Chapter – II

Dominating and Supportive Aspects of Male Chauvinism:
The Dark Holds No Terrors
and
The Tiger’s Daughter
Deshpande’s novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* depicts estranged relationship between husband and wife. Sarita, the protagonist of the novel, comes back to her parent’s home and the novel progresses through her memory. To find out the progression of the man-woman relationship in the novel, one has to arrange it in chronological order of events.

The relationship begins, proceeds, and ends on various planes. In the beginning when Sarita first meets Manohar, he is a famous literary figure and hero in college. On the other hand, Sarita is neglected and prefers to remain away from the crowd. To her, “...college meant lecture in the morning, practicals in the afternoon, exams every six months and medical college at the end of two years” (50). Her friend, Smita forcefully drags her to the inauguration of the Literary Society anchored by Manohar. In their first meeting, Manohar impresses her a lot. Sarita is blank about what is going on the stage, the speeches and the audience. But she is completely obsessed by Manu. She says:

Instead, bits of his face clung to my mind like barnacles. As if they were the sentences in my book I had underlined with pencil, writing in the margin, v. i., very important. Straight dark thick eyebrows. A firm chin. (And whoever said that a receding chin is a sign of weakness?) Full lips, almost as full as woman’s. And that mannerism of his, of pushing the hair back from his forehead with one hand, showing off his slim and long fingers(51).
Sarita is impressed by the smart and handsome personality of Manu. The attraction for the opposite sex plays a vital role in college life. It leads to love and further, if it is successful, leads to marriage. Saru first sees Manu and adores him in her first meeting. For the first time Sarita and Manohar confront each other. He objects to her entry in the hall. It does not develop hatred in her mind for him. Once again she experiences the same fascination:

Once again, the others were...are...faceless, nameless non-entities to me. He was the only person I saw. His effortless control over the others, his anger at the mistakes, his smiles that came and went in a flash... (53).

Saru is so fascinated with the working capacities of Manu who has a tremendous control over his group. Again Manu leaves unforgettable impression upon her mind. One knows it from her observations when he finishes his poem:

When he finished, there was a mock-serious applause, and cries of ‘Wah-Wah’ I was silent, neither laughing nor applauding, but something inside me responded to the gesture, the words with loud cry of ecstasy. I went home in a daze (Ibid).

Saru obsessed with Manu, always thinks of him, and weaves her fantasy around him. At the same time she is serious about her studies, her
exams and practicals. The next meeting is important because it is reciprocal.

Saru finds him alone in the canteen. She musters up courage and decides not to waste this golden opportunity. She faces him boldly, he too responds. She notices that he is attracted towards her, “...my undisguised admiration pleased him immensely” (65). He accompanies her to the hostel, she is sure that they will meet again. She runs to her room and celebrates her joy-lonely, feeling the increased heartbeats. Urvashi Sinha and Gur Pyari Jandial observe that this meeting:

...triggers a romance and Manu with lost glory and declining future immediately responds to the now attractive Saru’s interest in him. (quoted in Mohan[ed.] 2004:133).

Their meeting shows the real progression of their relationship, the tender feeling felt by both Saru and Manohar. It is Manu’s fame, which makes him habituated to adoration, but he is shrewd enough to know the difference between her adoration and other’s and responds accordingly. This meeting elevates the relationship to an equal plane for both of them.

They meet everyday. With every meeting their attraction to each other increases. She rejects the thought of departing from him and enjoys meeting him, assures him of her love and he too understands the intensity of her feelings. She feels that they both are ‘unique’. She enters a new
world of strange and wild enthusiasm. She is amazed at Manohar and his manners, flitting from subject to subject skillfully. While hers is, "...the drab world of lectures, patients, exams and results" (154). The world of literature fascinates her when she compares it with her dull routine. Now, she thinks of her marriage. She is aware of the fact that her orthodox mother, who suppressed her, will never permit her to marry Manu.

Emotional suffocation in the family by the elderly person has a deep impact on the minds of younger ones. The traditions and culture when exaggerated create a spark of rebellion among the younger ones. They always search an opportunity to get freedom to secure their emotional outlet with the result they get attracted towards the people who can understand them.

The same happens with Saru who decides to marry Manu and revolts against her mother’s authoritarianism. She had already opposed her mother when she joined the medical college. The relationship, which she builds up with Manu, has the foundation of negative motivation, which she herself accepts: “If you hadn’t fought me so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him” (96). Relationship built upon negative motivation does not last long. This may be the reason for her doomed relationship, which she hints at, “For
he is groping in the dark, as much as I am” (Ibid). Saru is in search of liberation from her parental authority. She looks at her love marriage with Manu as an opportunity as P. Ramamoorti puts it:

The departure of the heroine from mother is the first step towards autonomy; for, the mother is first pedagogue of the do’s and don’ts on the woman (quoted in Singh [ed.] 1991:119).

Saru’s relationship with Manu is a natural outcome of her feelings, she did never experience such feelings, “for anyone to want me, love me, need me” (65). She swamps the opportunity in the form of Manu, which is natural and which normally happens in love-marriages. It seems that her decision to marry Manu has two bases: negative motivation and natural feelings.

Saru makes firm decision to marry Manu to win her freedom, which was rejected at her parental home. Saru, who had come to become a doctor chooses her future and is ready to face it boldly. She never cares for her mother, who objects to her choice. She continues to meet Manu, who says, “...meeting an hour or so each evening. We must have a place of our own, even if it’s just a room” (37). When Manu tells her about finding a room in the chawl, she feels trapped. It reminds her of her earlier experience, her teenage trauma. When she was eleven years old, her friend Vijaya who was three years older than her opened the secret of the
gift that she often got from her boyfriend. Once she took Saru with her to
the boys’ hostel, the dirty atmosphere suffocated her. The giggling boys
with their short clothes were behaving cheaply with Vijaya and she too
responded smilingly. While escaping from there, a boy blocked her way
and teased her calling ‘baby’ bringing his face near to her. Saru was not
mature then but vaguely knew, “…that he was a male and I a female” (38).
Her feeling of being trapped in relation to marriage is a premonition of
disaster.

The guilt about Manu’s love momentarily confuses her but she
comes out of it proving herself silly and absurd. She accepts Manu’s love
undoubtedly because it is her trauma that nobody has loved her. She says,
“And yet, I could not doubt his love. He cared for my feeling no one had
ever done” (39). She did not get that much love from her ‘own’ people but
from a stranger. When Manu asks whether departing from her parental
home is painful to her, she accepts the detachment dryly:

    After my last confrontation with my parents, I had already
detached myself from them. For me, they were already the
past and meant nothing (Ibid).

Saru, further, adds about the unfortunate upbringing when Manu
explains to her natural and easy process of cutting off child’s umbilical
cord and its separation from mother without much bleeding. She says,
“No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding” (Ibid). Though they face financial difficulties, the earlier days of their marriage are full of happiness:

It was heaven, in spite of the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dank sealed - in odours, women with inquisitive, unfriendly eyes, men with lascivious stares. And we were happy (40).

Manu also accepts her company, “When we’re together its heaven, wherever we are” (38). There is no friction, and for the time being everything goes on smoothly.

Rift in the conjugal life has many reasons right from social status to the mindset of either of the spouse. The internal and external factors are also responsible to some extent. Social structure, traditions and culture, status etc. are internal ones. These factors are always responsible for the change in the relationship.

Instead of earning, Manu through Prof. Kulkarni, tries to approach Saru’s parents. When Saru comes to know about it, her ego is hurt as she had decided not to seek any kind of help from parents. This incident annoys Saru though she doesn’t express it but departs spiritually from him. On the other hand, Manu’s ego is hurt at the growing popularity and social status of Saru. Both of them are annoyed with each other and the result obviously is the breakdown between the relationship.
The seeds of his sadism and her doomed marriage are sown here. Manu cannot tolerate people greeting his wife and ignoring him. He can’t express it openly but says out of irritation, “I’m sick of this place. Let’s get out of here soon” (42). The place which he used to call heaven is now transformed into ‘hell’ for him. He was overjoyed on finding the room but never imagined that soon it would transform. It seems that he is frustrated.

Saru feels herself responsible for his frustration, she says, “I was too busy, I was too tired, I was too exhilarated with the dignity and importance that my status as a doctor seemed to have given me” (41-42). It shows that Saru is satisfied with her profession as a doctor for which she had craved from her school days. Though she is satisfied with her career, she slowly gets discontented with her family. And contrary to the claims of most feminists, she does not achieve fulfillment in life, unsuccessful as wife and mother. Betty Friedan asserts:

For a woman, as for a man the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self-realization independence individuality self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted. Women’s sexual problems are in this sense, by-products of suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystic of feminism fulfillment ignores (quoted in Sharma 2005:6).

Saru acquires self-fulfillment with her outside world. At the same time she feels guilty for her absence of familial duties. She agrees:
...I found myself shrinking from his love making I thought then, that the fault was mine. It was because I was tired, always too tired after my long day at the hospital (42).

Saru examines his situation and blames herself for it. She knows his anguish but being tired with her work at the hospital she finds herself helpless. She cannot skip her practice, which is the main source to her family, she expresses:

He was the same. Still so eager to love me, so disappointed when I refused him, that I rarely had the heart to do so. And if there were times when he was rough and abrupt with me, I put it down to the ardour of his love (Ibid).

In this sense, Saru proves herself to be a traditional woman who is not able to leave her traditional self. On the other hand, Manu represents the patriarchal system, tries to enhance a sense of guilt in her. He makes her feel that, "My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood" (198). In spite of her medical profession and modern career, she feels guilty that she is not giving enough time to her family as a wife. In a natural toppling of the traditional order, she becomes superior and he is the other. She admits, "But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter" (Ibid). The changed status is reflected in Saru’s speech, "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (Ibid). Saru’s success and
Manu’s failure are two sides of the same coin which add fuel to fire. Saru gives a fine example to explain her point:

\[ a+b \text{ they told us in mathematics is equal to } b+a. \text{ But here } a+b \text{ was not, definitely not equal to } b+a. \text{ It becomes a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible (Ibid).} \]

Aware of woman’s situation in male dominated society, Saru finds herself a woman caught in a flux, a no win situation. Because of her guilty conscience she is ready to leave the job. She always holds herself responsible for the tensions on in her domestic life. In the course of time she remembers that she doesn’t have friends and neighbours, she meets them casually. But Manu visits his friends with Saru every weekend. She finds the visits, “...massive boredom... the food, the talk, everything” (158). Conversely, she observes that Manu enjoys their visits, he always hums a tune expressing his joviality. Saru thinks that he is pleased to show the people “...a prized possession. His wife. A lady doctor”(Ibid). In this connection Seema Sunil says:

It seems to Saru that she is no more than a show- piece to be exhibited to his friends (1995:82).

Manu shows his unstable personality of being proud of his ‘prized possession’ at the same time resenting her long time absence at home.

In Indian society, husband is expected to earn and wife to look after the household. In fact the style is gender specific. What Margaret Atwood
calls "The Quillier- Couch Syndrome”, the definition of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ by Quillier- Couch, deserves attention:

The ‘Masculine’ style is, of course, bold, forceful, clear, vigorous, etc; the ‘Feminine’ style is vague, weak, tremulous, pastel, etc. In the list of pairs you can include ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, ‘universal’ or ‘accurate depiction of society’ versus ‘confessional’, ‘personal’ or even ‘narcissistic’ and ‘neurotic’ (quoted in Pandey [ed.]2004:40).

The change in the duties of the husband and wife are taken to be very abnormal. An earning wife generally pinches the husband especially when he is not earning much or unemployed. Therein begins inner conflict that gnaws the man thoroughly.

In the initial stage of their marriage, Saru detects the cracks easily. Unfortunately, the thing for which she had broken with her parents was the lack of intimacy that she has found in him. But he also could not survive it for a long time; it has withered with the novelty of physical passion. The days of heavenly pleasure of the newly married couple have passed quickly. Saru is also aware of the unavoidable reason that is her status which transforms her love into a terrible thing. The birth of her first female issue is more painful to her naturally, less physically and more psychologically because of the absence of her kins. But Manu provides her support, being always with her. He proves to be a loving and caring husband. When she complains Manu about the pain, he explains her, “It’s
necessary pain, Saru...It's the link, the bridge you have to cross before you reach perfect love"(162). Saru also believes in his love but the pregnancy makes their intimacy impossible. Saru forces him to make love as soon as possible. He refuses but her force makes him listen to her. It is surprising that here one can see the harmony in their relation but unfortunately it does not last for long.

In the course of time Saru begets a male child. Saru achieves success as a doctor. While Manu feels he is a failure. Being a lecturer in third-rate college, earning an unspectacular salary, inferiority complex develops in Manu when she becomes the main provider of the family. When Saru is busy with her profession, Manu's leisure at home resents him a lot. In a patriarchal social set up, woman is supposed to do the household duties. However in the changed situation, Manu is compelled to do the same. The accumulated humiliation and anger buried deep in his mind now start to come out in the form of sadism.

He neither leaves Saru nor his male ego. Circumstances cannot provide him both money and self-pride at a time. Being unable to leave his well-settled family, he cannot survive his self-pride. In this context Premila Paul puts:

Unable to come to terms with the fact that he is a failure and his wife a remarkable success in life, Manu lets his wounded
male pride manifest itself in the form of sexual sadism. Bed is the only place where he can assert his animal power over her. Manu becomes a mean, loathsome fellow when he basks in her glory by day and ill-treats her at night

Initially, it was occasional but slowly it becomes frequent. It makes a deep impact upon Saru’s physique as well as psyche. She notes the change in his attitude. She shudders inwardly due to his sadism which comes from his subconscious that divides him into two personalities. The day’s defeated husband tries to conquer in the night by belittling his wife in the bed; the place where his male psyche asserts his right, to prove his strength. Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia defines sadism as:

...a derivation of pleasure as a result of inflicting pain, or watching pain inflicted, on others (www.wikipedia.com).

Manu takes pleasure in watching Saru’s pain which is the main cause behind their spiritual separation. It is her past family background that enables her to ponder:

Everything in girl’s life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male. But what did you do when you failed to please? There was no answer to that. At least, no one had given her an answer so far (163).

Saru is aware of the destruction of male by female domination before her marriage and decides not to dominate her husband like her mother. She knows very well, “Perhaps, there is something in the male,
she now thought, that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination”(85). Yet it happens in her case, she remembers the incident when they had gone to the market to buy the suitcase for their first trip to Ooty. Where they met his friend and his wife, the man called him ‘lucky’ and the woman said tartly that he has a doctor wife, and laughed sneeringly. The taunt creates bitterness in him, which provokes the monster in him. At night, their intercourse transforms into ‘rape’ that leaves her in pain and fear. But to her surprise in the morning, he is quite fresh, there is no sense of guilt or trace of tension on his face. Gradually sadism becomes routine in Saru’s life, she says, “…hospital, teaching, rooms, visits, home, children. And the nightmares”(29). She enlists the nightmares easily with her daily routine. She describes her bedroom as a ‘dark room’. It shows that she detests their conjugal life:

I hate being touched. May be that’s why I’m comfortable here with Baba and Madhav. There is no touching, either physically or emotionally. Each one of us is intact, a separate whole (120).

Even the thought of ‘the painful nights’ makes her shudder violently. Being away from him, she feels relaxed, at least, physically. It isn’t the thing that Saru blames Manu entirely of his being monster at night but finds herself guilty too. It normally happens to her, when she comes late. Once without informing him she comes late, he is waiting for
dinner. She tries her best to make the atmosphere normal but silence is his answer which is a premonition of the disaster. She says knowingly, “Terror waited for me in our room. I could not escape it” (79). She is also aware of its inevitability. As Seema Sunil says:

The burden of double duties gradually imbalances the marital balance between Manu and Saru. As she gets busy in her career Saru starts neglecting her husband. Her work keeps her away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches late at night (1995:80).

Saru is really fed up with the double duties, day’s labour in the hospital and painful and fretful nights at home. And she is ready to even skip her bloomed career. She says, “To obtain such a respite, an interlude of peace, I would give up much. Even my work? Yes, even that” (78). Her sense of guilt and her fatigue enables her to muster courage to ask him about leaving her job. But Manu strongly opposes and explains his incompetence to earn money. Saru can clearly note the panic on his face. He dissuades her not to leave her profession, as their standard of living wouldn’t be possible on his income only. He also suggests her to take off the next day and go to the movie. Saru notices the change in his attitude. That night she experiences no sadism. On the other hand, in her words, “That night he behaved like a young man with a girl he loves. He was tender, teasing and infinitely protective” (81). This shows his unsteady
behaviour, he shudders with the thought of living like a pauper; the third rate living, he is habituated to the luxurious life with the earning of his wife. Saru observes his lifestyle, “So many expensive clothes, always in the latest modes. And recently, a beard as well”(121). On the contrary, Saru is ready to leave her practice and face the situation. She has shed her pride long back in her profession so it becomes easy for her but not for him. The feeling of insecurity doesn’t allow him to permit her to leave the practice. He wants her money to lead a luxurious life but his male ego questions her coming home late night. He doesn’t dare to ask her about her delay but avenges at night. And she is oppressed both physically and psychologically to which she finds refuge going back to her father’s home. That proves futile at the end with the realization the lines Deshpande quotes initially in the novel from ‘The Dhammapada’, “You are your own refuge; there is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve” (7).

She finally tells her father and seeks his help as he had done earlier by approving her admission to medical college against the wish of her mother. Saru narrates the incident of a female journalist who had come to interview her for a special edition of women’s magazine. Manu reached there. The journalist’s attitude hurted Manu’s ego. Her laughing at his
inadequate income undermines his confidence. Saru narrates her experience that night, “He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this...this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body” (201). Baba suggests Saru to discuss the problem with Manu like a mature person, but she knows its futility that he is unaware of it. Saru believes in his ignorance too. She can’t mix up the day’s usual, cheerful Manu with the night’s monster Manu. To her, he is spilt into two personalities.

To find out the external and internal causes of Manu’s sadism one has to peep into his psychological make up. Saru’s success in her profession, the remarks of the chawl people, the journalist and his friend’s wife’s taunts cause his inclination to sadism. These are the external causes for his sexual sadism. While talking about the internal causes, Seema Sunil says:

Manu’s wounded male pride manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism. In daytime, he basks in her glory but at night takes vengeance on her. In the beginning, Manu’s beastly behaviour at night mystifies Saru. Each time it happens, she does not speak and puts another brick on the wall of silence between them. She fears that she will be walled alive within it and die slow, painful death. However, she is surprised that all this has no effect on Manu (1995:85).

In this connection one has to understand two terms ‘Big Wheel’ and ‘Sturdy Oak’. As Deborah S. David and Robert Brannon have explained
in the book The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex-Role, Big Wheel implies the male quest for wealth, fame, success and sign of importance. Sturdy Oak signifies the aura of confidence, reliability, unshakeable strength and toughness (1998:44). Manu is devoid of either of these qualities and Atre/Kripal’s views seem pertinent in this context:

...he undergoes temporary phase of impotence. This suggests that his inability to play the ascribed social role is eroding his self-esteem. Manu is typical patriarchal character. He can neither become the “Big Wheel” nor the “Sturdy Oak” nor can he accept his failure (1998:44).

Saru’s emergence as a successful doctor and Manu’s erosion as a male takes place simultaneously which he vents in the shape of vengeful rapist. Manu’s present condition is an outcome of social role-reversal. Traditionally our society has set the norms and fixed the gender roles, male has to earn the bread and butter outside the home while female the kitchen, strictly within the four walls of the home. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines gender roles:

The male ethos is war, domination, competition, scarcity, control etc. for the purpose of having the power to choose and enforce the survival of their seed. Within the context of the patriarchal system, women are reduced to sexual toys and caretakers of children (www.wikipedia.com).
The work allotted to woman by the patriarchal society bounds her to home. But circumstances compel Manu to do the household duties instead of his wife which annoys him. As Atre/Kripal opine it:

...challenges his male ego and self-image. Manu sees himself reduced to a cipher. Being weak natured, he resorts to the easiest and the most violent way of asserting his superiority over Sarita. By raping her every night, he tries to reclaim his masculine identity (1998:24).

Considering himself helpless and effeminate, Manu to gain his masculinity gives vent to his feeling through his beastly sexual assault on Saru. He uses this ultimate means to subjugate her. Naturally, Manu’s cruelty affects Saru. Siddhartha Sharma remarks:

Manu does not love her as he used to earlier. Saru begins to hate this man-woman relationship, which is based on need and attraction and not love. She scorns the word ‘love’ now. She realizes there was no such thing between man and woman (2005:32).

Though, Saru loved him blindly, slowly she starts hating his habits; she finds a lot of change in Manu’s nature. She objects to his habits like sitting his feet up on the stool, picking his ear. He also tries to look more masculine, more virile for that he keeps beard in latest fashion with expensive clothes. Saru feels that his modern outlook is deceptive, just an attempt to prove his manliness. Saru is afraid of his beard as Seema Sunil points out:
Saru wonders whether the beard is a mask to hide something or to add something to the face which may enable him to start the things he lacked (1995:83).

An important factor to consider Manu’s over-reaching maleness is his socialization as a male child. As he is the representative of typical Indian society and its patriarchal system, one has to focus upon the development of the male psyche in Indian society. The birth of a male child is always supposed to be a thing of honour and is celebrated with joviality. It is a matter of pride and achievement for the parents. On the contrary, the female child is unwelcome. The mother of the female child is often supposed to be guilty and responsible for the same and that’s why tortured and sometimes killed by her in-laws. In this way, the gender discrimination starts right from the birth of a child. The famous feminist Elaine Showalter rightly observes:

For the middle class Victorian girl, the departure of a brother for school was a painful awakening to her inferior status (quoted in Jain[ed.] 1996:50).

From the early stage of her childhood, female child is made aware of her subjugation. On the other hand, the male child is nurtured often with extra care and good food; he is offered all the opportunities- good schooling, good dressing and expensive toys. In short, he is nurtured with
indulgence. On the other hand, female child is denied all this. In this connection, Nagendra Kumar remarks:

In India woman’s fate is decided very early in her life because the parents start discriminating between their male and female child from the very beginning. It is incessantly hammered on the girl’s consciousness that she has to move somewhere else and must be submissive and assimilative, come what may. Thus she starts a life of duality and conflict since her childhood (2001:40).

If the member of the family finds that the male child is playing with girls or with girl toys like doll or doing female works like cooking and washing they scold him bitterly saying, ‘you are not a girl’ making him aware of his superior gender. In this way, a male child’s ego is nurtured from his childhood while female is considered to be weak, less important and secondary thing. She is constantly reminded of the worthlessness of her sex. As Shubha Tiwari puts it:

Social stereotypes about gender roles are stronger than we can imagine them to be. One can present hundreds of examples. A gift of male kid – electric train, and for female child – a doll (quoted in Bala [ed.] 2001:71).

The parents impart the gender discrimination from their childhood. Saru herself experiences it at her home. Her mother used to say, “He’s different. He’s a boy”(45) about her brother and such influences create the psyche of the male and female child from their childhood. Simone de
Beauvoir’s views “One is not born woman, but made,” expresses the same, she further says:

The girl is required to stay at home, her comings and goings are watched: she is not encouraged to take charge of her own amusements and pleasure


From the childhood, their personality is continually being carved by the fact that he is a male and she is a female. Their traditional mind-set makes them think that they are born to control the weaker sex. Male sex is superior and female is inferior, as Urvashi Sinha and Gur Pyari Jandial comment:

The husband is expected to be the authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the life of a wife. The wife should regard him as her master and should serve faithfully. Thus the traditional concept of superior husband and subordinate wife had been the guideline of Hindu-marriage


It is seen several times that a man comes home from the work expecting his wife to serve him and dance to his tune. Even if she is earning equally, kitchen, children, their studies and orderliness of house are her responsibility. And if she is just a housewife she is full time servant of the family. It is taken for granted that the children are her responsibility. Providing the whole household with every necessary
comfort is her task. Thus the system exploits and derogates her. This male superiority is well pointed out by Simone de Beauvoir:

He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his ‘half’. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required. She loses some of the rights legally belonging to the unmarried woman.


Like Simone de Beauvoir, Saru’s observations of gender discrimination from her own experiences are most suggestive in her speech at girls’ college:

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 5’ 4`` tall, you shouldn’t be more than 5’ 3`` tall. If he’s earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous ...you can nag, complain, henpeck, whine, moan but you can never be strong. That’s wrong which will never be forgiven

(137).

Deshpande’s another protagonist Indu in Roots and Shadows narrates her upbringing:

As a child, they told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they said. It is the only way, they said, for a
female to live and survive (174).

In the light of these views Manu’s character gets fully revealed. The novel doesn’t provide details about his childhood but as he behaves like a typical Indian male, he represents the patriarchal system that, “compels her to assume the status of the other” (quoted in Parshley [tran.] 1997:85). This is what Kate Millet calls ‘sexual politics’, “where by one group of persons is controlled by another” (quoted in Tiwari 2004:33). Manu proves himself true to this tradition of gender politics. As Atre/Kripal say:

An examination of the male characters leads the reader to glimpse the dynamics of Indian patriarchy, and what feminist scholars have termed as “gender politics” (1998:41).

Manu, the lawmaker of Indian orthodox culture, denies woman to be a decision maker. He has offered all the good and dignified qualities to male sex that is health, wealth, fame and success as well as confidence, reliability and strength while female sex is devoid of this. Manu, who is presented as a typical traditional middle class Indian male, also depicts these qualities. As G. Dominic Savio remarks:

As for Manu, his inflated ego bursts as he is forced to accept his wife as his equal. He does not come up to the societal expectation that a male should have a job and high income. He is far behind the ‘husband’

(quoted in Bala [ed.] 2001:64).
Manu’s vices: less important, less earner, and ‘less’ in so many things on the bright background of her wife’s career as a famous doctor and economically independent woman are clearly seen. His split personality comes out with sadism. After every painful night normally each morning, he greets her saying, ‘Good Morning Saru, slept well?’ Urvashi Sinha and Gur Pyari Jandial point out:

Saru’s efforts to comfort Manu in the morning are often aborted by his normal behaviour and feigned ignorance about the rape. It leads to her doubting herself but the repeated rape and bruises on her body leave no doubt in her mind


Manu’s eccentric behaviour doesn’t allow Saru to discuss her problem with him. Without telling Manu her real problem, making an excuse of her mother’s death, she goes back to her father’s home to seek refuge, but while introspecting she finds no other alternative than to become her own refuge.

Her relationship with other men is totally the outcome of marital discord. She tries to seek happiness out of marriage which proves futile. Her extra-marital relation fulfils her economic need. Though Boozie is interested in her as a female; she is totally chaste in her behaviour with Boozie and it can’t be denied that his male body arouses physical passion in her. Though Saru’s relationship with Boozie, intimacy with her at
inauguration function superficially doesn’t affect her relationship with Manu, inwardly it helps to heighten the intensity of Manu’s brutality. She not only runs away from Boozie with her realization of his being homosexual, but also crushes her physical attraction for him. When she realizes Boozie’s real nature, she detaches herself from his emotional attachment. She does not welcome his unnatural sexual behavior. Saru prefers to go back to her suffocating world with Manu.

Her relationship with Pdmakar Rao, her classmate, is also a failure, which is her attempt to find an escape. Actually both are disappointed with their marital life but Saru recognizes him to be a selfish person. According to Charu Chandra Mishra:

Her brief stint of adultery with Pdmakar Rao, her classmate and now a colleague, reflects not only the fall of her character but also her maniac obsession with self. Such an arduous journey for rebellious self-assertion must tell upon her psychic health considerably


Her affair with Rao fails to satisfy her emotional need, while Boozie arouses hidden physical passion in her which remains unfulfilled because of her objection to his being homosexual. Her relationship with Boozie is no more than an exploitative relationship for social and economic gain.
Saru’s failure in extra-marital relationship forces her to return to her drab world where she being a true representative of Indian woman, bears all the rapes keeping mum. It is her middle class traditional mentality that enables her to remain silent. She thinks of her children and her social status. Saru as an independent and intelligent woman tolerates Manu’s beastly behaviour. A happy married life calls for constant commitment and concern for each other. However, when there is a crisis in the marriage, the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness creeps in and couples look upto divorce as the only alternative. Once in pique of anger, she goes to the lawyer to discuss about divorce, but her upbringing in a traditional middle class family doesn’t allow her to knock the door of the lawyer. She returns thinking she will have to expose her marital life to the lawyer in detail. She will have to unveil her bedroom in front of the third person, naturally to the society in which she is honoured. The very thought of her children makes her abandon the thought of divorce. She thinks if they come to know about her plight it will wither their childhood. Considering it a social stigma, Saru decides not to go to the lawyer.

Fed up with the situation, Saru thinks to quit Manu’s home and uses her withdrawal to get self-confidence. She derives pride in her professional success and decides not to feel guilty for someone else’s
failure. A confident Saru realizes that the essence of marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge, she is ready to face the situation confidently with no come back, with no more humiliation, with no more terrors. In the beginning of the novel she is not afraid of darkness. Though her younger brother, Dhruva, was afraid of darkness, she used to tell Dhruva that dark holds no terrors. At night her brother had no courage to go in the dark. Thereupon she herself used to go in the dark saying, “What’s there to be scared of? Look, there is nothing” (205). She suffers terrific nights after her marriage. Manu’s sadism forces her to feel the darkness with terrors. At the end of the novel she resolves not to be afraid of darkness. She realizes that dark holds no terrors. Saru takes charge of her own life, acquires confidence to face Manu alone. Deshpande sets up a careful and purposeful correspondence between Saru and Virginia Woolf. Like her Saru too is invited to speak to a group of female students. She expresses her woe at her father’s home on not having a room for her and her mother. Her life is much better as compared to her mother’s, as Anne Collette opines:

Yet, according to Woolf’s terms, Saru has acquired that room of her own- it is the room of her profession, the room of her independent life- a life independent of the roles of wife, mother, daughter and sister. Saru’s ability to see that room as
gained, however, is mitigated by her marital situation in which her ‘room’- the body that houses her self-is violated

Saru rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. Torn between tradition and modernity, Saru realizes the futility of leading a lonely life at her father’s home. She goes back to Manu proving herself as a typical Indian woman who needs a firm support which can be received from a male that is her husband, Manu. In spite of being economically independent, she represents traditional Indian woman who seeks man’s support to lead her life.

Mukherjee’s novel The Tiger’s Daughter employs flashback technique. Tara, the protagonist of the novel, returns from America after her long stay of seven years. She had left Calcutta (India) at the age of fifteen for education. She is the only daughter of a very rich, strong, powerful and renowned Bengal Tiger- Mr. Banerjee. The novel unfolds through Tara’s memory. Twenty two years old Tara has married an American, named David; who comes sporadically through her memory. In order to understand her relationship with David, one has to see how it started and progressed.

At Vassar, Tara is naturally homesick in the early days. She does not mingle with her roommates as she was brought up as a sole child in
her family. But she got busy in her studies and exams. Tara meets David a year after her arrival; when her exam ends. Her academic adviser suggests her to join the summer school in Madison. She comes to join the school in Madison where she knocks down a young man- David. Both are unaware of the fact that they are going to become life partners. She simply forgets the incident. Unlike Saru, Tara does not fall in love with David at first sight. They both are not attracted to each other. Both are victims of love-marriage.

Secondly, Tara meets David in an elevator. She gets attracted towards him and falls in love with him within no time. She believes that to fall in love with somebody doesn’t require proper time, place or atmosphere. She expresses her feeling suddenly, “My goodness! How easy I’m in love!” (125). As the novel is narrated by Tara, she explains it on her part but David’s side remains unsaid.

Generally, it happens in a love marriage; spell-bound by the other one neglects his/her drawbacks. By glorifying his/her merits one leads a dreamy life up to the marriage. As usual the dream ends in the morning and his or her demerits come to the surface and become crystal clear with the day-light and gradually lead towards frustration and doomed marriage.
The same happens with Tara and David, they get married. Their cross-cultural marriage leads to disaster. New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines mixed-marriage thus:

Marriage between two people who come from different cultural, national, racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds (http://www.bartlyny.com).

After their marriage, Tara does not adapt herself to the American way of life and culture. The Indian culture is so deeply rooted in her that American life fails to influence her. Tara’s stay at New York doesn’t provide her comfort. She always craves and fancies herself to be in India and tries her best to give Indian touch to her two room apartment:

On the days she had thought she could not possibly survive, she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more “Indian”. She had curried hamburger desperately till David’s stomach had protested ...She had burned incense sent from home (34).

David, being an American is not habituated to have the ‘curried hamburger’. Tara prepares Western hamburger with Indian touch. David eats it without grudging and doesn’t mind her Indian decoration of silk scarves, he understands her needs. This is an evidence of their harmonious relationship.

One does not find any marital discord which one finds with Sarita in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors or Maya in Anita
Desai’s *Cry: The Peacock*. The heroines depicted in the above novels are victims of patriarchy, and they consider marriage to be the absolute goal. Tara is never fascinated with marriage and never thinks it to be an absolute goal. To her marriage means, “…certain physical mysteries, centering, as best as she could determine on or near navel” (124). Her schooling at St. Blaise’s had developed her sense of being loved or fancy about her would-be lover. All her early ideas of love, fair play and good manners had come from the nuns of St. Blaise. She does not believe in arranged marriage while, “She was anxious to fall in love, good heavens” (Ibid). In Indian marriages, groom is treated as the master while his bride, ‘the other’. Marriage is a technical process for a bride. Tara remarks:

> He scrutinizes the faces, tensed by strong lights, not smiling for that would be mistaken for boldness, nor yet really glum for that would be taken as a sour disposition (Ibid).

In Indian marriages the male is given much importance, without his choice nothing happens:

> When the choice is made and bargaining with furniture, ornaments, number of towels to be given, sheets and pillowcases, underwear for the groom, clothes for the female relatives, all settled with maximum discontent (125).

When the marriage is performed with all its rituals by the Brahmin and surrounded by relatives in the night when all go to sleep, “…then the groom takes his bride, a total stranger, and rapes on a brand new, flower-
decked bed” (Ibid). Tara thanks for her father’s procrastination that it never happened to her as hers is a love marriage. Both Tara and Saru seem fortunate in this case that they could avoid the ‘technical process’ because Saru chooses love-marriage and automatically saves herself from the process of marriage mentioned earlier. David is totally Tara’s choice, she says:

Now there would be no brilliant boys, no invitation, no priest, no fire, no blessings. She was a married woman, victim of a love match. David knew nothing of Calcutta, Camac Street, the rows of gods, the power of goodness of Bengal Tiger (Ibid).

Though David is Tara’s own choice even then there is no fervour in their relationship which one finds it with Saru and Manu in The Dark Holds No Terrors in their earlier days of marriage. May be David’s foreignness is the basic reason which creates barrier in the relationship. Tara accepts it:

But a husband is a creature from whom one hides one’s most precious secrets. Tara had been dutifully devious in her marriage. She had not divulged her fears of mleccha man (Ibid).

The obstacles in their healthy relationship seem to be David’s foreignness and Tara’s being ‘dutifully devious’(Ibid) in her marriage. In David’s case, Tara’s yearning for India creates disharmony in marital
relationship. Their relationship is precarious as Indira Nityanandam observes:

In this relationship there is no marital discord but only a cultural conflict as David fails to see any logic behind many Indian customs and traditions (2000:86).

Tradition and culture of any country has a great imprint on the minds of the citizens. One is not ready to give up one’s belief in culture. Such person is not able to cope with the other culture when he goes to any other country or region. Wikipedia, encyclopedia states that cultural conflict:

...implies a conflict between those values considered traditional or conservative and those considered progressive or liberal (www.wikipedia.com).

Michelle LeBaron defines it as:

People from different cultures often have such radically different worldviews that what seems like common sense to one side, is anything but sensible to the other. Different cultures and worldviews can lead to completely different understandings or frames of a conflict, making resolution a challenge (www.beyandintractability.org).

The cultural conflict which is the main obstacle in their harmonious relationship can be easily observed. David is always seen in search of fruitfulness of the activity while Tara emphasizes meditation. According to Tara, “He expected everything to have some meaning of point”(59). Tara remembers how David had laughed when she had
narrated the incident of Rajah’s burial in a children’s cemetery. It brings out the cultural clash between the two. Whenever she wants to tell him something about India either he laughs or shows his disgust which creates the chasm in the relationship. Being a typical Indian girl Tara is meek and submissive. So she never reacts to David’s laughing at her ideas. As Siddhartha Sharma argues:

Tara considers her marriage to David as a gesture of freedom, but comes to realize that such a freedom presupposes a bondage, which she is not willing to accept. She is dutiful daughter to the Bengal tiger, and wants to become a dutiful wife in the traditional mould. She wants to keep him in good humour and is wary of his comments or criticism (2005:93).

Tara, being an Indian woman behaves with downcast eyes. Rooted firmly in the patriarchal traditional system, she is unable to adapt herself to the conditions of the land she emigrated to. On the other hand, David being an American does not give much credit to cleaning the bathroom. It is supposed to be an individual’s duty. Normally they do their own household work without taking much help from the servants. But in India, being born in rich and upper caste family, Tara feels that it’s a servant’s duty. As a result, she face cultural crisis due to the Indian family system rooted in traditional values.

The institution of family provides every possible support to an individual. It is a social group,
Wikipedia, encyclopedia defines it as:

...a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity or co-residence. Although the concept of consanguinity originally referred to relations by "blood," many anthropologists have argued that one must understand the notion of "blood" metaphorically, and that many societies understand 'family' through other concepts rather than through genetic distance (www.wikipedia.com).

Family is regarded as the first school of every individual. The behaviour of elders always influences younger people. The feeling of security and belongingness arises and plays an important role in the development of a good personality. Joint families in this regard are proved most successful. As every individual gets an emotional support irrespective of some drawbacks, loves to be in the family. As a result there is the feeling of affection and oneness in the family.

On the contrary, family in Western countries, especially in America, has got less importance. The individual responsibility is more important than the collective responsibility. The American definition of family differs from that of Indian with the result that an Indian cannot cope with this surrounding.

An Indian has a great respect for the family. Being an Indian, Tara is proud of her family, its rich heritage and her forefathers. While David hates such things, “David was hostile to genealogies and had often
misunderstood her affection for the family as overdependence” (64). Conversely, David has a very short family background, just a divorced mother who lived away from him. Both belong to different countries and cultures. He is neither ready to understand nor is she ready to skip her Indianness, its rich heritage and culture. This is the basic reason for their discord.

The same happens when Tara tells David about her background. She told David about her mother’s devotion and her three baths for puja and he had asked, “Why three baths a day for God’s sake? Would you like to touch God when you’re horribly sweaty and dirty?” (48) Such questions keep him aloof from understanding her Indian psyche. David is wholly western and asks naive questions about Indian customs and traditions. Because of cultural differences, there is a lack of proper communication and understanding between them which make her insecure and apprehensive.

Another incident which creates cultural crisis between them is the letters which Tara gets from David informing that he has brought three books about India to read and understand India. The letters enrage her and she says, “...he had not understood her country through her, that probably he had not understood her either” (50). Naturally it depresses her. She
thinks that her husband is using another source when the source is at hand in the form of his Indian wife. She develops hatred for David. His mentioning of Susie Goldberg looses her faith in David. Her traditional psyche doubts David’s upbringing in free American culture, where there are no bonds and where any one can change his loyalty easily. Being an Indian woman, she suspects David.

There are certain incidents through which Bharati Mukherjee tries to emphasize the mental condition of Tara. When Tara is in the puja room with her mother she constantly remembers David. This shows that she doesn’t forget David. David is in her thoughts not only because she loves him a lot but also because of the way he made fun of her Indian culture and her tradition. She always thinks of David whenever she is at the home or with her friends. This emphasizes the spark of cultural conflict between them for which Tara repents her decision to marry an American.

Tara realizes that America has transformed her completely and now she has become foreign to her native values, religion and culture. M. Shivaramkrishna blames her American husband and western education for her feeling of rootlessness and lack of identity. She observes:

Tara in ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ finds it difficult to relate herself with the family, city, culture in general since her marriage to an American, her western education are enough signs to brand her as ‘alienated’ westernized woman. The
implicit logic is that since she is exposed to the West and has absorbed its values she must be necessarily alienated. Therefore, even when she tries to ‘voice’ her continuing attachment for and identity with India, the voice doesn’t carry conviction for it is at variance with the usual stance- of indifference and arrogance- one generally associates with the ‘westernized’, (exiled) Indian


Torn between two cultures, Tara thinks of her marriage to David as a thing of dishonour. She feels uprooted from Indian culture and surrounding. Whenever she is with her friends she experiences discrimination because of her being married to a foreigner. The friends, whom she had been yearning in America, turned to be hostile when she is in their company. This very feeling of outcast makes her restless. But in India she forgets David’s memories. It shows that she forgets David momentarily but she does not depart from him spiritually.

Her frequent visits to Catelli-Continental hotel enables her to meet Jayonto Roy Chowdhury- an old man and friend of her father, who wants to take her out for a ride. Tara merely accepts it as chance to write the incident to David who always accuses her of being inactive:

David was growing impatient. He had almost said that he thought her lazy, not doing enough, that inertia was the Indian’s curse (80).

David dominated Tara but it is unlike Manu’s domination of Saru. Manu chooses bed as battlefield where two bodies meet to avenge his
opposite sex, whereas David controls Tara psychologically. Here one comes across David’s positive dominance. Through his letters he inspires his wife. At times he scolds her to be active though he detests her culture.

The other day Tara is ready to go out with Roy Chowdhury to Tollygunge with Reena just to show her ‘work’ to David. She realizes their different attitudes. Tara thinks what he will do if he comes to India:

He was not like her. Would he sling his camera like other Americans and photograph beggars in Shambazar, squatters in Tollygunge, prostitutes in Free School Street, would he try to capture in color the pain of Calcutta?... perhaps he would not do these things either. He would land unannounced at Howrah station and say to the coolie wearing a number, I’d like the real India (108).

In his letters David constantly demands report of her ‘home-work’. Being involved in her friends and perhaps not interested in it, Tara often forgets the ‘home-work’. Instead, she thinks that she should convey him some incidents, she says:

David was painfully western; he still complained of her placidity. Things “happened” only when they began and ended. He wrote her that he worried she wasn’t doing anything (112).

David never likes her wasting too much time with her friends to whom he calls, ‘bigots’ and always wants her to do the thing that really mattered. The gulf between them widens because of her Indianness and his Americanness.
Tara herself, in her letters to David, admits the conflict of cultures, “...if she had been in New York and the old man, an American, his invitations would have been merely sporting. But at Catelli-Continental, she shared the outrage that inflamed her companion” (Ibid). Her Indian friend Reena opposes her strongly about her idea to go out with the old man. Finally, she agrees unwillingly. Being married to an American she would have blended both cultures finely but it does not happen with her. This communication gap is destructive for the institution of marriage.

The concept for happy and harmonious marriage has become futile due to patriarchal division of values where positive qualities are attributed to men and women are considered inferior. What Lynne Segal remarks is perhaps important that, “men wield power over women through terror” (Segal:1987:12). Therefore man thinks that woman is everything negative that he is not, and behaves accordingly. This attitude is responsible for miscommunication between the new couples in marriage.

Tara faces the same and always finds it difficult to communicate to her husband who is unaware of her culture and ‘another man’. Being brought up in the Bengali family her concept of marriage is set in typical Bengali ways, which had set up her mind too but she can’t explain it to
David, "The security of traditional Bengali marriage could not be explained, not to David Cartwright, not by Tara Banerjee" (126).

In her much awaited letter to David she clearly brings out the cultural discrimination. Describing the real 'bustee' in Tollygunge she says, "...poverty is an art your people will never master" (129). She is afraid that the incident should not make him think Calcutta as a jungle. She tells him about her trip with her friends but is sure that, "I don't think you could begin to comprehend these problems" (130). She tries her best to describe India through her letters:

Nothing my parents could give up would possibly change the life of the poor. India is not a banana republic there are not any landlord classes. You could simply execute or exile. We are involved in each other's fates (Ibid).

Though Tara tries to describe India, she is sure that David's Americanness will not allow him to understand India and Indian people.

After completing her letter to David her sense of hiding real things from him shows her betrayal with her husband and it is the outcome of his foreignness which expected, "...everything to have some meaning or point"(Ibid).

After her letter to David she gets many letters from David which accuse her of "stupid inanities and callousness" (131). David motivates her by asking tells her to, "...take a stand against injustice, against
unemployment, hunger and bribery” (Ibid). But Tara finds it difficult to cope up with the pathetic social scenario in Calcutta. While talking about Tara’s upbringing in the milieu of upper class people and their attitude, Indira Nityanandam observes:

All through her childhood, Tara has been unexposed to the reality of Calcutta life. To her, Calcutta just meant living in a huge house on Camac Street, going to school at St. Blaise, seeing movies at Metro and now whiling away her time at Catelli Continental drinking endless cups of tea and listening to the arm-chair politics of her numerous rich friends. Tara has not come face to face with the real Calcutta of poverty and squalor, industrial unrest and increasing crimes (2000:69).

Tara upbraided in an upper class family and acquainted with a very limited world, up to now has nothing to do with the outside world of poverty, squalor, industrial unrest and increasing crimes of Calcutta. David, an American liberal, wants to broaden her views which she doesn’t allow, eventually affecting their relationship.

Tara goes to Kanan Devi’s Ashram to perform ‘Pujas’ and ‘Kirtans’, her mother warns her not to inform about it to a foreigner, Antonia. Tara’s guilty conscious does not allow her to inform it to David too who is her husband but an American. So she skilfully avoids certain incidents in her letters to David. Her mother believes that exposing her family secrets to a foreigner is an act of betrayal. The dilemma in her
mind whether to write to her husband or to listen to her mother affects her relationship with David.

Apart from the discord in relationship one observes the accord in the relationship between Tara and David. On her journey from Bombay to Calcutta by train, Tara is reminded of David’s words which show his love for his wife. He was careful about his wife’s health. She remembers his suggestions, “David’s worries feared diarrhea, jaundice and polluted water” (21). This incident shows David’s love for Tara and hatred for India. In the same railway compartment, she comes to know that she is going to share her compartment with two men and such hostile atmosphere makes her feel the necessity of David’s presence, “Perhaps I was stupid to come without him” (Ibid). She misses David a lot. This shows her love for him out of necessity.

Tara is extremely proud of her culture, tradition and rich family background. Sometimes she oscillates between the modernity of America and tradition of India. She feels extreme love for David but hates the culture that David hails from. Though she is surrounded by her Indian friends, she doesn’t forget David. She thinks of him:

She thought at this moment David was probably sitting in his lumpy chair surrounded by quarterlies and radical journals and missing her very much (43).
Tara repents once again that she didn’t bring her husband to India. As her friends never talk about her husband, it pinches her. This shows her love for David.

David expresses his genuine love in his letters to Tara. S.P. Swain aptly points out:

Husband-wife alienation figures conspicuously in the novel. There were frequent pen-services between David and Tara. David wrote regularly. Nevertheless, the David of these aerogrammes, as the novelist avers, was unfamiliar to Tara. “He seemed like a figure standing in shadows, of a foreigner with David. Look at her letter to David: “I miss you very much…tell your parents to cable me if you get sick”’. Bharati Mukherjee has elucidated the note of estrangement in Tara through her inability to visualize and reckon David in India. In fact, it is her journey back to Calcutta (India) which has created a shadowy picture of David in her mind which in turn makes her ill at ease in her mind which in turn makes her ill at ease in her native place


It shows that Tara really misses David in India and even his absence makes her ill and nervous in her country with her own people.

Ananda Prabha Bharat rightly points out:

Tara’s mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities- one is an Indian and other an American. During such moments she feels to go back to her husband because she feels that she would be more at ease there


The relationship between David and Tara swings between love and hate.
In the very beginning of his letters, David agrees that he misses Tara very much and cares about her health. In America, he feels lonely. Aerogramme is the only mediator between them which he uses frequently to express his love. Tara too loves him very much, “It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much” (63). Being caught in an Indian surrounding, Tara finds it difficult to express her genuine feeling to her husband. It is seen that traditional Indian woman never expresses her love openly. Tara is no exception to this. Though she is always preoccupied with the thoughts of her husband, his likes and dislikes Tara never expresses her genuine love for David. At the Carnival festival as Tara passes from shop to shop with P.K.Tuntunwalla, she buys two ‘Hot Dogs’, a favourite dish of her husband. Tara would do such things quite often out of her love for her husband.

David complains about the Mets in America through his letters. Tara is now sick of her Indian friends. She comes alone at the Catelli-Continental to buy foreign newspapers and magazines which can give her information about American Mets, so that she may know about David. It shows her craving for David. The sense of being away from him enhances her sense of guilt and betrayal, so she tries her best to bring herself closer to David through newspapers and magazines.
Tara snubs her dear friend Reena as she calls David ‘a mleccha’, “She never thought of David as a mleccha, an outcaste” (Ibid). Her quarrel with her friends is a clear indication of her despair. Tara for a while repents for having outcaste husband but doesn’t think to leave him. In India, husband is considered next to God, a woman without husband is considered incomplete. Tara repents her decision to come to India without David.

Tara always remembers David when she is in difficulty. It is a fact that someone remembers his/her nearest person when he/she is in danger. She experiences the hostile atmosphere of ‘bustee’ in her trip to Tollygunge with Jayonto and Reena. For the first time, she observes ‘bustee’. Maya Manju Sharma aptly observes:

Tara has never been a part of the crowd. She has always been sheltered as child, young, adult and woman. Each excursion traumatizes her by bringing her closer to touch of masses (quoted in Nelson [ed.] 1993:12).

Tara is afraid of the vulgar people and thinks she will not be alive. The very thought of death enables her to think about the nearest person, that is of course David. Tara says, “She thought she loved David very much, and death or mutilation before she had told him that would be unbearable”(118). It shows she really loves David. David’s criticism of
Indian culture and tradition acts as a barrier between him and Tara; Tara being unable to assimilate in American culture.

Tara’s need for David is clearly seen when she is caught in a flux. In Nayapur, Tuntunwalla takes her to a guest house and orders her maid to be in the verandah as he wants privacy. In spite of being aware of the danger, Tara can’t protest against it as she is, “...neither forceful nor impulsive” (197). When she comes to know that nobody will protect her from Tuntunwalla, the very thought of insecurity makes her think of David, “Tara thought she loved David desperately” (Ibid). As Sushma Tandon says:

The second is the traumatic incident of sexual violence by Tuntunwalla. Tara is in desperate need to communicate but to whom? She finds all avenues closed (1998:34).

After her seduction by Tuntunwalla, Tara seeks psychological support from David alone, who is away from her. But her close friends also seem worthless to her. As a result, she gets frustrated in India. Her trip to Nayapur and the industrialization disappoints her further.

Fed up with all these incidents she constantly thinks of going back to David. She returns to Calcutta with her maid, she does not even wait for her friends to come back from the cinema hall. She announces her decision to go back which confuses her parents. Her friends and parents
try to persuade her but all their efforts turn futile. For her America is an alien country and now India too seems the same, “Tara does not feel at home in her new home. In her old home too she is not at home” (155). Her frustration towards both the countries forces her to go to David. Her decision to go back to America becomes firm when she gets a letter from David in the monsoon. David points out in his letter:

Calcutta as the collective future in which garbage, disease and stagnation are man’s estate. “Survival to the lower forms, insects and sludgeworms” (201).

This letter aggravates her condition. As the depression intensified Tara ultimately decides to go back to David.

Tara, with the intention to disclose her decision of returning to America, invites her friends to Catelli-Continental. But the situation outside the hotel grows awful. She is caught in riots and violence on the street. She takes shelter in the car. In such a critical situation when death seems to be so near and certain she only thinks of David. And Tara still locked in a car across the street from the Catelli-Continental, wonders whether she would ever get out of Calcutta and if she would whether David would even know that she loves her very much. This is her craving for David and nostalgia for India. She even thinks of her death and her unexpressed love for David.
The novel ends on the note of her craziness towards her unexpressed love to David. It shows how she pines to go to him and her eagerness to express her genuine feelings of affection to him. Once her close Indian friends force her to forget David, their irreverent attitude towards David pains her. At the end of the novel the author leaves reader guessing about the fate of the protagonist Tara Banerjee. Ananda Prabha Bharat however feels that:

Tara’s journey to India her own native land ironically proves frustrating slowly leading to his illusion, alienation, depressing and finally her tragic end

Like Sarita, Tara too chooses to return to David, having an Indian mindset. She thinks like an Indian woman and seeks male protection. Frustrated by her motherland, she chooses ‘the protected future’ that is David though he is living in the country which she never thinks her own.

Lastly, she realizes the pangs of alienation and reconciles with David. Her affection for her husband acquires a significant place. His last letter cautions her not to remain there in Calcutta. He comes to know about the danger through Ved Mehta’s journals and immediately writes to Tara to leave India. This act shows him as a caring and loving husband. He does not want his wife to live in such a place where human life is endangered by disease and stagnation. David insists Tara to come back to
him. Though her father is capable enough to protect her, she does not find herself secure in India and thinks David is her sole caretaker. This letter makes her think that she must not succumb to the temptations of her parents and friends, so she makes her mind to go back.

The roots in search of which Tara had come to India are not found. Realizing the futility of her search, she resolves to face the fact. Reality proves to be better than dream for Tara. In fact Tara has come to India in search of the cultural roots which she thinks she has lost in America. Alienated from her roots, Tara tries to discover the ‘India’ of her ‘dream’ but her search proves futile because of social and cultural environment.

Bharati Mukherjee leads her heroine through a series of adventures and misadventures to a final self-realization and reconciliation. Tara’s homesick eyes notice many changes in the city of Calcutta. She is outraged, and cannot respond to these changes. She longs for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces. What confronts her was a restive city.

Tara begins to feel alienated. She felt more alienated in India than in America. Hence she chooses to live in America with the help of her loving husband. Indira Nitynandam says that:
Her decision to go back to David is not the result of deep thought. Instead, it is impelled by his letters...Tara’s decision to return to David is not a positive realization or finding of roots away from home, but instead an escape from the present (2000: 70).

Though Tara prefers to go back, her decision is not the result of deep thinking. It seems that from the beginning Mukherjee has depicted Tara with a wavering personality which is revealed in the various incidents of her life. She is not a decision maker and easily falls prey to Tuntunwalla. Enakshi Chaudhari comments:

She had lacked the ability to take any action to stop him but she had been conscious of this inability too.

One can conclude that Tara’s decision to return to David is also true to her nature. Tara is not firm while David is firm, she is a submissive Indian woman while he is a confident foreigner. The two contrary temperaments as well as cultural, racial, religious and national differences affect their relationship.

One can find some similarities and contrasts between the protagonists of the two novels, that is, Saru and Tara after a close study of the novels. The protagonists are educated young women. Both Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee present the new educated women’s
world today and deal with the problems of their marital life. Devoid of staunch feminist and anti male stance, they handle woman’s issues.

Saru and Tara are urban women. Both have had love marriage and both are submissive, though Saru is aware of her needs and determines to lead her future life on her own terms at her parental home but before that she has played the role of a submissive wife. Both of them are the victims of the over possessive nature of their husbands. The only difference is that Saru’s husband, Manu is negative while Tara’s husband, David is positive in views. Manu’s possessiveness crushes Saru’s femininity and forces her to depart from him. Both Saru and Tara go back to their husbands.

Saru has a middle class background and a troubled childhood whereas Tara hails from upper class society and was a pampered child. Being a sole daughter of the family, her father grants her freedom, even allows sending abroad. Saru is in some respect, rebellious but she is also naturally submissive while Tara is overprotected before and after marriage. Saru is exposed to brutality from her very childhood, and even after marriage endures many sufferings. Being a daughter of an orthodox mother and wife of sadist husband, she faces bitter experiences of life. While Tara leads a luxurious life at both places and can never tolerate the slum life for a single moment. Being traditional, Tara presents herself as a
monogamous wife while Saru has an extra-marital affair with Boozie and Rao.

Saru lives in her own country while Tara leaves her country and settles abroad. Both feel the rootlessness but the difference is that Saru feels emotionally alienated while Tara’s rootlessness is external to the family. Saru’s rootlessness lies in her husband’s behaviour while that of Tara’s lies in herself. Saru is a mother of two children while Tara is childless. Saru is confident and achieves her aim to be a successful doctor by overcoming many adversities but she is not a successful wife. Though Tara is brilliant and takes education abroad in favourable situation, she neither makes career nor becomes a successful wife. Being a victim of cultural clash Tara is not decisive, always repents her decision. Saru sometimes boldly faces circumstances.

Saru and Tara purposely choose to come back at their parental home. Saru is unwelcome while Tara is warmly welcomed. Saru uses her stay to introspect by looking at her marriage from distance and to get further direction. While Tara, being found rootless even in her home decides to return to David.

Saru goes back to her husband even when she is the bread-winner and economically independent. The thing which forces her to return in her
suffocating world is nothing but the feeling of insecurity. The Indian women have the mindset that they cannot live alone and always want to be protected. Saru goes back to Manu finding secure place nowhere and comes to know inevitability of woman’s life. Being a typical Deshpande heroine, Saru is torn between tradition and modernity. Siddhartha Sharma says:

She is neither the typical western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism of its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage (2005:37)

In an interview with Vanmala Vishwanathan, Deshpande admits that:

It is needed. It is necessary for women to live with relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I’ve tried to convey in my writing (quoted in Pathak [ed.] 1998:236).

Proving herself true to tradition, Saru returns to Manu. Though she resolves overtly to no more fear of darkness but it is the realization of insecurity that forces her to go back to her husband. Tara goes back to David. She is well educated in a free country like America; she enjoys the freedom of thought and expression even though she is unable to keep away her Indian Sanskaras which are deeply rooted in her mind. She
craves for her own country while she was in America. She herself chooses to return to America. Her over-protected upbringing leads her to go to David to protect herself. Her rootlessness forces her to go back to David. The transformation of her own country, her rape, and the upheavals of Calcutta intensify her decision to go back. Being a true Indian, Tara seeks security in being an Indian wife. Both the protagonists represent Indian womanhood.