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IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE FICTION OF SHASHI DESHPANDE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO "ROOTS AND SHADOWS"

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande the daughter of famous Sanskrit scholar Adya Shriranga is a promising writer in the history of Indian English Literature. She bagged many awards for her credit. She won Thirumathi Rangamalai Prize for the novel *Roots and Shadows* in the year 1982-83. She becomes the inner voice for convoluted, self abnegated, mute and lost women in the male dominated society. In the novel *Roots and Shadows* she projects her protagonist, Indu, who faces discrimination, identity crisis at different levels of her life. The bigoted Indu is much anguished with the unfair treatment of the people. She is treated as inferior when she was a child. She is being differentiated in her romantic relationship in her conjugal life and as well as in her professional life. But at the end of the novel she realizes what she lacked in her life and achieved her individuality with her brave declaration of her right to independence. She represents the modern educated woman who always stands at the cross roads of tradition and modernity.

Key words: Literature, Patriarchal system, Identity crisis, Discrimination, Self surrender, selfdom, self abnegation, culture, Tradition, women, Encapsulate, Ascendency, Submission, Introspection.

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In the firmament of literature Shashi Deshpande is a shining star who portrays the piteous plight of persecuted women in the male dominated society. She is a scintillating Indian woman novelist who delineates the identity crisis of modern educated women in the patriarchal system of family. G.S. Amur aptly remarks: "Woman's struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother and most important of all, as humanbeing is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer, and this appears in all her important stories." Though there are many educated women characters in the novels of Shashi Deshpande

The present paper is an attempt to trace out the identity crisis in the fiction of Shashi

Deshpande with special reference to *Roots and Shadows*.

"We talk of revolution- political and economic and yet the greatest revolution in a country is one that effects improvement in the status and living conditions of its women."- Jawaharlal Nehru.

Women are paradoxically not treated on par with men though they constitute half of the world's population. The result of survey in 1963 perplexed Betty Friedan, a psychologist. The most married women complained of depression, of being unable to focus on anything, of bursting into tears without reason. But these were the women who had secure marriages, had children. They were blessed with good financial security and involved in community groups. The collective depression among women

confused Friedan. According to Friedan a “ problem that had no name.” In her book which is titled as *The Feminine Mystique* she traces the origin of the problem and tells that these women were not suffering because of some hormonal, sexual or other psychological defects. After speaking to hundreds of women she realizes the source of these women’s depression was identity crisis. Woman, from her childhood were being told that they would find fulfillment and happiness as wife and mother, in the traditional feminine roles. But the fact that when they spent their energy just that they felt more and more unhappy. As one young mother told Friedan: “ I’ve tried everything women are supposed to do- hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning... but .I’m desperate. I begin to feel that I have no personality. I’m server of food and a putter- on of pant and a bed maker, somebody to call on when you want something. But who am I?” Another woman told her she had everything- a husband who was moving up in his career, a lovely new home, enough money. Yet she woke up in the morning there was nothing to look forward to. Women had just one question that summed up their feelings: Is this all there is in life? In the view of Indian traditions women is just being wife to her husband, a mother to her children and care taker of the house. It makes the women to feel that they are inferior and men are superior and different. The tradition never expects women to play any role other than the traditional ones. Even the ideological intentions of Tagore, the versatile genius of Indian literature is really surprising. In the words of Tagore “You are a woman; By serving you must worship, and by serving you must rule.” The patriarchal system in India magnifying the role and goals of men and minimizing the importance and ambitions of women in all spheres of life. Over the centuries the characteristic images of women are swayed in all civilizations and cultures. The classical image of Hindu wife has to conform to the concept embodied in the famous ‘sloka’, Grihini, Sachivah, Sakhi, Mitah Priya, Shishyalalite, Kala vidhu meaning that as a wife, woman has many roles to play. She must not only be a wife but also a counselor, the playmate to the partner.

Karyeshu Mantri, karaneshu Dasi
Rupecha Lakshmi, Kshamaya dharitri

Bhojyeshu Mata, Sheyaneshu Rambha
Shatkarma yukta, kuladharna patni.

(A woman should serve her husband as a minister while counseling, by her looks she should be as goddess Lakshmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a mother like when feeding and in bed she must be like a celestial beauty.)

The repercussions of identity crisis and male dominations are very much visible in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In the story *Indu*, the protagonist of the novel *Roots and Shadows* though she is an educated woman suffers the identity crisis in different stages of her life. Identity crisis is more important conflict which people face in their lives. Erickson, the psychologist coined the term. According to him “ An identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. In situations like starting a new job , the beginning of new relationship, the end of a marriage or the birth of child are the different levels where people experience this crisis.

When one explores the different aspects of oneself in the different areas of life, including her/his role at work, with in the family and in romantic relationship can help strengthen one’s personal identity.

Convolutd self abnegated, mute and lost women are the subjects for Shashi Deshpande’s novels. She occupied a prominent place and created a niche with her portrayal of women characters who have quest for identity. Her sensitive delineation of modern, educated young women who are crushed under the male dominated and traditional bound society is an eye opening to the readers.

The novel *Roots and Shadows* published in the year 1983 which won the Thirumathi Rangamalai Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. Shashi Deshpande’s depiction of women searching for their roots and identities is note worthy to mention. In this novel the protagonist *Indu* is a modern educated woman who faces the discrimination, male domination and identity crisis. As Tara Ali Baig comments , “Arch traditionalist women are, it is they who have successfully and brutally established man’s ascendancy over women in society.” But, *Indu*, the protagonist of the novel is

different from the other women like Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda, and Atya who follow the age old traditions without questioning. Indu struggles hard to safe guard her 'self' and individuality suffered the discrimination as an young girl. Right from her childhood Indu was compelled to bear the brunt of suffocation and persecution made by Akka.

"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. And ... I had watched them and found it to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission." says Indu furiously who is forced to submit to her lot. Indu is told that a girl child has no choice except to submit. Submission is the only survival in this male dominated society. Indu experiences losing the complete identity speaks about the piteous plight of women in the society.

Indu pores out her anguish when she says "The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered ... have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life time of disuse?" She expresses her loss of ipseity when she talking to one of her cousins Naren as " How will you understand, Naren, you who have never had to fight, to turn aggressive, to assert yourself? How easily it comes to you, just because you are a man ..."

Women always occupy a secondary place in the family which is very much visible when Indu says " Can you imagine them sending up a cup of tea for me? Women and children should know their places". The very statement of old uncle i.e " For a woman, intelligence is always a burden, Indu, we like our women not to think." hurts the feelings of Indu who struggles to achieve distinctiveness. Limitation, protest, self discovery have encapsulated Indu who tries to vail out the incarcerated psyche of her femininity. Indu showed her courage to retain her individuality by marrying a man of her choice. But unfortunately again she faces the divisive forces that threatened her selfdom. Indu, in her maternal home felt as if she was incomplete and without a sense of

the wholeness of the personality. But even after marrying Jayant she does n't attain wholeness and integration of the personality. She is engulfed with an "Usual feeling of disorientation". She always remains outsider and untouched by the milieu.

" For some reason I was out sider.

The waves of sorrow, sympathy and comradeship rippled all around me, but left me untouched."

Indu's decision of marrying Jayant proves as an anticlimax as he is also a man with materialistic attitude towards life. Jayant is not different from any orthodox man who expects his wife to be demure and coy. He does not want his wife to shed her inhibitions even in their privacy. The expression of passion towards her husband results in rebuffing. Being rebuffed, she uses to be engulfed in the sea of humiliation. With a choked voice she confides as "And now I know ... it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I'm still and dead."

So when she looks at herself even in the aspect of romantic relationship she is expected to be submissive. She feels herself like a liquid as if she had no shape of her own. The thought of shedding 'I'- identity for the sake of her husband threatens her. She compares marriage as a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other. Indu is not only unhappy and dissatisfied in her marriage but in her writing profession as well. She is forced to be complaint where she is working as a writer. She is not allowed to write what she herself wants to write and forced to write according to the directions of the editor and in accordance with the interest of the people/public. When Indu wants to resign the job Jayant rejects her idea with a view that "We need the money, don't we? Don't forget, we have a long way to go." The tedious Indu wants to ask her husband "go where". But she does not do so and hates herself for being trapped. She pities at her own condition.

Indu is summoned as Akka is on her death bed. Her home coming has given time for introspection. At the end she realizes what she lacks.

"I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage." "Self surrender" and "self abnegation" are her greatest enemies. As Henrik Ibsen says "I must take steps to educate myself you are not the man to help me there. That's something I must do on my own." Shashi Deshpande projects the change in her protagonist Indu who conquers all her fears and achieves harmony in life. Indu says "I must know to live without fear ... fear of being involved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without fear of failure". Finally she refuses to be influenced by Jayant. She decides to do what she wants and makes her husband to understand her strength. Her husband Jayant also recognizes Indu's interest consequently this has brought understanding between them. Finally Indu concludes her journey of transformation with an awareness that relationships are the roots of one's being and follow one like shadow.

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