



WOMEN'S ASSERTION, REALIZATION AND FREEDOM IN THE NOVEL ROOTS AND SHADOWS BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's novels depict the anguish, agony and conflict of the modern, educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality and independence on the other. Roots and Shadow explores the inner self of Indu who symbolises the New woman who is educated and lives in close association with society brushing aside all its narrow convention. She has the freedom to talk about anything she likes and is also free to think of her own caged self besides politics, corruption. In the fiction, women seem to work within social restriction. The quest for individual identity is marked by the conflict between the inner and outer selves of the protagonist. The quest for self-realisation is marked by the protagonist's urge to be free

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Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande is a novel which explores the inner struggles of Indu, who represents a set of modern women who are educated and are very much in contact with the society, dealing with the critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. 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.

Indu comes back to her ancestral place from where she, against the wishes of her father and the other members of the family, had accepted so many years ago to get married to a person of her own choice. She comes back to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change though everybody is unaware of it. And the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu.

Indu has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be free and independent. But, now a number of questions come before her, which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not a true love. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wanted to show her family that she was a success. She goes back to her parent's home to find out the roots, but she finds the shadows instead. It becomes a time of reckoning for her. She thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage, her own marriage based on love, etc. After illuminating interactions with the varied personalities in her family, she works out their futures and also her own future. She decides to go back to find out her own home.

Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generation. Thus, the writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set-up. One set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya; and the other set is represented by Indu. The new generation (here represented by Indu) reviews everything with reason. Indu analyzes the ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve these. She tries to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But, unfortunately, in all her efforts, she fails miserably either due to the impact of the culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, or timidity or all these combined together.

Besides being an educated young woman, Indu is very sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become independent and complete in herself but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. She finds dominant Akka and her family to be a great hindrance to achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. When she studies in the college, Akka doesn't allow her to meet the boys and cultivate friendship with them. So, later on, Indu leaves the house and gets married to Jayant, who is her own choice. We find that she leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete, but ironically enough, soon she realizes the futility of her decisions: "*Jayant and I . . . I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize.*" (14).

Indu laughs at the idea of not calling one's husband by his name as it shortens the age of the husband. Later, she realizes that she too is not different from other women as she always wants Jayant to be with her. The only difference is her reason for thinking so. After she gets married, she does all the activities which her husband would like.



Perhaps, marriage has taught her the things like deception and artificial show all these bitter facts of losing her identity into her husband's frighten and scare her. The paradox of the situation is that she is not happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. She has achieved completeness with Jayant but she does not want this sort of completeness.

At one point in the novel when Naren tries to make love with her. She offers herself twice to Naren. And then the question haunts her how she will view the act of adultery. Immediately after the act, she goes to her own bed, but deliberately avoids sleeping as it would erase the intervening period and what happened between Naren and her. On the one hand, she does not take love-making as a sin or crime, but on the other hand, the very next day, she starts thinking of the enormity of what she had done. Indu tries to reason out each and every action. Her mind starts musing over the reasons for giving her body to Naren. And further, her mind on the matters of sin, crime, right and wrong can be seen as under.

Indu doesn't believe in love. To her there is no such thing as "love" in real life though it exists in books and movies. According to her "it is a big fraud." It is not the only thing in life. And if somebody believes in it, he or she is trapped and becomes humble and dependent. The concept of love is false for Indu, so Naren asks her what the truth is. At this her answer is:

The sexual instinct. . . That is true. The material instinct . . . that is true too. Self interest, self love . . . they are the basic truths, you remember Devdas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love, but I could have buked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God ! A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! How disgusting!. (173)

As a child she was always told to be obedient, submissive and unquestioning. She used to laugh and always thought that she would never try to show what she was not. But marriage changes everybody to her great shock and surprise, she found that Jayant had not only expected her to submit but had taken her submission for granted and she also, without being aware of it, submitted herself to him step by step in the name of love. When the realization came to her, she found it was not love but an adjustment as she never wanted conflict in her married life. As it was a love-marriage, she did not want to give any chance to her parents to blame her for the step taken by her. She wanted to prove her success.

Here, the writer has very rightly and minutely put forth the situation in which young modern women, who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join modernity, are entangled. According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one's own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. In the end, comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination. That alone can bring harmony in life. But, unfortunately, she herself has failed to do so either for fear of Failure or because of timidity. The very fact makes herself as a sinner, deceiver and becomes a cause of her sufferings.

Another ambition or ideal dream for Indu is to attain the state of detachment, loneliness and be perfect in herself. To achieve this she had made Naren her reference group. She always wanted to be like Naren – completely detached and non-involved. However, she wonders if she would ever reach the stage of no passions and ambitions and being satisfied. To her surprise, she finds herself involved and attached in many ways. She expects others to show concern for her so, she wishes that her parents invite them (Indu and Jayant) formally to their place though her father does not find it necessary to give a formal invitation. In the same way, she expects too much from Jayant which results in frustration; "I am grading expectations down. Each month, each day, I expect lass and less and less from . . . why can't I compromise for what he can give . . . deep affection, yes; total, absolute commitment."(61)

Indu just burns in anger as what she expected to hear was that Jayant was pining for love. Similarly, when Naren says that he is going back to his work, the word going disturbs her and she feels like a deserted abandoned child. She feels very much attached to Naren as she thinks that it is only Naren who has achieved the state of detachment. Indu longs to be detached and independent but to no avail. She feels ashamed of herself when she does not see the things in a practical form. She tells Naren: "I am still and dead. And now when you tried to kiss me, I thought . . . this is Jayant. So that's all I'm, Naren. Not a pure woman. Not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it."(192)

On the one hand. She is ashamed of her not being a pure woman, but on the other hand, she hates her womanhood. She stops working for the woman magazine. In fact, she started hating and fighting against the womanhood since the day she was made aware of her being a woman by the elder women in the family. The thrusting-upon attitude by the society in general and the family members in particular has made her more rebellious and aggressive. She looks at each situation from the same angle. Even at the idea of love which she herself initiates, after experiencing some of her married life, she looks down at marriage as a trap. Indu struggles hard to understand the life in reality, the actual cause which is destroying her married life. She feels that



her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance is being destroyed in the presence of Jayant. And when she talks of such feelings to him, he would call it only 'nonsense' and never bothers to understand what she really wanted, what her feelings are. She toys with the idea of leaving Jayant when she sees that there is no real understanding between them.

But then again her questioning mind questions as to why she is in a confused state of mind. This is the main trouble with Indu. She is willing to wound but afraid to strike. As a result of this, instead of leaving Jayant, she goes back to him with the vain hope that the things will change.

One can see her failure as her new efforts are also rooted in dishonesty. Indu's mind is torn between two extremes. On the one hand, she is so attached to her parental house that the house and the voice, the sounds, the smells and the members of the house have become a part and parcel of her life; and on the other hand the house turns out to be a caged place, a trap and the family a large amorphous group of people with conflicting interests. She is always in a confused state of mind and struggling with the situations to reach a final solution.

Thus Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West. There was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a 'Pativrata, a Sati' and something which has to be protected by man, but now she is a changed person who is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Indu represents this woman. And now the question before the society is whether to reject and condemn her or to encourage and cooperate with her in her efforts to establish a new image.

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