

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST ASPECTS IN
SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

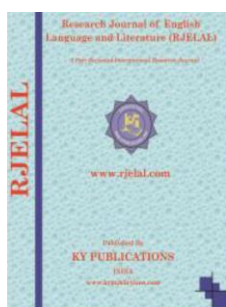
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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at interpreting Shashi Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* from the feminist point of view, which emerges as a predicament theme in some of the works of Shashi Deshpande. Deshpande is an Indo-Anglian writer who had made conscious and sustained attempts to analyse the predicament of women from various angles. It is interesting to note that though the problems of women have been engaging the attention of all major Indian writers in English, these problems have formed the bulk and core of the creative output of Indian women novelists' writing in English, in particular. The contribution of Shashi Deshpande to the variety and validity of the Indo-Anglian novel is considerable. Her works provide searching insights and a great deal of human understanding. The words of Shashi Deshpande stress her acceptance of the ideas of Judith Butler, who boldly states that "Feminism reasserts the difference between male and female genders" (23). As a feminist Deshpande's realistic view on the condition of middle class Indian women is well expressed in her novel *Roots and Shadows*.

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is by no means a monolithic term. If one seeks a common strand in a number of its varieties, it is the critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking which aims at the domination of the male and the subordination of the female. This patriarchal ideology teaches women to internalize this concept in the process of their socialization. It brings forth the concepts of gender which are man-made. Simone de Beauvoir is of the view that the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She states, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine" (The Second Sex, 295). Very often what has been termed

great literature is preoccupied with the androcentric ideology which focuses on the male protagonists providing the female secondary roles.

Throughout the twentieth century there has been a study of a ubiquitous male control over every aspect of a woman's existence. Sarah Grimke observes:

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means of selfish gratification, to minister to his sexual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. (67)

Feminism strives to undo this titled and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and

equality have gone, and still go, unheard in a patriarchal social structure. Kamala Das writes:

I don't know politics

But I know the names

Of those in power

And can repeat them like

Days of weeks or names of months.
(Ramamoorthi 148)

Feminism refutes these masculinist approaches to women. It aims at looking things from "a woman's point of view...an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries" (Spacks 4). Theories of female creativity generally make use of four models of difference like biological, linguistic, psycho-analytic and cultural. Shashi Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* concentrates primarily on the last of the models.

DISCUSSION

Roots and Shadows, Deshpande's first novel, projects the inner world and thoughts of Indu. She is revolutionary woman. She is seen to be acting against dominance right from her childhood. At her ancestral home, she hated obedience and passivity as a girl child. After the death of her mother, she was brought up by her aunts as her father left home. Indu refuses to be cowed down by Akka, the rich family tyrant who dominated this family. Here, we see that feminism not only raises a voice against male dominance, but also against women who cherish the values of patriarchy.

As an act of revolt, she marries Jayant who does not belong to her caste and thus breaks traditions. After many years, she visits her ancestral home at the time of Akka's death. To her great astonishment, Akka has left all her wealth to her. For Indu it is the time of questioning, of rethinking her life, her journalistic career, her marriage, and her illusion of hard-won independence. She meets Naren, her cousin and feels that he understands her more than Jayant does. She gets attracted to him. But at the last, she decides to return to Jayant. However, she returns with a complete new self.

Shashi Deshpande unveils Indian women in proper light and shade. Indian women in her novels can be divided into three groups: 1. Those who follow tradition as Virtue. 2. Those who realize the futility of conventions and yet are not able to come out, and 3. Those who are independent. To the first group belong the uneducated. They bank upon age-old beliefs and superstitions, and it would be hard to change them. Narmada Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Sunanda and Kaku are remarkably traditional in their manner and outlook. Akka too belongs to this class but without the powerlessness and mawkishness of any one of them.

In the second group, none shines as brightly as Mini. She is to marry a rich man who has no virtues or capabilities except his wealth. She realizes that her parents are constantly worried to find a match for her. In spite of financial difficulties, they have to bear the expenses of serving people who came to see her. She was then presented as a showpiece, rejected or selected considering her outer appearance only. If at all she was liked by all family members of the boy's family, there was again a problem of dowry. So, she decides to marry the rich man to put an end to the sufferings of her parents.

In the third group stands the indomitable new woman, Indu. She is educated and lives in close association with the society, brushing aside all its narrow conventions. She has the freedom to talk about anything she likes and is also free to talk about her own caged self, besides politics and corruption. Married to Jayant, Indu freely moves with Naren and uses words like 'kiss', 'rape', and 'orgasm'.

Through the character of Indu, the novelist has portrayed the inner struggle of an artist to express herself. Indu wants to bid adieu to her monotonous service, but Jayant does not approve of it. Indu's self-alienation increases as she becomes aware of the conflicting demands made on her by her desire to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine passivity, and her ambition to be a creative writer. Thus, Indu perceives herself as an object. When one is an object, not a subject, all of one's own physical and sexual impulses and interest are presumed not

to exist independently. She now wants to become a true woman and throw off the mask of an ideal woman.

In spite of serving the family, women own emotional needs remain unfulfilled. This is seen in Indu's feeling of isolation which finds an expression in the words, "I am alone" (*Roots and Shadows* 10). And again her disorientation is expressed in her questions: "Our own people? Who are they? Where do I draw the boundary?" (12)

Women are left with no choice in their lives. There is shadow of male dominance over every aspect and facet of their lives which thwarts their progress. They experience claustrophobia and their wishes are buried in depths of their hearts. As a woman, Indu is hardly left with any choice. Her life is actually circumscribed. She says, "A woman's life, they had told me, contains no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this" (43).

Marriage is not the same thing to a man as to a woman. These two sexes are different from each other through each one has the necessity of the other. But this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them. Women have never constituted a caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste upon equal footing. A woman like Indu is allowed no direct influence upon her husband. The husband is impervious to her emotional urges. Instead, it is she who has to cater to the needs of his urges and drives.

Patriarchy makes woman merge herself into others and neglect her own self. Her identity is lost and she has to live according to her husband's needs. Jayant betrays Indu's hopes for harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. Nor is he "a sheltering tree" to her. Instead, she finds that she has relinquished her identity by surrendering herself before Jayant's masculinity by becoming his wife. She remarks, "I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to hear" (45).

Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman but Indu plays the role of an ideal housewife but it

restricts her self-development. She is even denied the scope of giving free play to her artistic potential. Thus, marriage leads her to aimless days, infinitely repeated life that slips away gently towards death, without questioning its purpose.

Indu recognises her displacement and marginalization as a woman. The authoritative and dominating male does not only suppressed the female voice but also brought silence, dullness and repulsion to the houses women live in. Women can neither express themselves nor choose for themselves. They can neither love nor hate but be content with gift of silence. In silence, Indu really pines for love almost frantically: "I want to be loved, I want to be happy" (54).

Patriarchy reduces woman to the state of an object. A woman's experience is primarily defined through the interpersonal, usually domestic relationships. Her identity exists largely as 'being-for-others' rather than 'being-for-itself'. Thus, she turns herself into an object and most particularly an object of vision-a sight. Indu experiences herself as a woman given to physical narcissism in her self-reflexive concerns with her body: often looking in the mirror.

Male dominance reduces a woman to state of total surrender. Indu feels that she has become so fluid that she has no tangible shape, no form of her own. It is Indu minus the 'I', which render her an ideal woman. She remarks, "It's a trap . . . that's what marriage is. A trap a cage? . . . A cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other . . . and it's not a joke, but a tragedy" (59).

As members of the subordinate sex, women are characterised by obedience and submission. Indu says that as a child she was asked to be obedient and unquestioning and as a girl she was told to be meek and submissive. Indu is submissive to Jayant because she does not want conflict. She clings to Jayant and her marriage not for love alone, but because she is afraid of failure. She is scornful of love, to her "love is a big fraud, a hoax, that's what love is all about . . ." (66)

Many sexual and gender roles are imposed upon women in a patriarchal, male-bastion culture.

Such relative identity or rather 'received role models' distort or problematise Indu's self perception. Such a world reduces woman to mere thing or a mindless body, because her feminine instinct for articulation is suppressed. The novelist also expresses the male prejudice against female children. Indu's father had parted her fifteen day old motherless baby, with the family he hated and despised. He had not even come to see her until she was more than a year old.

Indu thinks about the state of widows. They are forced to have bald heads and regarded inauspicious. The society is also very much prejudiced against the childless women. Indu, though an educated and modern lady, is not respected by the ignorant lot who see her as a childless woman. Thus, women are treated only in terms of wives and mothers, and not with regard to their virtues.

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande is not only conscious of the problems and dilemmas of women but also tries to suggest a solution. Only a woman can break the age old traditions and beliefs binding her feet with fetters. Indu ultimately decide to do what she wants to do. She decides to resign from her job and do the kind of writing she had dreamt of doing.

Indu also realises that her home is with Jayant because she loves him very much. Naren, with whom she had an adulterous relationship, is now nothing more than a shadow to her. She would live with Jayant and try to transcend the restricting bonds. Thus the novel ends with the note of affirmation. Indu assert her individuality as a woman and also as a partaker in the endless cycle of life.

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