psychological rape as human biology never operates in isolation from human psychology and physical pain transforms into painful psychological responses. Pain makes Saru undergo shame, developing serious and self-imposed silence; a kind of trauma, which she cannot share with anyone, consequently making her lose the capacity to gain pleasure from anything in life. Rejection and cruelty in all sorts of negative relationships viz. relationship with her mother, relationship with her husband, indifference of her father, unsuccessful relationships with Boozie and Padmakar- result in rejection of her own self. Feelings of insecurity encircle her and these circles of varied diameters surround and surround
her, subjecting her to prolonged periods of tension posing challenges to her self-esteem. Though there is a respite for her after her marriage, from the scathing comments of her mother; the tragedy is that past continues to sting and pain her, causing seemingly irreparable damages to her self-concept and an increased vulnerability to other kinds of pain inflicted by Manu. Deshpande shows remarkable dexterity in handling this highly sensitive issue of sexual sadism.

A dichotomous perception of Sara’s relations with Boozie and Manu is another thematic concern in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. With Manu, her relationship is a relationship of silence, a relationship of loneliness in which both of them fight their own battles in the silent chambers of their hearts. Despite an earnest desire to develop a relationship of close understanding and companionship with Manu; the rift between both of them goes on widening. Sara feels helpless to sort out her marital disharmony and this emotional deprivation leads her to have affairs with Boozie and Padmakar. She is in awe of Boozie, who is a perfect blend of manners and physical attributes. This relationship is initially perceived by Sara as a relation between master and student but gradually it evolves into a flirtatious relation when Boozie provides her money to start private practice in a good colony. Ironically enough, Manu shuts his eyes to Sara’s advances towards this man and withdraws himself into his own cocoon. Even, when she borrows money from Boozie for opening her hospital; he stays silent as a mute spectator. Neglect by Manu is a very painful situation for Sara, as she expects that, “He could have asked me then…Why? And I would have told him…What would I have said? But the occasion didn’t arise because he never asked me. And there was, perversely, no relief in me, but contempt that he didn’t” (92-93).

Introspection at a later stage, reminds Saru, of the bruised psyche of her husband even when he pretended to shut his eyes to her associations with Boozie. She realizes how she was hurting and letting her husband down, and how he tried to show his neglect though actually deeply pained and helpless. Saru remembers, “And I thought of the day I had said…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” (93). Saru’s alliance with Padmakar was a brief insignificant interlude. Padmakar was
Sara's class fellow in medical college whom she happens to meet by chance after many years. Since she doesn't find any ray of fulfillment in their friendship; she withdraws from him after a few meetings and the relationship ends very soon without any significant or worth remembering influences. Relationship with Boozie and Padmakar provide momentary or short lived solace to the protagonist, when her dreams of a happy conjugal life are shattered. The author is quite successful in suggesting the priority of marital relationships over the extra-marital relationships for most of Indian women, as finding comfort in the company of a male friend is generally not sanctioned by the Indian society.

The Dark Hold No Terrors also highlights the basic human instinct of sharing one's thoughts and feelings with others. The protagonist of the novel suffers from deep frustration in her life because of her inability to share or express her feelings. The author feels that sharing is a wonderful means of self-validation. Social psychologists Don F. Fauler and Dennis C. Alexander endorse this view:

No one can tell someone else how or when to self-disclose. It is known however, that a primary ingredient in a lasting deep relationship is each person's open, honest, genuine sharing of self with the other. Sharing is risky business, and everyone gets hurt a few times, but to touch the humanness of another person is a most rewarding experience (Fauler and Alexander. Communication and Social Behaviour: A Symbolic Interaction Perspective 52).

Fauler and Alexander explain that whenever two persons feel some compatibility and comfort in each other's company; they feel like communicating with each other and resultantly; the relationship starts blooming. Before her marriage, Saru felt somewhat ill at ease about engaging in self-disclosure with her father, because of the communication barriers created by him. Moreover, she never found him empathetic and reciprocal and therefore there was no self-disclosure on her part. Conversation with her mother was always like spitting venom at each other as there was no
understanding between them. Therefore Sara's need for communication which was never fulfilled made it difficult for her to solve her relationship tangles.

Communication no doubt, allows one to make sense of the world but what is more important is that it also allows one to make more sense of one's own self. We all seek reality and confirmation of that reality through others. In order to maintain some security, human beings look for some signals in others that tell them who they are and how good they are. For example, calling a person by his name is a validation of who that person is. Right from her childhood, Saru was an insecure girl, who was rarely called by name by her father. To Saru also, her father had always been a "non-entity" and a "negative man." Therefore, she had also never called him "Baba" lovingly or casually. When she woke up after some sleep on the day of her arrival at her parents' house and suddenly calls her father, she feels strange about her own self:

'Baba?' she called out suddenly, like a frightened child. And there was something strange, she knew at once, in her calling out to him that way. She had never done it, not even when she was a child. Perhaps she had known even then that he was feeble. No, worse than that, that he was a nonentity and didn't matter (29).

While the relationship of parents with their children is generally self-giving; children also seek self-satisfaction out of it. This fact is indeed very vital for any fruitful relationship. Relationship between Saru and her parents was neither self-giving nor self-satisfying as there had always been communication barriers. Parents never felt any need for nurturing sweet bonds with their daughter; bonds for which the sensitive soul longs throughout her life. Saru reminisces painfully, "He never took any interest in my school or college. He left all to her. And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva’s death. I just didn’t exist" (32).

Every human being looks for social confirmation in his interaction with others. A person acquires and sustains his or her self-image through relationships. All of us make discriminations and judgments about others, and all of us are judged by others
in one way or another. Denial of any opportunity to share her joys and sorrows, fears and longings, insecurities and doubts; makes it difficult for Saru to develop any positive and realistic self-image, subsequently exhibiting signs of being disconnected from herself or blocking off from her own feelings. Her behavior clearly suggests that she is repressing deep pain and fear and also experiencing a pattern of being neglected from an early age. The writer Megan De Beyer analyses the role of parents and other relatives in helping an individual frame a positive picture of him. The writer says:

One of the most important self-development processes deficient in this type of upbringing is that of validation. The journey of understanding, trusting and responding to your feelings begins, when your early caretakers regard and direct your myriad of emotions in a loving way. This validation process empowers you to make sense of your unique needs, wants and responses to the world, and in this way you begin the journey of knowing who you really are on the inside. As an adult, we self-validate ourselves by continually confirming who we are through our words, actions and life decisions. We also self-validate, by finally accepting ourselves with all our shortcomings (Beyer, “Mind Set: The Void Within” The Times of India 3).

Shashi Deshpande finds an individual’s relationship with her own self very intriguing but very compelling. She philosophizes that an individual must know and understand herself before loving or entering into relationship with others. When the protagonist Saru starts understanding her own role in the disturbed relationships with her husband, she vividly experiences their differences. Through the character of Saru who failed to make contact with her deep inner core; Deshpande highlights the need to achieve a sense of individual identity before being able to commit oneself to others. Throughout the novel, Saru keeps running away from her own self. But sitting in her father’s house; she realizes that it is an impossible task to run away from herself or from her husband Manu. She understands how her conditioning has made an impact on the choices in her life and how it has diminished her real self-knowledge and grounded her self-esteem. She further realizes that the more lasting solution will be to
have a loving relationship with herself which will be meaningful enough to sustain her relationships with others. The valuable advice by the author Erikson underlies the need to find the ‘real self.’ Erikson says, “One must achieve a sense of individual identity before becoming able to commit oneself to a shared identity with other person- that is, you must know yourself before you can love someone else.” (Erikson as qtd. in Sigelman, *Life Span Human Development* 289).

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande has raised many pertinent but delicate questions. Like her all other novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* too, has an open-ending. There is a subtle hint of the protagonist thinking of rebuilding her relationship with her husband after undergoing immense emotional struggle. An earnest self-interrogation and self-assessment sets her thinking on the lines of preserving her relationships. Marilyn Ferguson throws light on the significance of wisdom to take one’s own decisions in life, “No one can persuade another to change. Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another either by argument or by emotional appeal” (Ferguson as qtd. in Covey 60-61). Sara understands the need to be sensitive and considerate to her husband without being judgmental. She understands that her approach and her husband’s approach are so opposed to each other, that unless she makes a conscious effort to open their communication barriers; there is no hope for peaceful re-establishment. Through introspection, Sara’s perspective expands, her understanding deepens and the negative labels or perceptions she had nourished about her husband start disappearing. A sense of identity, control and inner-directedness fills her with both elation and peace.