



STRUGGLE IN THE FEMALE LIVES IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

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ABSTRACTS

Shashi Deshpande is a renowned name in Indian English Writing for feministic concern. She exposes middle class women protagonist with great details successfully like Sarita, Urmila, Indu, Jaya, Sumi, Kalyani and Manjiri. She reflects upon sufferings and struggles of women in male dominated patriarchal society. Her protagonists never withdraw but struggle hard for their self identity, self realization and emancipation in life.

The present research paper reveals the suffering of three women i.e. Protagonist Indu, Akka and Mini. The present novel projects the dilemma of preference between family and profession for educated woman protagonist Indu. The novel also deals with the search for self- identity, familial and profession crises, unhappy extra-marital affairs and the final realization. The present novel also portrays the struggle of another female character Akka and immense suffering of Mini before marriage.

Roots and Shadows has two groups of woman. The old generation was represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra kaki, Kamla kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya and Mini while protagonist Indu was the facade of new generation.

Roots and Shadows is a thought provoking novel. Novelist Nayantara Sahgal tackles many themes through this novel. The novel revolves around the theme of search for self identity. Protagonist Indu is constantly engaged throughout the novel about her identity.

Key Words: *Career Oriented female characters, Search for individual self identity, trap of marriage, lack of communication, emotional suffering.*



Introduction:

The novel inspects social norms and expectations on individuals. Protagonist Indu undergoes the societal pressures much. This pressure works through the gender roles and societal constraints. It puts the limitations on Indu's growth as an individual and on her freedom.

The present novel talks on traditional silence of women and her passive existence. It further presents the pre-marital difficulties in a girl's life, issue of marriage and helplessness of woman.

Novel is a manifestation of male supremacy and trap of marriage. Dominant husband Jayant dominates the married life, took her granted most of the time. He is more practical and less emotionally attached with wife Indu.

Protagonist Indu faces problem of being disliked since childhood. Her father Govind arranges an inter-caste marriage against the wish of family members. He opposes the family and started his new life. After the death of his wife, he leaves daughter Indu at the mercy of the same family members and forgot his duties. Indu wonders of how can her father part from her while she was a fifteen-days-old motherless baby. She guesses of her being a girl was a big reason.

Protagonist Indu's suffers mainly on emotional ground. She grows in Akka's strict supervision after father walk off. Being the eldest family member, Akka keeps a watch on all family members and forced them for morally correct behaviour. She dislikes the friendship of male and female. She restricts Indu to meet any boy and have conversation. The traditional group of women of her family carves on her mind the importance of being obedient and to accept every situation without questioning.

Protagonist Indu believes in individuality. She asserts her distinctiveness time to time before marriage. She is not scared under the pressure of Akka. She puts her straight forward thoughts in front of family members time to time. She selects Jayant from other caste and marries him stubbornly in spite of oppose of Akka and other family members. She wants to get away from conservative thoughts of family members.



Protagonist Indu has no psychological satisfaction and marriage fails to complete her desire. It is merely an illusion of happy married life but largely it turns out a trap for her. She needs approval of husband in almost everything.

Protagonist Indu is educated and working woman and her thinking is affected by the western thoughts of feminism. But she is aware after 10 years of married life that those overseas developed thoughts about women were not accepted by Indian community. She is largely criticized on calling husband by his name. She resists such superstition while being representative of the new generation. She enquires Akka fearlessly about the connection between husband's span of life and calling him by name.

Indu never could connect husband Jayant on emotional line as he is very practical. He does not indulge in the world of imaginary books and arts. He lives modern way but his behaviour has the roots of patriarchal society. He doesn't like Indu's writing about women's problem and questioning about traditional norms.

Protagonist Indu has ardent passion for love but husband Jayant is shocked of it and put her off and turns away from her. It reveals the harsh realities about the basic needs of women. Women are shy enough to disclose their basic needs. They have to hide it from society and even from the closest life partner. This creates hurdles for proper communication between husband and wife. Protagonist Indu fails in marital life due to lack of communication with husband.

Husband Jayant takes her granted in everything and does not offer her independent life. He is not interested even in children. He avoids talking about the topics and asks her to wait for children till they get well settled economically. It unsettles protagonist Indu on emotional ground.

He also forces her to continue job despite her lacking interest there. Husband Jayant first thinks of influencing Indu's decision about continuing job. Jayant loses his head after realizing his failure.

Protagonist Indu makes certain changes in her likes and dislikes as per the opinion of husband. After all, she has to succumb to the pressure of existing conditions to avoid quarrels and to have peace in her married life.



Protagonist Indu finds double standard of men in concern of physical needs. Akka's husband expects her to remain faithful but he sought pleasure outside the marriage. He even desires to bring another woman in house but parents' pressure restricted him. Novelist Shashi Deshpande reveals the double attitude of the society. The society expects sacrifice and compromise from woman in married life. She has to follow all the code of conduct of society but husband is left at his will. He can behave as per his wish. He is not answerable to anyone.

Protagonist Indu stops believing in love. She realizes the futility of love feeling. She makes a way to her frustration through Naren through illegal relations with him.

Protagonist Indu visualizes happy married life but even the 10 years big span kept her unsatisfied. Indu is afraid of loneliness. It is psychological fear of loneliness. She feels scared and emotionally unsettled. She cannot imagine her life without husband. She accepts the subordinating position in married life and tries to please him as the most Indian women do. It is one type of adjustment to keep the life going.

Protagonist Indu tries to save the life of Mini. The ups and down in her own life does not pervade her from helping others for their better life. She pays to Mini's marriage as per the wish of Akka and saves Mini's parents from worries but she also attempts to persuade her parents at her best to stop the marriage. She speaks to Mini not to marry with the choice of parents.

Protagonist Indu is economically well settled but the patriarchal and traditional set up she grew in does not allow her to settle down on emotional ground. She aspires to be free and self defendant life despite her love to husband although she finds no escape route through her sentimental connection to husband and family.

Novel also deals with a note of compromise. The way Indu finally decides to get back to Jayant to save her married life and gives priority to the peace of family is highly representative of the Indian culture and values.

Another dominant figure in *Roots and Shadows* is Akka. Novelist Shashi Deshpande portrays strong willed female who improved her own conditions and later ruled over the entire house. Akka is rich and childless. She was married at the age of 12 with 30 years young man. She faces lots of hurdles in her married life at the initial



periods like sexual harassing and tormenting by husband. Akka has many miscarriages as a result of less attention on health and her mother- in- law made her life very hard. Childless Akka is exploited on emotional ground and suffers with insult and physical injuries. Her husband develops affair with a woman after 20 years of their marriage. He desires to bring her home but fear of Akka's mother- in- law blocks him from doing that. But Akka never raises any questions and never thinks of any revolt. She suffers everything noiselessly.

Akka takes care of husband for 2 years during his illness after a stroke of paralysis. She performs her duty of a dutiful wife with sincerity. Meanwhile, she does not allow that woman to meet husband. She takes her revenge very firmly. Akka illustrates a new and confident after the death of husband. After husband's death, she returns at her parents' home and imposes serious code of conduct of behaviour for everyone.

Novel demonstrates the psychological conditions and plight before the marriage of girl through Mini. She is cousin of protagonist Indu. She is orthodox. She has no aim other than marriage, husband, kitchen and children. She dedicates her life for family and manages the responsibility of house chores at early age. She shows interest in house chores and other traditional qualities of woman since childhood.

Father and uncle are not able to find appropriate bridegroom for her. She feels blameworthy for her physical appearance. Many have discarded her. She feels responsible for the difficulty of father and uncle while searching a proper match for her.

Arranging marriage is a very complex process in Indian community. Mini's parents face these pre marital difficulties. The present novel talks on traditional silence of women and her passive existence. It further presents the pre-marital difficulties in a girl's life, issue of marriage and helplessness of woman. Bhatnagar O. P. analyses in his article "Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in Roots and Shadows": "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 the family, with the male world and the society in general" (Bhatnagar 118).



Mini is not happy with the proposal of less educated and mentally challenged groom but ready for family members. Protagonist Indu understands this and tries to take out a solution. She tries to convince Mini's father Anant about the age difference and Mini's unexpressed psychology. But father Anant is stubborn about his choice. Novelist brings to light the social problem of dowry. Protagonist Indu even talks to Mini and convince her. She says: "But Mini... marriage is.... It means living with a man. You have to listen to him, endure his habits, his smell, his touch, his likes, his dislikes. You have to sleep with him, bear him children. Can you do all that with this man?" (RAS 137). But Mini doesn't listen her.

Mini respects the efforts of uncle and father of groom hunting. She desires to save them from difficult circumstances of running exhaustedly. Marriage is her ultimate aim without considering anything. Mini agrees for marriage only to decrease the suffering of parents. She says: "Any man, Indu? Yes, any man. Any man who says 'yes'. You don't know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-Kaka running around after eligible men. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with a message, 'It doesn't match.'" (138-139).

Conclusion

Novelist Shashi Deshpande shows that girl neither belongs to parents' house nor husband's. She is denied everywhere. *Roots and Shadows* presents the premarital problems for parents and psychological conditions of a girl very artistically. Mini catches the attention for her consideration of parents while in general girls are dreaming for their princes. The dowry problem is still a problem and headache in middle class. The spoonful parents are economically strong but rest of the parents like Ananta has to compromise with the future of their daughters. Novelist presents post marital problems for woman. Marriage turns out trap for protagonist Indu. It stops her professional growth. Her troubles are immense to feel guilty for being woman and not man. She feels like a caged animal, helpless and finds no escape route.

Novelist Shashi Deshpande shows the more need of conversation in husband and wife for mutual cooperation and bars the old traditional methods where both used to meet only in darkness of the night. She expresses that woman need not to submit herself and shed her 'I' like renowned females. If women believe on their capabilities,



they will have many opportunities in this democratic set up. The sky would be no limit for their growth. Just what they need is to adjust the present and look for better future. The end of novel is confirmatory. Protagonist Indu returns to husband with the hope of better future and with determination of her writing career.

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