

Chapter II

The New Woman

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a compelling story of a woman's struggle against all odds, where the novelist shows multiple issues concerning women and their condition. The novel portrays the story of a marriage on the verge of breakdown and of a woman, who is made acutely conscious of her gender since childhood. The novel shows mother figures are not the matriarchs to be glorified but the suffocative and the authoritative figures to be disdained.

In this novel the mother-daughter relationship is based on gender bias and lovelessness. Saru's brother Dhruva is the fundamental factor of her mother's existence. The root of gender differentiation in the society is unfathomable and Saru's mother is no exception. As a young girl, she feels rejected by her mother, who prefers Dhruva, her younger brother. Saru is the burden to be eased and a responsibility to be fulfilled. She is just treated as a playmate and a governess for her brother Dhruva. She is always ignored and neglected in favour of her brother. She is not given much importance.

Saru recalls various incidents that differentiate the upbringing of her brother and herself. Saru remembers her mother telling her of her birth, "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" (169). But her brother's birthdays are celebrated with much fanfare and performance of religious rites, whereas her birthdays are not even acknowledged. She then thinks that, "There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening . . . My birthdays were almost

the same . . . but there was no puja” (168-69). She takes it as an indictment on her gender and this results in the sense of rejection that she develops later in life.

The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. The Indian society, steeped in tradition and superstition, considers the birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. Siddhartha Sharma in the book *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study* quotes the words of Sarabjit Sandhu who remarks that,

The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one—after all, he is male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give “agni” to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in ferment.

(28)

Saru’s mother’s obvious preference for her son, Dhruva, creates a sense of alienation within her and precipitates a sense of rootlessness and insecurity.

Saru is constantly reminded of the superiority of the male over female. One day Saru and her brother Dhruva, while playing in water find a crisis. The boy is drowned in a puddle and her mother blames her. Saru is accused of killing him and her mother lashes at her, “Why are you alive and he dead?” (34-35). She remembers how her mother endlessly moans her son’s death and even expresses her wish that he be alive and Saru dead. She feels miserable when her mother blames her for the death of Dhruva. She lives her life with the guilt, which is inflicted on her. Many such scenes are etched in her mind and the Indian view of the girl as a liability and the boy an asset are firmly implanted in

her mind. Shashi Deshpande delves into the problem of every woman in this society where she is rendered a second grade position but is expected to be the lynch pin of the family.

Saru's mother Kamala loses interest in life after Dhruva's death. She snatches every opportunity to reproach her and takes no interest in Saru's education, career or future. Saru is deprived of parental care and affection. Her mother's hatred for her and preferences for her brother Dhruva is evident from her actions. This kindles Saru to become a strong-willed, self-assertive and independent woman.

Saru's mother keenly seeks to shape her daughter after herself. Being a traditional mother, she is very careful about her daughter's looks which should one day tempt a man for her to marry. The writer portrays the inner turmoil of a woman like Saru, fighting within herself between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the surrounding, especially by the mother.

Saru's mother warns her that she should be careful about how she behaves and also tells her not to come out in a petticoat. She feels ashamed of herself even in the presence of her own father. When Saru plays in the sun, her mother dictates:

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. (45)

Shashi Deshpande thus reveals the social aspect of keen sibling jealousy born of a mother's undue fondness for the son. Saru has childhood scars. Her feeling of being unwanted is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. This creates a rift between the mother and the daughter and forces Saru to tread on the path of rebellion. She deliberately indulges all her life into acts, which enrages her mother and in the process of moving against the flow, she drains herself emotionally and physically. Saru knows that womanhood is a source of sorrow and she says "*If you're a woman, I don't want to be one*" (63).

M. Q. Khan and A. G. Khan in the book *Changing faces of Women in Indian Writing in English* quotes the words of Adesh Pal, who uses psychological parameters to analyze her personality and observes: "For Saru 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 flare up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others" (74-75).

Once Saru states: "No, I couldn't. I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them . . . her . . . something. What? I didn't know. But I had to make myself secure so that no one would ever say to me again . . . why are you alive?" (50). Her wish to be a doctor is instilled in Saru by her mother's neglect. Saru's relationship, at this stage, with her mother becomes so much strained that she now wants a total freedom from her mother's dominance. The medical degree seems to her to be a passport to this freedom. So Saru decides to take up medicine once she achieves first Class in XII. But her father

asks her what subject will she take for B.Sc.? She declares that she will not go to B.Sc. but instead she will take up medicine. This is an unexpected response to her traditional mother, who replies that; “And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, You still have to get married, spend money on her wedding” (144). The father, who already understands the modernized idea of a professional woman, supports her morally and financially to achieve her goal. Her mother suggests to her father, “Let her go for a B.Sc. . . . You can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over” (144).

The sense of rejection by her mother fills the mind of the adolescent Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. 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 and says “I hated her. I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer” (142). This drives her to leave home for Bombay to seek medicine as a career.

The intensity of hatred is so overpowering, that her mother disowns her and dies unforgiving. Saru is left struggling with her life although there is no link with her mother: “I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She's always done it to me . . . taken happiness away from me. She does it even now when she's dead” (109). No mother can dislike her own daughter with such fervor. But Saru's mother is an exception. “Imagine saying . . . I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me” (197). Saru is surprised to know that her mother dies peacefully in spite of having caused her so much pain: “What about me? Did she think of me at all? She died at peace with herself, you say. How could she after what she did to me?” (195).

J. P. Tripathi in the book *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* writes

Mothers in Shashi Deshpande's novels do not realize the fact that the traditional middle-class idea that a woman's only career should be her family is now rejected by the up-coming girls who are very much influenced by factors such as the spread of scientific ideas, the growing impact of other cultures on the individuals, and the availability of a vast body of literature. Though most of the educated working women still give preference to marriage and their family life, the wish to be economically independent, to have an individual identity in society is more pronounced among the majority of women than was found earlier. (152)

Saru is highly self-willed and her problems multiply because of her ego and innate power over others. Saru sees marriage as an escape route made in order to liberate herself from the suffocation she experiences in her parent's home. She falls in love with a young writer called Manohar of another caste. She informs her decision of marriage to her parents and her mother asks her,

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?. (96)

The traditional mother, who knows marriages only through engagements arranged by the families of the boy and the girl on the basis of caste, religion and community, warns Saru against her decision to marry Manu –

“I know all these ‘love marriages’. It’s is love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don’t come crying to us then” (69).

These words of Saru’s mother with disgusting hatred and prejudices of centuries, enrages her. She feels that it is her mother who makes her dream of finding happiness through a man. Saru revolts against her parents and runs away from home to get married to Manohar, who is an English teacher in a small college. She always feels insecure in her parent’s house and marries to secure the lost love in her parental home and to restore her identity as an individual. Siddhartha Sharma in the book *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study* quotes the words of S. P. Swain who writes that “Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility” (31). To prove her mother wrong Saru determines never to return to her father’s house.

Saru as a modern woman is firm on her decision. She thinks that she has to make herself secure and so works hard for her education as well as marries Manu. Her marriage with Manohar at one stage makes her feel secured and thinks that no one would ever say to her “. . . Why are you alive?” (50). He is an ideal romantic hero for her who satisfies her hunger for love. “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” (40).

Saru considers herself the luckiest woman on earth, as the initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss. She describes her dingy one-room apartment in which they first lived, as “heaven on earth” (40). She is blissfully content “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” (40). Soon she realizes that happiness is illusory. Saru thinks that if her mother “. . . hadn’t fought her so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him. And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him and yet pitying him too” (96).

As long as she is merely a medical student and her husband the breadwinner there is peace at home, even if ‘home’ is surrounded by filth and stench. Saru remembers how a particular incident becomes a turning point in their blissful marital relationship. One night she returns home late in her bloodstained coat as she helps out the victims in a fire accident in a factory nearby. The neighbourhood thus comes to know about her identity, and she gains recognition. People would come to her for medical help and other related matters. Saru becomes a busy doctor, which ultimately upsets her family life.

In the beginning, Saru does not realize the change that has come in Manu. Her success as a well-known and reputed doctor becomes the cause of her strained marital relations with Manu. He is uncomfortable with Saru’s steady rise in status, as he feels ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru. In a retrospective mood she says much later: “He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (42). Her husband gets annoyed of her popularity and her busy life makes her to concentrate less at the domestic front. This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. A conflict in her mind ensues due to her achieved position and the ascribed position of her husband.

Earlier she is happy and content to live on Manu's salary but in her new role as a career woman she becomes discontent. She resents: "For me, things now began to hurt . . . a frayed sari I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable" (92). Her question of his virility makes him so angry that at night he takes her with brute force that leaves her whole body bruised. Here violence is present at a sexual level. She is stifled and feels pinned down by her husband at night. To gain his masculinity, he gives vent to his feelings through his beastly sexual assault on Saru and feigns ignorance in the morning of his beastly behaviour. The rape-like act is a sadistic expression of power and hatred for the wife. The writer reveals the woman's struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity for herself, and also subtly bares the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society

The financial ascendance of Sarita, changes Manu into a wild animal. She expresses her desire to leave her medical practice but Manu dissuades her from doing so, as their standard of living would not be possible on Manu's income. The other nightmarish incident recurs later in response to another similar, tactless remark made by Manu's colleague and his wife. Manu and Saru meet his colleague and his wife while shopping, prior to going on a vacation to a hill station. During the talk, Manu tells his colleague that they are going to Ooty. The colleague comments that they are lucky to be able to afford such a trip and that he himself could not afford a much less expensive vacation. The colleague wife's reply that her husband could have afforded it, had he married a doctor, humiliates Manu, who once again victimizes Saru. She expresses her

helplessness later to her father: “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 anything. I can never do anything. I just endure” (201).

A girl, who comes home to interview Saru for a magazine, innocently asks Manu: “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (200). At that moment, Manu, Saru and the interviewer laugh over it as if it does not matter. Saru’s husband is a cheerful normal human being and a loving one during the daytime. But his action at nights terrifies and humiliates Saru. She says

And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death. Perhaps the process has already begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself. (96)

Shashi Deshpande clearly states that, to be a woman retains no glory and she brutally exposes the irony of self-sacrificing martyrdom. In the novel she expresses that,

Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. Stupid, silly martyrs, she thought: idiotic heroines . . . Their unconscious, unmeaning heroism, born out of the myth of the self-sacrificing martyred woman, did not arouse either her pity or her admiration. It made her angry . . . But they had schooled themselves to silence. (107)

However Shashi Deshpande proves that in the institution of marriage, an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear

of hurting the ego of her husband. She is socially and economically superior to her husband. As Saru observes bitterly: “ $a+b$ 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” (42).

According to T. M. J. Indra Mohan in the book *Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Spectrum*,

A tradition bound woman may sacrifice anything for the sake of her family's welfare and she may not zealously guard her individuality. In the case of educated woman it becomes more often than not the family life's happiness is minimum because of divided self between husband and children and then between work and herself. Feminine sensibilities crumble and natural love disappears, and it results in incompatibilities.

(103)

The incompatibility between the husband and wife gives Saru a sense of alienation.

Love is no longer for them a sweet thing to possess and enjoy. “Love . . . how scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called ‘love.’ It's only a word, she thought. Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away” (72). Equally, Manohar's male ego tries to dominate Sarita, which ultimately results in disintegration. It is not clash of principles but only the clash of egos. Sarita's female psyche, encounter the working forces which emanate from her husband's masculine vigour.

Sarita's family life and happiness starts declining as her popularity starts increasing day by day. She is unable to devote her time to her husband and children's needs. Though she is fond of doing household duties, her profession makes her weary and tired. So she is not able to spend time with her family. Saru appoints Janakibai to look after her children. Saru thinks "They're used to being without me. I'm out most of the day, anyway. And I told you about my Janakibai. As long as she's with them, I didn't have to worry" (71). But, the children long for motherly love and care. She feels a gradual disappearance of love and family-attachment; she faces a psychological conflict, which becomes inevitable. She fails first as a wife and secondly as a mother.

Parents appointing a maid to look after their children show the city life. But it is a well-known fact, that nobody can replace the place of mother in the family. There are many instances, which clearly show their longings for motherly love and care. Renu, her daughter is often portrayed as cold and silent. Renu does not talk much even to her mother, quite unlike the other children of her age.

"Renu, what is the matter?"

Nothing.

Why don't you talk?"

I don't feel like it." (21)

As a mother, Saru fails to understand her daughter's odd behaviour. Renu's drawing reflects her loneliness or uncaring child's attitude, longing for mother's love. The picture of the child in the dark forest clearly shows her sense of loneliness. This is quite unusual because children of Renu's age would only want to draw colourful pictures and not a dark one with a black crayon. Shashi Deshpande clearly shows the conditions

of Renu and Sarita through the picture of the deep, dark forest, which reflects that they are encompassed by the lonely feelings.

Sarita also feels lonely because she does not receive any love all through her life. Everyone has failed her. Thus, Saru is the symbol of many women, who live their lives in loneliness. Extreme boredom and meaninglessness threaten to disintegrate Saru who imagines herself as a lifeless puppet, a ventriloquist's dummy in a dismal dystopian world. Her sense of entrapment and loneliness is primal and is concerned with the question of a woman as a being. She wonders, "Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of . . . my husband, my wife, my children, my parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure?" (195). She comes to an existential conclusion that "Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone" (219).

The family institution begins to disintegrate when a woman achieves greater economic or social status than a man. She realizes that a woman must necessarily remain a step behind her husband. Y. S. Sunita Reddy in the book *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* quotes the words of John Ruskin, who holds a similar view: "A man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly; while a woman ought to know the same language or science only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends" (63). But what a woman like Saru wants is, the recognition as an individual and that is denied to her. A wife wants equality, involvement and continuity within marriage. But these desires are not given the due importance, as a man is egoistic. Saru's perusal for a separate female identity makes it difficult for her to come to a compromise.

Saru is a reputed woman in the outside world, but inside she does not know how to deal with her husband's sexual tortures. The problem faced by her is the problem of many learned and professional women of the society. As the Indian society is still bound by tradition and superstitions no one dares to challenge the existing male-dominant order.

Saru's mother, has in one way, helped her to mould her psyche – to accept the pains and sufferings to lead her marriage life a successful one. She decides to keep her marriage in favor of her husband. But, Manohar's disgusting behaviour in the night frightens and traps her like an animal. She has nobody in her life to share secret pains and unburden her heart. There is an urge “. . . to confide in someone, to talk to someone, was growing in her. Often she had found herself staring at people, weighing them up, thinking . . . are you on my side? Are you? And, even more often, waking up at night with a start, thinking . . . I am alone” (43). What is more pitiable about Saru is that she begins to perceive herself from the parameters of her mother. The daughter who “. . . wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer” (142) finds herself hurt, wounded and suffering from her mother's curse.

Saru finds herself lonely and a dissatisfied person. The isolation and fragmentation in her marital life make her look for other possibilities. Her own fear and confusion makes her run to seek others help and sympathy. She turns to Boozie for happiness, then to Padmakar and Madhav.

Boozie, her mentor, takes personal interest in her and she uses him as a support to elevate her career. According to Saru, Boozie is a handsome masterful man. Everything about him right from his language, his skill appears to Saru, in perfect management. She tells: “When I saw him, I knew I would never pray any more for a patient. I would learn

this instead, this skill, this proficiency, this perfection. I knew he was a good teacher.

Well, I would learn from him. Everything that he could teach me, I would learn” (90).

Boozie teaches her to dress with elegance and to speak good English. He teaches her to improve her accent, to enjoy good food and to read. He also helps her with enough money to set up consulting room of her own in a well- known and decent locality.

Boozie is her god father, who helps for her betterment. She wishes to have a house of her own. She also wants to live a comfortable life. She manages to fulfill all her desires through him, and says:-

I would not bring up any child to a life of deprivations. I wanted it soon . . . that finale of a middle- class dream . . . a house of our own. Furnished with all the gee- gaws that are an indispensable part of the dream. And here he was, the fairy godfather, who could, with a wave off his magic wand, make things easier, miraculously, wonderfully, easier for me . . . if only I could please him. I knew I could if I tried. I did. (92)

Companionship and freedom are offered by her relationship with Boozie.

Although there is no physical relationship in Saru’s affair with Boozie, it still gives rise to misconception in Manu’s mind. Even at the inauguration of her consulting room, when Boozie deliberately displays his affection for her in public before the invitees to the programme, Saru feels more resentful towards her husband than to him:

I could feel the stares. Everyone’s except Manu’s. Who would not look at us. And I should have hated him then . . . not Manu, for he had done nothing then for which I could hate him, but this attractive, ravishingly 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. (94)

Saru though she walks out of her parental home in protest against her suffering, gradually realizes that walking out does not solve her problems. Saru runs from the “endless repetition of the same pattern” (173) of her marital home to her parental home only to confirm that there is no hope for her. She says “Yes, that’s why I’m going. To get away from this house, this paradise of matching curtains and handloom bedspreads. This hell of savagery and submission” (28). Despite her vow never to return to her parent’s house after a gap of fifteen years and unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband, she does so. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* broods over her agonies even after she escapes her marital home.

After her return to her parent’s house in a detached frame of mind, she feels strange despite the fact that nothing has changed in the house, not even the seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she has played hopscotch as a child. Saru gets a cold reception. Her father too sounds strange as he talks like an unwilling host to her as if she were an unwelcome guest. Saru confides in her father stating, ““She cursed me, Baba,’ . . . ‘Even her silence at the end was a curse. And you say she died peacefully’ . . . Does a death redeem a whole life? Can’t you understand, Baba, that it’s because she cursed me that I am like this?’” (197).

Saru is in grave need of sympathy and yearns for security and emotional attachment. She blurts to her father that “My husband is a sadist” (199). But her father

does nothing to console her; he fails to comprehend her vocabulary like sadism and cruelty. Her father expects her to talk in a matured manner because this kind of intimacy between husband and wife has never occurred between him and his wife. He advises that “Silence had become a habit for us” (199).

Saru expects moral support from her father and hence requests him saying “. . . 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” (204). On listening to Saru, her father walks away. Her father’s unchanging attitude saddens her. She thinks that people like her are “fated to be strangers” (105). Many a times she wants to tell her father that “Baba, I’m unhappy. Help me, Baba, I’m in trouble. Tell me what to do” (44).

Shashi Deshpande tries to say that a woman’s inability to belong to both her father and her husband’s families makes her desperate, as all her expectations go in satiated. When things go out of Saru’s control she realizes her folly and failure. Sarita realizes that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems. She realizes that we come into this world alone and go out of it alone. The period in between is short. She realizes “And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long-lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop” (208).

At her father’s house Saru objectively mulls over the reasons of her disastrous marriage. She blames herself for it as she easily identifies the consequences of male ego. Her stay in her parent’s house gives her a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her mother, her children, and her dead brother, Dhruva. She ruminates, “My brother died because I heedlessly turned back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (217).

Her introspection helps her to free herself from the feelings of guilt that she makes Manu what he is.

Saru realizes that after becoming independent there is lack of happiness, fulfillment and harmony in Saru's life. Therefore she wants to search them in the life of a traditional woman. She now, at her father's home, cooks for Madhav and her father, keeps the house clean, washes the cloth herself, and lives confined in the four walls of the house. The kind of contentment that she discovers in her new routine life makes her feel that she has a totally new life, calls her a totally new person. Saru has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her the courage to confront reality. She begins to think sensibly and logically. Her self-confidence is revealed when she says, "All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings ... they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk" (220).

Saru's fears, uncertainties and insecurities are not merely confined to her relationship with her mother but they also exist in her relationship with her children. Saru mentions that, "It had been in her for some time now, a feeling that her unhappiness was a taint that would eventually stain them as well" (134). It seems to Saru that the sterility and monotony of her own life is badly affecting her daughter's life too. Renu mirrors her own mother's anguish and depression. Saru states distinctly, "She does not talk much. She reminds me of a room whose doors are closed. Nothing emerges, neither her joys nor her sorrows. And I sense a lack of feeling, of sensitivity in her" (33).

Renu represents her grandmother. Shashi Deshpande writes "And yet she knew how often Renu reminded her of her mother. Her quiet watchfulness. The feeling she

gave you of being weighed up, criticized, possibly rejected” (34). Consequently, Saru sometimes, uncertain about herself, wonders whether she is an unnatural, unloving mother? She decides that she would give her children their due love and care which she herself has never received from her mother. So that they would not blame her the way she blames her mother.

According to K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who in the book *Indian Writing in English*, writes that Sarita

Strips herself of self deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusions, and Shashi Deshpande’s language itself flickers like a candle and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children or the sick needing her expert attention and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self-confidence. (758)

Saru frees herself from the shackles of tradition in quest of her self-identity, which she ultimately realizes in course of her life. Unshackling herself of all constraints she says: “I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated. . .” (220). After she receives a letter about Manu’s arrival, although initially she is not ready to face her husband, she tells her father, “. . . Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can” (221). These words show that she passes from the state of illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and ultimately attempts to reconcile herself to face the hard realities of life. This is true not only of Sarita but of all middle class workingwomen in modern India.

Saru decides that she would not endure any more humiliation because of Manu's failure and her success. She decides to assert herself and fight her own battle. She realizes that her life is her own, which she will have to shape as well as face the events of her life. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. With this mind she confidently waits to confront her husband and decides to go back with him. She is bold enough to go back her husband and cure him of his depression caused by inferiority complex and bring normal harmony in her family life.

Though a woman's legs are weary, heart is numb and mind is blank, she still wants to keep marching. Thus *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a story of Saru's struggle against the darkness of tradition, an attempt to search for own identity and progress towards modernism. Saru struggles to achieve her identity in patriarchal society. She is placed between contradictory identities of modern and tradition, by family and profession, and by culture and nature.

Shashi Deshpande's novel depicts human relationships, especially the one that exists between husband and wife, mother and daughter and father and daughter. Saru overcomes the darkness of tradition and past. She does not follow Manu's code that a woman should be under the control of father in her maidenhood, the husband in her youth and sons during her old age. Saru is shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning but slowly as the novel unfolds, she goes through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization. At the end, she emerges as more confident, more in control of herself, and significantly more hopeful.