

**SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*: QUEST FOR FREEDOM AND REVOLT AGAINST MALE PSYCHE**

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande shows the issues and anguish of modern women in the contemporary society in her books. The significant themes in her novels are economical deprivation, physical torment, misuse, cunningness, marginalization, domestic violence, and gender discrimination. Roots and Shadows is her first novel in which she depicts the misery and suffocation experienced by Indu, the protagonist. It tells about her painful self-examination and self-revolutionary attack on the male domination and self mistakes. The research papers focuses on gender discrimination, role of women in the modern days and revolt against patriarchal society.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, internal struggle, desires, fight for freedom

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian English novelist. She is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award. She published many short stories and novels in which she wrote about the problems of women. Quest for freedom and identity is the common theme in her novels. Like other women writers, she too depicted the conditions of women. About women being the focal point of her writings she stated:

Most of my writing comes out of my intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society: it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles conjoined upon me by society...My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman.
(Deshpande 9)

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* deals with psychological clash of woman character, Indu. The novel highlights the issues of women in the contemporary era and brings up that there is a desperate need to challenge male psyche to get the independence from the shackles of custom and tradition. It provides how women struggle physically and mentally. Sarbjit K.

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Sandhu says "the novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general" (27).

Indu is an educated girl who is a journalist and wants to be free to discuss anything she prefers, for example, about her own life, government issues, politics, corruption, and others of her advantage. She is constantly constrained by Akka, an old woman who stays in her home. Akka never visits medical clinics and she is so obsessed with untouchability and thinks that someone may touches her. She has strong self opinion and domineering woman. As Indu was born and brought up in a conventional family, she can't escape from every one of the social and customary exercises. She is advised to plant tulsi and water for it. She finds herself caught in situation of giving preference between family and profession, between man centric society and customs. She loves creative writing but does not desire to lead an unconscious life. Indu couldn't tolerate Akka's domination on her. She starts to question Akka's authority and considers her an unsympathetic and domineering woman and says "there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate" (68).

Indu weds Jayant, whom she selects. They are happy for a couple of months. Since she is again constrained and controlled by him, she feels that she has lost her freedom. She realizes that everybody in her home expects something and a lot from her life. She comprehends Jayant's alienated sentiments and feelings when she faces her professional crises. As a journalist, she needs to change the society as possible as she can; however Jayant imagines that Indu can't change the entire framework as a pen writer and says: "what can one person do against the whole system. No point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures. We need the money, don't we? Don't forget, we have a long way to go" (19). Exhausted Indu became absolutely acquiescent. Since Indu endures from segregation, she represents 'dust and bareness' (10) and the 'dark room' (21). She remarks: "I am alone now and move along people I don't know....I had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries....'I am alone' (10). Since the traditional India objects women to be free in the society, Indu could not express her feelings freely. In silence Indu urges for love. Communication gap between them makes her introspect: "Jayant and I...I wish I could say...But I cannot...I want to be loved. I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness comes to us for the asking (13). Since his opinions are dissimilar from her, she always fought with her husband. The misunderstanding has brought a long gap between them. Of course, it is a common scenario in the family. Indu says:

"What I feel for Jayant Can I compress all of it within this world? (Love). It is much more, so overwhelming a response of the whole of me to him. Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again. I often toyed with the idea, I even worked it out into a short story once, in which a young woman leaves her husband and goes away. And when a third person, a common friend asks her why, she says, "Because I love him too much" (97)

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There should be equal freedom for men and women but the male dominated society doesn't give equality for women. Men generally have superiority complex over women as they earn money for bread and butter and myths were written that men are special and stronger. In the novel, Jayant does not encourage Indu to continue her creative writing; she is completely sadden and starts to dislike him. She tries to fulfill of her husband desires as:

Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him? And I can't blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be...Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own. (54)

The myths in all the Indian religions show that women should be polite to her family and women are the symbol of 'working machine' in bedroom and kitchen. There is a wrong notion that women represent sexual symbol and satisfy the desires of men. One should know that women are human beings with self desires and unrevealed agony. The writer rightly mentions the realistic scenario. She says that women are demanded to satisfy the needs of men. Indu reminds us:

When I look at the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I, dress, I think of Jayant, when I undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him... And one day I thought, isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? (29).

When Indu hasn't got freedom, her mind searches for full of opportunities and independence. She was fed up with marriage system. She improves an extra-marital affair with Naren, her childhood friend. "As a woman I felt hedged in my sex. I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me" (87). Lack of freedom and lack of communication makes her select a friend to have dating. Thus we see that women are seen as nurturers and the providers of great emotional caretaking. But men are considered providers of economic support. As a girl develops, unknowingly, the lines of *Manu-Smriti*:

By a young girl, by young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house," get incorporated in her mind. Girls inherit their mother's domestic chores and adopt stereotypical gender roles. Low self-esteem and self-worth are common. After marriage, her husband and in-laws control her life. Consequently, the girls enter a state of silence. (Prasad 212)

Indu's psychological contemplation routinely happens in the life of her. She doesn't share her sexual feelings and loneliness with her husband. As she has hesitant character like Hamlet from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, she would communicate her internal cleave to Naren. She tells him that "As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be meek and submissive" because 'you are a female' (174). It reminds the Indian social scenario. Many writers such as Kamala Das, Manju Kapur, and Anita Desai explored the same in their works. Their voice show us how women are treated in the modern India and interestingly, woman is an adversary of other woman. In this novel, Akka dominates Indu and tells "you're a woman now...you can have babies yourself" (87). Indu continues that

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I am a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, baldly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had the entire child's unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. 'And don't forget,' she had ended, 'for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything.' And that had been my introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. I was unclean. (86-87)

Indu understands that she has left her roots in her maternal family. The connection with Naren addresses shadow to her. The connection between them is physical attraction only; she felt that it is a great retribution on Jayant. "She had locked herself in a cage and thrown away the keys" (85). Since every one of the women feel that they were caught by the name of marriage and family in cultural standards made by men, Indu isn't special case from them. She says:

But what of my love for Jayant, that had been a restricting bond, tormenting me, which I had so futilely struggled against? Restricting bond? Was it not I who made it so Torment? Had I not created my own torment? Perhaps it was true ... there was only one thing I wanted now...and that was to go home...the one I lived with Jayant. That was my only home...I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant ... I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me ... That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. (87)

Men in overwhelmed society thinks that the aim of women is to produce children. Though women are human beings, they suppress on the name of culture, tradition and religion. Deshpande draws attention to the troubles that middle-class families come across in their pursuit for appropriate grooms for their daughters. The search for a man is such a big task that parents become anxious and desperate and at one nod from the man, settle the marriage. In the process of it, most of women become noiseless as they never reject the conventional society. The writer has given realistic and situated social conditions in the novel as: Women are treated "to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren" (128). Boys get good education; clothes and food in spite of women give product. "The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. Sons bring in dowry could be one reason, but the Indian society, steeped in tradition and superstition, considers birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage" (Sarbjit Sandhu 65).

Shashi Deshpande has depicted an inner-struggle of women as a woman. Girl children are not permitted to play with boys; they are not given equal preference in the society. A boy can visit, play and talk about anything with boys or girls yet girls are not allowed to impart their sentiments with other girls in the absence of their parents. They are requested to follow whatever their parents and relatives declare. Women are facing lot of issues in the country. As a young lady, Indu was not happy in their home, as a married woman she has totally searched for freedom. No woman gets freedom in her life after her marriage. Their obligations and responsibilities would be more so that they work hard seriously for their

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family. In connection to this, Dalit writer, Baby Kamble says that “Women work very hard and yet face so many problems in spite of a slight improvement in the financial position” (1). The married couple must share their opinions and feelings freely otherwise there would be some problems arise in the busy schedule.

In this novel, Indu feels that she battles for freedom however she can't choose what she needs from her husband. Her internal and desirable struggle isn't intellectual struggle; it is the passionate struggle and romantic sexual desire by leaving responsibility as a wife, daughter-in-law and other side of the coin, she rebelled against male psyche however before long comprehends she has made a wrong step by leaving her husband. Related to this, Sarabjit Sandhu rightly says: “The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude” (40). Shashi Deshpande says, “To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?...Oh! Yes, you can't escape the shadows. The clearer the light the darker the shadows. They follow you everywhere” (Dhawan 35). Indu finally understand what real freedom is and it lies in the change mode and made interesting things. In the event that she had asked her husband what she felt and what she needed from him, she would have certainly succeeded in her life. Obviously her desire and determination have not stopped her to go anywhere due to the gender discrimination.

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