

# SOCIOLOGICAL DISPARITIES IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS*

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**Abstract:** Literature reflects life. It is a tool to mirror human ideas, feelings, emotions and life itself. Many writers have expressed human lives through literature. Among all the writers a few Indian women writers like Kamala Markandeya, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Shoba de have mirrored the lives of Indian women. Shashi Deshpande, the famous Indian novelist born in Karnataka depicts the inner feelings and emotions of Indian women through her novels. The plight of middle class educated and working women, the marital adjustments and the quest for identity forms the major theme of her novels. Her novels show how carefully she expresses the frustration and disappointment of women who experience in the social and cultural oppression in the male dominated society. Her fiction concentrates on the status of the women in the traditional bound male-dominated middle class society of the contemporary India. This paper explores the sociological disparities of the protagonist Saru in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. It is an individual's journey in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented tradition. The novel portrays the struggle of a girl in an Indian family where a male child is preferred to a female child. The central character of the novel Saru experiences the indifference of her mother and her own guilt.

**Keywords:** Literature, Gender, Disparities, Patriarchal Society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian women writers like Shashi Deshpande have projected the women's emotional turbulence prevalent in Indian traditional families even after the post independence era common among professional women too. The Indian women believe in traditional values and compromise for the sake of the maintenance of harmony rather than rebel, which might effect in the distraction of family relationship. They continue to support the ritualistic tradition – bound life. To the contrary, the modern women tend to recognise the structural inequalities between man and woman and the cultural conventions which have assigned woman a secondary status. The woman in the present century is strongly aware of the sociological inequalities piled on her and unlike her counterpart. She does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain unreceptive and submissive. *The Manu Smirti*, The Hindu Laws of Manu, a text laying down the rules of social behaviour declares the roles of women as: "Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. Her father protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (2). According to the Manusmiriti also known as *Manav Dharam shastra*, the women are left to live in submissive manner. They are not permitted to express their views and thoughts with her family and outside.

Though women constitute roughly half of the world's population, their contribution in various fields of activity has been totally inconsistent to their numerical strength. Labelled as the weaker sex they have been denied full justice - social, economic and political. Women have landed up as the ultimate victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination first as daughter, later as wife and a mother and later a grandmother. She plays different submissive roles like preparing food

for all the family members, looking after the children, waiting for the husband foregoing her food throughout her life time even at times of hunger. Social disparity has enormous influence in conditioning the female's psyche which begins early in the childhood. Gender inequality is differentiated right from the child's birth and therefore it is a social and cultural creation. It is clear from the ancient days that the girl child is taught to withhold, conceal and suppress her true life. The female child is left to subordination, exploitation, violence, domination and ensnared in patriarchal cultural ideals and paradigms. The development of a girl especially in Indian society is primarily in relation to her approach and her duty towards her family. This identity depends upon the subtle balance that the girl maintains between submission and revolt.

One of the major forms of discrimination which Shashi Deshpande projects through almost all her novels and particularly in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has been the preference accorded to the male child against the female child. This practice of the preference of a boy child has ultimately denied the girl child's good health, education, recreation, economic opportunities and their right to choose their partners.

Shashi Deshpande represents her women as an embryonic woman of the present industrial age, who yearns to achieve individuality and the real self- identity without changing the cultural and traditional conventions of the society. Eventually they find themselves against the well-established social inactivity. Even the broad-minded educated women with an unmanageable longing to break from time honoured crippling and iniquitous social law, do often lose their strength and locate them in embarrassing situations. Yet the educated, economically independent women too, have not been able to come out of the overwhelming difficulties created by the tradition and beliefs that has been preserved in the conventional Indian Society.

From ancient times man has been portrayed as a prominent member of the society. Women have been and continue to be oppressed, subjugated, marginalised and silenced. Their experiences are often muted in almost all the literary works of the past. The emergence of a few women novelists like Kamala Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), *Possession* (1963), Ruth Pravar Jhabwala in *To Whom She will* (1955), Shoba De in *Second Thoughts* (1996) significantly influenced the change in approach. Deshpande discloses the gradual process of oppression and gender discrimination in the family and in the male oriented society. Deshpande shows enormous sympathy and cautions awareness for the young female to execute her future status for the society. The causes that influence her include cultural aspects, social and psychological ways such as her status in family structure, marriage, and relationships. The woman she portrays neither represents the old, conventional image, nor a recent westernized one. She is the very woman hard to rise above tradition but is unwillingly trapped into it.

## II. THE TRAUMATIC SOCIAL INEQUALITIES OF THE PROTAGONIST SARU

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande brings out emphatically the experiences of the traumatic societal inequalities of Saru. Saru, an educated economically independent, middle class woman is made aware of her gender even from her childhood days. Her loveless relationship with her parents and worried relationship with her husband lead her to an unbearable search for identity. She is persistently reminded that she is a girl whose fate is to get married and leave away from the house. Deshpande opens up the narrative through the bitter experiences of Saru right from her childhood. She is ignored in favour of her brother Dhuruva. She is not permitted to express her views as she is restrained to be a subaltern. Her initial memories are those which underline the preference shown by her mother in support of her brother.

There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an *aarti* in the evening during which Dhruva, as an infant, sat solemnly on Baba's lap, and as a child, by his side, cap on head, fatuous smile on face, while I helped my mother to do the *aarti*. (DHNT 168)

Even at a very tender age, this disparity gets fixed in the female's psyche which forces her to opt for other choices where it might get rectified. Yet to the contrary, the agonising indifference continues on all spheres which the woman is unable to reach during her life time. Her brother Dhuruva's birthdays are given main concern and celebrated with great splendour and fanfare, while her birthdays are hardly acknowledged which she repents as, "My birthdays were almost the same . . . a festive lunch, with whatever I asked for, an *aarti* in the evening; but there was no puja" (169). Saru always wonders that her birth was a reason for her mother's unhappiness. She recollects,

Birthdays were not then the tremendous occasions they are made out to be now; but the excitement of having one, of being the centre of attraction never palled. It was always a fascinating thought-'I was born'. 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. (169)

Usually the rains are considered to be an auspicious sign. It has been a mythical belief that the rains bring new hope, new life and a new future. Here when the mother utters, it rained heavily and it was 'terrible,' it exhibits her fixed attitude of a girl child to be an ill omen which she is ready to equate it to the rains too. Her mother's aversion for Saru and preference for her brother, Dhruva is obviously expressed from her actions. This generates a gap between the mother and daughter and forces Saru to walk on the path of rebellion. This discrimination is so deeply imprinted in the mind of Saru and all her future actions get ultimately blemished. Saru finds her mother's preference towards her brother Dhruva and an indifferent attitude towards her as humiliating because they were invalidating her survival as a human being in the family. She also remembers the sense of enthusiasm which pervaded their house on the occasion of his naming ceremony.

THEY HAD NAMED him Dhruva. I can even remember even now, vaguely, faintly; a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone that I held in my hands ... these are the only tangible memories that remain. (168)

Mrinal Pande, the eminent Hindi writer in her first novel *Daughter's Daughter* (1993) published in the International year of the Girl Child presents gender discrimination to some degree. The novel explores the instances in the life of a growing girl who was regarded inferior because of her birth as a girl. Tinu, the daughter's daughter gets enough opportunities to observe and experience the condition of being a daughter's daughter during her visits to her grandmother's house and her uncle's house. Being a daughter's daughter, Tinu's position in her uncle's house is lower. There are several incidents, where she realizes what it is to be the daughter's daughter, in contrast to the son's offspring. Tinu's uncle's son Anu is given preference and nobody says no to him and always acts according to his wishes. Anu always orders as "You sit there. You are Daughter's children! We'll sleep here near Grandmother" (31). Tinu and her sister had no way but to do as intended for because they know they were daughter's daughters and have no right to say or act anything against the son's children.

These experiences of indifference cannot be paralleled to any particular caste, region or period but it spans the experience of any Indian girl irrespective of geographical or chronological space. Saru's status is also similarly put down in her family. This creates a sense of hostility within her and precipitates a sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Things become considerably worse after Dhruva's death when her mother with her characteristic self-hatred charges her for his death. Saru's mother is so depressed after the death of her son and she does not show any interest in Saru's existence. Her mother's constant passion for her dead son and the denial of her daughter create a deep and permanent mark in the mind of Saru. Signe Hammer is a non fiction writer in *Daughters and Mothers: Mothers and Daughters* (1975) declares, "for any daughter, the relationship with her mother is the first relationship in her life, and may also be the most important she will ever have" (1). Saru is unlucky to get her mother's love owing to her gender difference. The differential attitude amidst mothers towards their daughters gets reflected in certain notions like cautioning the skin colour, restricting their behaviour too, in their entire environment. For example, Saru was frequently reminded of her dark skin texture and for that she should not step into the sun in case it might deteriorate her colour and spoil her marriage. She recalls her dialogue with her mother,

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. (DHNT 45)

Dark skinned girls were not preferred by Indian men. Focusing on the conjugal relations Shashi Deshpande seeks to depict the practice by which a woman is trained to play her submissive role in the family. Saru's mother does not care for her education and future. Saru is ignored at every given opportunity. Saru becomes completely desolated on attaining her puberty. Her mother reminds her as, "You're a woman now, she said" (62). She bitterly reminisces, "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one, I thought resentfully, watching her body" (62). The origin of gender differentiation in the Indian society is so profound and Saru's mother is no exception. Saru again experiences herself and expresses it as, "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" (62). Saru is continuously worried that she is a girl whose fortune is to get married and leave the house, while her brother need not be like her. The mother is worried about her daughter's appearance, the colour of her skin. If she developed darkness it would be difficult to get her married.

In many societies the male child is considered as the sole bread winner of the family. Saru recollects her parent's negligence towards her which included both her father and mother. Saru reminisces, "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 didn't exist for her. I died long before I left home" (32). Her agonizing thoughts reveal her non existence. Saru further laments over varied disparities she encountered which becomes applicable to every Indian female. There were no photographs of hers in her parental home which she noticed without emotion. She had experienced such emotional bruises on almost every stage of her life. She sarcastically comments that there was one photograph of hers for which she justifies her act of her mother's as, "She must have been reluctant to throw this one out because Dhruva was in this photograph too" (58). Saru had come to the conclusion that she shall always remained to be the 'neglected child' whereas her brother Dhruva was always the 'preferred child.' This act of discrimination gets exhibited in the India family system which neglects the female child right from her birth. The parental care has been disproportionate between, the girl child and the male child. Preference of the male child still seems to be inherent in the Indian Patriarchal society. Sarabjit Sandhu in *Image of woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (1991) asserts, The mother is very much attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one, after all, he is a 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. (20)

The expectations of the parents to prefer son and not daughters prove their selfish desire for, it rests on the hope that the financial and emotional care especially in their old age could be provided only by the sons. The parents of the sons considered the male gender to add more wealth to their family property and discarded the daughters for they thought that the female gender was solely responsible for draining their property through dowries. Saru grows up disliking her adulthood that consisted of feeling impure and embarrassed of one's sexuality. She resisted the thought that the only purpose of a female is 'to be married.' She decides to pursue for higher studies but her mother objects for sending the application for Medicine. She explains to her father her interest of going for medicine in Bombay. Saru bears in mind that she wanted to study Medicine but her mother was against her. Though unsuccessful, her mother tried her best to persuade her husband not to allow Saru to join in the medical course.

Yes, but they're girls whose fathers have lots of money. You don't belong to that class. And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding . . . . Medicine! Five, six, seven. . . . god knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc . . . You can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over. (DHNT 144)

This attitude exhibits the typical Indian mothers' fear of the expectations of the society. They had to satisfy the groom's family at the time of marriage. It has been assumed that, as the girls get married off and the boys stay with their parents, the parents could totally depend on them in their old age which invariably forces them to prefer the male child for their selfish ends. As and when a girl child is born in households in India, she is considered as debt whereas the birth of the boy is considered as an asset. Hence any expenditure for a boy does not mean much for the parents. To the contrary, when it comes to girls there is always a thought in the parental psyche that one need not afford too much on the girl's education for they have to spend money on her wedding which might be a heavy demand from the bridegroom's side. Though Saru's mother objects her for studying medicine her father does not object her in joining the medical course. Veena Das emphatically states that, "Daughters are comparable to something kept in trust for another. You have to care for them, love them, and you will be held responsible for them but you are destined to lose them. Once a daughter is properly married and goes to her own house it is like a debt that has been paid" (93)

Shashi Deshpande expresses an important message that subjugation and exploitation are not restricted to the male-female relationship rather it also exists even amidst female-female relationships. The strength of detestation is so intense, that her mother disowns her and dies dejected at last. If Saru's mother had aggravated her by her deliberate aggression, her father had contributed to her present confusion by remaining a voiceless spectator in the family drama. Like a traditional Indian father, he enjoys the privilege of being the Master and head of the family in spite of being irresponsible. He is not worried with the problems of his own family members. "He had always been so much a man, the 'Master of the house', not to be bothered by any of the trivial of daily routine" (DHNT 20). Though her father is a silent observer he does not forget to do his fatherly duties. Saru remembers that when she wanted to study in medical college, her mother had been against her studies but it was her father who gave his willingness to do medicine. Saru recollects it to be the first time her father ignored her mother's words not purposefully, not intentionally but he did it as if he could not listen to her at all. Saru recalls her conversation with her father,

Are you sure you want to do it? Have you thought it over?

'Yes Baba'.

'You can't change your mind later. This isn't something taking singing lessons'.

I flushed. Why remind me of that?

'I am eighteen now. Not a child'.

It isn't easy. You'll have to work enormously hard. (143)

Saru succeeds in persuading her father to send her to medical college. Shashi Deshpande conveys us clearly the fatherly affection and motherly repression towards their daughters. She does not forget to bring out the importance of a father in an Indian family. Saru tells her father that her mother annoyed and cursed all her life. Her mother's vengeance made her life destroyed. Saru always imagined that no mother could ever dislike her own child.

The childhood experiences influenced Saru heavily that she wanted to become a dominant person in her life and a respected person in the society. Her mother often reminded Saru that her father was not a millionaire to put her in the hostel. She was against her studies. Saru could not bear the words of her mother and speaks outrageously at her mother for the first time; "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" (142). Saru then cried loudly, noisily and fought vehemently like an eleven or twelve year old girl instead of eighteen year old. She promises to rebel against such traditions and in spite of her mother's protest joins a medical college in Bombay. Saru defies her own mother in becoming a doctor, and she then defies once again marrying a man out of her caste and defies even the social conventions.

Saru remains to be very confident, knowledgeable and amazingly conscious of her own profession and a name in the society. After going to the college, while studying anatomy and physiology, she begins to accept her womanhood rather than hate it. At this time she begins to take pleasure in her female individuality and learns to dress and walk gracefully. Saru's rebelliousness can also be analysed as an inbuilt quality present in her. As Premila Paul in *The Dark Holds No Terrors, A women's Search for Refuge, Indian Women Novelists* (1991) views, "Saru is highly self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others" (61). Saru revolts the traditional code at the slightest threat she receives in her mother's house. Gauri in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960) turns rebellious because of the ill-treatment meted out to her husband; Saru's boldness is her unique trait. Her mother refused to accept Saru's marriage as Manohar belonged to a lower caste. She recalls the conversation with her mother when she confronts with her intention of marrying Manu:

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?"

The word her mother had used, with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries had so enraged her that she had replied..... I hope so. (DHNT 96)

Determined not to yield to the traditional views of her mother, she marries Manu, her senior in the college. Saru ignores her mother's advice and ignores the hierarchical distinction between their caste and profession to marry Manu. Her mother expresses her outrage towards Saru, "You won't be happy with him. I know you won't. A man of a different caste, different community... what will you two have in common?" (98). The typical common traits of nurturing, caring, sharing affection in a mother gets demolished, when they witness their daughters going against their expectations of the society. The popular belief that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth remains to be a farfetched vision. It is accepted that there arises a special bond in marriage. It is shared between two souls, who after promising to each other that they would be companions for their life time rest mainly as the sole responsibility of the women alone. Though marriage is considered as physical, mental and spiritual communication of their souls, in the human relationship there lies a disparity wherein the women always play or should play the secondary position. According to the Vedas and Upanishads the prime duty of a women particularly as wife has been dictated as,

Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi,

Rupeeha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitrii,

Bhojyeshu Matra, Shayanetu Rambha,

Shat karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (religion.blurtit.com)

A women's part proves to be a slave while serving for the husband in her family. She has to prove herself as a minister in counselling others. Her looks are to be like Goddess Lakshmi. In forbearance she has to resemble the mother of earth. She has to remain a typical mother while feeding and on the other hand the wife has to prove herself as a celestial prostitute in the bed like the mythical Ramba. Ramba in Hindu mythology is the queen of Apsarases, the magical and beautiful female in heaven. These six traits have been accepted to be the universal character of a typical Indian wife.

The position of the husband paradoxically determines only an authoritarian position where he will dominate his wife throughout his life. The traditional status remains to be a 'superior husband' and a 'subordinate wife.' Both the ethical values and its execution prove to contradict each other. Just as the process of Industrialization, urbanization and the impact of western culture have led to the breakup of traditional joint families; it has also led to various socio political problems. Anuradha Roy in *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers* (1999) exhibits this changing scenario as, "Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by women. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance" (88). Neglected by her parent and hated by her mother Saru makes her own choice in marrying Manohar an underpaid Lecturer in a college. He is also a representative of a lower caste than Saru. With the belief that as every typical Indian woman, Saru considers and believes marriage to be,

I told myself, making marriage the open sesame of all enjoyment for me. But when we got married it was like nothing I had ever imagined. After the first moment of apprehension . . . a purely physical response or lack of it, rather... there was never any withholding in me . . . All the cliches, 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. (DHNT 40)

The proof is that Saru, Manohar's wife, has attained an economically superior position both infuriates and frustrates the egoistic trait in him. To assert his superiority the only weapon which Manu upholds is 'physical assault' and 'rape' for the man finds no other way to prove his superiority. Beena Agarwal asserts, "Saru's decision of marriage as a compensation for her loss was an error on her part that adversely affected her perception and expectations in personal life" (36). The egoistic attitude in this man ultimately leads him to execute sexual violence which Saru recalls,

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, paralyzed 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. (DHNT 112)

She explains her husband's nightmarish attitude to be the reason for her coming back. It is not so easy for a daughter to share this kind of experience with her father yet she narrates it to him so as to gain a solace. Shashi Deshpande creates a straight forward relationship between a daughter and a father. Saru prompted hesitantly, she looked at her father's face and reasoned out the cause her return, "He attacked me"; "He attacked me like an animal that night" (201). Her father's Adam's apple moved up and down incoherently saying, Saru..., she then replied, "I must tell you and you've got to listen. Who else is there? There's no one else. No one at all! You've got to listen" (201). Saru seemed so worried and her father said soothingly, I am listening, Saru. Go on, I'm listening" (201). She in a dull monotone again said that she couldn't do nothing and retaliate. At last she endured. She recalls,

'I never knew till then he has so much strength in him.' Her voice was dull monotone again. 'I could do nothing against him. 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'. (201)

The circumstances appear all the more terrible for Saru as Manu pretended as though nothing had ever happened. He was perfectly normal in the mornings and continued his routine work as if he was in total ignorance of his own actions. As a typical Indian women realizing that both her professional and economic status had been the cause for his sadistic nature, Saru stepped down to inform him of even quitting her job in order to put an end to his frustrations. She says, "I want to give up working'. . . . I want to stop working. I want to give it all up . . . my practice, the hospital, everything" (79). As a typical husband who has enjoyed the luxuries that has been provided by his wife Saru through her profession, he immediately rejects that idea,

But why, Saru? Come on, I know you're joking.' On my salary? Come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that? . . . Can you bear to send the children to a third – rate school? To buy them the cheapest clothes, the cheapest of everything? (81)

Even when the woman is ready to sacrifice the materialistic comforts and profession, the man who exploits her does not accept her solution. To the contrary, he expresses his inability. It is this inferior status that succumb him to humiliate his own wife. The regular violation of her physic by her own husband leads Saru to lose faith in love and marriage. As a dejected woman she laments,

Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (133)

The happiness and marriage does not rest long. In spite of the unhygienic living condition Saru felt herself to be happy in their initial stage of their marital life. Later after years of study and gaining recognition as a doctor, the love and affection which existed for these years start to gradually decline. Saru herself realizes that her entry into her profession had destroyed the marriage though she realizes that, "the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter" (42). The woman's gradual progresses as a lady doctor which creates a break in the bond between the husband and wife. For the man, the new found respect and recognition in his wife, develops a changing attitude for he is unable to accept the reversal of the traditional roles which ultimately lands him to execute the sadistic pressures over his wife. Saru recalls the conversation between Manu and his colleague's wife as,

'Yes, we're having a small holiday'.

'Where?'

'Down south. Ooty for few days, Banglore and Mysore on the way'.

'Lucky fellow. We've been dreaming of Matheran for years. Can't afford even that'.

'If you had married a doctor,' the wife said tartly. You'd gone to Ooty too'.

Ooty? I'd go further . . . London, Paris, Rome, Geneva.'

'We aren't in that class as yet'.

The man laughed, his wife laughed and the two of us laughed as well. And no mirth in any of us. (111)

This particular incident infuriates Manu and he starts to emit his frustration still more aggressively on Saru on that night. At one stage Saru is unable to tolerate the terrifying attitude of Manu. Though an intelligent and independent woman, Saru endures repeated rape because of the shock and her love for her children. A woman in steady confusion, she longs to talk about her miseries. Her effort to break the silence takes her to a lawyer, but the thought of talking about it and the social stigma of divorce unnerves her.

Can I divorce my husband?

Any reasons?

He's cruel.

How? Will you be specific? Please give details. (97)

Saru refuses to bring her private miseries as a sociological one. She is afraid of her children's future. In such a societal construction, with its conventional inflexibility and economic disparity almost all the women land up in a 'Crux of fear' from which they are unable to overcome. Very few women endure the struggle and seek a compromising solution which proves to be the ultimate state of the subaltern women psyche.

The reaction of men leaving out the husband too, does not prove to be of a healthy attitude which gets reflected in Saru's and Boozie's relationship. A woman in order to get uplift in life, if ignored by the husband and owing to circumstances seeks the help of a stranger. She is looked at as an 'object of desire' and not as a subject to be treated gets justified here.

The lustful desires of a man remain to be either the same or become pervert rather than of a humanitarian concern. Saru gains recognition as a famous doctor in the society after her marriage. This subaltern nature makes Saru to look for other paths of extramarital relationship. In Anita Nair's *Mistress* (2005) the protagonist Radha being dissatisfied with her businessman-husband, Shyam, opts for an extra-marital relationship with Chris, a travel writer and cello player from America, to fulfill her desires. Saru's relationship with Boozie is a short-lived alternative for her discontented marital life. Boozie is a handsome, elegant and efficient doctor for Saru. She wishes to leave the dingy two-room flat which she had spent till then. She aspires to have a house of her own. She desires to lead a contented life. So she utilizes Boozie as a support to lift up her profession. She starts to enjoy the superior financial and social status with the help of Boozie. His speech and his quick progress through the hospital wards make Saru to admire him. She thinks that he is the perfect man to coordinate her profession. She says,

He was, I saw, quick, gentle, meticulous and skilled, doing the job with a marvellous dexterity. "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. (DHNT 90)

Later Saru realises that Mr. Boozie's interest in Saru is very intimate not that of a teacher and student but that of a woman and a man. Saru feels strange and she responds to his playful manners. "From the day he stopped his car at the bus-stop where I stood and took me out for a cup of coffee, saying, 'The day I have no time to take a pretty girl out to tea . . . It took me a long time to realise that his interest in me was as a woman not as a student'" (90). Boozie helps her with enough money to set up her practice in an honest locality. She manages to fulfill her wish of accomplishing higher education and also gaining better quality of life, which otherwise may not have been possible for an ordinary girl like her. Her familiarity as a doctor is socially accepted. She becomes a famous doctor and Manohar turns out to be simply a Lecturer. This profession makes her socially and economically his superior. When she walks out of the room with her husband, she starts gleaming through because "there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namaste's. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored" (42). It is her profession as a doctor, had made her economically and socially superior and has also been the cause of her husband's frustrations.

Saru even decides to quit the job but Manu reminds her of the economical downfall and deterioration in life style. So she continues her job. This acceptance of her role as the leading earning member of the family expresses her anguish through the imaginary advice given by her to the girls in Nalu's college:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband . . . That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. . . Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. 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 helps you, both

of you. And so you must pretend that you're not as smart as you really are, not as competent as you are, not as rational as you are, and not strong either. You can nag. Complain henpeck, whine, moan but you can never be strong. That's a wrong which will never be forgiven. (137)

Saru realises with honest astonishment that she ought not to have made this speech at all. She thought that she would have given the advice of choosing medicine as a career for women. Saru's marriage with Manu and her status in society as a doctor fails to secure her freedom she yearns for. She receives Manu's letters but opens none of them. Later she hears the news of his arrival to bring her back. She feels desperate and has no interest of going back. She is still in an undecided state. Her father advises her not to get back. Her father says, "Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him" (216). His real affection is clear and he pleads Saru to meet her husband and talk to him. Saru has a peculiar expression over her face and at last she decides to meet her husband. Saru realises that she had been a puppet because she had made herself one. She had been afraid of proving her mother right. Ready to go to see her child-patient she informs Baba that if Manu comes he should be asked to wait for her. At last she decides to explore herself sociologically and economically as a 'woman.'

### III. CONCLUSION

The economic freedom which the woman had succeeded in attaining a status had led her life to be in a state of dissolution. In spite of both the husband and wife being educated, the man always yearns to occupy the superior position. On any occasion he considers even the economic growth a family to be his contribution. The mutual acceptance of considering the wife as an equal partner gets deranged even in educated families. Deshpande proves gradually that the central character Saru emerge in spite of the societal disparities wherein many Indian women continue to submerge themselves in that dark world filled with fear, angst, terror, frustration and humiliation etc.

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