CHAPTER-III

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

Sexual frustration and sadism is what very few writers are bold enough to talk so unequivocally because these are very sensitive issues and improper knowledge and wrong handling of these can land them in hot soup in the literary society; setting every one’s tongue wagging and raging controversies. But Deshpande is brave enough to come out with it in her very first published novel The Dark Holds No Terrors. Patriarchy can take different forms of oppression and subjugation. This novel takes into account the feminist assertion that economic independence is a major factor that can usher in happiness in a woman’s life and can equalise both men and woman on a single and identical platform. Deshpande is a realist writer who knows the pros and cons of this assertion. Truly she depicts both the merits and demerits of this statement of feminists in her first novel, clearly bringing out that even economic independence is no surety of happiness for women.

Published in 1980 and translated into German and Russian languages, Shashi Deshpande’s first published novel The Dark Holds No Terrors brought her international fame and recognition. This novel exhibits the oppressive silence and surrender of the Indian women. Sarita is the female protagonist of the novel. It unfolds the life of Sarita from her childhood to her youth as the narration moves back and forth in time. The theme of this novel is Sarita’s search for self identity and liberation. “Saru’s journey is a journey from self-alienation to self identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self.”

Going back to her father’s house after a hiatus of fifteen long years is the commencing point of the novel. Her visit to her father’s house is occasioned by her mother’s demise. Staying away from her husband Manohar, seems to her a good riddance for some time. “It was not to comfort her father that she had come. It was for herself.” (TDHNT 43) She has been living with him in a very oppressive silence. That is why she does not keep her word never to step into her father’s house; an oath that she has taken when her parents did not consent to get her married to Manohar as he belonged to another caste. Here in this house she scans her life from the very beginning till the present and feels empowered to have her say. After this the rest of the novel is her own musings on the past as the past seems unavoidable and haunts her time and again. Her past acquaints the readers with the suffocating silence and the emotional disinterestedness between
her and her husband as the words of her father "silence has become a habit for us" (TDHNT 199) are even quite applicable on their relationship too. She reflects on her past and examines her relationship with her mother, her brother Dhruva and her husband Manohar. The dark no longer is a scary thing for her and hence the novel’s title proves apt as dark holds no terrors for her. Her rumination not only articulates before us the sufferings but also enables her to have a new understanding of her relationship and she ultimately comes out of her fears. As she thinks, “The dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them with us, and like traitors, they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul.” (TDHNT 85)

The technique used in the novel is of flashback. Deshpande being a supporter of women’s cause never transgresses the limits of her art. She does not enumerate women’s problems in a very ornate and hyperbolic language just to exaggerate the proportion of their miseries. Rather she is a realist and with objectivity in mind she delineates their problems in a very realistic manner. The novelist brings out powerfully the psychological problems of a career-oriented woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. Realism adds charm to the plot. Some writers tend to over emphasise the problems of their heroines just to have a greater impact on the readers and to move them to pity in order to stimulate them into action but they also fail diametrically in such attempts many times as even the readers lose interest in the plot after perceiving the failure of the writer in successfully portraying the character’s problems. Deshpande is one of the few writers in India who never loses track of her narrative style. She never forgets even for a moment that she has to depict the problems of the women but they should never be over emphasised nor even be told in an embellished language as then the problems that women grapple with lose touch with reality as they really are in their life. As a conscious writer Deshpande believes that it is her very liability to write with a mission and that mission can only be achieved by realistically delineation of women’s problems and the realistic portrayal of their multi-dimensional roles that they have to play as a mother, wife, sister and daughter in her life.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents a marriage which is in jeopardy; on the verge of collapse. Sarita whom all consider and esteem as a very reputed doctor finds herself as a trapped animal into a cage when her husband assaults her sexually at night. Thus she becomes a victim of marital rape; a theme that Deshpande later on picks up in *The Binding Vine* in the character of
Mira. The trauma is too much for her as she married Manohar according to her own wishes and against her parents’ command. This silence which exists between both of them is the result of the incompatibility which emerges out of Manohar’s incapacity to deal with her wife’s growing social status as contrasted to his own status which fades into a pale in comparison to hers. In modern times, both men and women are working hand in hand. Women refuse to don the caps of traditional women who used to keep sitting idle at home doing but the household chores. They are equal partners in family earning bread for the family. But still in some part of the Indian society this fact creates ruckus in the family life. The situation sometimes gets aggravated when wife’s earning is markedly more than the husband’s; a fact that husband finds quite convoluted to cope with. It is the case with the protagonist Sarita who earns double than her husband and her recognition in the society is remarkable. People know her well and admire her for being a self made person; one who has worked day and night to achieve her dreams. But the same fact overhauls her husband’s perception about her and Sarita notices metamorphosis in him; one who becomes a mentally sick, moron and sadist to degrade himself to such an extent that he starts pushing his masculine lust on her wife at night; a fact that she cannot live with.

She meets Manohar in Bombay; the man of her dreams. It so happens that her friend Samita forcibly takes her along to the inauguration ceremony of Literary Society where she meets Manohar. Manohar was a post graduate student and the secretary of Literary Society when she enters college. Later she attends one rehearsal of college drama which is being directed by Manohar. She is charmed by the fact that Manohar wields great influence over all. After rehearsal he is widely appreciated. She falls in love with him that very moment, “After that day he was a figure I fantasised about, the person round whom I wove my foolish dreams. No, not dreams, just one dream really. Always the age old feminine dream of a superior conquering male.” (TDHNT 53) She falls in love with him and wants him passionately. She dreams of him. Gradually their intimacy grows and Manohar starts taking interest in her. Her joy knows no bounds when he proposes her, “and that he, a man set apart from others, above the others…should love me seemed even more incredible. The fisherman’s daughter couldn’t have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him, than I was by Manu’s love for me.” (TDHNT 66) She could not imagine that she can be someone’s sweetheart, so special, to mean so much to someone. “It was impossible that I could mean so much to any human being. It was impossible that such things could happen to me. They happen only to girls in movies and books,
not to girls like me and yet I could not doubt his love. He cared for my feelings as no one had ever done.” (TDHNT 39) But he had emphatically announced himself Keats in love with Fanny Brawne, “I longed to believe in immortality. If I am destined to be happy with you here…How short is the longest life,” (TDHNT 65) the same intensity Keats experienced for his beloved was shared by Manohar for Sarita.

They resolve to marry despite the fact that her parents did not concede to this relationship. Sarita quits her parental home to be with him forever. Manohar feels perhaps she might have felt pain and anguish. Leaving one’s parental home is not as an easy task. But for her the idea is revolting as, “suffering? Painful? I was impatient with the words because they meant nothing to me. After my last confrontation with my parents, I had already detached myself from them. For me, they were already the past and meant nothing.” (TDHNT 39) as she knows that the child has to be separated from the mother so there is no meaning of feeling pain or suffering as, “have you seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, How easy it is to cut the umbilical chord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, Cut and its done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It’s as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding?” (TDHNT 39)

But they could not marry as they did not have a place of their own to stay. Later Manohar breaks the news to her of his getting a single room. He announces the clarion of marriage. But Sarita feels trapped and terrified. She tries to reason out why she feels the way though she could not doubt even an iota of Manu’s sincerity. Manu who has triumphantly declared, “When we are together, it’s heaven, wherever we are.” (TDHNT 38) With him she had not transgressed the limits. She had no physical intimacy with him. She reasons it is not even the fear of sex after marriage that has made her so then why after all she is bent to have fears.

Why then this fear, this trapped feeling? Clinically, rationally, I analyzed my own feelings. It was not sex, not fear of sex. I was after all, I told myself, a medical student, knowing all there is to be known of male and female and what goes on between them. (TDHNT 39)

Perhaps her fear in her heart was an inclination of something which has to happen with her in the offing. It was her heart informing her and warning that her married is going to turn into a
loveless endeavour. She has to suffer. It was to warn her perhaps that she must reconsider her resolve to marry him.

Sarita is a love sick daughter of her parents and she lives under the burden of crime often imposed on her of her brother Dhruva’s death. When she first happens to meet Manohar, she is quite impressed. He is a poet and orator. Lovesick she wants a person to shower all his love on her. A person who can be her soul mate and when Manohar comes across her, she thinks he is the one who can fulfil all of her dreams. It is a human nature that a love starved person takes fancy to anyone from whom there is an iota of hope of love and affection. It is what happens to Sarita also. She has nice idea of each other together. She finds him the one who can solidify her and shower his love on her. She sees the hope of the fulfilment of love from her husband Manohar and after her marriage she enjoys the feeling of being the cynosure of someone’s eyes. As she recollects the time of initial period after her marriage: “It was a 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.” (TDHNT 40) Everything seem to be pleasant. The bond between both is so strong that they entirely forget all other considerations.

Like any newly married bride she has fear of having sex after marriage. There is a bit of tension in her. She is anxious of the first sexual encounter. But gradually her fear sheds her off. She like any newlywed bride enjoys the sexual rendezvous with her husband Manohar. She craves for such acts of love as it is not sexual act rather each sexual act seems to her the act of love. Sex if it is blended with the feelings of love and trust strengthen the love bond and provide solidarity to married life. Sarita after marriage revels in the power of sex: “there was never any withholding in me. I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved.” (TDHNT 40) She discovers to her amazement that all the preconceived ideas related to sex were quite true. Her body responses nicely to the love she receives, “All the clichés, I discovered, were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved was an intense joy. It was as if little nerve ends of pleasure had sprung up all over my body.” (TDHNT 40)
She revels in the sexual act with Manohar. It was not actually an act of sex rather a very fact of her being loved by a person who is her paramour. She was never satisfied with her physical love with him and wanted more. Whenever she has any doubt of her being unloved, she would turn to him to get reassured of his love and they would again indulge in sex. The very word sex for her earlier was not something dirty rather it meant to her love, assurance, emotional bond. As she says, “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me.” (TDHNT 40)

Before her marriage she is averse of her female body. Her initial awkwardness of the female body fades away in the dim forest somewhere now. She has started studying medicine and she was now well aware of the female anatomy, thus the initial hatred of her own womanliness has gone away. She knows the fact, “I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body has to be, those were the things that had to happen to me.” (TDHNT 63) From being a plump girl, she undergoes great change and becomes slim. She is reconciled to her female body. The fact that people glare at her body which often used to give her pain, is nowhere seen now. There is a new feeling of love and pride for her female body which has just dawned in her. She is no more tortured or self divided with regard to her female persona rather she feels a certain degree of pride in the fact that she is born as a female. She now enjoys a sort of secret pride and sense of triumph for her body:

I became slim. My breasts which had caused me agonies of self-consciousness earlier, making me feel everyone was staring at them, so that I longed to wear some kind of armour that would hide them from the world–but now they became something to be proud of. I learnt how to dress, to accept the curves of my hips, the slimness of my waist. To take in male stares and admiration with outward equanimity and secret pride. (TDHNT 63)

But as soon as Sarita’s stature in society gets boosted after her marriage as a doctor, her married life seems crumbling; the fact that she was a lady doctor was unknown to people of her chawl. But one day there was an explosion in the nearby factory and she happened to nurse the wounded bodies which were brought to the hospital. The neighbours got to know that she was a
lady doctor. Every now and then someone from the neighbourhood would knock at the door and call her for help.

And, then, one day, things changed. It was the day there was an explosion in a factory. Burnt mutilated bodies poured in, in a horror so vast that it seemed meaningless. There was no time, anyway, either to think or feel. The world consisted of bodies from which I drew blood, bodies into which I transfused blood, bodies on which I did venesections, bodies to be dressed, bodies in agony, bodies blessedly, quietly dead. (TDHNT 41)

She was a lady doctor and her husband is only an English teacher in some not so important college. Hence no wonders her fame in society shoots up like a rocket out of a sudden. The people she meets applaud her for getting so much in life. She is respected everywhere. The people start recognizing her and generally bypass Manohar. “When we walked out of our room, there were nods and smiles, murmured Greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him.” (TDHNT 42) Whenever someone happens to visit them at home, it is Sarita whom all want to meet as they need her help for their ailing family member. The scene was so common that without opening the door Manu would gauge who might be coming and for whom, “Open it, Saru, it must be for you.” (TDHNT 42) This realisation slowly begins to grow inside his heart. It is strong enough to convert him into a non entity; developing in him a kind of sadism: “And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps the same thing made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband.” (TDHNT 42) Sarita reasons that marriage is not a partnership where equality reigns supreme rather it is a confused imbalance. Holy books might delude that the essence of marriage is to maintain equality but in the feasible world of flesh where it is; nowhere. “a+b they told us in mathematics is equal to b+a. But here a+b was not definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible.” (TDHNT 42)

The problem takes huge dimensions on a day when there is an interview on career women brought out by a woman’s magazine. The day brings the culmination point of their shattering married life. The interviewer casually questions Manohar, “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (TDHNT 35-36) This statement shatters
his equilibrium and makes him inferior. This question arouses his sadism which has been
smouldering inside his heart. Though still latent, the question by the interviewer adds fuel to the
fire and stimulates his sadism so much as to make it acquire huge forms. Sarita herself recalls
the day later on in her father’s house: “The bitch. Why did she have to say that? It was the day
that it began.” (TDHNT 36) Being a male dominated society, it is but natural that a man feels
congested if her wife starts getting recognised in her life. This fact jeopardises their life. It
makes husband sink into a non entity; a fact that he can never digest. Consequently the cracks in
their married life become visible. Marriage is a brittle affair. Love and trust are the two vital
factors that keep it intact but in case anything of it is missing, life becomes a hell. The same
happens with Sarita’s married life. Manohar cannot digest the fact that his wife is earning more
in her life than him. As Premila Paul says:

His sense of insecurity starts with the explosion in the nearby factory. The lover in
him dies when neighbours wake up to the fact that Saru is no ordinary housewife
but an important doctor. But it reaches the point of culmination with the
interviewer’s query and a friend suggesting that a holiday tour could be possible if
he had a doctor wife.³

Manohar is no god but a human being marred by ego; instilled in him through the inferiority
complex that he has generated because of Sarita’s social status quo. Manohar is known by the
diminutive Manu, “A name no doubt carrying overtones of the legendary patriarchal law-giver
who saw the world from a male centred perspective.”⁴ Soon Sarita wakes up and the fool’s
paradise she has entered into, no longer shelters her with love, affection and security. Soon the
façade of the marital bliss lifts its veil and what remains is the eroding surface and it leaves her
shattered. The sexual act now for her becomes a dirty word. Earlier the same word meant the
heavenly bliss. Her husband’s sadism leaves her with contempt for the word. She stops to revel
in its mystery. She rebels against this act of love which has nothing but lust; but she cannot deny
him straightforward. But the cracks seem visible now in their relationship. While sleeping on
the hard floor at her father’s house, she is hurt as it is difficult to sleep on that floor which is not
convenient at all. The pain reminds her of the pain that each of Manohar’s sadistic nature gives
him and then the pain of floor seems like a speck of dirt having no material existence indeed.
The pain she gets in her father’s house by sleeping on the floor is contrasted with the pain that
she suffers at her own home. It is the pain of being brutally raped. The pain of sleeping on floor is a blessed pain as it contains nothing of the ignominy.

She struggled to a sitting position, her body waking up to an awareness of new pains, of new areas of soreness, that come from sleeping on the hard ground. Blessedly clean pains. Not like the others. I am dark, damp, smelly hole, she often thought when the pains of the night come back to her in the day, shaming her as if they were evidence of her wrong doing. I am like a house full of unclean things, never cleaned, never opened. (TDHNT 29)

Sarita’s body is enthralled by a male’s ego. It is not about Sarita only but the novel universalises the situation of Sarita with that of thousands of other women who are faced with the identical crises in their lives. The female body is colonized by the male body and she dare not make any grudges about it. Consequently she is being silenced and subjugated. She has to bear the trauma of being a partner in the sexual act; an act which is emotionless and loveless. It is an act where there is no union of souls rather only the union of bodies. Many times this female self tries to utter the words of revolt and protest but she cannot as it is against the social norms and not in favour of her own marriage.

I struggled to utter the usual words of protest, to say, No, not now, stop it. But the words were strangled in my throat. The face above mine was the face of a stranger. Blank, set and rigid, it was a face I had never seen. A man I did not know. (TDHNT 19)

Sarita has her nightmares where she is assaulted. She visualises nothing first. There were only hands and teeth trying to tease her. But gradually these nightmares grew in number and also became more intense. She saw now not only hands and teeth rather a full fledged body which was trying to force himself over her. But every time it came she woke and she could not see the face of the man. But then one day she had the nightmare and she also saw her face. It was to her very astonishment, “but my husband” (TDHNT 12) as she says, “Panic and sensation came back simultaneously. I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me, snoring softly. No more a stranger.” (TDHNT 12)
Sexual affinity takes a toll on her. It is not sex that she despises but it is the brutal manner that she is attacked as is someone has been murdered in cold blood that has told upon her very psyche. She views sex in the dim light now. In this context her earlier notions of assurance, love and emotional bonding have fled and what now remains are the dirty implications of the word. She knows there is nothing like love in this world. Paul observes in this context: “She sees sex as a dirty word and the experience as a terror, an inhuman insult to her personality. Though sex is often said to be an essential part of love, in Saru’s case it acts as the instrument of estrangement. With her responsibilities increasing outside of home, she recoils from Manu’s love making.”

Manohar loses all charm and beauty for her. She is averse to the idea of his being so attractive once that girls would do anything to augment intimacy with him. She had herself been one of those girls who were mad after him. He is unattractive, silly, flibbertigibbet now; one who can brag of just ugliness. This ugliness is not wrought upon him by his increasing age or getting bald. It is however concerned with Manohar’s sadistic nature. Sarita despises him and eventually wants to evade him at night so that she can hope for more mature relationship but what she gets is nothing but only sex. That is why she starts trusting the fact that love is no love rather a disguised form of sex only where love is absent. She believes that “She Had Lost Forever…The Eternal Female Dream Of Finding Happiness Through A Man, It Would Never Come Alive For Her Again.” (TDHNT 124)

Distressed and anguished at heart to know that the man she loved more than her own life can be so ruthless is a fact that she can never digest easily and becomes a neurotic; a mental patient who loses all her power to live her life nonchalantly. Every night is a horrible night for her.

The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognise. Total non – comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralysed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength which over whelmed me. (TDHNT 112)

She endures as it is a woman’s fate to endure. But every night she has to keep silent, “and each time it happened and I don’t speak. I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death.” (TDHNT 88) Earlier she
thinks it is because that she is very busy in her professional life and perhaps is unable to devote
time to her husband but gradually she realizes it is because of her higher social and professional
status which has relegated Manohar to a secondary position and made him sadistic. She is
unable to believe the fact that Manohar can even think of this. The man she married as she loved
him; the man she thought she could harbinger piece of love and emotional bonding; the man she
trusted the most; the man she once thought fit enough to be married how can he be so mentally
derailed to even ponder on such a thing? The realisation is too heavy for her. Sylvia Plath has
rightly said: “And I know that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man
showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service
ended was for her to flatten out under his feet like Mrs Willard’s kitchen mat.” In a speech
which she delivers on medicine as a profession for women, Sarita eloquently puts forth the
women’s dilemma which bespeaks of their inferior status in society which male dominated
Indian society has awarded to them.

Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband?
That’s important, very important, because it’s symbolic of the truth. A wife must
always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an M.A, you should be BA. 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. (TDHNT 137)

She very well exposes the dichotomy in the man woman relationship. A woman can never be
equal to man however smart and independent she might be. She might fend for herself and the
family but still she incurs the wrath and not praise for her own self. This is monstrously
improper and imbalanced scale. “Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an
equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal.” (TDHNT 137)
All married couples share inequality as she believes. Marriage is an instrument to sustain this
monstrous imbalance. “It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of
your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you.” (TDHNT 137)

Truly Sarita attacks the paradigms of the patriarchal set up. She very well exposes the nakedness
of patriarchal system of society where a fine balance has to be made. Balance here is not of
being equal rather balance means that man should be powerful and the women must be weaker. In every field this balance must be maintained otherwise life is bound to be out of gear.

Saru therefore advocates the feeling that women should pretend that they are smart, competent, rational or strong. Woman can nag, complain, henpeck, and moan, but never should show themselves as strong personalities. A woman is expected to behave in accordance with the whims and fancies of her husband. Economic independence and independent identity are not meant for a woman.

Lovesick she sets out on a love relationship with her mentor Boozie whose reputation in the hospital increases very soon. Although she first thinks that this relationship is just that of teacher and student but soon she finds overtones of a relationship of a man and woman. Earlier Boozie’s holding her hand, smacking on her back, hugging her seem to her like a common relationship of friendship but gradually she also starts responding to him. With his help she gets higher status in life. He helps her with money to start up a new clinic in a good locality. Manu never questions her relationship with him and this perhaps also irks her. On the day of the inaugural ceremony of her clinic, Boozie shows very much affection to her that all the people are surprised but Manohar does not pay even an iota of attention to this fact. Although Sarita does not feel bad to what Boozie is doing but the fact that Manohar does not feel hurt really shatters her.

I could feel the stares. Everyone’s except Manu’s. Who would not look at us. And I should have hated at him then… not Manu, for he had done nothing then for which I could hate him, but this attractive, ravishing masculine man who was doing this deliberately. Attracting attention to the two of us. But funnily, enough, it was not him I hated. It was Manu for doing nothing. This man… no I could not hate him, knowing what I did about him. That behind the façade of aggressive, virile masculinity there was nothing at all. (TDHNT 94)

Her relationship with Padmakar, who was her class mate, does not last long. She does not want to continue it for a long time. She ends it after realising that he wants more out of this relationship. For her no relationship can really work. She comes out of her house and wants to evade the reality of her being hurt in sexual acts. She turns to men like Padma and Boozie but she is not at all happy in these flirtatious relationships.
And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequence I feared and hated, but also the thing itself. When had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well were illusions, and not Relevant to my life any way. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfilment and happiness came, not through love Alone but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (*TDHNT* 133)

Saru is a modern woman who even does not hesitate to have extra marital relationship with men. Saru turns to other men when her own life brings misfortunes to her. There is no solace in her married life. “I had met him, smiled at him, listened to him. And now I knew it had not been thoughtless on my part. I had done it deliberately, coolly, with calculation, because, foolishly perhaps, I had imagined it would give me an escape route, something that would leave me out of my loveless trap.” (*TDHNT* 132) She comes late from work so that she could escape the sexual trauma that has rent her physically and mentally. She tries to find the missing love and emotional support from other men but fails to get that. Saru although has extra marital affairs does not transgress her limits and does not establish physical relations with any of the two. In this respect Kamini Dinesh says:

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* also there are other men but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to Saru the disillusioning realisation that there can be no happiness or fulfilment in these relationships. They cannot be an escape route from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has finally to fall back on herself.8

In law it is a crime to have sexual intimacy with a woman without her sweet wish even though she may be a wife. But society thinks that it has legalised such things and women are panicked to raise the voice of revolt as it is their marriage citadel. ‘Love’ is a dirty word in the male dominated world where it has been confused with only the act of lust and sex. But in marriage it hardly gets obvious as society has given right to a man to possess his wife’s body and if she desists this-a man can be very cruel and takes it as an offence; an act of violence of his male authority which is strong enough to create cleavage between the husband and wife which is quite deep that it is impossible to create a bridge of communication and understanding between the both again. Time and again the female self is inclined to say the word of revolt but she is hushed up; her voice is literally stifled whenever she exerts to say anything; the social taboos
hang heavy on her soul and the will power to initiate the struggle is smothered. “I struggled to utter the usual words of protest, to say, No, not now, stop it. But the words were strangled in my throat. The face above mine was the face of a stranger. Blank, set and rigid, it was a face I had never seen. A man I did not know.” (TDHNT 19)

The institution of marriage is a major paradigm of the patriarchal set up of society to usher in female subjugation. Deshpande in The Dark Holds No Terrors questions the very validity of the institution of marriage which ravages the life of all women rendering them without life; utterly listless. Despite the fact that marriage is thought to be as a source of everlasting joys, love and security in our scriptures, religious texts and Indian philosophy but the picture is not all pleasant. Our philosophy projects marriage as a bond not of bodies but rather of souls. The word “Sahridya” in Hindi means when the hearts are joined by the bond of love, security and feeling of oneness in marriage. Marriage as conceived in our scriptures is not a contract made in the western countries where a man and woman sign to be together but rather it is a spiritual bonding designed himself by the God itself. Here in India it is often said that marriages are preconceived in heaven but only performed on earth. God has a noble design of making his own crafty plans but the picture is not bright at all. The reality is all contrary. The seamy sides are never glorified in the philosophical ideas. God’s designs are not to be taken care of. If God plans everything then He is not perfect at all when one sees the disintegrating marriages which shatter the peace of both the partners. How can God be so unkind, so ungracious that He forgets to bless the couple? It is futile to make God scapegoat of everything. It is the 21st century and if the people are still living in the fool’s paradise then they are simpletons.

The reality is marriage is the most important weapon to subjugate women. It is a pity that in the present age it is a means of exploitation. Men consider their wives as their own possession completely forgetting the fact that even women have their own existence and identity. There are many women in the novel shown in the background who are victims in loveless marriage. They are brutally beaten, sexually assaulted. They work like gallows slaves in their family all through the day still their value in the household is negligible.

The sad plight is not confined to Saru only, rather it is universal. The novelist has rendered this theme very well in the novel and has brought before us whole gamut of women characters on whom the impact of marriage could be seen. Saru’s friend Samita cannot have any economic
independence. She is a parasite thriving on her husband. For everything she has to take his consent. She borrows hundred rupees from Sarita as she has to buy Sari for one of the relatives. She cannot talk about Sari to her husband as he will fly into a rage. What a sad plight! There is no equality. Vidya, who was associated with Manohar’s theatre, undergoes a metamorphosis from her pre-marriage image of being self-willed and defiant girl who could easily label Shakespeare as a writer with a narrow vision as he created tragedies with the powerful heroes immortalsing males only. She could prove her point easily whenever Manohar and the group associated with the group used to discuss on the merits and demerits of the writers. She would say, “Oh Shakespeare… But Shall I tell you men one thing? He has a limited vision…..I’m saying is that his is a typical man’s view of life-the man at the centre, the woman always on the periphery.” (TDHNT 155-156) Vidya tells Sarita when she meets her after several years that she has left theatre as: “Ashwin doesn’t like the idea of my going on the stage. His family disapproves too. They don’t mind my associating with the theatre occasionally but no acting, directing or anything like that.” (TDHNT 156) Sarita realises the fact that marriage is neither stability nor hope for a better future. The essence of marriage brings in its train so many trials for women to bear.

Society has its own notions. Women are known to have accomplished success if they have married, continued with the marriage and borne children. Sarita hates this, “But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because I got married and I have borne two children.” (TDHNT 121) A woman’s success is always measured in terms of her relationship with her husband. If a woman fails to marry or does not marry the society starts raising many questions. Getting a man to successfully marrying is considered to be the first and the most important goal for a girl. A woman’s success in terms of her professional life, her academic life etc are all insignificant things and have no value. To make marriage work a woman has to do all that which her husband approves of otherwise the institution of marriage can fall apart any time. At a time of daughter’s marriage, she is exhorted to be humble and silent even if her mother-in-law says anything hurting. They have to convert their marriage into workable one. A failed marriage brings disgrace to the woman although it is the male who is at fault. The fear of society makes them crawl into submissiveness. Their ultimate goal is to, “everything in a girl’s life… was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male.” (TDHNT 163)
The predicament of many other women who are victims of this male dominated society is laid bare before us. There are several instances of those women who are the victimised members of the society but perhaps society and law do not come to their succour when they need them the most. Saru is reminded of a conversation between her mother and a neighbour about a lady who was being tortured by her in-laws. The lady is so ill treated that “She had been tied to a peg in the cattle shed for ten years and fed on scraps like a dog. And then, after ten years of this life, she had at last died.” (*THDNT* 87)

There was another woman who would threat to commit suicide everyday as she was fed up with her life. A torture she suffered from her in-laws was too heavy for her. But she was always stopped at the eleventh hour of her actually committing catastrophe. But one day her resolution to finalise her fate was so fixed that “She had taken them by surprise. She had been ill-treated by her in-laws and had made a habitual threat of running to the well to commit suicide. She had always been stopped just in time, people running out in response to her screams, finding her balancing herself on the narrow ledge of the well. But one day she had, perhaps truly desperate at last, to the well silently at night and thrown herself in it.” (*THDNT* 147-148) Name taking of husband is thought to be very bad in Indian society. Madhav flushes when Sarita says her husband’s name, “The boy flushed and she wondered why until she realised that it was perhaps the fact that she has said her husband’s name. To him it was, may be, like a revelation of some intimacy of marriage. She knew that in his home, his mother would never call his father by name. It would be… “your father”. (*THDNT* 47)

Sarita reflects on the fact that marriage has the unbounded capacity to subjugate women. They are changed personalities after marriage. They feel fettered in their in-laws’ house. Whenever they come back to their parental house they smoothen out their long skewed souls. They are free at heart at their parental house. But they are like caged animals at their in-laws’ house. There is very less feeling of oneness at heart. After some time they fail to recognise their true selves. They are utterly transmuted into unidentified souls. Their individuality all is robbed of from them. They become mere bodies-nay living dead souls like Coleridge’s mariners in ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner.’

Sarita is a modern woman who is unable to take into the throat the fact that woman hood is something to be ashamed of. She is like other women who are clinging to traditional values and
do not open up their mouths to say anything related to their problems. In her father’s house she
tends to the problems of the neighbouring women who are ailing. These women folk find their
womanhood something to be ashamed of and Sarita just equates them with foolish people.
“Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them.” (*TDHNT* 107)
She calls them “stupid, silly, martyrs...idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks, and
destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty” (*TDHNT* 107)
She cures them by taking interest in their problems.

She moves back to her father’s house as she comes to know through Prof. Kulkarni, Manohar’s
professor, that her mother is dead. She thinks it is a better pretext to be away from her own husband
for a few days. As she goes to her father’s house, the story of Krishna and Sudama comes to her
mind. She feels like Sudama who has come to Krishna for help and aid. But she was quite aware of
the fact that she was no Sudama at all. She was that poor, she has good clothes to wear and has
slippers on her feet. Then why after all the story has come to her. She reflects:

> It was the Krishna Sudama story that suddenly came to her mind. That, and the
illustration which had accompanied this story in one of her school texts, showing
Krishna and his queen Rukmini running joyously to greet poor, ragged Sudama
standing at the Palace gates. As she knocked at the door, softly at first, then harder,
she wondered why the story had come back to her now. She herself was certainly no
Sudama in rags, bare feet and humility. (*TDHNT* 15)

The novel is a fine study in the mother daughter relationship also. Her mother had died and
Sarita notices that the *tulsi* in their house has served its purpose. The very aim of growing *tulsi*
at home is to perpetuate the man’s life and hence the *tulsi* at her father’s house had well served
its purpose as her mother died before her father thus perpetuating his very life. Sarita says, “The
*tulsi* had been the only spot of green. But that had gone as well. Of course, it had served its
purpose. She had died before her husband. Wasn’t that what all women prayed to the *tulsi* for?”
(*TDHNT* 15) Sarita shares no good relations with her mother. It is known from the fact that her
fingers remain steady when she comes to know that her mother has died. “My fingers, I noticed,
were steady. Not a quiver in them.....I can remember that she cursed me as no mother should.”
(*TDHNT* 25)
Sarita cleans her mother’s room which is in very much disordered state as her father did not want to clean that place as he did not want to let her memories go off. The room reminded him of his wife. The articles and belongings of his wife were the only token of her remembrance but Sarita wants to tidy up the dishevelled room. She finds beautiful, ornate and heavy saris there. Madhav wishes that Sarita should wear these. But she bluntly says, “I don’t have any good memories of my mother. I want nothing of hers.” (THDNT 59)

Sarita reflects on her past and the scary past unfolds the truth of her life; the way she was treated during her childhood. Her brother Dhruva was always preferred and she was neglected. She did not have really good bonding even as a child. Her father did not talk to her much. “We rarely spoke to each other, even then. Dhruva, yes, they had conversations together. And he took him out on the bike with him, Dhruva perched in front of him on the small seat specially fixed there on the bar. The reserve was perhaps part of an old fashioned attitude that daughters are their mothers’ business. But my mother had nothing for me, either. Whose business was I then?” (THDNT 104-105) Very true of Indian society, where still the boys are preferred and most often girls are thought of as burdens. Consequently she becomes an assertive person; one who is self-willed. She does every that thing of which her mother is critical of. As she says: “I hated her. I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer.” (TDHNT 142) Siddhartha Sharma rightly remarks: “Thus, unloved and unwanted, she develops hatred towards the traditional practices during her impressionable years. Her hatred towards her mother is so acute that she becomes rebellious just to hurt her.”

For Sarita’s mother it is surely Sarita whom she holds accountable for Dhruva’s death. Dhruva dies by drowning. Sarita and Dhruva both as kids are playing when Dhruva is drowned. Sarita tries her utmost to save his life whatever she can do but unfortunately she being a kid cannot muster up her courage to jump into the water pond to save him and runs away from the scene. As Sarita has, “Watched him drown.” (TDHNT 34-35) But her mother leaves no stone unturned in accusing her of Dhruva’s death. “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead?” (TDHNT 34-35) Sarita has no responsibility in his drowning still her mother holds her guilty and time and again kills her inside her heart with the allegation of his death. For Sarita it is very tough to live under the blame of such allegations.
I didn’t truly. I didn’t. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn’t. And I ran way. Yes, I ran way, I admit that. But I didn’t kill him. (*TDHNT* 146)

In this context, Adesh Pal observes: “For Sarita the very word “mother” stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being… thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.”

After the premature death of Dhruva, her mother’s treatment becomes more harsh and cruel. Sarita’s birthdays are never celebrated. Her birthday passes off without any acknowledgement both at her home and at school. No one bothers to care which day it is. But her brother’s birthdays were celebrated with full enthusiasm and there was always a puja when he was alive. There is no puja on her birthday. Sometimes she thinks that her birth was a terrible experience for her mother. As she thinks,

But of my birth, my mother had said to me once… ‘It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible.’ And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains. (*TDHNT* 169)

In order to live her life her own way, she departs for Bombay and becomes a medical student contrary to her mother’s wish. From very childhood, she has made up her mind to be a lady doctor when she has seen a lady in some ceremony who had remained aloof from all as she was a lady doctor and has oodles of air of superiority. In her formative years that experience had left an indelible impression. She has said to herself, “But I could be a doctor. Yes, that would be the key that would unlock the door out of this life which even then seemed to me dreary and dull.” (*TDHNT* 140) Her mother was very critical of a girl’s education. She denied when Sarita talked to her father regarding her decision to go for medical. Her mother did never see her as a successful lady doctor. To her very reply, they had an altercation. Sarita replies: “I’m not talking to you. I’m not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No, forever a, “no” to anything I want. You don’t want me to have anything, you don’t want me to do anything. You don’t even want me to live.” (*TDHNT* 142)
Her mother believes that only those girls can go for studying medical and that while staying at hostel whose parents are fabulously rich. They are middle class people who cannot have even two square meals thrice a day. They cannot afford to pay the expenses for her medical study. Fee and the expenses of the hostel are too high. “Yes, but they’re girls whose fathers lots of money. You don’t belong to that class.” (TDHNT 144) She represents the traditional women of Indian society who have been treated alike in their infancy and adolescent age. They were not given good education. They were told to sit inside the four walls of the home. Similarly for her mother, the idea of a daughter’s education is a futile activity. It is a waste of money. It is no sound investment. For a son it is a sound investment as a son will bring hefty dowry and has to look after his parents when they grow old and become physically unfit. But for a girl it is all like flinging money into a garbage box which will never be usable again. Her mother says, “But she’s a girl…And don’t forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married. Spend money on her wedding. Can you do both?” (TDHNT 144) But her father favours her education and despite the fact that he was dissuaded to spend money on her medical career, he decides to get her admitted in a medical college in Bombay. As she later muses, “But I was not alone then. Baba was with me. He helped me. Without him, I would never have succeeded.” (TDHNT 139)

Sarita after the untimely and unfortunate death of her brother realises the fact that for her mother she has no existence. She curses her fate and the fact that she has been born a female. Her friend Samita’s gift of earrings to her is not welcome at her home. Her mother warns her never to accept any gift from anyone. Her mother has no love and affection for her. She does not like anything of hers. Once her mother gifts earrings to her but she knows the fact that the earrings are not a token of love rather this gift has been given to her with a consideration that as a growing female child she must possess these. Sarita denies accepting this gift, “So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear. I put the box down and flounced off to bed.” (TDHNT 171)

At her fifteen birthday, she happens to get late while returning back home. Her mother rebukes her for getting late. Her mother always wants to dominate over her. It is as if she wants a chance to show her inner bitterness on her. She does not seem to remember that it is her birthday and at least on the day of her birthday she should never be pestered with harsh remarks, retorts and
arguments. No one bothers to celebrate her birthday. No presents and no gifts are given to her. Even not any cake is cut. No one acknowledges the fact that it is her birthday. One can easily empathise with Sarita by stepping into her shoes. On being enquired about why she got late, her answer is she had gone for a walk with friends. Her mother’s anger knows no bounds on getting such response from her. She scolds her that Saru remembers to go on a walk but she does never remember that there are so many of the household chores pending at home. Her mother wants her to partake in the kitchen, preparing food for the family. She wants that it is her duty to pay attention to sweeping and scrubbing utensils. She retorts back:

Didn’t you think you could have helped me at home? There are vegetables to be cut, the buttermilk to be churned. When you’re working, I never ask for a bit of help, I slog the whole day all by myself. But to go for a walk…. A huge anger filled me making me almost blind. What about me? It was my birthday. Did she remember that others had gifts and smiles and festive meals, while I? (TDHNT 170)

Even her resolve to marry Manohar is more strengthened by her mother’s dislike for him. He is not Brahmin whereas Saru is a Brahmin. Obviously the age old traditional values have to come into force when they decide to marry. Her mother directly disagrees for their marriage. She convulses at the thought of love marriage and that too with a low class man. She out rightly denies this alliance. But it does not matter Saru whether her mother agrees or not as she has never shown consent to what she wants to do. Her resolve is fixed and rock steady which her mother’s reprimanding and scolding nature can never shake. She defies her mother’s contempt:

What caste is he?
I don’t know…
A Brahmin?
Of course not.
Then, cruelly… his father keeps a cycle shop.
Oh, so they are low caste people, are they? (TDHNT 96)

Her resolve to marry a man of her own choice was her first deliberate assertion. As Viney Kirpal quotes P. Ramamoorthi, “the departure of the heroine from the mother is the first step towards autonomy. For the mother is the first pedagogue of the do’s and don’ts on the woman.”11 How
strange it is to realise that mother whom all elevate to such a high place and esteem so much can
clower herself to such an extent as to differentiate her own children. The preference for a male
child can be so strong that a mother can obliterate the girl child fully out of mind is hard to
believe. Even after her marriage, she never thought good of Sarita. She accuses her and curses
her, “I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrows than she has given me.”
(TDHNT 197)

A quest for identity is a major propellant that sets Sarita’s thoughts in motion when she thinks of
marrying Manohar. Her hatred for her mother spurs her more into marrying him. As S.P Swain
writes, “Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine
sensibility.” She later on thinks: “If you hadn’t fought me so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so
against him, perhaps, I would never have married him” (TDHNT 96). Her yearning of seeking
individuality is not negative at all. It is a positive gesture by the new women like Sarita who are
in the search for their identities and refuse to bog down. Her vocation of a doctor is another of
her assertion as she wants to show her mother that she has notched up a respectable position in
society despite the fact that she has always been relegated and no support in any form has ever
been given to her. She chooses to be a lady doctor just because she wants to show to her mother
that her gender biased treatment cannot deter her resolve to achieve a respectable position in
society. “She is a modern perfectionist who defies her own mother to become a doctor, defies
her caste to marry outside, defies social conventions-to advance her career.”

Her mother never bothers to care a fig for her. She never cares to know how a child’s heart must
have felt after such imposition of blames. She never tries to empathise and sympathise with her.
Not even for formality she tries to console her, love her and show any affection to her. Sarita all
through her life lives under the burden of such a heaviness of crime and the guilt hung heavy on
her bosom. It is as if she herself guilty who has killed Dhruva: She recalls: “My brother died
because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My
husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood.” (TDHNT 217) Thinking about her
parents’ gendered role in her upbringing she says, “He never took any interest in my school or
college. He left it all to her. And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva’s death. I just did not
exist for her. I died long before I left home.” (TDHNT 32)
Her mother is a person for whom she never existed. Even when she died, she did not reconcile to Sarita. Mai-Kaki, a neighbour informs her that her mother did not like the idea of going to you when she was dying. She did not like to be taken care of by Sarita. She was adamant. “Her refusal to be reconciled to you. Even then, when she was dying, she said the same thing, …what daughter? I have no daughter” (THDNT 109) But it is surprising that her father too does not like her much. He even does not pay attention to her. He never bothers to see how she is being brought up. He believes that it is a woman’s concern to look after the children especially girls. He takes interest in his son when he is alive and takes him out for a ride. How cruel is the gendered nature and sexist biases of parents who forget that they themselves are responsible to bring them down on the earth. They are not borrowed from anyone rather are their own daughters.

Perhaps the wish for Dhruva’s death was lurking in Sarita’s mind. It was quite obvious when a small child is treated so badly and the other child is the apple of parents’ eyes then sibling rivalry is obvious to surface. Sarita though did not try to kill him but perhaps there was a subdued wish as some critics believe for his death in her mind so that the gender discrimination might end up but the idea does not seem very substantial as she never really tried to do that. It was purely an accident when Dhruva out of an impulse follows her to the place which she refers to a secret place.

The social construct of sex is quite obvious in the novel as in the case of Sarita. Family always tries its bit to victimise the girls. They are made to feel that they are girls. Sex and gender are not only biological factors. Society creates this awareness in women that they are women which means that they are meek, humble and docile. Sarita is made to feel that she is a girl and as such she must be like a girl with quite feminine virtues. She remains victim of her parents’ gender bias. She is made to feel that she is lower in rank to her brother. A mother is always worried about her girl’s complexion as if her complexion gets tanned the chances of finding a groom for her will also mitigate. Her mother is quite apprehensive of this fact and time and again scolds her for sitting in the sun as she fears her complexion would get dark and the prospects of finding a suitable match for her will also get darker:

Don’t go out in the sun you’ll get even darker.

Who cares? We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.
I don’t want to get married.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can’t.
And Dhruva?
He’s different. He’s a boy. (TDHNT 45)

Sarita was never allowed to enter the holy places at homelike Kitchen and worship room during the days she had menses. Those were the days that were horrible for her. Not just the pain was unbearable rather the behaviour of her parents was gruesome to her. She did not want to be like her mother having to tread the same path of her mother. She starts inculcating disgust of her own biology, a shame that she was a woman. It was a feeling which engulfed her because she hated her mother. “No, it was something quite different, much worse, a kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother. (TDHNT 62) The indiscrimination was appalling and aghast. Parents create a sense of inferiority in girls too. Gender discrimination can really take wretched forms. Sarita remembers her pathetic condition as if she was an outcast and a leper whom people don’t want to have any contacts with.

Not just the three days when I could not enter the kitchen or the puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with the thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being the pariah with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed, pollution. (TDHNT 62)

Sarita is always tutored regarding the aspects of her growing body. The biological development of a girl child even in Indian families is also seen as a clandestine, hugger mugger and furtive affair. At a time when a girl attains puberty; a time of bodily change- which means appearance of breasts and commencement of menstrual periods- a girl is cautioned to be aware of male stare and be separate from her male friends. She has to be careful of her body. She is reminded of the way she must behave as a girl. She must be cautious that she should not flaunt her body even by mistake. Sarita is really unwanted in her parental home. She is made to realise that being a woman meant a train of problems. During three days of menstrual cycle a girl is left segregated; all alone by her own self. She is declared as dirty. "You should be careful now about how you
behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even if it’s only your father who’s around.” *(TDHNT 62)* Her hatred found its expression in the following lines, “If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one.” *(TDHNT 55)*

A woman has no identity of her own. Her identity is always in the flux. “This drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified you for so many years…how then do you know yourself, and who you are?” *(TDHNT 118)* Sarita realises the fact that women are born to be sufferers here. God has given them birth just to make them suffer the pangs of pain here on this earth. They have to pocket insult at every step; be it their family or the professional front. Men think they are perhaps superhuman persons; demi-gods who can perform any uphill task and thus achieve perfection, but what about women? They are good for nothing fellows if one looks at them through men’s lenses. They have to bear the brunt both physically and psychologically. The name with which woman has lived so long is part and parcel of her identity as she is known by that name but marriage robs her of her entity. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* there is a reference to such a change in name. Identity crisis is a constant theme in Shashi Deshpande through which female subjugation is easily brought. In almost all her novels Deshpande describes many such Indian practices which are used to relegate women and to make them non-entities. Samita is re-named as Geetanjali after marriage, preparing her symbolically to go through the pain, inflicted violently by the sickness of patriarchy. As Smita tells Saru, “He hates any one calling me Samita now.” *(TDHNT 118)*

Sarita had visited a friend of Manohar. She was astounded to see his wife. The wife has been so submissive. It seemed that she has no identity of her own. No one noticed her when she came to serve tea to them. Even her husband did not get her introduced to them. She seemed a listless figure. She was a figure without any influence. Once who was very much weak. “Her face was unchanged, expressionless, as if she had fallen in with her husband’s desires and successfully effaced the person that was her……….I looked down at her feet and saw that there was no shadow. For some reason the words came to my mind… if I cast no shadow, I do not exist.” *(THDNT 159)*

Sarita feels that her profession is acting as a ventriloquist. She is nothing but a dummy without it. She has no identity. It is only by relating her to her profession as a lady doctor that she attains some identity. Her own identity is nowhere to be found as she has effaced herself and started
viewing herself into the image that Manu wanted to see. Prof. Kulkarni visits her in the hospital and is taken aback to see great changes in her. To his question she says, “Changed?, yes, may be. I’m more elegant, more sophisticated, I know how to dress, how to carry myself. All just a veneer. Behind this, there’s nothing.” (TDHNT 24)

Sarita’s misfortune brings for her new uses. She opens up new vistas of new learning. She decides to leave her husband and children and goes to her father’s home as she has come to know of her mother’s death a month ago and there at her father’s home she feels comfortable and marches on to her journey of self realisation and self finding. She returns back after a gap of fifteen years. She returns as a well-established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of life she is passing through. She is confused, hopeless, dull almost thoughtless as a recluse. “She was not apprehensive, though not eager either, for the moment of confrontation. She glided back at the rickshaw in which she had come. She hadn’t paid the man as yet as if keeping a route open for retreat.” (TDHNT 15) She did not pay the money to the rickshaw puller as he was uncertain about the fact whether her father would accept her in his house.

Sarita sees the futility in her resolve to go to her father’s house to console him. There was no point as she feels. Her mother never mattered to her when she was alive. So why should she matter when she is dead? She is torn in her mind whether she should go or not to her father’s house when she comes to know that her mother has died of cancer. She reflects, “We had lived fifteen years without mentioning her. Why should she matter dead when she had never mattered alive?” (TDHNT 27) Even Manu finds it quite absurd as she believes that her parents never remained in touch with them. “Why do you have to go?.......Did they let you know when she was ill?” (TDHNT 27) He thinks it is perhaps because she wants to seek forgiveness what she has done to them. But the idea is quite revolting and absurd:

Forgiven? I began to laugh while he stared at me in astonishment. Forgiven? I want nothing so complicated. My wants are simpler. To sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension. Not to think, not to dream. Just to live. (TDHNT 27)

The very objective of her coming which prompted her was to evade the sexual sadism of Manohar as she has been living a very abject life with him. Sarita has not very good notions
about her father. Her father had been a very timid person. He has no say in his household. It was her mother who used to have her sway on the house. Her father was a man whose identity was never recognised. He was a negative person. To Sarita, “He had always been a negative man, incapable of strong feelings.” (*TDHNT* 30)

At her father’s home although she has come with a wish to have some love and affection from her father but she is given a cold reception. There was perhaps no respite for Sarita after coming to her father’s house. She thinks after stepping into her father’s house which thing impelled her to come there. Why it had been so important to come there. She feels perhaps herself disappointed as she will seek no solution of her problems. The sense of urgency with which she has entered his house has vanished. She thinks the very purpose of her coming to his house as defeated. Thus, “Why had it seemed so important to come here, and, at once? She thought of Abhi’s tears… I want to go with you, mummy. I want to go. Of Renu’s face and questions….Grandfather? What grandfather, mummy? I thought my grandfather was dead?” (*TDHNT* 17) She thinks perhaps her father or Baba as she calls her father considers her to be an unwelcome guest, “he sat gingerly on the edge of his chair, like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest.” (*TDHNT* 18)

Her father has always been a manly person in the sense that he had never done any of the household chores ever. It was her mother who used to look after the house chores. But seeing her father managing her life after the demise of his wife staggered her. She could not believe the fact that her father was so verse now in cooking and other chores. “He had always been so much a man, ‘the master of the house’, not to be bothered by any of the trivials of the daily routine.” (*TDHNT* 20)

The sense of love and affection is quite missing in her father’s house for her. There is no comfort that she can seek even in her father’s house. Her mother has already breathed her last and her father does not ask her about her married life just because hers was a marriage that none of her parents really supported. It was an inter-caste marriage and no one favoured her. She is pained at heart to think that she is not showered love just because she is herself responsible for her married life. She cannot blame her parents for the consequences that now she has to face. Yes in case hers had been an arranged marriage, she would have got real sympathy and love from her parents. As in that case the blame would have fallen on their shoulders for arranging
such a match. “It’s my fault again. If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?” (TDHNT 218) She thinks of her friend’s marriage which has been quite unsuccessful. But the woman was not that tense as she was sure of getting the strength from her parents. Her parents gave her love and affection as it was their decision to get her married to the person they thought is suitable. She had no responsibility in that case.

She thought of the girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl’s face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despair nor shame. For the failure had not been hers, but her parents’; and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl. (TDHNT 218-219)

Her father never took any interest in her as a child. She was an abandoned child. The responsibility of her upbringing was vested with her mother only. She was surprised how could the same man take keen interest in Madhav with whom he has no relation at all? Her mother never cared for her. “He never took any interest in my school or college. He left it all to her. And she never really cared. No after Dhruva’s death. I just didn’t exist for her. I died long before I left home.” (TDHNT 32)

Sarita wants to disclose to her father, “My husband is a sadist” (THDNT 199) but she finds it difficult. She tells her father that she does not want to talk to him as a daughter but as a woman but her father cannot understand her. She tells him finally about the sadism of her husband and announces, “He’s cruel to me…in bed.” (THDNT 200) and she informs him of the day when the lady asked him about his response on her wife’s shouldering all the liabilities of the family. Although there was no transformation in his behaviour in his mood during day but at night he transmuted himself into an animal, “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.” (THDNT 201) What shocked her more was his usual conduct during the next morning as if he had not been all cruel with her. He behaved as if everything has been a part of married life about which no fuss should ever gather. “I wondered what we would say. Would he apologise? Or
explain? Would he look guilty and shamefaced? But when I went out, there was nothing. He said, as if it was just any day, ‘Morning, Saru. Slept well?’” (THDNT 202)

These things even he has not shared with his own wife. She narrates to him the whole story and says: “I couldn’t fight back. I couldn’t shout or cry, I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure.” (TDHNT 201) He fails to provide her emotional support. He gets up and moves away when Sarita continues telling him the state of affairs of her family. She finds that she and her father both are not like daughter and father rather they both are utter strangers to each other. They have never shared a friendly bond before so it is quite impossible to seek the possibility of such an occurrence now. She thinks that they, “are fated to be strangers.” (TDHNT 105)

She is uncomforted with his solutions. She thinks there would be no respite, no solution of her problem. There can never be any way out and as such perhaps her living would mean nothing. “But there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother dies alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood.” (TDHNT 217) She imposes all blame on herself for everything that has befall on her family life. But her father urges her it is not the case. He informs her that she has undergone the pain as a child because she has somehow accepted herself the murderer of Dhruva. She must not take her mother seriously as she was adamant and never thought much before speaking, “Sometimes I used to think you took your mother seriously and blamed yourself for Dhruva’s death. You know she was not herself when she said that. She was…hysterical. But I thought you began to believe it yourself.” (TDHNT 181) The automation that she notices in her father and Madhav’s relationship is very shocking to her. She is astonished to notice that it is a relationship where no one makes any demands on another. No one of both of them have any expectations from each other. Their very relationship is so spontaneous. They have classified their roles categorically. They fit in their roles adroitly. No one is complaining. “Both comfort and security had come to her somehow, not from Baba, not from Madhav, but from the very pattern of their life together.” (TDHNT 160)

Sarita tells her state of affairs to her father and like a child seeks the solution of her problems. She urges upon him to suggest her some way out but he is left blank as no idea strikes his mind. It is their family matter and it would perhaps not be proper to intrude upon their life. She did not
get his consent in her marriage now what role she expects him to play. Worse than everything, the issue of sexual intercourse was very tough to deal with. Her father could not answer her anything, “But how can I answer that question, Saru? What can I do?”….But you’ve got to help me, you’ve got to. You did it once. And because you did I went to Bombay, met him and married him. And that’s why….” (THDNT 204) The best he could suggest her was to seek some psychiatrist’s counsel. He suggests her, “All the more reason you’re a doctor, you should know. May be he needs treatment….” (THDNT 203)

She receives a mail that Manu is coming to take her back with him to their home. She could not feel easy as she does not want to be with a man who is very insensitive to her pains. She realises that one is alone in this world and from nowhere one can hope for any succour, “perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone” (THDNT 219) and she decides to leave her father’s house prior to Manu’s arrival. For a split second she is numbed and comforted. She is taken back to the world of fancies and pleasant reveries where there is no burden of heaviness but, “She could not find refuge again in such a specious argument. It was too glib, too easy a way out. To say that it isn’t real, it doesn’t really matter… what does that make of life then? How can it help me to go on, she thought despairingly? (TDHNT 219)

Marching on her way to seek ultimate realisation of the self, she encounters several problems. From self-alienation to self-identification, the novel evinces how she comes out of her fear which is the root cause of her suffering. She was so scared of the final confrontation with Manu that she says, “Promise me”, “Promise me you won’t open the door to him. Don’t open the door when he comes.” (THDNT 218) Her father was a man who was indecisive in her eyes, but she was utterly surprised when he advised her to face the situation: “Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what’s wrong. Tell him all that you told me. Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him.” (TDHNT 216) He exhorts her not to leave the house without meeting him as no escape route was ever possible, “Don’t go without meeting your husband. Talk to him. Tell him what’s wrong.” (TDHNT 217)

Thus she hits upon the idea that everyone is alone ultimately in this world; an idea with which she was not reconciled earlier but now she seemed to accept that hard reality; however bitter it was but it had to be truthful that one is alone in this world; alone to tackle the umpteen problems which cling to oneself like the flies gather on carcass, but now she comes to terms with that
concept and becomes comfortable “So I’m alone. But so’s every one else. Human beings… they’re going to fail you…we have to go on trying.” (TDHNT 220) Ultimately she realises that the fault of her misery has been her own self, “I have been my own enemy.” (TDHNT 221) Thus she enters into a phase of light leaving behind the darkness which has blinded her vision completely.

My life is my own…somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right. (TDHNT 220)

She realises that escapism can never be possible way out. “Escapism is no solution; a permanent solution has to come from within.” Truly Deshpande sets new ideas working in this novel. She exhorts the fact that human relations cannot furnish solutions to rectify our problems. One has to look within only; then true path can be sought. It is like seeking God within. There is no possible glancing at God outside but only a real peep inside can prove fulfilling and can help in attaining the spiritual truth. No doubt Sarita is awakened in the end. She does not want to escape now but she wants to confront the harsh reality. She wants to face Manohar tooth and nail. She no more camouflages herself from Manohar’s arrival. Here it is quite significant to quote Shashi Deshpande herself:

Interviewer: Looking for a total sustenance only from human relationship seems frustrating. Looking for it outside-in art, in your job seems less so.

Shashi Deshpande: I agree there. This is the conclusion I’ve come to myself in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Before the beginning of the novel, Deshpande exploits one epigraph. The epigraph is used by the writers to indicate the central point of the plot; a device most commonly put to exercise by T.S. Eliot in his poems. The epigraph of the novel really captures the theme of the novel from the very outset: -

\[ You \text{ are your own refuge; } \]
there is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve. (The Dhammapada)

The epigraph from Dhammapada apparently drills home the point that it is only the strong will that can counter any problem of however enormous dimension it may be. Self confidence and courage can tackle any problem. Escapism is no solution. The courage is inside the human mind. One needs to be awake to that fact. Sarita’s all endeavours now are directed towards the only objective to live. Saru is mentally prepared to face Manu as: “If Manu comes, tell him to wait, I’ll be back as soon as I can.” (TDHNT 221) When finally for Sarita the time to face her life comes, she gets confident that her life is her own and she cannot hope for a help from outside rather she has to find out the way out from her inner self. Thus she resolves to shed off the darkness which has engulfed her life for quite a long time. Dr. K.R. Srinivas Iyenger points out, “Sarita cannot forget her children or the sick needing her expert attention and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can pen up a new spring of elemental self-confidence.”

Even at her father’s house she did not leave her contact with the patients and whenever she is called upon for help, she willingly provides it. The women in her father’s neighbourhood seek her help for the cure of their ailments. The novel thus is a beautiful study of how women in their life feel. As a realist writer Shashi Deshpande has time and again written novels exposing the patriarchal designs in subjugating the women and their souls. Patriarchy can take up different forms. Women are subjugated in so many different ways. In the present novel it is the sexual deranged behaviour of a husband who cannot resist himself to rape his wife at night is what is dealt with utmost openness. Deshpande has shown the cruel condition which the female protagonist has to pass through night after night.
REFERENCES:


