

Feminist perspective in Shashi Deshpande's roots and shadows

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Abstract

Present paper deals with feminist perspective in Shashi Deshpande's novel roots and shadows

Keywords: Feminist, Shashi Deshpande, roots and shadows

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is quite late in the development of the twentieth century English literature. Women are always oppressed, suppressed and marginalized by men. They have been ill-treated and exploited in all walks of life. After independence, many Indian women novelists have raised their voice against the exploitation of women. Among these women writers appear the names of Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and so on.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in the post-colonial Indian women writers in English. She was influenced by her father Adya Rangachar who was the distinguished Kannada writer. She was also influenced by the literary works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw. Her novels are women oriented like Jane Austen and deals with "Women's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as human being" [1].

As a contemporary author, Deshpande presents the realistic picture of the male-dominated middle class society of India. Her protagonists are caught between the tradition and modernity but they try to strike a balance between the two. Deshpande is very realistic in the sense that suggests marriages are not based on love but convenience.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the novel *Roots and Shadows* from the feminist perspective. It discovers the pain and suffocation of the protagonist Indu in the male-dominated society. She tries to escape from this to find her real 'self', but every time she is deceived. After a long time and much introspection her journey ends with the realization that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots behind.

Indu lives in a joint family with her Kaka's (Uncle) and Atya's. She is brought to this house when she was only fifteen days old child. In this house 'Akka' her father's Atya is a dominant person. She rules over the house. Akka came to this house as a childless widow with her property and old uncle.

As a girl child in their joint family, Indu always taught to be

obedient, submissive, meek and unquestioning. Indu is an educated modern Indian woman who has her own way of living. She is torn between tradition and patriarchy and rebels against the conventions and gets married to Jayant whom she loves at the age of eighteen. From this point of marriage, her life is filled with deceptions and disillusionments.

Indu leaves her house to be free, independent and complete. She wants to show her family members that she is a modern and successful woman. Indu gets shattered seeing the so called modern image of her husband, Jayant. She realises that like any other man, Jayant expects her to conform to his views, while he remains immune to adjustments. Her idea of being complete vanishes after her marriage. After this deception and disillusionment, she went back into the conventional ways of life. She behaves like the traditional Indian wife. She says:

"Marriage makes me so dependent. When I look in 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. 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." [2].

Indu forgets her identity by becoming his traditional wife. Women are always recognized by a relationship like Kaku and Kaki, Atya and Vahini, Aji and Mami, have they no independent identity of their own? Indu makes adjustment in the name of love but she understands that she has actually deceiving herself. Reddy [3] quotes:

"Her hard-won independence seems only one ephemera when she honestly questions herself if she is indeed independent. Under the guise of independence, the rebel in her had conditioned herself to become as submissive as any other Indian wife."

Indu works as a journalist but is not satisfied with her job. She wants to go for creative writing but Jayant was not ready for that. In her professional life also, Indu has to curtail her freedom and submits to the dictates of the editor, Indu stifles her conscience and leaves her middle class values behind. She submits herself in the name of love but she realises that it is not love but adjustment. Her husband's nature compels her to hide her true 'self' from him:

"I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage." [2].

In such situations, Indu is summoned by her grand aunt Akka who is now lying on her death-bed. After ten years Indu went to her ancestral house. Akka was dead making Indu as her heir. For the last ritual of Akka every family member came there. Indu realizes many things in her stay with that ancestral house. Due to her

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confused state of mind, she enters into the physical relationship with Naren, Old Uncle's grandson. In their childhood they were friends. Indu liked Naren's free way of living. Naren says:

"I didn't want to belong. I didn't want to be envied. I didn't want to be admired. I just wanted to live the way I felt like, the way I desired." [2].

Indu likes his detachment, his completeness and wants to live like him. Again Indu offers herself twice to Naren. But later she feels guilty due to the old Sanskar and she resents it. Such behaviour of Indu shows her split personality being cultured middle class educated women. Indu is a woman, who initially loved Jayant but by inviting Naren in her life, cheating her husband Jayant. She wants to be free from all this, but she finds herself involved in marital life. She expresses her confused state of mind before Naren:

"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." [2].

Indu is always in a confused state of mind. She wants to escape from the burden and responsibilities of womanhood. She thinks that marriage is a trap. Meanwhile, she receives the letter from her husband Jayant. He wants her to forget all the family bonds and come back to his home. Old Uncle tries to clear the confusion in her mind. According to him, it is unavoidable, unavoidable, inevitable because the whole world is made up of inter-dependent parts. He says-

"If all the bacteria in the world were to die, the rest of the life would be unable to exist." [2].

Indu is fully attached to her ancestral house and also to her husband, Jayant. On the one hand that house and the members of the house have become a part and parcel of her life; and on the other hand she can't live without Jayant. Sandhu [4] quotes:

"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."

One morning she receives the news of Naren's death. Naren was dead like his parents by drowning. Indu took the decision to sold

that house and also to pay for Mini's wedding. At last that house was sold to Shankarappa. Now, she came to know that that ancestral house had been a trap, binding her to past. After selling of the house, Indu says:

"Yes, the house had been a trap, too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now, I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself." [2].

Ultimately, she realises that she has been chasing shadows leaving her roots in Jayant. She regards marriage as a trap and not as a bond of love. Now, she realises that we, can't escape from attachment as it is the law of life. Finally shadows disappears from her vision and she sees the clear light of day with the realization of her real 'self'. This is the perfect and practical realization and balance between tradition and modernity. Bhatnagar [5] comments for the end of the novel.

"Thus, Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing idea and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude."

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