**Abtract**

The Roots and Shadows explore the struggle of Indu, who is an educated and modern girl. She comes to her paternal home for the funeral ceremony of Akka. She has been determined girl, who always wanted to be free and independent. She got married to Jayant her own choice like Saru. Indu is a modern girl, she laughs at the idea of not calling one’s husband by his name as it shortens the age of husband.

ShashiDeshpande is undoubtedly the most significant of the contemporary Indian novelists in English. She has taken for study the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. Almost her protagonists are women; her heroine are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. She is one with Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal. She is not merely describing the pathetic life styles of Indian women but, trying to understand and suggest measure for amelioration. ShashiDeshpande is very recent author in Indian writing in English. Her contribution to the world of fiction dates back to the 70s. Initially she wanted to bring forth in her novels the changed society, but she is too much fascinated by her women characters’ so much that she lays more emphasis on women. She herself says that she knows how women feel and she knows the mood of India.

**Introduction**

The present study explores the rules and regulations of the traditional Indian middle class families. It tells the reader how a girl struggles for her survival in her own house. It is a genuine problem of Indian families. Girls are used to fight for their education, rights, marriage and so on with their family and society. Here Indu represents as a modern educated girl who can fight and win in her own life and how she is different from other girl child of her home.

ShashiDeshpande occupies a niche of her own in the later part of the 20th century. She is known for her lucid and simple narration. Her language is simple and elegant. She is known for writing a simple story depicting the struggle of the individual to live in the society despite several forces suppressing his survival. Being an author of the recent past, Deshpande reflects a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class woman. The predominating issues and terms in her novels arise from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from traditional to modern. In consequence, there are tensions emerging out of this scenario, wherein the Indian woman is caught.

Comparatively, ShashiDeshpande is newer the scene of Indian English writing. However, despite the smaller volume of her writing work has drawn attention because of her detailed, sensitive, and realistic representation of the Indian middle class women in the domestic sphere. In her novels, the predominating issues and themes have emerged from the situations. It focuses on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from the conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tension in which the Indian woman is caught in a transitional world.

Deshpande, being the author of 70s and 80s, understands the women well, and has tried to project the realistic picture of the middle class educated women, who are finically independent. She portrays modern educated women who are sensitive to changing time and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities, to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in their search from freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Conscious of the predicament of a woman is not economically independent. The author presents her woman as daring to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds them caught in a conflict between individual aspirations and social demands. Her women protagonist ‘Indu’ in Roots and Shadows and ‘Jaya’ In That Long Silence, being women writers are torn between self-expressions and social stigmas, material and psychology. As Maria Mies observes:-

“Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and demand of the social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and the lack of opportunity” (1)

ShashiDeshpande’s women stand at the cross-roads of tradition. They seek change but within the culture norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alone with dignity and self-respect. Her women protagonists are from the middle class society. Her concern for women and their oppression is reflected strongly in all her writings. The reason of Deshpande choosing the middle class woman might be (a) her own background is the hail from a middle class family; (b) she is preoccupied with the social forces at work in society; the clash between the old and the new; between idealism on protagonism; and (c) the middle class woman represents a larger part of the contemporary Indian society.
Generally, there are two types of role played by women characters in Indian fiction, i.e. conventional and unconventional, both the types suffer in one way or the other. The woman in Shashi Deshpande’s novels is initially an unconventional one, but death is not the way out for her. They are aware of their identity and against tradition but at last they compromise with existing reality. Their lives do not exactly veer “that...-...-...ve faithfully. This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had not known it......that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant....and lost the ability of be alone.”(2)

Traditionally, in the Hindu marriage the position of husband and wife is clearly defined. The husband is expected to be the authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the life of the wife. The wife should regard him as her master and should serve faithfully. This is the traditional concept of Hindu marriage. But Indu is modern and educated girl, she doesn’t want to be this traditional value.

The Indian tradition considers the marriage ceremony as one in which the husband and wife become one however ‘that one is the husband’. In an Indian marriage it is understood that the wife will merge her name, personality, life style and in fact, her entire life into that of the husband.

Mini another woman character of Indu’s house perceives her husband’s house as her final abode and her husband as an oracle. The Indian women have been accepting their husbands with their flaws and trying to live up to their desires and demands by transforming and molding themselves. Their predecessors act as archetypes for them. They absorb the trends set by them which dictate the feminine qualities to be performed by women. Although these feminine qualities are imposed on them yet they find it difficult to free themselves from its bondage. Indu analyzes: What choices do I have, Indu?

She asked me, resuming her snipping [...] Millions of girls asked this question millions of times in this country. (3)

Roots and Shadows also present another facet of deprived womanhood through the character Akka who is the youngest sister of Indu’s grandfather. Akka had become the victim of the evils of patriarchal practices. At the age of twelve she got married to a man who was much older than her. Child marriage stifles her childhood which expounds to her the real trauma of being a girl. Her soul of a child whither when she has to tolerate the scathing and bestial sexual advances of her husband. Narmada-Atya narrates about panic-stricken Akka trying to escape her husband’s brutality:

“But I heard that twice she tried to run away [...] a girl of thirteen. Her mother-In-law I heard, whipped her for that and locks her up for three days. Starved Her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband’s room. The child, they said, cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, ‘Lock me up again, lock Me up’. But there was no escape from a husband then. I remember her telling Me before my own marriage was consummated, ‘Now your punishment begins, Narmada’. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.’”(4)

Akka’s story is an example of the suffering of a girl undergoes due to traditional evils like child marriage at the age of twelve to a man thrice her age and size: Akka becomes a victim of his lust. She fails to satisfy his fondness of woman and like feudal lords he had a number of mistresses. Akka’s attempt to escape her nightly tortures by running away from home is foiled by mother-in-law who caught her and beat her up. In spite of being locked for days without food Akka would beg her mother-in-law in vain not to send her back to her husband’s room. Through Akka’s condition Deshpande brings out the brutish treatment of woman especially young girls in the name of tradition, which compelled a wife to please her husband, no matter how brutal he was to her. She highlights the Indian tradition, which had denied a woman any right over her own body and made her a victim of marital rape. As a result of such inhuman conditions, Akka begins to view sex as a punishment.

Women like Indu can neither express themselves nor choose for themselves. They can neither love nor hate but be content with ‘the gift of silence’ (5) that marriage had brought them. But Indu is modern girl; she wants to express her grief, problems and want to get rid from situation. In silence, Indu pines for love almost frantically,

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.(6)

Indu, like Saru experiences disillusionment in sex and fall a victim of ‘sexual paralyses. This silent sexual humiliation leads Indu to have extra marital relationship with Naren. This is the second step to express her self-autonomy and modernity. Indu seeks freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. Indu
laughs at the idea of ‘love’. “I love a book, a word, or a sari, a curry, a dog, a child, a man.” (7) When Naren asks her what the truth is, she answers: ‘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 shocked when he dies for love, but I could have bucked. A grown man moaning and crying for love.God; how disgusting could have bucked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God; how disgusting.”(8).

Indu strives for expression and modernism through an extra-marital affair 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 happened 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, I told myself in a fit of bravado.”(9).

Indu’s musings on life and fine her problems also reveal the truth that she has been running after shadows (illusion) in search of happiness, and that the sources of her unhappiness id her roots (tradition). She has been told since her childhood about her role in life as a female.

As for love Indu doesn’t believe in it. To her there is no such thing as love at least in real life. Of course it may exist in books and movies. According to her ‘it is a big fraud’; it is not ‘the real life’. And if one believes in such statements, he or she gets trapped and becomes humble and dependent. She realises that love has no place in the world; they see only deceit, treachery and hypocrisy. She also sees that sex become a symbol of power and authority and marriage.

Even in the second world of autonomy she thinks the extra-marital relationship is false, deceptive and is leading. She begins to understand that marriage has failed to satisfy her hunger for total independence. Marriage demands enormous sacrifice from woman and in that sacrifice she cannot express herself to be totally free and independent. In fact, a fresh bondage begins. In this way, Indu becomes self-disillusioned in marriage and extra-marital relationship. Indu’s quest for completeness turns out to be her quest for meaning for self and life. Perhaps marriage has taught her things like deception and pretentious show. Consequently, Indu learns to repress her sexual desire to maintain the status quo in her marriage. While Jayant effectively desexualizes Indu in refusing to accept her sexual personality and indirectly moulds her identity according to his prescriptions.

Sex is supposed to be a pleasurable activity. But in a situation where the woman is merely an object of the man’s gratification, is forcibly violated, or is disallowed self-expression during lovemaking, the chances of her being sexually abused are great. For the Indian woman, it is often a common experience. The taboos surrounding any discussion of sex also make it impossible for her to talk about it (even with her husband) or to seek counsel.

“It is socially acceptable that within the family the man is the master and the woman is the inferior and the subordination partner. Social pressure force women to maintain this status quo. A woman who does not accept the traditional role of submissiveness and subordination needs to be ‘advisor’ or ‘tamed’ into accepting this position, and any means including violence is justified in achieving this goal.”(10).

A woman’s role is not only confined to the centripetal needs of the family in which she lives but also to its centrifugal needs. It is here that a woman has to be more than a submissive housewife. She has to become a ‘society lady’, as Shobha De would put it. But Induis different she does not pride in her suffering. She cannot bear the suffering she has to face in the family and therefore breaks away from it and marries Jayant. In the family she was an incomplete being, without a sense of the wholeness of personality. But with Jayant she feels a sense of completion and wholeness.

I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And Jayant I thought I had found the other part of my whole self. (11)

Indu is interested in creative writing-a means to articulate her modern voice and thinking to forge moments in art that are arresting and original. To this Jayant says ‘No’ because they need money and they have a long way to go. It is the authoritative husband who has the final say in this regard and not a meekly submissive wife like her. O. P. Bhatnagar rightly remarks:

…..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 male-dominated society. (12)

Through the character of Indu, Deshpande has portrayed the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potential for creative writing. Indu wants to bid adieu to her monotonous service but her husband, Jayant, does not approve of this idea. He is a barrier to her feminine urge for self-expression since he believes that a person like Indu can do nothing against the whole system by wielding her pen:

What can one person do against the whole system? No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go. (13)

Indu rebels against the suffocating and traditional authority of Akka, and the oppressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit and accept their lot. Right from her childhood, it is denned into Indu’s mind by the women members of the family that she as a female and that she has to conform to the pattern of behaviour expected of female, but Indu resents this:“As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning.” (14)

The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent in 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 cruelly the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

My womanhood,…, I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been trust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. “You’re a woman now”, Kaki had told me. “You can have babies yourself.” I, a woman?………you can’t touch anyone or anything. (15)
She starts fighting her womanhood, she hates the utter femininity of the girl’s hostel where she resides, and narrates the incidents that reveal the tactlessness of her relatives in that period of traumatic, pubertal transitions. The idea that her body is unclean has been planted in her mind. Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Simone De Beauvoir observes:

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on. (16).

Indu has all the qualities of a Modern Indian woman. She has the fighting spirit and wants to justify her modernity. She hopes she can be her whole self again by being away from him and living by herself. She says: “Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again.” (17).

Indu the protagonist is a Modern, Educated and Working woman. She wants to lead her life according to her will. She breaks traditional wall and value of her family by her strong will power. She differs from Narmada Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda and Kaku who follow tradition as the virtue. They strongly believe in age-old conventions and practices. She also differs from Mini who though educated, lacks will power and hence, sacrifices her individuality. Though Mini is deeply aware of her peculiar position, she makes no efforts to come out of the tangles of the society and be independent. Indu, on the other hand, rebels against the narrow conventions and more particularly, the tyrannical authority of Akka on matters of education, love and marriage. She reacts: “…there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate, and for her it is ‘A declaration of independence’.” (18).

Defying the traditional role she is expected to play but Indu seeks 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. As Indu explains the reason for shift:

Women, women, women…..I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn’t go on. (19)

Indu strives to seek a new environment where nobody, especially people like Akka, can exercise their wills on her. She marries Jayant, a man of different cast but of her own choice and leaves her parental home. In her very first meeting with Jayant, she is swept off her feet. He gives her a feeling of solidarity and certainty.

Indu is brought up in a family where tradition under the patriarchal roof is strongly supported and straying from it is considered a treacherous act. On the contrary, since education and modernity are slowly creeping into the younger generation, especially among the people like Indu, tradition is anathema to them. Kaka tells Indu, “…elders were to be feared, respected, and obeyed. We used to sit up when we went out;…..You youngsters now…you’re a different breed altogether.” (20) Indu knows how women in the patriarchal social set-up are subjected to ill-treatment and humiliation and how the situation becomes even worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widowhood is forcibly thrust and violation of the set rules condemns the woman’s life to the position of outcasts.

She refuses to be a mother of a child, though she acknowledges the truth of the maternal instinct. She does not welcome a child wholeheartedly. Her non-real marriage and no-real love makes her feel trapped in a negative situation as it starts to shatter her positive struggle to be independent for selfhood and intellectual liberation.

According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to one self in speech as well as in action. Indu realizes her position in her ancestral house; the responsibilities, fears and frustrations do not touch her. The turmoil and distaste that had filled her slowly begin to seep out of her. She is viewed as an assertive woman with an emerging new self. Though Naren’s preaching of detachment, she is able to rebuild her lost vision. She suddenly realizes what she lacks, “I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage.” (21)

The novel pictures the agony and suffocation experienced by Indu in a male dominated and tradition-bound society. Indu lands herself in great mental trauma when she refuses to play the straight jacketed role of a wife, imposed upon her by the society. She represents any woman placed in transitional period who is torn between age old traditions and individual views. She is fully aware that these bonds are unreasonable and yet she wants to be bound by them as the typical traditional woman. She knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realizes that it would be an act of wisdom to keep the traditional family ties without losing her individuality. She is the real face of modernity.

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[20] Ibid. p. 46.

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