



INDIAN EDUCATED WOMEN'S PERSISTING IMPEDIMENTS: A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

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ABSTRACT:

*The modern Indian women emerge with some new hopes and aspirations. They are trying to assert and ascertain their rights as human beings and have determined to fight for gaining equal treatment with men. The most important achievement of these modern women is their awakening into a new realization of their place and position in family and society. They are conscious of their capabilities and limitations. Before marriage, they are brought up in traditional families having mediocre financial status. So they are forced to face many obstacles to pursue education and career. After marriage, they are grabbed in the crossroad of tradition and modernity—that of a working woman and a housewife. Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* confirms the sensitive and serious condition of Indian women created out of the mean and malevolent of the society through Indu, the protagonist and other women characters of the novel.*

KEYWORDS: *Drab, Drudgery, Exploitation, Constraints of tradition.*

INTRODUCTION :

Some Indian women novelists in English have been honestly highlighting feminist movements, thoughts and theories along with women's own weaknesses and complexes. They are different from men novelists because their "experiences are different" in a sense that they "inhabit different worlds" and they try to "recreate" their worlds "through their creative imaginations"¹. Their writings "present detailed accounts of women's emotions, ideas and preoccupations"².

Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent Indian women novelists in English who has been mentoring the task of making women as well as society aware of myriad man-made and cancerous social mores by which women are being thrust into the drab and drudgery of exploitation. Shashi Deshpande's novels transparently portray the concrete and practical realities of day-to-day human existence, specially that of a woman from a woman's point of view. She neither feels limited nor gets restricted to proclaim to be a woman writer. In an interview with Sue Dickman she pointed out, "I am a woman, and I do write about women, and I am going to say it loudly"³.

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the fact that the horizon of Indian woman's scope has extended beyond the confines of her home and family. However, some changes are found in the attitude of the

woman herself. She has got an access to education and exposure outside the family. She tends to realize herself as an individual and her importance as a human being is not less than that of a man which is “most vulnerable to any intruding and corroding influence”⁴. She has got an access to education and exposure outside the family.

Shashi Deshpande’s also exhibit show Indian middle-class women are being victims in their family and society though they are modern educated and career-oriented. Mukta Atrey and Vinay Kirpal observe: Shashi Deshpande depicts the anxiety of the educated, independent, middle-class Indian woman searching for a balance between her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother in a predominantly patriarchal society, and her newfound sense of self and longing for freedom and private space.⁵

Roots and Shadows, the first novel to be written by Shashi Deshpande, has both strength and intensity to make Indu, the protagonist, emerge as a modern woman in a quest for personhood and fulfilment. Nowadays, when change has been the new tradition, women are getting highly educated and demanding freedom for their marriage and choice of profession. Indu appears to be intelligent and sensitive. She releases herself from the constraints of tradition with a hope to obtain an autonomous self. She marries Jayant at her own will by flying in the face of her family. In the early days of marriage, she acquiesces in her married life. She confesses, “I had become complete. I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding. Perfect communication”.⁶

Subsequently, she realizes that marriage is merely an adjustment rather than a real involvement. She admits, “And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But, can perfect understanding ever exist?” (RS 115) She seeks an escape from family relationships, but discovers gradually how relationships are the roots of the one’s being and follow one like so many shadows. In conversation with Naren, she becomes tenderly emotional to say, “Can I just put down the burden and walk away, Naren, I can’t. This is my family. These are my people” (RS 159). She was completely demoralized and felt entangled with the regulatory ties of her Akka-dominated family life, but she now finds her life with Jayant in the shadows of repression and regression as she sheds “bits of” herself “along the way” (RS 159). So, she, in the presence of Naren, exclaims: “And I thought...I have got away. But to what, Naren? To what I have got away? Is that any better than this? Is there no more to life than this? Are we doomed to living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape?” (RS 160)

She has become aware of being trapped in her traditional role and now she dares to question her subordination and inferior status. She is caught in the dilemma when she elevates herself to cope with her new role of breadwinner as she is urged to do so to meet the increasing financial requirements of the family. Simultaneously, she is expected to leave no lacuna with her traditional role of wife and mother. As Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows*, expounds:

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. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. (RS 158)

Apart from Indu's predicament, the novel has focused on so many serious women's issues like Akka's nightmarish experience owing to her husband's ceaseless lust when she was "a girl of thirteen" and "there was no escape from husband then" (RS 170); the dowry as a deterrent in Indu's cousin Padmini's marriage as "everything clicks, there's the dowry hurdle (RS 51); overbearing of gender discrimination and Indu gets fed up with the strong inclination of her family members towards sons so much that she once envisages "If I had been a son...." (RS 163).

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the logical culmination of our conventions pursued by us for years now that the culture of treating women second to men and the ethos of gender discrimination have their roots in our tradition and religion. She has expounded these facts through her novels like a rap over the knuckles. She knows that, though her writings cannot provide reassuring sustenance to these deep-rooted problems, they can guide and inspire. Truly, hers is "socially committed writing, as it comes out of a concern for the human predicament"⁷.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Shashi Deshpande, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Penguin books, 2003), p. 144.
2. Nirmala Prakash, "From Feminine to Feminist Consciousness: Shashi Deshpande's *The Stone Women*", in Basavraj Naikar eds. *Indian English Literature: Vol. III* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002), p. 232.
3. Sue Dickman, "An Interview with Shashi Deshpande", *Ariel*, Vol. 29, No.1 (January, 1998), p. 133.
4. A. K. Awasthi, "The Quest For Identity in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande" in R. S. Pathak eds. *The Quest for Identity in Indian English Writing Part I: Fiction* (New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1992), p. 95.
5. Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal, *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1998), p. 13.
6. Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1996), pp. 114-115. All subsequent references to this novel are given parenthetically with abbreviation as RS and the concerned page numbers.
7. Shashi Deshpande, "The Power Within", in Jasbir Jain eds. *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing*. (New Delhi: pencraft International, 2000), p. 212.