Human beings are the products of the social system in which they live and dwell, and in order to play their societal roles appropriately, certain types of relationships have been established. One thing that these relationships give birth to is a sense of commitment. One of the most committed relationships, from emotional and psychological point of view, is the one shared by mother and daughter. However, in today’s postmodern world, in which gay/lesbian relationships and live-in relationships are being accepted increasingly in practice, it appears a little obsolete to talk about mother-daughter relationship. But one cannot gainsay the fact that this is undoubtedly the single relationship that has the strongest bearing on a woman’s life and experience. As Signe Hammer points out, “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). Therefore, psychologically they are united at a centre that works like a magnet, bonding them together despite the conflicting journey of their relationship. The fundamental conflict arises when mother, herself a patriarchal construct, tends to impose patriarchal principles and values on the daughter. Consequently, the daughter may submit or rebel as a reaction to it. In this context, Nancy Chodorow observes that, “most psychoanalytic and social theorists claim that the mother inevitably represents to her daughter (and son) regression, passivity, dependence, and lack of orientation to reality” (65). Moreover, the daughter may hate and cause injury to her mother in response to her mother’s apathy, indifference or alienation. Such a rebellion in the daughter is caused especially by her access to education and social awareness. But no daughter can escape completely from the burden of being the daughter of her mother. To point out its reason, Adrienne Rich gives her concept of “matrophobia”. She States:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (236)

Therefore, when the daughter herself attains motherhood and becomes an experienced self, she cannot help turning back again to her mother, if not exclusively for strength and understanding, then for measuring her present state.

In the 1980s, when Shashi Deshpande made her debut on the literary firmament, Feminist Literary Movement was at its zenith, touching highly sensitive issues with new modes of interpretation. With an innovative perspective, though tinged with ramifications of traditional feminine discursive practices, Deshpande introduces her first creative literary piece. Her eminent novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is an insightful story of mothers and daughters in a typical patriarchal framework, foregrounding the daughter’s search for her own refuge. Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, comes back to her parental home not merely to escape from the oppression of her husband but to weigh her experiences with those of her mother; and thus to attain a balanced view of her relationship with her mother. Therefore, it becomes interesting to examine how the bond between mother and daughter becomes strained and psychologically complex in Shashi Deshpande’s present novel.

However, another significant psychological dimension of mother-daughter bond is highlighted by Judith Kegan Gardiner when she states:
The positive side of the mother-daughter relationship, its interdependent nurturance and warm attachment, also creates problems. The daughter must pattern herself after her mother, acquire her gender identity, learn her roles, and at the same time differentiate herself as a person. (147)

The daughter remains in a constant dilemma throughout her life to abdicate her mother but never succeeds in her attempt absolutely. However, the mother acts as a mirror for the daughter to conceive a distinct identity for herself. It’s because every daughter is ‘quite a little mother’ full of possibilities and every mother is full of experiences of being a daughter. Therefore, the daughter sees herself in her mother and this identification leads her to constitute her selfhood. But Saru’s mother reflects a negative image of her daughter. Saru painfully remembers, “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). Saru is thus made to naturalize a negative image of herself. However, she is further trained in the values of a male dominated society. Her mother says, “You should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it’s only your father who’s around” (Deshpande 62). Saru is made to feel ashamed of her own feminine body when she approaches puberty. She is given a straw mat to sleep on and is served from a distance. The status of a pariah is offered to her and she feels, “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).

Thus, Saru’s mother keenly seeks to shape her daughter after herself. Being a traditional mother, she is very careful about her daughter’s looks which should one day tempt a man for her to marry. She dictates:
Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker.
Who cares?
We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.
I don’t want to get married.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can’t.
And Dhruva?
He’s different. He is a boy. (Deshpande 45)

Hence, Saru is made to feel inferior to her brother in her early childhood. He enjoys all the privileges of being a son while Saru is denied even her own share of love. Each time she is the scapegoat and Dhruva is the object of attention. Such discrimination on the part of the mother results in sibling rivalry. In this context Rashmi Sahi observes, “When a mother differentiates between her own children the boy and the girl for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains, there is no other torch bearer than for the girl child” (20-21).

In her relationship with her kid brother, Dhruva, Saru unknowingly becomes dominating like her mother. The reason is that because of the initial identification of the child with its mother, it internalizes some of the features of mother’s behaviour and later recreates them in its future relationships. This is what Nancy Chodorow also says:
In later life, a person’s early relation to her or his mother leads to a preoccupation with issues of primary intimacy and merging. On one psychological level, all people who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so. (79)

Though Saru loves Dhruva and cares for him, but she detests him too for the advantages he enjoys for being a son. Deshpande reveals through their relationship the social aspect of keen sibling jealousy born of a mother’s undue fondness for the son. As Charu Chandra Mishra is of the view, “It seems, at first, that against the patriarchal power of domination, her
relationship with Dhruva forms the battle ground on which she is fighting for a space of her own” (97). Dhruva has been terrified of the dark. During night he comes crawling into her bed. For Dhruva, thus, Saru acts as a surrogate mother in whose company dark holds no terror for him. However the accidental death of Dhruva leaves Saru shocked and bewildered. But her mother’s hatred for her does not spare Saru even at this critical moment. Saru’s mother blames her innocent daughter for her brother’s death. Whereas G. Dominic Savio believes, “Dhruva’s demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment” (61). Saru is made to feel guilty of the deed which she has not done consciously or unconsciously. Her mother holds Saru responsible for Dhruva’s death and retorts, “You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (Deshpande 191). These words of her mother, then, keep haunting Saru throughout her life, proclaiming her a murderer of her own brother. This nasty blow of her mother leaves Saru completely shattered and consequently a severe detestation shrouds their future relationship. Charu Chandra Mishra points out, “Throughout the novel this guilt consciousness seems to act like a fatal flaw at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia. This is the turning point in the novel that brings the mother-daughter conflict to the forefront” (97).

The fear of being betrayed or being rejected remains rooted in Saru’s consciousness. The roots of her isolation lie in her own childhood experiences. Beena Agarwal observes:
Saru’s presence in the family was treated as a curse to the family because her mother considered Saru responsible for the death of Dhruva. The negligence of mother, indifference of father and the burden of the guilt of the death of brother, enforced Saru to leave her parental home to seek spaces in professional life. (33)

Consequently, Saru becomes restless to get admiration, social recognition and professional success to seek a space equal to her brother. She completely devotes herself to get medical degree that seems to her the sole mean to attain freedom. However, her wish to be a doctor is instilled in Saru by her mother’s neglect. Once Saru states: “No, I couldn’t. I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them . . . her . . . something. What? I didn’t know. But I had to make myself secure so that no one would ever say to me again . . . why are you alive?” (Deshpande 50). Thus whatever happens in Saru’s life is related, directly or indirectly, to her relationship with her mother. She cannot shake off her mother’s influence wholly even after separating herself from her. As Nancy Chodorow maintains:
A very young child, for instance, may feel invulnerable and all-powerful because it has introjected, or taken as an internal object, a nourishing and protecting maternal image, which is now experienced continuously whether or not its mother is actually there. Alternately, it may feel rejected and alone whether or not its mother is actually there, because it has taken as internal object an image of her as rejecting and denying gratification. (42-43)

Constant neglect and rejection of her daughter by Saru’s mother has so badly affected Saru’s psyche that now it seems almost impossible for her to believe that she can be somebody’s beloved. “Insofar as aspects of the maternal relationship are unsatisfactory, or such that the infant feels rejected or unloved, it is likely to define itself as rejected, or as someone who drives love away” (Chodorow 78). Hitherto devoid of love, her heart cannot easily admit the thought that she can be the centre of attention. Saru states candidly, “I thought no male would take that kind of an interest in me. Yet, there was one” (Deshpande 91). This shows that Saru has been suffering from inferiority complex. There is always an insecurity and uncertainty about her, making her self-conscious every time.

Her mother’s hostility has created in Saru a dislike so strong that she develops a habit of doing everything that her mother opposes. When Saru tells her mother about Manohar, she asks:
What caste is he?
I don’t know.
A Brahmin?
Of course not.
Then, cruelly . . . his father keeps a cycle shop.
Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they? (96)

Such words of her mother, full of disgust, prejudice and hatred, enrages Saru so much that she becomes adamant to marry this man only. Unfortunately this impulsive decision of Saru has made a hell of her life. She painfully utters, “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 letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him and yet pitying him too” (Deshpande 96). Thus a kind of madness has overtaken Saru resulting from her mother’s hostility to her.

“Ironically, a female can be made an agency for the effective promotion of a male point of view as in the case of Saru’s mother” (Tripathi 43). Therefore to blame the mother alone for the miseries of Saru would be a rather partial view of the situation. Besides mother, it is the institution of patriarchy and the wrong or biased conditioning of the daughter that are to be blamed. Saru, at one place, meditates on her grandmother who was deserted by her husband, leaving her behind with two little daughters, one being her own mother. It was said that her grandfather had opted for Sanyas, a total renunciation of the material world. It was, however, her grandmother’s father who then looked after them and got the girls married. “But there had been, obviously, the burden of being unwanted, of being a dependent. Yet her grandmother had never, so she had heard, complained. It’s my luck, she said. My fate. It was written on my forehead” (Deshpande 70). Thus, Saru’s mother’s own childhood is spent with the feeling of unwantedness and dependency on others. Hence she has internalized these feelings of rejection and negligence as part of a girl’s life. She creates exactly the same kind of atmosphere for Saru as she had once received in her own mother’s home. As Simone de Beauvoir observes;
But why should her daughter, this other woman, enjoy advantages denied to her? Ensnared in ‘serious’ matters herself, she is envious of all the occupations and amusements that take the girl out of the boredom of the home; this escape gives the lie to all the values to which she has sacrificed herself. (535)

For Saru’s grandmother the need of the time was to get her daughters married. The same concern for the daughter she has transferred to Saru’s mother. Therefore being a typical product of patriarchal conditioning, Saru’s mother wants for her daughter a marriage and not a career in medicine. When Saru rebels against her mother’s choices, she becomes hostile to her daughter. “But then it had been a kind of miracle anyway, her joining medical college in spite of her mother. Standing up against her, asserting her will against her . . . that had seemed impossible” (Deshpande 139). This victory of Saru against her mother’s constant rejection creates a breach between mother and daughter, and alienates them from each other.

Saru’s obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. It signifies that Saru is guilt obsessed and this guilt does not permit her to seek wholeness in personal relationship. She concedes, “It seemed incredible to me that I could evoke an emotion so strong in anyone. That anyone could care for me in that way and to that extent” (Deshpande 65). Moreover, it was her mother who made her dream of finding happiness through a man. But this does not work for her and she finds disappointment in it. Beena Agarwal points out, “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). It is Saru’s relationship with her mother, bereft of any emotional bond, which renders her emotionally starved in her married life too. Each of her physical contacts with Manohar
merely satisfies her bodily cravings without touching her being. Saru wistfully captures the scene:

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. 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. (Deshpande 40)

Thus in spite of being physically fulfilled Saru remains emotionally unsatisfied. It is the void created in her by her childhood neglect which she now seeks to fill. “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted. If I ever had any doubts, I had only to turn to him and ask him to prove his love for me. And he would . . . again and again and again” (40).

A daughter usually confides her secrets into her mother’s bosom but unfortunately that source is missing in Saru’s life, not for her mother is dead now but because no tacit understanding ever exists between them. She has nobody in her life to share her secret pain and unburden her heart. “The urge to confide in someone, to talk to someone, was growing in her. Often she had found herself staring at people, weighing them up, thinking . . . are you on my side? Are you? And, even more often, waking up at night with a start, thinking . . . I am alone” (Deshpande 43). What is more pitiable about Saru is that she begins to perceive herself from the parameters of her mother. The daughter who “wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer” (Deshpande 142) finds herself hurt, wounded and suffering from her mother’s curse. Saru confides in her father, “She cursed me, Baba. . . . Even her silence at the end was a curse. And you say she died peacefully. . . . Does a death redeem a whole life? Can’t you understand, Baba, that it’s because she cursed me that I am like this?” (Deshpande 197).

A sense of guilt engulfed Saru when she realizes that she has deserted her mother. She wonders, “Will Renu turn mocking eyes on me one day? Will Abhi defy me? Will they betray me as I betrayed her?” (Deshpande 139). She attempts to identify herself with her mother not in the role of mother but as being a woman. Once she has thought that “If you’re a woman, I don’t want to be one” (Deshpande 63). But now she compares her situation with her mother and finds, “. . . my mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in the dingy room to comb her hair and apply kumkum, she slept in her bed like any overnight guest in a strange place. And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing ‘a room of our own’” (Deshpande 135-36). Once Saru has thought that “to get married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but damnable” (Deshpande 140). But in her attempt to divorce herself completely from her mother, and to be a sheer opposite of her mother, Saru ends up becoming a parable of Indian womanhood. Like a traditional woman she wants to make her marriage a success. Her profession of a doctor has left no space for her to be a good wife and a loving mother. Sometimes she imagines:

I saw myself, the end of my sari tucked into my waist, hair tied into a neat knot, smiling at them all as I served them. And all of them smiled back at me. A mother in an ad, in a movie, dressed in a crisply starched, ironed sari. Wife and mother, loving and beloved. A picture of grace, harmony and happiness. Could I not achieve that? (Deshpande 80)

Even after becoming independent there is lack of happiness, fulfilment and harmony in Saru’s life. Therefore she wants to search them in the life of a traditional woman. She now, at her father’s home, cooks for Madhav and her father, keeps the house clean, washes the cloth herself, and lives confined in the four walls of the house. “The gestures, the actions, the very words that accompanied them were, though she did not realize it, her mother’s. As if she was unconsciously, unknown to herself, mimicking the mother she had never admired, never
endeavoured to imitate” (Deshpande 106). Thus despite her deliberate attempts to remain split off from her mother, Saru sometimes finds herself acting out the role of her mother. In this context Judith Kegan Gardiner comments, “Without a firm individual identity, mother or daughter may react to the other’s self, body, habits, or life-style as though they were her own” (148).

Saru’s fears, uncertainties and insecurities are not merely confined to her relationship with her mother but they also shroud her relationship with her children. Saru once mentions, “It had been in her for some time now, a feeling that her unhappiness was a taint that would eventually stain them as well” (Deshpande 134). Saru notices strangeness in her daughter Renu’s behavior. Saru describes, “She stares at me critically at times, a cold, shrewd, objective observer behind those little girl’s eyes of hers. And I become nervous, unsure, uncertain of myself” (Deshpande 33). Sometimes, it seems to Saru that the sterility and monotony of her own life is badly affecting her daughter’s life too. Renu, however, mirrors her own mother’s anguish and depression. Saru states distinctly, “She does not talk much. She reminds me of a room whose doors are closed. Nothing emerges, neither joys nor her sorrows. And I sense a lack of feeling, of sensitivity in her” (33). Even in her paintings, Renu draws thick forest shrouded by darkness, a kind of manifestation of her inner landscape. With that mystery about her, Renu represents her grandmother. “And yet she knew how often Renu reminded her of her mother. Her quiet watchfulness. The feeling she gave you of being weighed up, criticized, possibly rejected” (Deshpande 34). Consequently, Saru sometimes, uncertain about herself, wonders whether she is an unnatural, unloving mother? She decides that she would give her children their due love and care which she herself has never received from her mother. So that they would not blame her the way she blames her mother. However, the kind of mother that Saru wishes to become has been described by Simone de Beauvoir as women who are “sufficiently satisfied with life to desire reincarnation in a daughter or at least to accept a daughter without disappointment; they will want to give the child the opportunities they have had and also those they have missed” (533).

Adrienne Rich contends that, “thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted” (235). Similarly, Saru’s feeling of being unwanted and rejected is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence both as a wife and as a mother. “She was not a wife, not a mother, not a professional woman whom others looked up to. She was the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat” (Deshpande 182). For Saru, there is no one to soothe her, comfort her. The words of her mother, “You killed him. Why don’t you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?” (Deshpande 191), keep haunting her. Saru remains guilt conscious first for being blamed for Dhruva’s death and second for deserting her mother. She thinks, “Her cruelty to Dhruva, to her mother, to Manu . . . she would never be rid of it. She would carry this ugly, unbearable burden until she died” (Deshpande 212). Saru’s mother was in a habit of finding fault with her daughter. As a result, Saru loses confidence and begins to blame herself. She thinks that now no forgiveness is possible. She confesses to her father, “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” (Deshpande 217). Her perception of life has changed completely and she begins to conceive life from a traditional woman’s point of view. Saru thinks, “It’s my fault again. If mine had been an arrange marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?” (Deshpande 218).

Shashi Deshpande, in one of her interviews, said that: “Being mother, daughter, wife is important for a woman but that is not the be all and end all of her existence” (qtd. in Sahi 22). Therefore, the end part of the novel shows Saru accepting her loneliness and simultaneously
attempting to reconcile and negotiate with her mother’s memories and her guilt and doubts. Saru contemplates:

They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife . . . persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. (Deshpande 220)

A better realization of her relationship with her mother descends on Saru when she tries to accept the elements she hitherto neglects and detests because they, in one way or the other, belong to her mother. What Premila Paul feels about Saru is that: “Though she tries to learn from the mother what not to be, she ends up as an educated version of the mother herself” (35). Saru’s coming back to her mother’s home suggests a daughter’s effort to understand her mother’s behaviour. When Saru puts her feet into her mother’s shoes, then she realizes what it is to be a mother in the patriarchal society. The values which a mother tries to instil in her daughter and restrictions which she put on her are merely the modes of survival in patriarchy. Perhaps mother believes in the simple dictum that it’s difficult to cover the whole earth with carpet, but it’s easy to protect one’s feet with slippers.

In patriarchy only time changes but the woman’s condition is still the same as it was centuries ago. Time changes and so do the things; but how much actually and in what proportion? Various attempts have been made, bulky books have been written occupying a considerable space in the libraries, cases are filed in the courts, processions are taken out, newspapers are full of women’s pitiable stories, political parties proclaim a better social status for women; but the question is: has it brought any significant change in woman’s condition? Unfortunately the answer is ‘No’. However, the novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors, does not limit itself to depict the complex mother-daughter relationships. With a woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships. What Saru accepts at the end is applicable to all human beings. She declares, “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 else, we have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves we’re sunk” (Deshpande 220). When Saru confronts this nothingness positively, a strange kind of feeling grapples her. “She was overcome by a queer sensation, as if everything was unreal. Her own body felt insubstantial. There was a feeling of weightlessness that made her almost euphoric” (Deshpande 219).

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