

A QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE OF WOMEN AS WIFE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande a novelist and a short story writer occupy a predominant position among Indian English novelists. The new woman is constantly trying to live as an independent individual. In *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande deals with a women's attempt to assert her individuality and her freedom. Deshpande's theme is the identity crisis faced by Indu. Indu too searches for release from the constraints of the traditional and tradition-bound institution of marriage in search of an autonomous self, only to realize like them again. Indu comes to her home after being called by Akka who is on her death bed. Now she gets an opportunity to introspect her past ten long years. Indu, once again, becomes the center of attraction of the family as Akka makes her the only heiress of all her property.

Keywords: identity, stereotypical, women etc

Deshpande has portrayed two types of women in this novel. One set of women represent tradition and the other set of women represents modernity. There is a woman like Narmada, Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Sunanda, Kamla, and the most significant character after Indu that is, Akka who follows tradition as a virtuous thing. For them, defying tradition and rituals means committing a crime. Modernity is represented by Indu and Mini who make all efforts to challenge the entire patriarchal structure but Mini lacks courage and will-power. Though Mini is educated and belongs to a modern world yet she does nothing to get free from the shackles of a male-dominated society.

The title *Roots and Shadows* is quite significant in this regard. Roots may represent the place of birth which gives a sense of roots or origin. These roots give us a sense of belongingness. Shadow is largely negative. It may stand for illusion, darkness, and pessimism. The protagonist of this novel, Indu, wants to come out of her traditional roots which become

bondage for her, and she keeps craving after shadows in search of freedom, peace, joy, identity. Unless Indu encounters her shadow, she doesn't understand the importance of roots.

Indu from her very tender age has always hated Akka for her narrow-mindedness. Indu rebels against the suffocating authority of Akka and the oppressive atmosphere of the family, where women have no choice but to 'submit' and 'accept' their sayings. An air of superiority hangs around her and everyone looks at her with astonishment. She may be called a 'New Woman' who has the desire to talk about anything and the liberty to question the nature and seriousness of matters related to her. To pursue her studies in Bombay, she leaves her home at the age of eighteen. She cannot tolerate the rigid atmosphere prevailing in the house.

Indu has been a very sensitive child since her childhood. Right from her childhood, it is dipped into Indu's mind by the women members of the family that she is a female and that she has to conform to the pattern of behavior expected of females. The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent for enforcing strict restrictions on her movements as soon as she reaches the age of puberty and as the girl matures, her mother's authority weighs more heavily upon her. Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

My womanhood..... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up "You are a woman now? Kaki had told me. You can have babies yourself. I a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone in to tell me, badly, underlie how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child's unselfconsciousness about our body, had for the first time, felt in immense hatred for it. You can't touch anyone or anything (79).

Defying the traditional role, she is expected to seek fulfillment in education and career. She works as a journalist for a woman's magazine but gives it up out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine. She marries Jayant, a man of different caste but her own choice, and leaves her parental home. In her very first meeting with Jayant, she is swept off her feet. She hopes that her marriage with Jayant, would enable her to realize the need "to belong" to be "wanted", "needed" and "loved" and as she desired the most primary. But she painfully realizes that she has walked into just another trap. Indu leaves her ancestral house and enters into another to be independent and complete but very soon, she realizes the fruits of her decision.

The realization of the need to conform for survival and the awareness that conformity is the great destroyer of selfhood and the only self that can be achieved is the self, born out of interpersonal relationships makes Indu cry out in agony. After marriage with Jayant, Indu yearns for her identity. She doesn't feel herself when she is with Jayant. Ultimately self-

realization dawns upon Indu. She realizes that she was running behind shadows leaving her roots far behind in the family and Jayant.” (85).

Towards the end of the novel, a different Indu emerges who no longer denies the fact that she is a woman. She takes independent decisions to spend money on family members that were given by Akka. It shows her self-assertion. She helps in Mini's wedding with that money. Now she is no more afraid of being a woman. She finally reaches her female phase where she realizes her inner strength.

Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict and that she has clung tenaciously to Jayant, top her marriage, not for love alone but because she is afraid of failure and she wants to show to word and her family that she is a success She resorts to deception by putting up a shade of happily married life which she fell has taken its toll on her personality.

When Indu is at the crossroads of her life with her sense of certainty, confidence, and assurance, she gets the opportunity to back to her ancestral home. to frustration and disappointment. Women are enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse and as a desire for sexual satisfaction, women are not ethically accepted. Finding her sexual personality repressed within her marital relationship Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an extramarital relationship with her cousin Naren.

I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happens between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don't need to erase anything I have done, she told herself (114).

This bold assertion of her and this open statement is shown by Deshpande to show how the quest for identity leads to a women's self-assertion. Perhaps by presenting Indu more deliberately, Shashi Deshpande answers the double storm clouds adopted in our society, where men will take the liberties of seeking sexual pleasure even though they are married. Indu experiences some of the freedom in her relationship with Naren. She feels a need to open up to him, and therefore she talks about herself and her failures. The newly acquired sense of freedom that Naren's friendship gives her makes her give in to natural impulses.

Deshpande portrayed Indu as an indomitable new woman as an educated and lives in close association with the society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. Indu wants to bid adieu to the monotonous service, but Jayant does not approve of it. Indu's self-alienation increases as she becomes aware of the conflicting demands made on her by her desire to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine impassiveness and her ambition to be a creative writer. Despite serving the family women's own emotional needs remain unfulfilled. Women are left with no choice in their lives. There is a shadow of male dominance over every aspect and facet

of their lives which moves towards their progress. Her life is acutely circumscribed. Womanhood restricts woman and puts her on the periphery. Indu loathes womanhood which is trusted upon a girl for its association with the idea of uncleanness. To assert her right to an independent existence, she longs to escape from the burden and responsibilities of womanhood. In an act of unreflecting defiance against patriarchy. She believes that woman should deprive herself of the satisfaction that comes from bearing a child. She does not believe in mothering

Through this novel, Shashi Deshpande is not only conscious of the problems and dilemmas of women but also tries to suggest a solution. Only a woman can break the age-old traditions and beliefs binding her feet with falter. Indu ultimately decides to do what she wants to. She decides to resign from the job and do the kind of writing she had dreamt of doing in her lifetime. Her quest for identity leads to her assertion where she diminishes all her shadow around her.

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