Chapter 2
Shashi Deshpande: The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)

Transcending psyche: Aesthetics of Space

“Power infuses discourse”, according to Paul Foss in *Language, Sexuality and Subversion*. “Discourse has become the arena for the generation and propagation of historically specified norms and socially adequate forms of power”. Language too conveys a certain power. This power of language and discourse must be refused by the project of feminist discourse. Feminist thinkers must self-consciously and critically confront various traditions of political discourse, feminist and non-feminist. The writer Shashi Deshpande belongs to this tradition of feminist thinkers, and is redescribing social reality and experience in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. “Words are often no more than silence, and silence has its voices”. (Deshpande, The Dark--112) It were these subdued, silenced, euphemized, entrapped voices whose accounts of resistance, reaction and subversion Shashi Deshpande was trying to give voice to through an imaginative treatment of the contemporary problem and an artistical exploration and interpretation of the term ‘woman’ in all its variegated aspects.

What is curious as the story of feminist discourse and its discontents unfolds; and what the thesis hopes to demonstrate as the argument proceeds, is the startling way in which contemporary feminists have, from time to time, recapitulated in their thinking earlier arguments on language that erode the search for emancipatory feminist speech, in these texts under study. Indeed in a few instances, feminist commitment to a particular account of human speech interdicts by definition any possibility that speech might serve liberatory purpose. This is true of important thinkers representing radical and Marxist feminist theories who, in what appears to be an unthinking embrace of Hobbesian or Marxist views; undermine their own explicit liberatory aims.

On the other hand, one also finds prominent liberal feminists embracing a contemporary political language, that of academic social science, in which people become abstract role players as mothers, wives and daughters in the thesis, and the social spaces inhibited by real human beings are turned into hollow structures that mysteriously
perform decreed functions. Accepting the presumptions of classical liberal market theory, this language reduces human motivations to a utilitarian calculus of self-interest. Neither the discourse of modern social science, then, nor the discursive tradition of Western political thought can, together or singly, serve as the rich, fertile soil in which to sow the seeds of emancipatory speech.

No single thinker or text, no school of thought or writing, no scientific model of social life, offers an adequate image of human subjects, nor a compelling account of that speech which is a central human capability, which makes us the creatures we are and holds forth: the tantalizing possibilities of creative change when language bursts the bonds of social control and, unexpectedly, offers intimations of a life still-in-becoming. The scope and urgency of this complex theoretical matrix cannot be understood outside a context that is both historical and textual, thus the study of Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors.

An emphasis on ideological forms of oppression has been the main strength of radical feminist theories of women's subordination, but also their main weakness, in the sense that cultural forms are too often seen as directly expressing universal patriarchal values, unmediated by history, economics or politics. In its approach to questions of ideology socialist feminism has developed a historically specific analysis that has tried with some success to theorize the relationship between class and gender. These texts must be read with contemporary discourses that construct class, race and gender, so that we may hear more accurately how their writing appropriates and changes dominant ideas of sexual difference. Moreover because of the subordinated place of women within the ruling classes, and because sexual difference is constructed through the hierarchies of class and race and vice versa, women's writing both articulates and challenges the dominant ideology from a decentered position within it. The given text then moves through the rhetoric of radical individualism towards a critique of both patriarchal and capitalist relations.
The Dark Holds No Terrors is a proto-feminist text that both moves within and pushes beyond 'bourgeoisie ideology'. Women’s fiction and poetry is a site where women like Deshpande actively structured the meaning of sexual difference in their society, especially and powerfully as it applied to difference between women. “I, as I would like myself to be.” It was this inner urge of the Dharwad (Karnataka) born daughter of the renowned Kannada writer, dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shriranga that made a great Indian woman novelist out of her. Exploring the terrains provided to her since 1980 when her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors appeared, Shashi Deshpande traverses through the in’s and out’s of the ‘woman problem’ with the social consciousness of the phenomenon enacted around her. Deshpande’s early English education at the protestant mission school in Karnataka and the days of her being influenced by British classic texts all gave her a vivacity and vividity of presenting her ideology through the creative impulse of the novel and short story, the genres with which she was most comfortable.

In her different works such as The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up And Be Dead (1983), Roots And Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1992), A Matter Of Time (1996), Small Remedies (2000) Deshpande narrated an interesting saga of human bonds and bondages making a fascinating reading. Shashi Deshpande along with other feminist Post-Independence Indian English novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan and others presents women in their heroic struggle to break through the patterns of sexuality and sensuality and to discover themselves as human beings capable of playing a positive role in the development of society.

While her novels were taking shape, she wrote four books for children and a number of short stories books such as The Miracle And Other Stories, Collected Stories Vol I, The Intrusion and Other Stories along with the recently anthologize Best Loved Indian Stories, Vol.1, published by Penguin India, 1999 and The Stone Woman (2000). She is a winner of the Sahitaya Akademi Award (for the novel, That Long Silence) and the Nanjangud Thirumalamba award. “Basically, mine is a quest for the human self
within the woman” Deshpande said in one of her interviews. Woman is the central object of her fiction. Her women characters are born out of a typical Indian situation. They represent middle class society. Her theory is not of Western Feminism. In fact she has no theories, she rejects them and gives her own assessment of the predicament of Indian women caught between tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature, assertion and confrontation, freedom and loneliness and self-aggrandizement and self-realization. The conflicts faced by women in her novels are existential in nature. They can occur for any woman in society.

Their self-assertion is self-alienation. The more search for freedom and independence and the meaning of life, the more it results in alienation and loneliness. This is the typical existential problem every man encounters and every modern woman according to Deshpande is facing. Deshpande however takes pity on her women characters for the predicaments created by them through self-delusion and hallucinations and towards the end she provides a touch of humanism mixed with love. Her subjects are the realities of women’s lives and the truths that lie behind their silences. One theme which recurs in many of her books like The Dark Holds No Terrors is rape; both as a random violent act and within marriage. It is a subject which society prefers not to discuss,” says Deshpande.

Many of Deshpande’s women characters learn to break free of the stereotypes, which surround them: the stereotypes of the mother and wife who remain silent and sacrifice her own needs and her own self. Deshpande’s range is narrow but intense. Like Jane Austin, she concentrates on “two inches of ivory” but highlights the agony, the suffering of higher middle-class Indian families. The novelist has again and again assured us of a fresh lease of life: “Things will work out somehow; nothing is over, we leave our marks” (Deshpande, The Dark-136)

Frequent reference to Indian epics and allusions, to archetypal characters like the Dasarath, Rama, Sita, Draupadi and Gandhari make the role of the reader difficult, for they demand his familiarity with them in order to understand the protagonist and her
problems with insight and sympathy. Folk tales and fables are used to project the minds of the characters. It is credible that despite her family background, in particular her father’s intellectual pursuits and her own philosophical orientation, Deshpande has taken up for discussion some crucial aspects of woman’s life such as sex, sexuality and her body. In a male dominated society a woman is not expected to feel any sexual urges. She is expected to be passive and unresponsive. It shocks people to see passion in a woman. The time must come when a woman’s body must be heard. According to Raman Seldon:

Woman must uncensor herself; recover her goods, her organ her immense bodily territories, which have been kept under seal.
She must throw off her guilt. (Seldon. A Reader’s guide to Contemporary Literary Theory. 150-151)

Anything like this is yet to happen overtly in Deshpande’s fiction though one comes across some hints of the same. Though Deshpande has reservations about being called a ‘Feminist’ or ‘women writer’, she admits that her writing emerges from her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society--- there I was, happily married two lovely sons, but I was feeling very incomplete, even dissatisfied. (Deshpande, Of Concerns—)

She admits that it is out of the difficulty of playing different roles enjoined in her by society, out of the knowledge that she is something more and something different from the sum total of these roles her writings emerge.“ My writings come out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman” (Deshpande. Of Concerns, Of Anxieties)

Her chief concern is the human relations, not the rationalized but the felt, perceived and real, not the traditional but redefined human relations especially the relationship between man and woman. In all these the central figure is woman. She says“
Ultimate fiction is life-imagined. Imagination superimposed upon life, reshaping it.” (Deshpance. Of Concerns). The feminist depictions in her novels may not be palatable to many because almost invariably her novels seem to end where they began, with only a changed protagonist who has followed the tortuous route of self-examination and self-realization. No structures are changed and no changes are visible in the private sphere of home in this fictitious world. Her writings emerge from her own experience of being a daughter, a wife, and most importantly a women whose life has more meaning than all these roles that Indian society imposes on a woman. She writes:

I’m not only a woman. I’m not only a mother. I’m not only a wife
I’m not only a female. I’m a human being with a mind. It gave me
a lot of unhappiness that my intellect wasn’t being connected to
my female self. I was always’s Mrs Deshpande, Raghunandan’s
mother Vikram’s mother--- That anger ultimately translates into
feminism. (R.K Dhawan, Indian Woman Novelists)

What sets her apart from other Indian writers in English is that she has never ‘exoticised’ India for the western reader. She has been steadfast in refusing to compromise to suit global market trends. A careful perusal of her works reveals some influence of the Bronte sisters, Jane Austin, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica Jong. Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer stimulate her writing but their influence was quite late in her fiction. Inspite of her appreciation of these writers she is not an ardent follower of their style. Matrimony is often regarded in India as the *summum bonum* of a woman’s life. In many cases however it serves as a weapon in the hands of the patriarchy to coerce and silence. In India, a wife finds it impossible to relate to the world without her husband, for it is held that a husband has a protective and dominating role to perform, in which the wife feels secure and happy.

Reallizing this fact, *Saru* (Sarita) the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was obliged to give this ironic (imaginary) advice to future wives,
A wife must always walk a few feet behind her husband—
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— no partnership can be equal. It will
always be unequal, but take care that it is unequal in favour of
your husband. (Deshpande, 124)

This is the sad commentary on the incompatibility in and the hypocrisy of married life,
which the novelist has presented realistically. There is in Deshpande’s novels a revulsion
to normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation. Woman,
she feels, must not be reduced to the level of a breeding machine. She highlights the fact
that a woman is not merely a conglomeration of feminine functions. There is no superior
or inferior, we are just two halves of the one species (Ardhanareshwar) as given in vedic
texts. She fully agrees with Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex) that the fact of their
being human is much more important than their being men and women.1 The novelist
does not believe in offering readymade solutions. But the conviction that “we can always
hope” and that “life has always to be made possible” speaks of a genuinely positive
attitude to life. Deshpande’s protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles,
and the novel end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in
the future. The novelist emerges in them as a bridge between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande does not indulge in technical innovations or stylistic deviations,
but her use of language is precise and fresh. She says herself in one of her interviews,“I
do not use Indianisms to make my writings look Indian—I never try to make India look
exotic” (Dhawan) One may find in Shashi Deshpande’s novels occasionally
autobiographical strains, but her characters and incidents are not directly lifted from her
own life. What the novelist does is to make the creative use of her experiences and
memories in her works. This is particularly true of her earlier writings. Memory plays a
significant role in Deshpande’s novels. The narrative keeps on moving back and forth in
time. The novelist also uses some devices of the stream of consciousness technique
novels like flashback and interior monologue to probe into the psyche of her characters.
Deshpande does not write for foreign readers and there is no attempt in her novels at 'window dressing'.

Her real contribution lies in the portrayal of the plights and problems, trials and tribulations of the middle class Indian women, especially those who are educated and have chosen a career for themselves. Deshpande is not unconcerned about Indian reality in respect of the lot of women, but she is not a strident and militant kind of feminist who sees the male as the sole cause of all her problems. Her concern is nothing less than the human predicament. As a chronicler of human relations she is superb. The desire for conveying a message is seen in Deshpande’s works, but it does not take the shape of the omniscient author who goes around imparting meanings. The desire to create a meaning, to convey a message, which outlives the plot of the novel, continues in her case in the form of repetitions: repetitions of character types, plot construction, social milieu and the literary interest of her female protagonists. The repetitions and the seriousness, with which they are made, also give rise to more than one set of meanings.

Her introspection and psychological probing make her second to none in revealing the subconscious or unconscious psyche of her female protagonists. As compared to many other Indian women novelists of the twentieth century, she is much more vociferous in voicing her fears and concerns regarding the future of women in congenial surroundings. Her female protagonists are sensitive, self conscious, intellectually brilliant and creative. Deshpande’s novels move from self-abnegation to self-realization.

“Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of --- my husband, my wife? my children, my parents?” (Deshpande, 178) This is the question that comes to one’s mind as one goes through the turmoil’s and tribulations of Shashi Deshpande’s novel The Dark Holds No Terrors. Shashi Deshpande tells us the story of man and woman from woman’s point of view and of wife and husband from the wife’s point of view. She describes and dissects the life inside the cage, behind the veil, under the bell jar from precisely that vantage point of inner space. In a tormented saga of a tormented wife the novelist portrays a search for authenticity. All Saru (Sarita) the protagonist wants is to
Saru’s mind, psyche and experience are being exposed to the very shreds in apt and literal terminology by Deshpande. She is like Margaret Atwood (in Surfacing) in her depiction of Sarita’s predicament.

The novel is shrewdly presented by Deshpande as Saru’s own series of memories, a first hand account of both her past and present life, written only for herself, and thus as a direct and truthful statement on one woman’s introspective analysis, her concrete existence. Her representative insights do not take her to one single place; her constant going back to various sources leaves her divided, but in a very productive manner as one realizes towards the end. Perhaps one could best explain her state of mind by using the words of Derrida:

Everything begins by referring back (par le renvoi), that is to say, does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partition divides, from the very start, every renvoi, there is not a single renvoi but from then on, always, a multiplicity of renvois, so many different traces referring back to other traces and to traces of others. This divisibility of the renvoi has nothing negative about it, it is not a lack— this divisibility or this difference is the condition for there being a renvoi, possibly a renvoi of being, a dispensation or a gift of being and time, of the present and of representation. (Jacque Derrida. Sending: On Representation 33)²

In evoking the original gushing forth of existence Deshpande renders a spell-inducing tale not in the complete naturalistic style but with some magical realism. The character Sara is a deep psychological study of a woman’s mind developing through
different phases of growth and maturity, in search of a true self-consciousness. The growth from the earlier thoughts of terrified and subdued childhood, her constrained relation with her brother Dhruva, disliking of an opposing girl-child hating mother, a silent father; through that of a young girl experiencing the soarings of adolescence, peer pressures, first loves, new stepings into just discovered womanhood, identity search; to that of a guilty wife, non dutiful daughter, distanced mother and a self-exploring and strife torn identity.

In studying these idioms, theory of Foucault can be put into practice. Michel Foucault posits ‘memory as a site for resistance’. As he mentions in his psychological studies “to travel and progress, I must always move through fear, confront terror.”(David Glover and Cora Kaplan. The New Critical Idiom) Jonathan Arc also puts it in his Introduction to Post-modernism and Politics that the process of remembering can be a practice which

transforms history from a judgement on the past in the name of a present truth to a ‘counter-memory’ that combats our current modes of truth and justice, helping us to understand and change the present by placing it in a new relation to the past.

Saru’s remembering thus acts as a cure for her life’s problems. Her memory also becomes a site of resistance as she confronts the terror of her own being as a daughter and a mother with the fear of Manu’s sadism chasing her. She goes through a phase of intensive study and analysis of her past in relation to her future in order to reach a conclusion that is both sane and true. She passes through different phases quite alone and questioning her basic womanhood.“ Go on where? But the darkness yielded no answer” (Deshpande, 74)

The whole novel is strewn with sights, sounds, incidents and experiences as one explores Saru’s psyche to the very shreds. Pande has portrayed in apt and interminable language the torn, disintegrated, fragmented self caught in a mélange of feelings of guilt
and shame; suffering physical, emotional, mental and psychological rape at the hands of a sadist husband of her own choice. She carefully teases out the identity crises of Sara through step-by-step indulgence in exposition of Sara’s character and thoughts built up around incidents of her life. Her thoughts as a daughter towards her mother and father, as a wife towards Manu (Manohar) and as a mother of two children, Abhi and Renu are brought out clearly. The whole novel is a kind of reflective work, written in the memory of Sara as she thinks back on bygone events and incidents of her life; trying to locate some truth out of them and create a ‘Utopian’ self.

A tormented Sara comes back to her father’s house and indulges in a kind of self-introspection. It seems as if she is oscillating between the time and space montage of Virginia Woolf trying to make sense of the distraught and dislocated world around her. She comes back to him a guilty and a shamed person; guilty because of her leaving them adamantly and marrying a man of her choice; a choice that turned out to be a bad one and shamed because of the physical torment she faced; about which any description or mention to her father is a matter of great shame. Guilt follows her even in her mother’s dislike and the death of her brother Dhrava, an unexplainable guilt, silent yet ever piercing her. The ghost of the dead brother, a kind of split double self of her own self constantly haunts her. She enters the paternal house like a stranger, an “unwelcomed guest” as she calls herself and meets her silent and passive father after a long gap of fifteen years. Both father and daughter are unaware of what had happened to each other’s lives during this time period and both are equally unconcerned about each other now also. Sara’s urge to find an escape or a place of refuge away from her husband where she can be herself brings her into direct confrontation with her real self; a self that was unexplored by her till now, a self that had both the negative and positive aspects, a self equally human in feeling hurt and equally self centered in hurting too.

All Deshpande’s women are bound down by something more than just life and being women. They seem to be caught in an overpowering, self created mesh of guilt, shame and suffering, seeking a release or ‘catharsis’ from a second self created inner self. Duality of existence is their problem, which tears them apart. There is further a kind of
unseen strain, a pressure felt in all the power relationships; be it father-son, mother-daughter, husband-wife, brother-sister which bogs them down, as Sarita says, “mine was a strictly circumscribed life” as she was “the wronged child—the unloved daughter, the scapegoat” (Deshpande, 165) During her stay at her father’s house Saru gets sufficient time to re-live the events of her life and to be a true judge of her failings, sufferings and sorrows. She explores her relationship with her mother, brother, husband and father and herself as an individual and not just a mother, wife or daughter. She begins the journey as a struggling, split self, tormented at the hands of a sadist husband, tortured by the thought of an unloving mother who thought her to be a killer, disappointed that she is not a perfect mother to her children and guilty at losing her brother. “I could not, would not bear it. I began to fight back, hopelessly, savagely.”(Deshpande, 10)

Protest and skittish rebellion is inbuilt in Saru’s character, whether it is as a child, as a woman, as a wife, as a mother or as a sister. She reacts against the authority of her parents as a child when she joins the medical college. She revolts against her brother Dhruva calling her “Saratai” and following her everywhere. She reacts against Manu’s sadist attitude. She in the end of all situations puts up a revolt from self, that makes her the typical non subjugated, non stereotyped woman character that had started emerging in the novels written during Deshpande’s time, in which the heroine’s self realization emerges out of the protest against a cloistered self and society.

The lead character need not exhibit a perfect role-playing in the sense of being a complete woman. ‘Complete’ implies to being a dutiful daughter, perfect wife (satisfying in all respects to her husband) and a perfect mother. The ‘humane’ aspect of a faultering female self is made popular here. A woman is not expected to be a perfect creature doing all the things right. She is equally human and given to emotions and failings, obscure and eccentric behaviours not necessarily correct. A torn psyche, a distraught self, fragmentary emotions all become popular in Deshpande’s novels and this is what Saru too portrays: “I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure”(Deshpande, 12)
Sara is seen to struggle between a split-self, a double persona of 'she' and 'I' constantly in the novel, which raises a kind of confused state, representative of her state of her mind. She faces her father after fifteen long years passively and calmly but the fear of his not recognizing her or not entertaining her grips her psyche: "the silence was palpable, throbbing and heavy—nothing had changed." (Deshpande, 12) The absence of changes in the first look troubled her somewhere deep down, but the feeling of being at home came late to her, though it did come once the process of flashback started. This flashback took her down the memory lane and into the different relationships she entertained in her life. Thus started the process of re-living through the lost chapters of her past life and a process of realization. From this de-construction emerged her re-construction.

There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing. No, worse, of being just a ventriloquist's dummy, that smiles, laughs and talks only because of the ventriloquist. (Deshpande, 18)

Her story starts in an indirect vague way. The reader picks up the threads as the story progresses. She presents no clear cut divisions in the chapters in terms of parts. Although the novel is distinctly divided into four clear parts but all the parts talk about all the relationships Sara has. The novel explores Sara's relationship with her parents as a daughter and her outright rejection on being like her mother.

A kind of shame that engulfs me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that puts me in the same class as my mother---If you're a woman, I don't want to be one. (Deshpande, 56)

Saru exhibits this inbuilt hatred toward's her mother as her mother toward's her. Deshpande goes beyond the set prescribed role of a perfect mother all caring for her children describing a mother who made Sara into the hate filled child she is. Her
preference for Sara’s brother Dhruva as is the general case in most Indian families, her hatred towards Sara when she was found guilty for the death of her brother at a tender age, her staring at her critically and her rejection of Sara’s ambitions being a girl made Sara nurture an inbuilt subversion against her. She found the same critical eyes of her mother in her daughter Renu “She stared critically at me, a cold, shrewd, objective observer—oh no, she’s not like her (Saru’s mother)” (Deshpande, 28) Instead of a male gaze, Sara is gazed at by her own mother. The mother here becomes the dominant discourse against whom Sara has to show subversion. The figure of the mother thus takes an ambivalent shape. There is often a sense of frustration, of non-comprehension, of resistance in the daughter when she thinks of the mother. However, this complex relationship between the mother and the daughter cannot be simplified as hatred nor can it be claimed that her heroines are ‘anti-matriarchal’.

Deshpande’s protagonist Saru herself, does not give the reader the feeling that she is anti-mother. Saru while trying to sort out her own reaction to her husband’s split personality, also tries to come to terms with the unremitting nature of the mother. Her mother had refused to see her daughter till she dies. A feeling that her daughter’s irresponsibility was the cause of her son’s drowning, strengthened her decision for Sara. Yet it is Saru’s decision to go to a different place, and study medicine, and a little later, Saru’s decision to marry Manu, a man whom she herself chose, which act as a turning point in Saru’s mother’s relationship with her daughter. When her daughter was mentioned, she says, “What daughter? I have no daughter” (109) Saru herself believes at one point that it is because her mother cursed her that she is unhappy in her marriage, and is irreconcilable with her childhood. Yet her search does not end with simple answers like a mother hating her daughter, or a daughter hating the mother.

This blame followed her everywhere. Saru’s mother Kamla is an orthodox, traditional woman who throughout her life fails to understand Sarita. The archetypal terrible mother that she represents sees Saru only as a burden to be eased, a problem to be solved, a responsibility to be dispensed with and a person who has no right to any choice in life. Saru’s being born a woman was a great disqualification for her as is the general
case in Indian orthodox families. She was taught to be ashamed of her body—her breasts, her pelvis. Shame was inbuilt in her character. Only when she goes to the medical college does she realize that it is an essential part of the body and nothing to be ashamed of.

Women in our society are generally taken to be just a body without emotion, without feelings without individuality. They are reduced to just sex objects or ‘vessels’. Not only do men ‘gaze’ at these ‘vessels’ voyeuristically but women themselves gaze at women. Deshpande here is trying to dispel this myth of just a man’s gaze with Saru’s mother time and again teaching her daughter to be conscious of her body, her manner of walking, her clothes. Such kind of critical analysis though to some extent obnoxious is required in Indian culture where men look at women in a voyeuristic manner. The freedom to dress and the freedom to body is essentially denied to a daughter from a very young age and in youth this body becomes something to be explored misleading many young girls. This is portrayed by Shashi Deshpande in the following lines spoken by Saru in adolescence:

my breasts which had caused me agonies of self-consciousness earlier—now they became something to be proud of. I learned how to dress, to accept the curves of my hips, the slimness of my waist. To take in male stares and admirations with outward equanimity and secret pride.

(Deshpande, 56)

The traditional upbringing of our society makes it mandatory for a woman to teach her girl child about her body and its function of pleasing a male. Shauna Singh Baldwin too talks about this in What The Body Remembers which is a truthful account of how a woman’s sole aim and purpose in life is to fulfill the physical needs of her husband and to produce children. A woman is constantly encaged in her own body by the society and the key is left with the husband to open it up at will. Deshpande presents the case of a mother being critical of her daughter’s body and asking her to be ashamed of this fact of her
being a woman. But the modern woman to some extent does away with this false myth and comes out in the open with her body, not ashamed but proud.

According to Kate Millett in Sexual Politics, Ideology is the universal penile club that men of all classes use to beat women. Women do not beat themselves. The unconscious, both its formation and its effects, are denied and ‘penis envy’ has only to be exposed as the pathetic support to patriarchal power that it is for women, the real women hidden under male propaganda to be free in their individual consciousness if not yet en masse. As a consequence of this optimistic view very few women speak for themselves in the pages of Sexual Politics, maybe because a real woman is hard to find. It is this search for the real woman in Sara that Deshpande is attempting. In Millett’s world weakness and masochism are male projections of women’s character. According to Millett’s theory The Dark Holds No Terrors reads as a model of patriarchal power in action, sadistic, depersonalized sexuality and the subordination of women in full swing.

‘Shame’ as a theme has been treated by many writers of Indian origin like Salman Rushdie, Baldwin, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Kamla Das, Githa Hariharan and others. Each present an account of their views, relative to the society they are living in. Deshpande does the same here: “Everything in a girl’s life, it seemed was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male”(Deshpande, 56) And so was Saru’s in her young days when she was new to the experience of puberty and of a male’s world. Manu (Manohar), a charismatic young poet who was no less than a prince of Sara’s dreams was the center of her attraction like many other girls in her college. It was this inherent desire of Sarita to get away from the monotony of parental authority that led her towards establishing a relationship with Manu in the first place.

The woman in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. This simple need to be independent eventually becomes a demand of the inflated ego and takes shape as the love for power over others. She resents the role of a wife with the hope
that her new role will help her in winning her freedom.
(Prasanna Sree Sathupati, Indian Women Writers, 17)

And on finding his love Saru revolted against her parents authority and took no time in marrying him. He created a completely new world of awe and aura for Saru when they were together which was to fade away into thin air as soon as it was made.

I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved—marriage (being) the open sesame of all joy for me—I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love.
(Deshpande, 34)

Manohar had once been a promising poet and the effective secretary of the literary association, ‘Debating Union and Dramatic society’. Saru’s dumbness and even inconspicuousness when Manu commanded silence at the rehearsal of a play was only the dramatic performance of assertion later. The dream of total submission to ‘a superior, superhuman male’ working with him, for him and being his subordinate is only a transient stage in the emotional growth of Saru’s personality as she says,

I saw myself humbly adoring, worshipping, and being given the father-lover kind of love that was protective, condescending, yet all encompassing and satisfying. (Deshpande, 47)

Female sexuality is still the suppressed text of those liberal and left programmes that are silent on the issues of women’s subordination. This silence has had its negative effects upon feminism itself, which must always speak into other political discourses. Where both left and right sexual ideologies converge, associating women’s desire with weakness, unreason and materialism. It has been noticeably hard to insist on positive social and political meanings for female sexuality. Only its supposed disruptive force can be harnessed to revolutionary possibility, and then, perhaps, only for the moment of
disruption itself. While most feminisms have recognized that the regulation of female sexuality and the ideological mobilization of its threat to order are part of women's subordination, it is not surprising that they have too often accepted the paradigms that insists that desire is a regressive force in women's lives, and have called for a sublimination of women's sexual pleasure to meet a passionless and rational ideal. (See Mary Wollstonecraft. A Vindication of The Rights of Woman.)

Saru looked for love, which would be protective, condescending, yet all encompassing and satisfying. Like Jane Austin's heroines Deshpande too has made her protagonists go through a phase of skittish rebellion or egoistical error to meek acquiescence in the values of patriarchal society by marriage to a paternalistic father cum lover. But the difference comes in the way the lover turns out to be a monster to the critics in Deshpande's works. They however forget that the supreme ego of the women characters is no less and the blame is not entirely on the patriarchy. Somewhere in Saru's attitude we find not just an itching for domination but a total ignorance of Manu. In her self-centered march to progress she nullifies Manu's existence and in turn gets nullified herself. For a successful life the feeling of equality yet difference is much needed which both lacked. It does not take long for her to realize that Manu was no "P.B.Shelley" the great poet that she thought him to be after all and that he is totally burnt out. Her respect for him wanes when she recognizes him to be a failure and she a successful doctor.

Her career becomes a crutch for Saru as it gives her so much power and importance over others. The life that they begin together eventually becomes a power race of two egoistic people in which she overtakes him effortlessly. This becomes the first point of trouble for their married life. Later on being interviewed by a woman the odd question asked to Manu hurts his pride so much that he turns a sadist: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?"(Deshpande, 182) Unable to come to terms with the fact that he is a failure and his wife a remarkable success in life, Manu let 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. Married to a neuro-pathologist, Shashi Deshpande presumable has sufficient
knowledge of the neurotic world of the likes of Manu. Saru felt that her body was being violated. Her gradual change towards Manu and their marriage corresponds with her change in attitude towards sex. She finds “the aggressive, virile masculinity” a mere façade and the recently grown beard a mask to hide, to add something, to assert the thing he lacked. Saru thinks herself to be a victim from the beginning. According to Jane Gallop:

Repudiation of the victim identity emerged out of my awareness of the way in which thinking of oneself as a victim could be disempowering and disenabling.

( Jane Gallop. Thinking through the Body)

Thus, Saru was feeling disempowered and disenabled due to her awareness of herself as a victim. She felt circumscribed and constrained by the marriage she was in. Earlier, despite the unclean atmosphere of their small room, sex seemed a clean act. As adolescent, sex was a shame, then an embarrassment, then a matter of pride, and after marriage a source of enjoyment. But now she felt utterly humiliated at the thought of being used and reduced to “a dark, damp, smelly hole”. She says, “I am like a house full of unclean things, never cleaned, never opened sometimes I don’t know how I can bear myself.” (Deshpande, 24)

Saru now sees sex as a dirty word and the experience a terror, an inhuman insult to her personality. Though sex is often said to be a uniting force, in Saru’s case it acts as the instrument of revenge and therefore of estrangement. The mere physical act of having sex with Manu was not only a torture to her physically but turned out to be an emotional, psychological and mental torture. This triggered her thought process and gave rise to the need of introspection. This marital ‘Rape’ and it consequences form a major part of Deshpande’s writings. According to Erik H. Erikson:

Marriage is an integration of two individual dispositions to bring up the next generation. Female identity is formed/
influenced by the inner space destined to bear the offspring
of the chosen man. (Erik Erikson, You:th and Crisis)

This is the core issue with which the difference between male and female becomes polarized with a finality”. Women and men with their different biological programming react to a situation in their peculiar way.

The Dark Holds No Terrors reacts against the traditional concept that “everything in a girl’s life --- (is) Shaped to that single purpose of pleasing male” (pp 148). There are references to the Women’s Liberation Ideologue of Betty Friedan and Virginia Woolf’s idea of a woman’s right to “a room of her own”. Saru in this context gets her own room and place to think once she returns to her paternal house although her personal room had by now been allotted to a stranger thereby depriving her of the feeling of own space and comfort. Still the parental home is a kind of refuge for Saru as for the protagonists Roop and Virmati of the other two texts under study. It provides a ‘comfort zone’ where the girls feel free to express their inner urges, as it is a place where they have been brought up and moulded according to the traditional mouldings. The dislocation from this ‘comfort zone’ provides them a diasporic identity and they yearn to come back to its refuge. Marriage provides them with a duality of existence. They start living their lives on two planes, dislocated from within, and unable to connect outside.

The strength of Deshpande’s novels is that she has not let it get trapped in the framework of clichés borrowed from the women’s liberation movement. The novel does not limit itself to women’s problems. With a woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships, man’s tragic aloneness and so on. Saru has absolutely no respect for the abject acceptance religiously practiced by the wives, incidently all Saru’s friends. The wife of Manu’s friend accepts total effacement of her very presence and position. She remains a silent, unobtrusive nameless waiter at the dining table, not even introduced. Vidya, who posed to be a liberated woman, pales into a shadow after marriage. Saru has utter contempt for Smita who changes her name to Gitanjali, annihilating her personality and puts on the romantic
mask of being a contented wife. Saru condemns them as “silly martyrs” and “idiotic heroines”. She remembers the Sanskrit from her school text of:

a woman who would not disturb her husband’s sleep even to save her child from the fire. A woman so blessed, it is said that Agni himself came and saved the child. (Deshpande, 188)

Any number of such mythological figures are created by men for women folk to emulate, thereby ensuring the unquestionable superior male position. Throughout the novel Deshpande maintains commendable objectivity and avoids generalizations and partial views. In fact the novel explores questions like “who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we each of us both?” (Deshpande, 144) Saru analyses and further provides an answer:

---there is something in the male--- that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve. (Deshpande. 144)

Though it is feminist affirmation of women’s strength, it is also suggestive of the destructive nature of women. According to Saru, Dhruva becomes “a creature of terrors” as he is “dominated by two females” (pp 77). The father and Manu are reduced in status by their respective wives; both feel whittled down by their wives overt dominating presence and position in the family. Deshpande elaborated this dilemma of successful yet unhappy wives, dominating yet dominated women in her novels. The thrust here is not on man’s cruelty to women but women’s cruelty to women, the internalization of the patriarchal cruelty by women. Manu the so-called sadist is not to be blamed entirely if the whole situation is observed. He throughout the novel appears passive with only hints of his cruelty visible through the narration by Sarita. His psyche is to be understood before pointing the entire blame towards him in light of Freudian reading of the novel through which sadism in his character and its reason’s become clear.
Like Tiger in *The Decline Of Male*, Michael P. Ghiglieri in his work *The Dark Side Of Man: Tracing the origins of Male Violence* begins by stressing that, “we humans carry a legacy of instincts from our primeval past.” He asserts that the overriding instinct of men is to sire a succeeding generation. To which he adds there will always be some members of the gender who take more aggressive steps to disseminate their genes. These men, who commit the felony of rape, are driven to “steal copulation from unwilling women and thus increase their odds of siring offspring.” Ghiglieri never makes it clear whether he believes rapists simply want to perpetuate their personal genes or whether he thinks the species somehow produces such a phalanx in order to help preserve its numbers. He adduces no convincing evidence for either view. Sadism being a form of rape can be studied to a similar conclusion.

Also Freud’s epistemology is clearly phallocentric. The male is the bearer of knowledge; he alone has the power to penetrate women and text. Woman’s role is to let herself be penetrated by such truth. Such epistemological phallocentrism is by no means specifically Freudian but enjoys universal sway in patriarchal civilization, in including traditional nomenclatures of *Sati, Savitri, Pativrata* and Manu’s laws. It is politically important, however, to point out that this pathological division of knowledge into masculine totality and feminine fragment is totally mystifying and mythological.

In the case of Sara, Manu similarly masochistically penetrates not only her body, but also her psyche and pride causing fear from the act of sex. The act is a sub-conscious manifestation of Manu’s being and existence, which gets repressed, in day-to-day life due to overpowering by Sara’s profession. The hidden desire to keep Sara an underdog, a repressed ‘female’ emerges through the display of maledom and sadism both overt expression of a covert self.

By positioning women as the symbol of lack and negativity, western philosophy applied on Indian texts, turns her into the ground of its own existence: by her very inferiority she
guarantees the superiority of philosophy. (Toril Moi. What is a Woman? And other essays)

In this way the idea of the woman as defective becomes a defense against the thinking male subject’s potentially devastating insight into his own lack. Historically, such strategies have not only been used against women, but also against ‘primitive tribes’, slaves, blacks, children, Jews, Muslims and so on.5

Saru constantly uses symbols to show her state of mind. Her association with Krishna Sudama (Deshpande, 11), Pygmalion-Galatea story (83), water and rain as a symbol of relief and purification and of shame and guilt being washed away. It is a novel powerful in depiction through words, sights, sounds, names and emotions. Saru constantly oscillates between the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘I’, as if she is seeing herself from a distance as somebody else, not a felt body but a third person. As Tillie Olsen shows us so clearly in Silences and even Woolf with her multiple narrators, the boundaries between “self” and “other” blur in an osmotic relationship constitutive of new, expanded, and expanding identity that never forecloses or concludes the process of constituting and differing from itself. Saru too associates as easily with Draupadi and Sita as with Shakuntala (129). She wants to be caught in the process of rebirth like Lord Ganesha, when she quotes “Ganpati bappa moray, puchya varshi lavkar ya” (i.e come back soon next year)(133). These associations with metaphors and symbols reveal the significance of her life and psyche. Deshpande again towards the end uses association with the train whistle as if crying for help (145), and Saru saying, “I cast no shadow, I do not exist” as a strong metaphor of existentialism and alienation.

The third important incident that Saru recalls repeatedly is her brother Dhruva’s drowning in a pond which created much of a mental and psychological impact on her. Her love for domination goes on with her brother too and the feeling of sibling jealousy on the son being the loved one of the mother makes Saru hate Dhruva to the extent of her wishing his death.
Sara wants to blot him out of the family picture and, when it happens there is a definite ‘After Dhruva’ (A.D.) gloomy atmosphere at home. (R.S. Pathak. The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, 35)

Sara never boldly refutes or denies the charges of murder except in the confession to her father. This is because she has in a way passively watched him die and therefore has passively contributed to his death. She had always an inner drive to make him the mythological Dhruva (pushed off the father’s lap by the step-brother) and Dhruva in death becomes a tantalizing “north-star” controlling her happiness from afar.

The guilt has come to stay and she is destined to be in the dock perennially; her husband, dead brother, dead mother and even her children are the accusers and she, the accused. In this guilt she starts associating Madhav with Dhruva. Madhav becomes the second Dhruva to her who has come back to confirm the guilt by constantly calling her ‘Sarutai’ and tormenting her conscience by his looks. Sara has always been a problem child and the mother a problem parent. Sara realizes because of her own suffering as a child that “a child is always like that, full of secrets. Secret wishes, Secret fears” (Deshpande, 23). She herself nourished many of them as a child. With all these strains she sometimes wondered if she was an unnatural unloving mother like her own which she had never wished to become. Any newborn child would automatically imitate the desire of the only person to whom it is closely related, namely the mother.

Rene Girard worked on the mimetic desire theory and Oedipus triangular theory in his book ‘Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and other in literary structure’ (1961) from which some aspects of Sara’s character can be studied. But a women’s desire to imitate their mother could not be explained thoroughly. He manages to lose the mother somewhere in his discussion because he refrains from all mention of the pre-oedipal stage, that is to say the stage preceding sexual difference. If we are to believe Girard, the child is born directly into the Oedipal conflict. He never alludes to the first years of the child’s wholly mother dependent development, the period when all its desire take her as
their object, and when the very existence of the father goes unrecognized. Saru goes through these complexities of psychology and like Gerard manages to loose the mother. But due to the ever-present pre-oedipal stage she feared the most, somewhere down the line she does become like her mother, though unconsciously.

Most of the protagonists in this study are distanced from their mothers from a very young stage like Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors) and Virmati (Difficult Daughters) or do not taste motherly feelings at all like Roop (What the Body Remembers) whose mother passes away during Roop’s early childhood. Much of the problem arises from this emotional void created due to lack of the warmth of motherhood. They grow in the warmth of the mother’s womb, but now distanced from her physically and emotionally the growth process is jarred. She had sworn that she would never fail her children Abhi and Renu in love and understanding as her own mother had done. But the very act of giving birth to a child had been of great repulsion to her. She views the labour with its grunts, cries and pain which made “an animal out of her” to be “a prelude to motherhood. She is least mother like on her initial reluctance to be on the giving side.

She had been buoyed up through all the months of pregnancy by the thought of a miracle awaiting her---the miracle of motherhood. But when, after a day-long struggle, she had felt, through a haze of pain and shock, Renu’s head forcing itself out, she had been outraged at the indignity of it. Her posture, her grunts, her cries, the pain which made an animal out of her---was this the prelude to motherhood? (Deshpande, 94)

In doing this she associates with the protagonists Virmati and Roop who too view motherhood with the same initial disliking, a complete rejection of a self and control over body. This initial reaction however was mitigated by the ecstasy Saru experiences on first breast-feeding her child. The real joy and true feeling of motherhood emerges in her then:

---and when she had put the inexperienced, greedy, seeking
mouth to her nipple, the satisfaction had been enormous— it had set up an intense erotic response within her. This bodily gratification comes to her only on becoming a mother which makes her complete in some way. (Deshpande, 23)

With her own motherhood is connected the memory of her mother. Saru’s obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. Death seals off all possibilities of straightening things. Dead or alive, Saru sees the mother sapping her of all happiness and asks herself why should she matter dead when she has never mattered alive?” She sees her as a “vengeful ghost”. Saru’s self-esteem is pretty low and is induced by her mother and Saru’s over interpretation of that. Saru feels an excessive need to prove herself to her family and she carries this childhood pressure to prove her worth into adulthood. Saru marrying Manu and her claim to have thereby severed the umbilical cord is an act of defiance proving her strength, power and self-reliance. It can also be viewed as a necessary action in order to not let self-criticism take her over which occurs however in both the cases. The mother’s Parthian shot—“ I know these love marriages. It’s love for a few days, then quarrel all the time. Don’t come crying to us then.” (Deshpande, 62) Is a sure prediction of Saru’s future and failure. Later Saru’s hurt ego would not admit her miscalculation and defeat. Though she tries to learn from her mother what not to be, she encs up as an educated version of the mother herself. This knowledge however hard she might try to escape from it is the cause of her turmoil.

The novel surely has positive suggestions to offer. Saru’s need for a confident and her finding some relief in unburdening her heart to her father reiterates the idea of interdependence. The perfect partnership between Madhav and the father is a demonstration of the meaningful interdependence. It is a perfect pattern where they make no demand on each other-

the father cooks and he cleans. It’s a partnership, wordless, uncomplaining and perfect. A tacit understanding. As all good
This understanding by Saru and a hidden desire to have such a partnership with Manu, on equal terms yet different but without any demand or blame forms the crux of her tension. The relationship of Saru with her father is built in such a manner that allows her the initial strength to come back to him in order to share her misery. It could be described as one, where the father is seen as being more liberal and the mother conservative, the father more loving and the mother an unloving, uncaring woman, who is only concerned about her dead son. The relationship of both Saru and her father with Sara’s mother is a relationship marked by silence. This silence of the mother contrasts the eloquence of the daughter’s narration. When the daughter asks her father whether he wants to listen to her story, whether they can, as daughter and father, separated in age by thirty years, talk about such things as the relationship between man and woman, he replies in positive, making the dividing line between patriarchy and matriarchy narrower. The mother then, in addition to being a contrast to the stereotype of an all forgiving woman, is used by the novelist as a margin, as a figure in whom the metaphor ‘woman’ becomes visibly ambivalent, a figure who exemplifies simultaneously the internalization of discriminatory habits which pass off as custom and tradition, and an existence as a silent figure. Saru cannot be placed or equated to the general category of women. She is somewhat different. More than a woman, she appears as a consciousness transcending a body.

Escapism is no permanent solution nor should one look to anything outside of oneself to provide the solution but seek it from within. Escape has been her mode of resolving the tangled knots, exchanging old horrors for new ones. It is to escape from the role of a wife that she has come to her father’s house. The title of the novel effectively presents the need for confrontation in terms of light and darkness. In fact, the novel deals with the nebulous area of half-lights. The truth behind Saru being the silent murderess of Dhruva and Manu being the predator and Saru the prey lies in this realm. It is hugely a protest novel – a protest against the ‘metaphor of the dark’ imbued in the title itself. As Cixous says in The Laugh Of The Medusa, that the dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored because we’ve been made to believe that it was too
dark to be explored. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments of 'Lack'. Darkness in Shashi Deshpande is a figure of 'absence' and 'negation' as blackness was for Henry Louis Gates in Black Literature and Literary Theory.

The novel contains elements of a protest novel since Saru revolts against all kinds of authority. She imbues a desire to be free from all kinds of bondages— be it parental pressures during childhood or that of a sadist husband or demanding children. She wants to be just herself. She wants to recover herself and be renewed in the act of resistance. She feels colonized within her relationships and protests by letting go of all and being alone. Saru’s act of leaving her brother Dhruva behind her, near the shore is also to an extent an act of protest; protest against his being a male child, protest against his calling her Sarutdi and protest against his closeness to her parents. This closeness once again witnessed by her between Madhav and her father is not bearable, making her look critically and questioningly at Madhav also. Madhav symbolizes to her, her lost brother Dhruva. The message of the novel is clear in Malcolm X words:

We have to change our own mind— we’ve got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to come together with warmth—

(Simon de Beauvoir, The Second Sex.)

this being true for male female partnerships too. The need of the hour is neutralization of gender aggression and an understanding from both sides— an understanding of equality with difference.

The question arises is exactly what it will take for a woman like Saru in a sexist society to be able to speak, or to remain silent in a genuine non-defiant way. Non-defiance is also important because defiance is still a reactive stance, induced by sexist aggression. Although there is every reason for woman to be defiant in response to sexist
onslaught, but it may block us from finding our own voice. As Beauvoir writes, “The free woman is just being born” (Beauvoir, 77) Saru’s caution to Dhruva:

the dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside of us all the time. We carry them within us, and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul.

is what she needs to apply to herself. Rather than escaping from the dark or cursing the darkness all that Saru needs to do is to break the self-imposed exile, light a candle and declare that the dark holds no terrors. It will also light up the fact that she is as much responsible as Manu is for the complex situation created. The opening of the door by Saru towards the end, reflects Sartre’s view on a coming back in his essay in 1948 ‘What is Literature?’

Thus by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others in order to change it. I strike at its very heart, I transfix it, and I display it in full view; at present I dispose of it; with every word I utter I involve myself a little more in the world.

The proposition that Saru puts forward at the beginning of the novel to test whether she is carrying the hell within is proved right, and it is time for confrontation with the hellish terrors within. The dead mother, the dead brother, Manu and even Renu to some extent are externalized aspects of those terrors within. The mother and the brother have been sealed beyond confrontation or reconciliation. Saru has to deal with the living at least. All along she has placed the problem outside of her, in Manu. She realizes that the problem lies as much within as the outside. Earlier it was only Manu’s inadequacy that she saw; now she sees her own inadequacy too, which is her inability to combine roles and be a source of love as a daughter, sister, wife and a mother.
The brief stay away from Manu and the children and at a place she had run away from has given her a good perspective and a chance to review her past, her own psychology, her own place in relation to others in the family and society around. With the self-realization comes the decision to confront the problems. She will not allow herself to be the object Manu can take his frustration on. Confrontation is not a one-way process. Manu too has to face the reality of his own failure and his wife’s success. The doctor in Saru is much more important than the wife or mother in her. Though the novel is open ended, the suddenness of Saru’s decision to confront Manu leaves the end of the novel a little unconvincing. Ambivalence, then is an important element that we detect in Saru’s attitude towards herself, her mother and towards her husband. It looks as though she is finding some kind of refuge in philosophical considerations. It looks as if Saru faces her life once again, but the facts of life have not changed for her.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* ambivalently projects deconstruction as well as re-construction of gender roles as the female protagonist of the novel is constantly, and often unconsciously, in search of an ‘inner space’ which is instrumental in the re-construction of gender identity. The novel presents the post-modern dilemma of a woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality and identity. The wife in the end is, therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife; one who is no longer afraid of the dark. It is this point of enlightenment, which brings to fore the lines of the *Dhammapada* given as an epigraph to the novel:

you are your own refuge;
there is no other refuge
this refuge is hard to achieve

Deshpande has made use of mythical allusions and parallels in her fiction. Even a less important work like *Come Up And Be Dead* has a fascinating strand of mythic material. In her short stories like *The Last warrior*, *My Beloved Charioteer* and *Seetha*, she has drawn upon material from mythology in order to reinterpret it. But her most subtle and successful use of myth and folklore is to be found in her mature novels where they
sustain the narration. Shashi Deshpande has created a familiar world anew in which authentic experiences of the interior landscape of Indian women is powerfully projected through devices like myths and folklore.

She does not use them as an embellishment or to make her novels ethnic or exotic. Myths, folklore, legends are deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche. They are expressed naturally and spontaneously. One of the best instances of the pervasive influence of myths are found in The Dark Holds No Terrors, where the story of Dhruva serves as an analogue to Sarita’s story. The names used by Deshpande in the novel such as Dhruva and Manohar also are significant and have symbolic undertones. Dhruva is symbolic of Saru’s desire to see him become a ‘Dhruva tara’ and representative of his early death. Manohar can be associated with Lord Krishna due to his quality of attracting the female sex. Later on this same name can be seen as an anti-thesis of Lord Krishna as Manohar turns a sadist. Also symbolic is the frantic woman’s dance at the temple, a ritual towards purification of self and throwing out the evil spirits of the body. Sarita remembers:

The woman began to gyrate, turning around in a slow, peculiar motion--- the whole face became an ugly bloody red, kumkum sweat mixed together to form a ghastly mask--- terribly inhuman as the Devi herself. (Deshpande, 92)

Sarita cannot even associate herself to the Devi Figure as well, which is just an inhuman idol to her. Saru is to realize later on that this kind of frenzied behavior she will also have to perform in order to re-discover herself and cut off her ties with the world and Manu and go into a self-reclusion for a renovated self. Also she recognizes that

It was horrifying, for some reason obscene, something I just could not understand. Only now, as a grown woman, I realize how much the whole thing resembled the crescendo of excitement during intercourse. (Deshpande, 93)
Sarita learns of her mother’s death and goes to visit her father. While she waits for the door to open she thinks of the myth of Krishna and Sudama. Saru wonders why the story came into her mind, for she herself was no Sudama in rags. This seemingly inconsequential detail illuminates her inner world, which contrasts so sharply with her outward prosperity and success. Career, marriage, motherhood, freedom and success have not given Sarita what she has craved for.

A reticent person, Sarita’s mother had almost stopped speaking but liked her husband to read to her from the epics—The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. To an uneducated woman, ill and dying, only the large verities could hold any meaning. An unhappy and deprived childhood, marriage, the loss of a much loved young son and the estrangement of the daughter—these were the facts of Kaurava King, at the end of the epic battle that especially caught her attention. She asks him to read it once again and makes one of her rare remarks: “Yes, that’s what we all have to face in the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone.” (Deshpande, 104) Many of the critics who have written about the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s novels generalize to some extent. Kamini Dinesh writes in her essay: “Moving out of the cloistered self: Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists”

The woman’s emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife, in the end is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife—one who has broken the long silence, one who is no longer afraid of the dark. She is the wife reconceptualised as woman and an individual—a marked contrast to the older generation of women around her with their uncomplaining, unresisting fatalistic attitude. Hers is the dilemma of the new woman that could be resolved when the claims of self-hood are reconciled with the claims made upon her by her family and society. (See R.S Pathak)
In analysis such as this there is no reference to the pain such difficult expectations cause in a woman. This burden of tradition and modernity has further complicated the life of Indian women. Saru can also be seen not only as a rebellious daughter seeking her identity, for her freedom, not as an egoist who cannot understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by her mother, not as a traveler on to a spiritual quest that ends in no resolution, but as a woman who possesses ‘white, soft and clean’ hands in the beginning and ‘roughened’ palms towards the conclusion. The fact remains that the, “man at the center, the woman always on the periphery --- he made the woman always subordinate to the man.” (Deshpande, 141)

The society presented in The Dark Holds No Terrors is certainly one going through transition where at least economically independent women could have choices in life. Saru has tremendous respect for the dignified, self-reliant teacher friend Nalu, who despises all compromises and remains single to lead a meaningful life of convictions. Even among men there is a Padmaker Rao who complains that his wife does not relate to him on equal terms but waits on him and talks of only middle class concerns like economizing the family budget though she does not need to. In presenting these variegated characters each a character study in itself Deshpande is letting loose an array of comments on Feminism. She is trying to give the changing yet traditional picture of society regarding marriage and women. The end of the novel is vague resulting in an inability to make any judgment. What is striking about this story is how well defined, and small this world is. This world is a world that is hardly exposed to hybrid cultures, although her reference to the city life, to colleagues and friends do bring us into contact with the external world.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is built around the metaphor of ‘the dark’ and ‘the light’. There was a time when Sarita, the protagonist, was afraid of ‘the dark’ fearing that her husband would invade her body and commit monstrosities upon her. The woman, who had been defiant in her childhood and adulthood, felt utterly helpless and panic stricken with the approach of the terrible dark. The suffocating dark, the heavy weight,
the pain and the hurt associated with the sexual act made her life agonizing. She longed to see the light and to emerge out of sickening state of ennui and exhaustion. In this novel, the metaphor of ‘the dark’ is inseparably linked with “panic and sensation” simultaneously. Silence is another metaphor reinforced still another time by Saru saying “silence has become a habit for us”. This darkness and silence is also manifest in the bodies inability to control itself.

Deshpande’s women like Sarita (Saru) are never static or passive nor do they remain clinging vines, dependent parasitically on their husbands. Deshpande’s protagonists raise their voice against the traditional role models of mothers, wives and daughters. They refuse to be objects of social and cultural oppression. They are also sensitive, intelligent and career oriented middle class women of a changing time and feel suffocated in male-defined codes of life. Her protagonists revolt against social taboos. They tirelessly question the very concept of love, marriage and sex and try to re-define human relationships. There is a quest for the self i.e. a search for identity. But their anger, their resentment against the existing situations and tradition does not, however, bring them satisfaction; rather it leads to frustration, hopelessness and the sense of meaninglessness. A sense of alienation seems to sap their energy. Shashi Deshpande tries to explore the root cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of her characters. Her characters suffer from ego inflation. Sarita too belongs to this category but her traditional role model archetypes of Sita and Gandhari, which form a part of her psyche, force her to cling on to Manohar, a sadist for some time before revolting.

Shashi Deshpande, in all her novels, has dealt with the problems of new women. She has specially concentrated on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by women in tradition-oriented institutions. The reality of modern Indian woman is that even to the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex, she is in state of utter confusion. Coming out of home she has seen and experienced the world on her own and therefore has developed different attitudes towards this aspect of life. These attitudes something reject the tradition and something rebel against them. That is why she feels a kind of imbalance between the traditional expectations and her new sexual demands. In
this process she suffers and looks for answers. Shashi Deshpande projects the reality of such women and tries to solve their dilemma.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a feminist novel not on the sole basis of the female centrality in it. The novel focuses on woman’s awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a person than as a woman and her wanting to have an independent social image. In a society where these are considered outstepping the limits, The Dark Holds No Terrors would be considered a protest novel too. Saru’s feminist reaction date back to her childhood when she had to contend with sexist discrimination at home. Her’s is a protest through mute suffering. The framework of the novel provides good acoustics for woman’s voice and establishes that women, too, has choice in life. But Deshpande does not glorify woman’s suffering. Though she enlists a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist, it is not on the grounds of her being a female sufferer or a martyr in patriarchy.

Deshpande projects women’s politics of suffering. The heroines believe in a self-imposed guilt that engulfs their whole being, the only respite to which lies in self imposed suffering and silencing due to inbuilt shame and guilt. This is also seen due to lack of parental support from behind and the inability to stand on one’s own feet. By suffering at the hands of maledom a kind of catharsis or purgation of the guilt of being a woman is sought; as Sarita says, “perhaps if I go on suffering--- and the more I suffer, the greater the chance, perhaps of my expiating that wrong.” (Deshpande, 185) Men cannot transcend into the ‘female zone’. This is beyond their understanding and reach according to Showalter’s Feminist Criticism In The Wilderness.

Shashi Deshpande is unlike Jane Austin in painting the human spectacle. The latter paints the comedy of human life whereas the former depicts the serious, the painful, and the agonizing aspect of life verging on the tragic. Though there are references to the feminist movement and British novels but Shashi Deshpande does not get trapped in the framework of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the west. The novel does not limit itself to women’s problems. With the woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande
probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships, man’s tragic loneliness. Sara’s existentialist dilemma is brought out vividly in her pathetic condition.

She is not self-conscious. Moreover her female characters contain larger and universal connotations. She depicts very effectively as to what happens to women after marriage. What they have been, what they have become, and what is in store for them. On the surface all is well with her middle class women. They have a relatively happy life and their husbands are well placed in life. They are also blessed with children in most cases. Yet there is something rotten in the state of their domestic and married life for which to some extent their husbands are responsible. Education, economic independence, and motherhood disturb the existing equation. The real problem, however, does not lie in either wifehood or motherhood but in the attitude of the middle-class male who negates the woman’s identity the moment she becomes his wife. As A.G. Amur remarks

women’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find, preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer. (Mrinalini Sebastian. The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Post Colonial Argument)

Deshpande’s relentless search for “self” in her fiction shows that she has largely confined herself to problems and turmoil’s of the female world. Nowhere does she encourage her protagonists to rise in rebellion against the males of the family; instead she wants to build a harmonious relationship between man and woman in a spirit of give and take, in a mood of compromise and reconciliation. A proper co-ordination, a reasonable, mutual understanding between husband and wife is essential for a happy married life. She portrays a locked womanhood suffering from a self-imposed guilt and voyeuristically gazing at its own ‘vessel’.

But according to some critics Shashi Deshpande as a feminist writer has put on blinders. There are families and situations where a woman plays a pivotal role. This she
ignores. She chooses to bring into focus the weak, woeful woman, with commendable success. What frightens one in these novels is the ‘reality’ of the role-playing, which these women are forced to accept, and the realization by the protagonist themselves that it is a mere role-playing. Neither the critical appraisals, nor the author herself, consider role-play as a construct; at least in literature, which can be something more than a mere stifling experience. They believe that behind her roles, there is a sense of identity, which becomes available to the protagonist through a process of self-realization and suffering guilt and shame. In an interesting discussion on the nature of role-play, Bettina Friede states that the positive qualities attributed to the portrayal of self-realization, when analyzed, reveal that there is always an assumption being made about an essential identity. Even when her women characters recognize themselves in their different roles, role-play itself has not been taken up by Deshpande as a narrative technique. Nor do her characters see in role-play any kind of liberating experience. This shows that they believe in an essential identity, which these thinking writing women try to bring out. Shashi Deshpande in her writings tries to do away with the idealization of role-playings, “the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.”

Deshpande is often asked as to why she writes only about women. The critics call her writing feminist propaganda but she vociferously denies any such intentions. She finds it strange that any woman’s writing is branded as feminist. She asserts that she writes from the viewpoint of a woman. To the experiences of the female protagonist she brings her own experiences, her own anger at certain issues are illustrated in her fiction. Deshpande’s fictional achievement should not be seen in terms of her subscription or non-subscription to feminism, for a writer of some substance is committed to human situation and not necessarily to any ideology. Her works mediate between the existing state of women and the feminist consciousness.

We need to understand about the intimate relationship between the specific forms of women’s subordination and other kinds of oppression. A psychoanalytical understanding of the construction of sexual difference does not turn feminism or socialism away from a political analysis of subordination or a political practice of
resistance but consistently informs and enriches theory and practice. For if social life is ordered through psychic structures that to some extent organize its meanings, that psychic life in turn is only ever lived through specific social histories and political and economic possibilities. Ignore that shifting reciprocal relationship, which constructs the particular subjectivities lived by women and men of different historical periods, classes, races and cultures and it becomes especially problematic to discuss how both individual and collective resistance to oppression is shaped and enabled. Without an analysis of the structure of feeling, it is hard to get below the surface of sexual differentiation and subordination, and to understand in what circumstances and in what terms women will rebel or submit. Femininity is never lived in the abstract however, but always, insistently, through a particular set of histories. It is then an act of transcending the psyche or going beyond the consciousness of ‘self’ and recreating and redefining the ‘Aesthetics of Space’, which is personal. Saru’s understanding of Manu’s psyche (even though sadist) and her own and then leaving the door open in order to face Manu and her own inner self is how she redefines her ‘room’ or her ‘space’.

To label the violence or self-destructiveness of these painful novels as neurotic expressions of a personal pathology, as many reviewers have done, is to ignore, Annette Kolodny suggests,

The possibility that the worlds they inhabit may in fact be real, or true, and for them the only worlds available, and further, to deny the possibility that their apparently ‘odd’ cr unusual responses may in fact be justifiable or even necessary. (Kolodny, Critical Inquiry 2)

But women’s literature must go beyond these scenarios of compromise, madness, and death. Although the reclamation of suffering is the beginning, its purpose is to discover the new world. Without an understanding of the framework of the female subculture, we can miss or misinterpret the themes and structures of women’s literature, fail to make necessary connections within a tradition. In 1852, in an eloquent passage from her autobiographical essay “Cassandra”, Florence Nightingale identified the pain of feminist
awakening as its essence, as the guarantee of progress and free will. Protesting against the protected unconscious lives of middle class women, Nightingale demanded the restoration of their suffering:

Give us back our suffering, we cry to Heaven in our hearts suffering rather than indifferentism- for out of suffering may come the cure.
Better to have pain than paralysis: A hundred struggles and drown in the breakers. One discovers a new world. (Nightingale. The Cause: A History of the Women’s Movement in Great Britain, 398)

Dominant and alternative discourses now move uneasily between old languages of natural, transhistorical sexuality and new languages in which masculinity and femininity are contingent terms whose meanings can be changed. Feminism has developed, through its own internal dialectic, a political language about gender that refuses the fixed and transhistorical definitions of masculinity and femininity in the dominant culture. A normative, subliminal, natural consensus around the subordinate status of women has been successfully challenged. Class conflict and struggle needs to remain high on the political agenda but the strategies of such struggle and the alliances that can be made between oppressed groups have changed and must change further; and ought to include, not exclude, the questions raised about sexuality and subjectivity.
Notes:

1 Simon De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex, Understanding of the sexist dilemma*, shows that the encounter with sexist aggression obliges the woman to reply either in ways that imprison her in her sexed subjectivity, or in ways that make her eliminate that sexed subjectivity altogether. Aim should be then to create a society of equals. This is being attempted in this study. A society where no men or women would live, but only humans or *hupers* (removing ‘man’ from the word human, and ‘son’ from the word person) gives us the word ‘*huper*’ coined by Prof. Upendra Baxi’s. (see Indu Prakash Singh. *Indian Woman: The Power Trapped*).

2 Following the work of Jacque Derrida, Jacque Lacan, Helene Cixous, Lucy Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, Franco-American critics focused on what Alice Jardine calls *gynesis*: the exploration of the textual consequences and representations of ‘the feminine’ in western thought. Some post structuralist feminist critics thus maintain that feminist criticism should avoid ‘the women’s literary ghetto’ and return to confrontation with ‘the canon’. While *gynocritics* looks at the patrilineage and matrilineage of the female literary work, poststructuralist feminist criticism views the literary text as fatherless and motherless; its feminist subjectivity is a product of the reading process.

3 Susan Faludi in *Backlash*, the most important book on women in recent decades writes that contemporary discussion about what bedevils men, fixes most exclusively on the psychological and the biological. She wants to avoid both pseudoscientific generalizations and musings based on random observations or conversations with friends. Rather, Faludi seeks to how the past impinges on the present, how forces converging since world war II have shaped the lives of men today, and what implications the changing cultural and social norms have had on the psyche of men resulting in rise of crime and rape cases.
The Hindu tradition conceives of Devi, meaning Goddess, as the female principle of divinity, the complement of God, the male principle. In the Shakti theory, the female principle is called Sakti, the energy of a God personified as his female partner. Thus Saraswati is the Sakti of Brahma, Lakshmi of Vishnu, and Durga of Shiva. Siva's consort, in her benign aspect is Parvati. Kali is one of the commonest names of Siva's consort in her fierce aspect. In different contexts and regions she is also variously known as Devi itself, Uma, Gouri, Chandi, Chamunda, Kapalini, Bhavani and Vijaya. In different early Indian texts, Kali is seen in different specific roles. For instance, she appears as MahishasuraMardini, the destroyer of the demon Mahishasura. In her role as the slayer of demons Sumbha and Nisumbha, she is goddess Kali “of emanciated body, clad in a tiger’s skin, with a garland of skulls hanging from her neck, and her tongue tolling out from her wide mouth.


In most societies and throughout history, the status of women has been akin to that of children. Both groups are maintained in a condition of privileged inferiority. Both suffer obvious modes of exploitation—sexual, legal, economic—while benefiting from a mythology of special regard. Thus, Victorian sentimentalization of the moral eminence of women and young children was concurrent with brutal forms of erotic and economic subjection.

Under sociological and psychological pressure, both minorities have developed internal modes of communication and defense (women and children constitute a symbolic, self-defining minority even when, owing to war or special circumstances, they outnumber the adult males in the community). There is a language world of women as there is of children.