

Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as a bildungsroman

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Abstract: In the formation of one's character and value, structure childhood plays an important role. Childhood as a significant area of human experience is not given ample emphasis as far as literature is concerned. In Indian English literature also women characters are widely depicted and critics have evaluated them. The girlhood of a woman is a crucial part of her identity formation. In literature, this period of identity formation of a woman is by and large unexamined and unexplored. Childhood experiences and atmosphere form one's personality. The innocent child is like a little plant which is shaped and moulded the way it is nurtured. If it is well nurtured then it turns into a confident, fearless, healthy grown-up human being, but if it is not nurtured well it turns into an immature, fearful character that cannot face the challenges in life.

Shashi Deshpande is perhaps one of the few Indian English writers who have portrayed the girl child with deliberation. There is a detailed examination of the girlhood of the protagonist who attempts to define her adult self-identity by analysing her growing years. This process helps her realize her family upbringing and socialization in childhood. *The Dark holds No Terrors* reveals the protagonist Saru's life, showing how her disturbed childhood has contributed largely to her inability to establish and maintain a personal relationship in later life. This paper focuses on how Saru's girlhood proves to be the identity formation period of her womanhood and after becoming a woman how Sarita reacts to her childhood experiences.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, Sibling Jealousy, Patriarchal Society, Hatred for Female Identity, A Rebel, Marriage as Rescue, Urge for Power

INTRODUCTION

The dark holds no terrors. The terrors are inside us all the time. We Carry them within us and like traitors, they spring out, when we least expect them to scratch and maul. (Deshpande-85)

Childhood plays a vital role in the shaping of one's personality and value construction. Childhood as a

major area of human experience is not given enough importance as far as literature is concerned. In Indian English literature also women characters are broadly depicted and critics have evaluated them. The girlhood of a woman is a crucial part of her identity formation. In literature, this period of identity formation of a woman is unexamined and unexplored to some extent. Childhood experiences and environment mould one's personality. The innocent child is like a little plant, which is shaped and moulded the way it is nurtured. If it is well nurtured then it turns into a self-assured, bold, blooming, grown-up human being, but if it is not taken care of, it turns into an immature, fearful character that cannot face the challenges in life.

It has been observed that a girl child is deprived of the warmth, love and importance given to a male child. This discrimination in children makes the girl child either despondent or rebellious. Such a gloomy and catastrophic treatment towards girl child is the reason for misery in her later life. A woman's matured years are firmly based on her childhood experiences. This discrimination in the society injures the psyche of the girl child and impairs her growth, leaving variously a sense of guilt, rejection and depression. Love is the only basic requirement of children and often girls are deprived of it due to various familial circumstances. It is the family that has to provide girl child with space and opportunity to grow and develop into a healthy adult and hence damaging home conditions always exert a paralyzing effect on the girl child.

About The Author

Shashi Deshpande is one of the dominant women novelists in India. She portrays Indian women characters in her novels. Deshpande's protagonists are the epitome the plight of women in Indian society. Shashi Deshpande states in an interview given to Laxmi Holmstrom.

I am different from other Indian who writes in English, my background is very firmly here. I was never educated abroad. My novels don't have any Westerners for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives, our inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them. (qt. In Barens: 11)

Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the women belonging to the Indian middle class, who are brought up in a traditional environment. They strive to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. She is also a contemporary writer who has given the graphic detail about the girl child and her psychology. Most of her women characters are able to transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of upbringing. The crux of all prevailing problems of women is their subjugation which is always present in the form of silent servitude. Their social conditioning generates a slavish attitude which in turn creates compunctions in their psyche when they decide to remould or change it. Since her childhood, the psyche of a girl child is moulded in a particular fashion to inculcate in her all types of feminine qualities.

Shashi Deshpande depicts the plight of married women in almost all her novels. In analysing the predicament of the married woman, Deshpande traces the causes to their very childhood experiences. Though Deshpande does not have many child protagonists, except her children novels, but she looks very seriously into her protagonists' psyche and analyse their childhood experiences in the backdrop of their present status in life. By putting emphasis on the childhood of her characters, Deshpande reveals her conviction that all of them carry the legacy of their disturbed childhoods into their married lives. Deshpande also seems to suggest that for making a healthy society, girl children need to be given due care and support. Shashi Deshpande is perhaps one of the few Indian English writers who have portrayed the girl child with deliberation. There is a detailed examination of the girlhood of the protagonist who attempts to define her adult self-identity by analysing her growing years. This process helps her realize her family upbringing and socialization in childhood.

The Dark Holds No Terrors as a Bildungsroman:

Bildungsroman is the category where the focus is on the psychological and moral growth of its protagonist, from his or her childhood to adulthood. A bildungsroman is a story of the growing up of a person, who pursues his/ her quest for seeking the answers to his/her questions through different experiences. Mostly, such a novel starts with a loss or a tragedy that disturbs the main character emotionally. He or she leaves on a voyage to bridge that depletedness. During the journey, the protagonist gains maturity, gradually and with difficulty. Usually, the plot depicts a conflict between the protagonist and the codes and conducts of society. Finally, he or she accepts those values, and they are accepted by society, ending the dissatisfaction. Such a type of novel is also known as a "coming-of-age" novel.

The Bildungsroman is a literary genre originated in Germany. The German word "Bildung" means education" and the German word "roman" means "novel." Thus, "Bildungsroman" means "a novel of education" or "a novel of formation." The bildungsroman novel depicts and criticizes those vices of society which cause the protagonist to suffer. The novel conveys a sense of realism, because the protagonist is a common, sensitive person who is affected by the loss that they suffer, and this loss, ultimately, changes the course of their life.

How a Bildungsroman Is Structured?

A Bildungsroman centres on the main character's transformation to reach maturity. Here's how the plot generally unfolds:

- **Loss:** The protagonist experiences a profound emotional loss at the beginning of the story, typically during their childhood or adolescent formative years.
- **Journey:** Inspired by their loss, the protagonist sets out on a journey, either physical or metaphorical, to find the answer to a big question and gain life experience that will help them better understand the world.
- **Conflict and personal growth:** The protagonist's path toward maturity is not an easy one. They make mistakes and are usually at odds with society. But as the story continues, the protagonist slowly accepts the ideals of society and society accepts them back.

- **Maturity:** The protagonist demonstrates immense psychological growth, change, and maturity by the end of the novel. The story sometimes ends with them giving back and helping someone else on the path to maturity.

The Dark holds No Terrors reveals the protagonist Saru's life, showing how her disturbed childhood has contributed largely to her inability to establish and maintain the personal relationship in later life. Saru is in one way or the other victim of childhood grooming and is an example of how the girl is marginalized and how she ultimately fails because of her childhood grooming and indoctrination. Saru stands for all the girls, who are rejected, alienated and discriminated. Saru is a typical example of a girl to prove that the life of a girl child is shaped and determined by what she experiences in childhood and however much she tries, it is not easy to get rid of it. Saru's later life suggests that if a girl child is not fed with love and care in her childhood, she fails to gather a sense of belonging and develop a sense of insecurity and fear.

Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is her first published novel and as in the case of her other novels, the protagonist is a woman. Saru, the daughter with whom the mother never reconciled, especially after the death of her younger brother, defies her mother, goes to a city, studies to become a doctor and marries the man she chooses herself. The protagonist Sarita is a successful lady doctor. The story tells her conflict that she has to face as a doctor and as a wife. During day time she is a popular lady doctor and at night she is trapped animal in the hands of her husband Manohar, who is an English teacher in a small college. Saru goes back to her father's house after many years because her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. She returns being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. During the day, there is no evidence in his behaviour to suggest anything that should be a cause for her anxiety. There are only bruises which show that the night has been real. Her inability to find out what was wrong prevents her from doing anything about this problem until she returns to her father's house. It is here, living with her father and Madhav, the young student who stays with her father that she tries to come to terms with the various events in her life. It is here that all the tortuous introspection goes on. Her stay in her father's house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with her father, husband, children and her dead mother.

This experience changes her perception. She has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her the courage to confront reality.

LOSS

The function of the family plays an inevitable role in shaping the psyche and attitudes towards the self, society and life in general. Deshpande in this novel depicts how love and loss gained in childhood make the person especially a girl child capable to ascertain her bond with the society. Family works as a backbone to the child and provides the child with emotional security, self-esteem and self-worth. The warm and sympathetic environment of family teaches the child to establish harmonious relations with other members of the family in particular and society in general. On the contrary, if the family does not play its appointed role adequately then it can become the main reason for one's stunted and unhealthy growth. And in the long run, this kind of family atmosphere can cause feelings of aloofness, bewilderment and a sense of insecurity in a person.

The novel portrays the agony of a girl child Saru. Saru is a scapegoat of gender discrimination. Saru has adverse childhood experiences that later on depreciate her life into desperate strife. The increasing enforcement of discrimination in childhood and her mother's consistent accusation for her brother's death and the resultant guilt she has developed disdained her life and put it on the unbalanced territory. Saru had a very bad childhood due to the conservative mentality of her parents. Her parents especially her mother is the epitome of all the typical, socialized women, who are themselves victims of patriarchal society and socialization. Such women like Saru's mother has brought up in a society where there is a mysterious boundary for a girl child to make her a typical woman, who prefers a son to daughter. Saru, at a very young age, is forced to assimilate her inferior position as a girl, to her brother in every respect. Saru can not tolerate the preference to her brother just because he is a boy. She recalls that there was,

Always a pooja 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 pooja (Deshpande-168-169)

Saru finds her mother's more affection towards her brother Dhruva and negligence of her, very

humiliating as it nullifies her existence as a human being in the family. Dhruva dies by drowning in water. Saru's mother never forgives her daughter for being alive even after her brother has drowned and Saru cannot forget the traumatizing effect of her mother's hysterical outburst.

Saru was deprived of all the rights of a child after the death of Dhruva. Grief engulfs the family and Saru's existence was not noticed. Saru, while remembering her past experiences as a girl, recollects her fifteenth birthday. She got a gift from her friend. Saru felt a sense of love, superiority and importance. However, Saru hated the gift given by her mother. She thought that the gift was given to her to have flamboyant look like a young girl and was not a gesture of love. She remembers:

So that was it, it was not for me, not to please and make me happy but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear... I don't want them. I don't want to eat. I don't want anything. (Deshpande-171)

While portraying the inner turmoil of her female characters, Deshpande has also explored that sometimes mothers themselves create conflicts in the lives of their daughters. To understand the mother-daughter relationship in Deshpande's novels it would be appropriate to note what Simone De Beauvoir writes in her chapter on mother. She says,

Some women feel their femininity as an absolute curse; such a woman wishes for or accepts a daughter with a bitter pleasure of self-recognition in another victim, and at the same time she feels guilty for having brought her into the world...vexed at having produced woman, the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: 'You Shall Be Woman.' She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double, and she also tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered. (Beauvoir-533)

The mother at time enforces her own destiny on the girl child. On the contrary, sometimes the mother prevents the child to be like her. Beauvoir says that the conflict exactly begins when the girl grows older tries to establish her independent identity from her mother. According to Beauvoir,

This seems to the mother a mark of hateful ingratitude, she tries obstinately to checkmate

the girl's will to escape; she cannot bear to have her double become 'another'. The pleasure of feeling absolutely superior, which men feel in regard to women- can be enjoyed by a woman only in regard to her children, especially her daughters; she feels frustrated if she has to renounce her privilege, her authority. (534)

During childhood, Saru's father also was not at all affectionate towards Saru. Though trying so much Saru did not get a single chance to have any long conversation with her father, while Dhruva. That is clear from the way her father used to take Dhruva out for a ride leaving her at home. He would make Dhruva sit on the bar of the cycle conveying her message that, "Daughters are their mother's business." (Deshpande-105) This plunges into her tender mind the painful feeling that she is unloved and unacknowledged. Saru feels she is no one's business. Saru feels very bitter and says, "My mother had nothing for me, either whose business was I then?" (Deshpande-105)

Even her mother does not care for her. Instead, she makes her feel more neglected and unloved. Saru's life is choked by her mother's routine criticism and fault finding. For the mother who bore puberty as pain and shame inflict the same impression on their daughters and the daughters struggle conformity like a disease. That is something shameful, this growing up and girl children are made to feel ashamed of themselves even in the presence of one's own fathers. When Saru's mother points out looking at her that she is growing up there is something unpleasant in the way she looks at her. Saru is made to feel an ugly girl. As Sarita says,

I was an ugly girl. At least my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying...You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that. (Deshpande-61)

Disharmonious relationship between Saru and her parents and suffocating home environment has its own adverse effects on Saru's delicate psyche. As a young girl, she longed for love, acceptance, and care. All her desires and longings were repressed. This repression is an outburst in the form of violent moods. This malicious home environment of hatred, hostility sows the seeds of rebellion within her. This rebellion manifests itself when she even as a child of tender age begins to harbour thoughts of Dhruva's death and because of this unconscious desire she is held back

from going to his rescue and he dies by drowning in the pond. Even when she is accused by her mother of murdering her brother, she does not deny the charge. As Premila Paul observes:

When the mother accuses her of murder she speaks out Saru's intentions and not the deed. Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfilment. (Paul: 64)

This incident clearly indicates the notions of sibling jealousy in Saru's mind. Such jealousy arises out of her mother's favouritism. Saru's mother's obvious preference for her brother creates a sense of alienation, of aloofness and insecurity within her. It also develops a sense of destroying the lives of her near ones. It makes her think,

My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed her manhood. (Deshpande: 217)

This statement suggests a study in guilt consciousness. Saru is a rejected child and her brother's death makes her all the more undesired. She is at eternal war with her mother who can never forgive her for being alive when her brother is dead.

Saru nurtures seeds of revolt within her due to growing up in this environment of hatred and enmity. She takes in many psychological knots woven into her personality and is ingrained with a fear of rejection. This discrimination leads Saru to rebelliousness, hatred and sense of guilt. Saru revolts against her mother and boldly rejects any connection with her. On attaining womanhood she was most worried about her periods not because of the inconvenience but because it put her in the same class as her mother. The rejection of the mother is very noticeable in the novel. "If you are a woman. I don't want to be one". (Deshpande-63) This is made worse by various kinds of regulations imposed on the girl child in patriarchal societies. As she grows, she is made to feel guilty and faulty for the natural thing, her femininity. A sense of remorse is installed in her for her physical growth. Saru's mother advises her to be careful in her behaviour as a grown-up girl. She should be careful of her dress in the presence of any male, even if it is her father. This acute self-consciousness of her femininity created by her mother and worsen by the patriarchal milieu around

her, causes feelings of disgust for her womanhood. Deepsheekha Kotwal has rightly comments,

Curiously Deshpande's women, not only rebel against male domination but furiously satirize their mothers and grandmothers who had not taught them to articulate their desires and needs. (Kotwal: 38-39)

JOURNEY

Saru wants to be an independent personality. She revolts against traditional codes and conduct. She wants to prove her firm existence in the society which was earlier neglected by her parents. Saru confronts her mother, goes to a city, studies to become a doctor and marries the man of her choice, outside her community. She even defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. Economic independence, status and power, became a goal and every move of her life is towards the achievement of that goal. Sarita becomes a reputed doctor, she becomes proud of her social status. She wants to outshine others not through dedicated service but through available means, including economic criteria and thinks that it is the real achievement. It is clear that these actions have been provoked by strong impulses of the reaction of her normal natural being. They have been taken to hurt her mother by trying to become what her mother never wished her to be. This is in a way more an effort to reject the mother than to assert her own genuine will and choice. Even the crucial decision of marriage with Manohar reflects the same forces at work in her behaviour. As Barche says,

Against her parents' wishes, Saru married a boy from lower caste. Her marriage to Manu is a sign of her turning away from the traditional ways and values her mother adhered to. She married to attain the autonomy of the self and to the secure love lost in parental home. (Barche: 87)

Saru later on in a mood of retrospection and honest confession admits.

If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him perhaps I would never have married him. (Deshpande-96)

It clearly hints at the fact that she is driven to marry Manu more by reaction and sadist rebellion against her mother than anything else. The desire of revolt empowers her to such an extent that she takes the

decision of marrying Manu even when she is not economically independent and both of them are students. The more vehemently her parents oppose the idea, the more determined she becomes. Saru begins to express her feeling through acts of defiance which spring from her resentment against her mother. The more she asserts herself in her acts of defiance, the wider grows the gulf between her and her mother. It is this irresistible urge to retaliate by wounding her mother's feelings as she says,

There was a pain in my chest, my throat ached, intolerably, there was a buzzing in my ears, a blur in front of my eyes, I hated her. I wanted to hurt her, make her suffer. (Deshpande-142)

She also dreams of her mother being dead. She tells her, "Yesterday night, I dreamt you died I saw your body burning." (Deshpande-143) This also shows her growing tendency to settle scores with her mother and draw a sadistic pleasure out of her mother's discomfiture. Saru is obsessed with what the mother said and did to her that it harasses her throughout her life even as a wife. It is evident from the way the mother predicted about the marriage, "I know all these 'Love marriages'. It's love for few days then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then". (Deshpande-69) She cannot forget her mother's words, "You won't be happy...I know you won't". (Deshpande-98)

Because of this negative predication by her mother she silently suffers in her unhappy marriage. She does not turn to her parents for support only to prove her mother wrong and to vindicate her decision of marriage.

Marriage as Rescue

Saru meets Manu in college. She is attracted towards him during her college days. He is senior by a few days and quite popular in the college. He is a famous writer and a poet of promise with some poems already published in magazine. She feels privileged because Manu makes her his companion. The initial years of her marriage are quite blissful as Manu seems to be her saviour, who rescues her from her insecure existence in her maternal home. As Prasanna Sree says,

The woman in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. The simple need to be independent eventually becomes a demand of the inflated ego and takes shape as the love for power over others. She

resents the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning her freedom.

(qtd. In Dr. Kavya:62)

Saru at the initial years of her marriage is very happy with her husband. Though they live in a shabby apartment and without any luxuries, they are together and happy. As, Saru remembers,

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... Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love, of my being loved, of my being wanted. (Deshpande-40)

During her childhood she was an unwanted child. This negligence has rooted in her so much that being loved and taken care of, gave her sublime joy and happiness. These are the feelings which she always longed for at her parental house and has found in Manu's love. But Soon Saru realized that the sublime was only an illusion. As long as she was medical student and her husband the bread winner there was peace at home. The problem arose when she began to get recognition as a doctor. As she says,

But now I know that it was there it began...this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too...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 shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband. (Deshpande-42)

CONFLICT AND PERSONAL GROWTH

The protagonist Sarita is a successful lady doctor. The story tells her conflict that she has to face as a doctor and as a wife. During day time she is a popular lady doctor and in the night she is a deserted animal in her husband's hands, who is an English teacher in a small college. When material prospects get more value, Manohar's place in her life becomes diminished. As a doctor, she is successful and quite busy which ultimately upsets her family life. Manohar is quite annoyed with her popularity. She is unable to give enough attention to the domestic front because of her busy professional life. She is not able to devote time to her husband and children. Here she fails as a wife and mother. Saru's financial and social status grows

far beyond that of her husband. She is a busy, successful doctor in contrast with Manu who is an underpaid lecturer. Saru's steady rise in status brings about a rift between Saru and her husband which grows even wider with the passage of time. This ultimately results in the torture of bearing Manu's physical assaults which Saru suffers at the hand of her husband totally perplex her. Sarita's finical strength turns Manohar into a rapist at night only to assert his potency and masculinity, as J.O.Brien observes, Men often use violence against their wives when they lack in other means of control such as economic or educational superiority over women. (qt. In Dr. Kavya-66)

His action humiliates Saru and she thinks,

And each time it happens 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. Perhaps the process has really begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself. (Deshpande-96)

Saru's insecurity is escalated by her disastrous experiment with marriage. Her dreams have a choking sensation; the nights are a terrible nightmare. Loneliness becomes an integral part of her and she leads a dual life. For the world, she is a competent doctor and in reality, she is a tortured woman. The pain and shame, she undergoes is deep feeling anguish, kills the very creativity and imagination, in transforming the person into something different. Her pain, her suffering can not be uttered in public but she feels her body as a burden. She is a mentally disturbed person. She is not able to speak out what she wants. She has a guilty consciousness that she had deserted her parents in order to marry Manohar. She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Now she thinks that had her marriage been arranged one, parents would come to her rescue now and at least they would be respectful and sympathetic for her sufferings. Absolute confusion prevails upon her. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, brother, husband and children as well.

Saru goes back to her father's house after many years because her marriage had alienated her from her mother all these years. She returns being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. During the day, there is no evidence in his behaviour to suggest

anything that should be a cause for her anxiety. There are only bruises which show that the night has been real. Her inability to find out what was wrong prevents her from doing anything about this problem until she returns to her father's house.

Failure as a Mother

A woman who nurtures such deep-rooted hatred for her mother and lives quite estranged from her husband cannot be a good mother to her own children. Saru's mother also had a very unhappy childhood. Saru's grandmother was deserted by her husband and she had to return with her two girls, to her parents. This rejected childhood also has contributed in conditioning her mother into a domineering mother. Saru also does not prove herself to be a good mother. She has secret fear in her of proving herself a bad mother. As she says,

When she held Renu in her arms, she had felt not love, but an immense fear, a terrible feeling of inadequacy. Could she measure up to all that this being, so wholly dependent on her, would expect of her? Would she not fail her as her own mother had failed her? (Deshpande-162)

Saru had sworn that she would never fail her children in love and understanding as her own mother had done. But the novel gives no proof that she was able to keep her promise. She has a secret fear that her children might think of her as she thinks of her mother. Once Saru's son Abhi wanted the presents that Renu, his sister, got on her birthday. Since he cried and spoiled her birthday, she would not give them to him. Saru repeatedly asked her to give them and Renu retorted,

Why do you always scold me? You never scold him. You never say anything to him. It's not fair. It's my birthday, my presents...And now you scold me. You always scold me. It's not fair, not fair. (Deshpande-173)

These words of her daughter open up her own childhood wounds and she asks herself.

Do we travel, not in straight lines, but in circles? Do we come to the same point again and again? Dhruva and I, Renu and Abhi...is life an endless repetition of the same pattern? (Deshpande-173)

Saru also is afraid of thinking that Renu perhaps has the same feeling towards her which she was having towards her mother.

Renu, my daughter. She stares at me critically at times, a cold, shrewd, objective observer behind those little girl's eyes of hers. And I become nervous, insure, uncertain of myself...Nothing emerges, neither her sorrows. And I sense a lack of feeling, of sensitivity in her. (Deshpande-33)

Though Saru had thought romantically about motherhood, when it actually came it was far from being romantic.

MATURITY

Saru's long hours of contemplation into her marriage makes her understand that her professional success had killed Manu's spirit. Actually, her introspection helps her to get freedom from the guilt that she suffered throughout her life. She decides to assert herself and fight her own battle. She realizes that her life is her own which she will have to mould. There is no refuge other than one's own self. The fear of darkness or ignorance or the unknown fear that haunted her so long gets evaporated and she decides to face her life. The novelist makes it very clear that a woman's life is her own and she should start thinking that she is an individual, certainly not a dependent but being capable of withstanding all trails in life alone. Saru earlier was the prisoner of her own fear and confusion but at the end of the novel she regains her inner strength and realizes that she is the master of her own destiny, as 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. (Deshpande-220)

The final picture of Saru is really appealing. At the end of the novel, Saru stands poised to receive her husband secure because of her newfound confidence in herself. At the end of the story, she chooses to give up her independence and reunite with Manu. Indeed, Bildungsroman typically concludes with the protagonist making some choice, thereby confirming that the protagonist has achieved self-realization and maturity. She successfully rids her complexes and guilt and comprehends the meaning of human life where she realizes that she is not the only one caught in loneliness. Kamini Dinesh's observation aptly sums up Saru's development as an individual in her own right.

To be true to herself the woman has to excoriate the film of superimposed attitudes and roles. Her emancipation is not repudiating the claims of her family, but in driving upon the entrapped inner reserves of strength. (Dinesh: 200)

CONCLUSION

In this novel Saru is shown to go through different phases of her life. After all Saru's experiences, from an unwanted child to a self dependent, reputed doctor, she finally comes to a successful and independent state which she can make her own decision and will not be restricted by anything. The various challenges during Saru's growing process that educate and change her emotions and identities align with the basic definition of a Bildungsroman genre. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a *Bildungsroman*, a coming of age story, because it begins with Sarita as a young girl and follows her as she deals with the trials and tribulations of growing into a young woman.

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