

Vol. 8. No. 4. 2021

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Contents available at:

[www.crdeepjournal.org](http://www.crdeepjournal.org)

Global Journal of Current Research (ISSN: 2320-2920) CIF: 3.269  
A Quarterly Peer Reviewed Journal



## Research Article

# Scaling the Ladder of Feminism: Determination of Deshpande's Characters

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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#### Article history:

Received: 12-12-2021

Revised: 15-12-2021

Accepted: 20-12-2021

Published: 28-12-2021

### ABSTRACT

The feminist movements changed the status of women in society and the writings of feminism proved to be a weapon for them. The characters of Deshpande like Saru gave a clearer call to women to rise up from their long slumber and say good morning to their newly awakened life.

#### Key words:

Ladder, Feminism, Deshpand

After the feminist movements in the sixties in the West, much has been written on women, but much still remains to be done to reflect the injustices meted out to women and also to rid the male-psyche of the prejudices and misconceptions regarding them.

Alexander Dumas became the maiden French dramatist to use the term “feminism” for the movement for women’s political rights. By and by, it spread across the world to secure complete rights for women – political, social, economic and educational. The movement went from strength to strength to strength and, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, made the complacent society to think anew about the age-old distorted beliefs. The movement could not make much headway in Indian society steeped and bathed in religious belief, superstition and tradition. Though of late, feminism does seem to have begun influencing a cross section of the Indian society. Some Indian writers in English have challenged the hitherto unchallenged man-woman relationship.

Ibsen promoted and heralded the idea of woman’s emancipation with his character Nora in “A Doll’s House”. But it was Simone de Beauvoir’s in “The Second Sex” (1949) that sowed the seeds for women’s movement. It was greatly appreciated as a feminist book when its English translation was made available to the public across the globe. She successfully shatters the myth of femininity and shows how deprived of their social, economic and political rights, they remain relegated to the background. Despite their great contribution, they are dubbed as the weaker sex.

Despite their respectable strength they are told that their femininity is in danger. According to Simone de Beauvoir: *All agree in recognizing the fact that female exists in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by ovaries? Or is it a platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination.*

She lent great force to the women’s Liberation Movement in the mid-nineteenth century by exposing the gross inequalities in society. She concentrated on the disciplines like biology, psychology and history and she also discusses girl’s education, love, sex, marriage, prostitution and domestic drudgery as well. She frankly talks about sexual exploitation and sexual pleasure for women, and does not give way to sentiments while discussing “maternity”.

The feminist movement was sparked off by Betty Friedan’s in “The Feminine Mystique” (1963). She interviewed many wives and mothers and discovered the falsity of a woman’s achieving happiness and contentment in marriage and motherhood although they had been blessed with all the comforts of life. All were merely trying to seek fulfillment by playing the role of a devoted wife and caring mother. To Frieden:

*For a woman, as for a man the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization – is as important as the sexual deed, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Women’s sexual problems are, in this sense, by products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminism fulfillment ignores.*

Kate Millet, another important and illustrious feminist in "Sexual Politics" (1969) vehemently argues that the women are in such an intolerable, subordinate position in the patriarchal social set up that most of them repress and deny its existence. In two of her studies, she found if the female children were given a choice, most of them would prefer to be born a boy. She graphically explains the sense of insecurity in women and the problem society would face in future in the form of female foeticide through pre-natal sex-determination tests. She further explains:

*The phenomenon of parents' parental preferences for male issues is too common to require such elaboration. In the light of the imminent possibility of parents actually choosing the sex of their child, such a tendency is becoming the cause of some concern in scientific circles.*

Germain Greer, too, belongs to the staunch category of militant feminists and goes to the extent of saying that "if women are to affect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry". A battalion of feminist writers made their significant contribution to the women's movement. Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" is about Esther, a young innocent and oppressed heroine who later becomes vengeful and consequently a new woman, mustering courage to cross patriarchal thresholds. Sylvia uses the metaphor of an exquisitely handcrafted mat made by Mrs. Willard for Esther's oppressive state. The mat is not a thing for interior decoration but is used to be soiled under feet Esther thinks:

*And I know that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out under his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat.*

Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood have also contributed immensely in the movement, and have been internationally acclaimed as great feminist novelists. Few centuries back, women writers dared not express themselves honestly by defying the rigid norms laid down by society, inviting social censure. But writers like Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Stieve Smith, Charlotte Mew, Mananne Moor and Elizabeth Smith took out pebble from their tongue. But the freedom to express themselves from the core of their heart was sought at the price of giving up the so-called "womanliness" – sex, marriage, children and the social status of a wife.

Modern women writers have shown their protagonists crossing the prohibited walls of freedom and are venturing into regions of experience which were earlier considered taboo. Although a very conservative nation, India too has uninhibited women writers like Shobha De, who has delineated in bold themes. However, in the west the women writers are relatively more revolutionary feminists than their Indian counterparts.

Indian novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao did not pay much attention to women emancipation despite being having a great knowledge of freedom movement and the role women played, they let themselves miss out on this opportunity. Excepting the "Old Woman and Cow", Anand is deeply involved in championing the cause of the have-nots. Gauri, its heroine, is a fine example of his idea of women's emancipation. Narayan's portrayal of women characters ranges from the meek and submissive wife of Margayya in the "Financial Expert" and Savitri in "The Dark Room" to the vibrant and radical women characters like Daisy and Rosie in "The Painter of Signs" and "The Guide" respectively. But Daisy and Rosie are not examples to be emulated.

Women in the novels of Raja Rao suffer from domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition, but the writer suggests no way out of their dilemma. His women characters are somewhat ambitious but end up playing the devoted role of a wife like Savitri in "The Serpent and The Rope". Indian culture being rooted into his consciousness fails him to offer any concrete solution to the besetting women's issues.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's portrayal of women is too optimistic to be realistic. His women protagonists are tender, charming, and virtuous, and play a significant role in effecting social change. But in spite of having such qualities they are victimized. Kajoli in "So Many Hungers!" undergoes immense suffering and misery, but her spirit remains invincible. Mohini in "Music for Mohini" effects social reforms in Behula village steeped in superstitions and obsolete customs.

The above given references are a living testimony that the male writers have failed to give an honest or real portrayal of their women characters. They have either exposed their weaknesses and drawbacks, or placed her on a high pedestal and deified it. In this way, the delineation of the real woman has escaped the pen of male writers somehow. Women remained weak protagonists because they were created by male writers. By and by, the women writers took the initiative themselves to project the despicable condition of women folk in India. A passing reference to their works will certainly help to understand the psyche of the women writers taken up for the present study.

For instance, Kamala Markandaya's works are a realistic delineation of the double pulls that the Indian women are subjected to, between their desire to assert themselves as individuals and their duty in the capacity of a daughter, wife and mother. She also points out the impact of socio-economic conditions on the women. Her first novel "Nectar in a Sieve" is a story with a well-knit plot and is based on the theme of hunger and starvation. Rukmini the narrator-protagonist narrates the story about the decline of her family into poverty. Rukmini and her daughter Ira, become the victims of socio-economic conditions. She finds herself in the well of miseries. Her husband becomes unfaithful and even her daughter becomes a prostitute to save the family from starvation. Social customs and conditions multiply their sufferings. Parents arrange marriages, and the size of the dowry decides the status of the bridegroom. Rukmini's elder sister was married off with suitable dowry, but Rukmini is married off to a tenant farmer for want of a suitable dowry.

Anita Desai has graphically presented the turbulent psyche of the modern Indian women. Her protagonists are intelligent, sensible and sensitive but in an attempt to manage home and children and attain emotional fulfillment, they reach on the verge of mental crisis. Unable to bear with the crisis, they go for drastic steps.

Attia Hussain's famous novel Sunlight on a "Broken Column" (1961) created an indelible impression on the readers' psyche. Absolutely autobiographical in nature, its plot deals with Laila's revolt against the joint family system. Although she lives a secure and sheltered life in a Muslim family with a western outlook, she is denied the freedom that women in the west enjoy. The reins of the family are in the hands of Baba Jan, a dying grandfather, a staunch and domineering patriarch. With the passage of time, the old order fast changes. Laila crosses the barriers and rebels against the traditional values and finally musters the

courage to find her soul mate Ameer, and marries him, in spite of strong disapproval of the entire joint family. Ameer joins army and gets killed leaving behind him a daughter and Laila learns to struggle in life along with her lonely daughter.

Nayantra Sahgal, a promising Indian woman writer, dealt with issues concerning women and finally they became major issues in the feminist movement launched in the sixties. Most important, she boldly exposes the prejudices women face in a male-dominated society. Her novel "Rich Like Us" is about a dynamic girl, Sonali, who is portrayed as a real character and not a caricature. She is the daughter of a Marathi and a Kashmiri mother and refuses to be a stereotype Indian womanhood found in fiction. A brilliant IAS officer, she goes to Oxford to escape the Indian world of arranged marriages. In this way, there is a large number of women novelists in India who present their female protagonists, trying to cross the patriarchal thresholds, but in vain. But the female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande emerge out as courageous women who tight their socks to fight the battle of their existence against patriarchy. In this process of becoming new woman, they do not become outcasts after showing back to their responsibilities as wives, mothers and daughters.

The image of woman is central to the study of literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian literature in English also. Literature is like a vast canvas in a framework in which writers portray their characters. The purpose of the present study is to flash light on some of those images and unveil them. Literature records life and society response to it which is embodied in the author's image portrayed in his creation. An exploration of the image of woman in literature enables us to assess the writer's vision of them. In a transitional period of our country's history when society is changing from traditional to modernity, such an exercise has its own value. To become aware of the emerging new image of woman is to be aware of a vital issues in our society.

The Gandhian whirlwind and the Freedom Movement catapulted Indian women into the forefront. Says A.R. Desai, "This was unique in the history of India, the spectacle of hundreds of women taking part in political mass movement, picketing of liquor shops, marching in demonstration, courting jails, facing lathi charges and bullets.

Women came to the front and four walls of the home widened and broadened into the boundaries of the country. Literature written at the time of the Freedom Movement projects a new image of the Indian woman. The works of Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand could not have been possible without it. Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography and Pandit Nehru's writings give short sketches of brave women fighters. The influence of Gandhian philosophy gave rise to a new humanism and a new morality based on human values rather than religious orthodoxy. The trend was towards a positive, brave and outspoken efforts to find out a new way of life for women.

On the attainment of Freedom and the completion of the Freedom Struggle, the image of the woman as an involved participant once again is relegated to the background. Many continued to be socially active but several women also went back to their former positions. But the Indian woman's psyche was touched and stimulated and the trend was towards a change.

However, it is only in the post-independence period that the woman's quest of a self of her own really commenced. As the country acquired a National Identity of its own, the woman's quest of her own self also followed. The spark that was triggered off by the Freedom Movement now started spreading championed by reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and others. Not only was there a shift in the sensibility of the society, but there was also an awakening and impetus was given to woman's aspirations. But there was no overnight revolution. The image of the archetypal woman still loomed large on the horizon in spite of the fast growth and development of women's education.

In such a scenario several successful attempts have been made by Indian women writers of fiction to present the New Woman who wrestles with the trials and tribulations of her life with dauntless courage and perseverance. There is the image of the New Woman herself being projected in post-independence literature and particularly in the literature written after seventies. The feminine psyche disturbed in a period of transition from tradition to modernity is voiced both in poetry and fiction. Authenticity, candour, boldness, ebullience, frankness, vehement assertion, sadness – these are some of the qualities associated with the new image. The image of the New Woman and her quest and struggle for an identity of her own is emerging in the Indian English Novel. Indo-Anglian literature, like the literatures in the regional languages, spans a rich variety of themes – from the theme of a conventional woman to that of the New Woman, reflecting in the process, the changes that have been going on in the society.

Over the decades, a series of novels appeared in the Indian English fiction dealing with the ordeals, which the women have to face in their lives. The treatment is no doubt powerful and the novels end up glorifying the writers and women protagonists like patience, devotion and acceptance of sufferings as the design of fate. But the novels of Shashi Deshpande in general and "The Dark Holds No Terrors" in particular, is totally a different novel. It explodes the myth of man's superiority and the myth of woman being a paragon of virtues. Her female protagonists are shown resisting patriarchy and they emerge out as new women with all their unprecedented strength. Shashi Deshpande holds great worth as an Indian English woman novelist and is genuinely considered the only Indian author to have made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist.

"The Dark Holds No Terrors" is the second novel of Shashi Deshpande. The novel is about 'Saru' who gives a clarion-call to women to rise up from long slumber. She is a well-educated, economically independent middle-class wife, made of her gender as a child and whose loveless relationships with her parents and strained relationships with her parents-in-law and her husband result in her agonizing search for herself. The novel opens with Saru's return to her parents' house fifteen years after she left home with a pledge never to return to the walls which meted out injustice to her. But the strained relationships with her husband becomes the reason of her return to her parents' house, where she hoped to get a chance to think over her relationships with her husband, her children, her parents and her dead brother, Dhruva. Coming events cast their shadows before and this bold step speaks volumes of her courage.

The portrayal of relationship of 'Saru' with her brother is special. Her brother is adored whereas she is ignored. She felt at every step of her infancy that she was an unwanted addition to the family. She is even deprived of parental love and not given any importance in the family. The birthdays of her brother are celebrated with great fanfare and religious rites whereas her birthdays are not even remembered and acknowledged. She experiences that the birth of her brother was taken as a boon whereas her birth was a bane for parents. Such feelings of hatred are written on the blank heart of a child. Saru feels that her birth was a

horrible experience for her mother, as she later recalls her mother telling her that it had rained heavily the day she was born and it was terrible for her mother. Saru painfully felt that it was her birth that was terrible for her and not the rains. She had started realizing that she has to face such ordeals in the fire of patriarchy. Somewhere in the corner of her mind, the seeds of indiscrimination were sown and she was mentally ready to reap the harvest.

She recalls the joyous excitement in the house on the occasion of his naming ceremony. The idea that she is a liability to her parents is deeply ingrained in her mind as a child. Her mother's fondness of her son at her daughter's cost is the rallying point for the novelist to bring her feminist ideas together. The mother's preference for boys over girls can be vividly witnessed in the majority of Indian homes and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. Sons bring a rich wealth of dowry could be one reason, but the Indian society bathed in tradition and superstition considers the birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. The first thought that rose in Saru's mind at hearing about her mother's death is: "who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died" (17). As Sarbjit Sandhu aptly remarks:

*The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is 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.*

Her mother constantly reminds her that she should not go out in the sun as it would worsen her already dark complexion. Saru painfully recalls her conversation with her mother in which the patriarchal darts pierce through her heart:

"Don't go out in the sun, you'll get 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". (40)

Such kind of blatant discrimination between Saru and her brother gives rise to the feelings of insecurity and hatred towards her parents, especially in the mind of Saru and Makes her a rebel. Y.S. Sunita Reddy observes: "*In this connection, Saru's mother's attitude is typically of most Indian mothers and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context*".

The crucial and turning point in her life is the accidental death of her brother by drowning. Throughout her life she is haunted by the memories of her mother accusing her of intentionally letting Dhruva die by drowning: "*You did it, you did this, you killed him*" (173). Saru too on her part has a guilty conscience as she feels that she herself remained a silent spectator to her brother's death by drowning. She never refuses the charge leveled against her by her mother. In this connection, G. Dominic Savio observes: "*Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment*".

In this context, Shashi Deshpande reveals the social aspect of sibling jealousy born of a mother's undue fondness for her son.

Those to whom injustice is done, do injustice in return. The discriminatory behavior of Saru's mother makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. Her existence became from bad to worse and experiences sheer injustice. Not only Saru, but any Indian girl can be the victim of gender discrimination or patriarchy in the Indian social setup. As S. Anandalakshmi opines: *The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's fixture, creating a deep symbiotic bond.*

Saru's mother can never be an exception to this and her life becomes a dreary affair after her son's death. She throws the entire blame of her misfortunes on the shoulders of Saru. She steals every opportunity to admonish her and does not show any interest in her education, career or future. Her feeling of being unwanted becomes so strong that she begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. On attaining puberty she says scornfully, "*if you are a woman, I don't want to be one*"(62).

She is given beastly treatment during her monthly ordeals during which she is treated like an untouchable, segregated from the other members of the family and made to sleep on a straw mat with a cup and plate exclusively meant for her to be served in from a distance. She feels awfully suffocated and is engulfed with a sense of shame and prays in deprecation for a miracle to put an end to this unpleasant experience. In this way unloved and unwanted, she develops hatred towards the traditional and orthodox practices during her impressionable years. She becomes so abhorrent to her mother that she becomes her enemy and also rebellious just to hurt her, "*I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer*"(142).

Finally, she resolves to cross the patriarchal walls and decides to leave home for Bombay to chose medicine as a career. Obviously, first step in making a new woman. In the medical college she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents' wishes. Her orthodox mother felt infuriated over the idea of his daughter marrying a man from a lower caste:

"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 words of her mother were imbued with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries and enraged Saru so much that she had replied... "*I hope so*" (96). Had her mother not used such disgusted words for him, she would probably not have married him and brought herself to such a miserable condition. She later recollects:

*If you hadn't fought me 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 his hand writing, hating him and yet pitying him too.* (96)

Love is a panacea and Saru craves for it as she was deprived of love and security and wanted to be loved. A drowning man catches at a straw. When she gets attention from Manu, she wonders and takes it as a nightmare, “*How could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, and appendage one could do without*”. (96)

Beggars cannot be choosers and the need of the moment was relation with someone who could give her love and security. She thinks: *The fisherman's daughter couldn't have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him than I was by Manu's love for me.* (66)

After sometime, when her relations become strained with Manu, she regrets for having rushed into marriage unconditionally: *The fisherman's daughter was wiser. She sent the king to her father and it was the father who bargained with him, while I [.....] gave myself up unconditionally. Unreservedly to him, to love him and to be loved.* (66)

The circumstances that led to her taking such a step, are the making of her taking such a step, are the making of her own parents. As Sunita Reddy opines: *If her mother had provoked her by her blatant hostility, her father had contributed to her present predicament by remaining a mute spectator in the family drama.*

Saru considers herself the luckiest woman on earth in the initial years of her marriage with Manu. She considers him as her savior and the romantic hero who rescues her – a damsel in distress. She marries to secure the lost love in her parental home and her identity as an individual. As A.P. Swain writes: *Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility.*

Although, Saru refrains from any physical indulgence with Manu but, after marriage, she revels in it with wild abandon: *I became in an instant a physically aroused woman with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. All the clichés, I discovered were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved was an intense joy. It was as if little nerve ends of pleasure had sprung up all over my body.* (40)

Her dingy one-room apartment with “the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dark sealed in odours” (40) is “a heaven on earth” for her. But, everything proves to be a nine day wonder and Saru realizes that happiness was just an occasional episode in the general drama of her pain. She remembers how a particular incident becomes a turning point in their blissful marital relationships. One night she comes back home quite late in her bloodstained coat as she helped out the victims in a fire accident in a factory nearby. The entire neighbourhood comes to know about her real identity and she gains a rich popularity in the area. People would visit her for medical help and other related matters. In the very beginning she could not realize the change that had come in Manu. Manu could not digest her popularity which becomes the cause of her strained marital relations with Manu. In a contemplative and 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)

The cracks started appearing in the strong wall of marriage because her popularity as a doctor came as a danger to his patriarchal whims and fancies. Manu feels absolutely uncomfortable with Saru's steady rise in status and he feels small and ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru. Moreover, she could hardly spare enough time for Manu and children. Both Manu and Saru want to move out to some other place for their different individual reasons. While Manu feels humiliated and embarrassed, Saru is no longer happy in that cramped and stinking apartment and wants to move into some well-furnished accommodation. Earlier, she was contented to live on Manu's salary but in her new role of a new woman, she becomes discontented. She resents:

*For me, things now began to hurt [.....] a frayed saree. 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).

The intensity of their love was reduced and Saru begins to hate this man-woman relationship, which is based on need and attraction and not love. She scorns the word “love” now. She realizes that there was no such thing between man and woman. With the passage of time and with the change of circumstances, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and concern towards husband and children. Consequently, the children are neglected and deprived of motherly love as care as she frequently gets late in the evenings.

With the passage of time, Saru's financial status rises, there is gradual decline in her conjugal relationship. She could pull on with her relations with Manu smoothly had she confined herself with treating people in the neighbourhood. She ascends the stairs of success through Boozie, who is a handsome and illustrious doctor. Saru does not mind his flirtatious nature. Their relation becomes more cemented when Boozie financially helps her to set up her own clinic in an urban area. Her ambition blinds her and she becomes unscrupulous in her relationship with Boozie and consoles herself by treating it as a mere teacher-student relationship. She tells herself:

*It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me [....] that was just his mannerism and meant nothing, if had nothing to do with me and Manu* (91).

Both had their own axis to grind in sustaining such a relation. Boozie openly flaunts his relationship with Saru to hide his homosexual nature and Saru wanted to exploit him through her feminine wiles to achieve her much coveted goal of becoming, established and reputed doctor. It is obviously, one more step in the way of becoming a new woman. She has already proved her mettle in her profession and converts all her stumbling blocks into smooth paths. Although there is nothing physical about their relationship but it creates a misunderstanding in the mind of Manu. She does not bother to explain her relationship with Boozie to anybody, including Manu.

Even at the inauguration of the consulting room of her clinic, when Boozie flaunts her by his side openly before the invitees to the programme, she feels resentful towards her husband:

*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 (94).*

But Saru's success in her profession and her rise in social and financial status in comparison with Manu's status becomes the reason of discord in their relationship. Saru is absolutely contented with her career whereas discontented at home. The long and the short of the story is that she does not achieve fulfillment in life. Betty Friedan asserts: *For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfilment – autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization as serious consequences, when it is thwarted.*

While thinking of her past, she recalls one particular event or incident which leads to her hatred towards Manu. It was on the day when they had been watching a TV programme. She recalls:

*[Manu] had been sitting with his feet up on a stool, [.....] soft, white, unmarked and flabby like his hands. And his laugh [.....] it was rather silly. A kind of bray almost why had she never noticed that before? And had he always picked at his ears that way, deftly, rather stealthily? It was like seeing a man she had never seen, never known. [.....] Now that she knew him, she rather despised (135).*

Such type of awful incidents aggravate the already strained relations between the two to such an extent that in the privacy of their room at night he never behaves like a doting husband but a revengeful rapist. In an interview with Saru, when the interviewing girl happens to ask Manu innocently: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well" (200). The three – Saru, Manu and the girl – merely laughed it off as if it were nothing. This particular incident adds fuel to the fire and Manu feels absolutely helpless and effeminate. To show his masculinity he gives vent to his feelings through his beastly sexual assault on Saru. No doubt, he is a cheerful and a normal human being and a loving husband during the day, but turns into a rapist to prove his manhood. Bitter incidents keep on piling up and become stumbling blocks in their relationship. There is one more incident which sends her to nightmarish experience. Before going on a vacation to Ooty, as Manu and Saru are shopping, they happen to meet one of Manu's old friends of college times along with his wife. While talking to each other, Manu tells him that they were going to Ooty. When his friend curses his bad luck for not affording such a tour during vacation, the wife of his colleague replies that he could also have afforded such tours only if he had married a doctor. Saru has to pay once again for such humiliation of Manu. Saru expresses her helplessness to her father in the following words: *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).*

Although she had become economically independent, she is plagued with miseries as she has to perform two fold duties. Besides her strict regimen of the profession of a renowned doctor, she has to perform the duties of a housewife also. She expresses her strong and honest desire to give up her medical profession but Manu will not let her do it as their standard of living couldn't be maintained on Manu's meagre income.

The situation becomes even more disgust when Manu pretends to be ignorant in the mornings of his rather beastly behavior at night. At this point of time, she also comes to know about her mother's death. Despite her vow to never return home, she comes back. She has reasons to do so as she doesn't have to undergo the humiliations of her mother's taunts and she also has a clarification to give to her father for her returning home on account of her mother's death.

After reaching her father's house, she ponders over the reasons of her unhappy and disastrous marriage. She puts the whole blame on herself as she easily identifies the consequences of the shattered male ego. The novel may also be taken as a study in guilt consciousness, as Saru ruminates, *"My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood"* (217). But, what Shashi Deshpande suggests is the gender discrimination by parents towards their children and the compulsion to perpetuate male-dominance if the chariot of marriage is to be kept going. In this way, Deshpande has presented a realistic picture of the dominance of patriarchy and the emergence of a new woman in the character of Saru. The novelist has also presented a realistic picture of the gross gender inequality prevailing in our society.

Although she returns to her parents' unwillingly, she finds that nothing had changed there and her father too sounds strange as he behave like and unwilling host, unwilling to receive an unwelcome guest. She needed sympathy but she gets nothing at all. Had she been a male child, he would have been given a warm welcome by the parents. On one occasion Saru present a perfect recipe for a successful marriage in orthodox India. In fact, she has a dig at patriarchy. On being asked by her friend Nalu to talk on Medicine as a profession for women, to a group of college students, she says:

*A wife must always be few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he is 5 feet 4 inches tall you shouldn't be more than 5 feet 3 inches tall. If he is earning, five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic disastrous and I assure you, it is not worth it He'll suffer. You'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage must be an equal partnership. That's nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever 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 help you, both of you (137).*

These words express frustration of Saru in a male-dominated society and are quite ironical in tone. Indirectly, Saru curses the patriarchy and has almost realized that she has to fight the battle of her life single-handedly with the weapons of courage and her education.

In a nostalgic mood, she also thinks about her relationship with Padmaker, her classmate in the medical college, who she happens to meet years later. After a couple of meetings with him, Saru dissuades him from keeping any further relationship with her. She does so because she learns from her experience that such type of relationships cannot give any comfort but will multiply her sorrows. She learns that love can be a misunderstanding between two fools. Saru had now no illusions about romance or love as these words had stolen or snatched the peace of her life: *Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions and for me, sex was now a dirty word (133).*

Her relations with Boozie and Padmakar open up a Pandora's. The drowning boat of her marriage life could not be saved from sinking with her relations with Boozie and Padmakar. In this connection Kamini Dinesh remarks: *These cannot be an 'escape route', from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself.*

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