

THE LONG SILENCE OF INDU IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS

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Abstract

This paper studies about the long silence of Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. Women live under the protection of either parents or husband or her children. This pattern of living, even though made her life safe and smooth, in reality, throng her into a difficult state of enslavement and dependence. The new education has roused her to her individuality. Women started craving for liberated and self-sufficient status in life. *Roots and Shadows* has a theme of traditional and modern views among the female characters of Shashi Deshpande. The novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realizes her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with the family, with the male world and society in general. In the end it comes the realization that freedom lies in having courage to do what one believes is the right to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life. Indu explores as a modern woman. She is educated and very much in contact with the society, dealing with her critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality.

Keywords: Struggles, Silence, Reality, Enslavement, Individuality, etc...

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande has achieved reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. She occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists. She was concerned with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Deshpande's novels are directly related to feminism. She encapsulates her artistic vision of feminism. In her novel "Roots and Shadows" deals with feminism in the sense of born out of the dilemma of Indian women placed between the two controversies (i) tradition and (ii) modernity. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, India. She was the second daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shiriranga. Her writing career began in earnest in 1970. She began her writing with short stories which later development into writing novels. Her sincere concern for women and their oppression was reflected strongly in all her novels and stories. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. This paper attempts to study Shashi Deshpande's women characters, her portrayal of women to studied in a feminist angle. As an author of the 70's and 80's, she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their life had not changed much even in the twentieth century.

Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the bitter pill and grievance of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. A look at her novels was revealed her treatment of major women characters and showed how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male

dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced and tradition bound society. She refused to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity women are always oppressed, suppressed and marginalized by men. After independence, many Indian women novelists have raised their voice against the exploitation of women. Among these women writers appear the names of sahgai, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and so on. Shashi Deshpandi occupies a distinctive place in the post-colonial Indian women writers in English. She was influenced by her father Adya Rangachar who was the distinguished Kannada writer. She was also influenced by the literary works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw. Her novels are women oriented like Jane Austen and deals with "Women's struggles, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother and most of all as human being."

Traditionally, right from the ancient days, woman is a male-dominated culture. Indian women were covered with many a thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention, ignorance and reticence in literature as well as in life too. Woman was an inanimate object. Freedom for the Indian woman meant freedom from centuries of male-domination and male-ordained social and cultural norms.

Indu, in *Roots and Shadows*, a middle class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka, *Roots and Shadows* also presents another facet of deprived womanhood through the character Akka who is the youngest sister of Indu's grandfather. Indu always

defined her as a callous woman lacking compassion and mercy. Akka returned to her parental home as a rich widow after the death of her husband and since then saddles the whole family by establishing herself as a dictator and treating her family members as puppets. Akka's formidable authority never allows people to peep into her life and understand her. It was Narmada-Atya, daughter of Indu's grandfather, who tells Indu about the traumatic and pathetic girlhood of Akka. She 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 withers when she has to tolerate the scathing and bestial sexual advances of her husband. Narmadha-Atya narrates about panic-stricken Akka trying to escape her husband's brutality. Akka's husband was a wealthy man and he kept mistresses. Akka as a married woman was expected to bear children but she faced many miscarriages due to "the kind of life she led".

Since then Akka learned the technique of domination. She became aware of the principle of survival of the fittest and grasped full control of the family in her own hands. She knew that the world was made up of two types of people (i) the powerful and (ii) the weak and the powerful always ruled over the weak. Deshpande's narratives bear the authenticity of woman's signature. She has rejected the masculine dialect and the masculine perception of virtue, relationships, content and laid bare before us the subversive role of tradition in perpetuating the secondary role of women and emphasized the need of discrediting its legacies of women have to emerge as liberated and emancipated beings. Akka, in order to establish her supreme power over her family hidden her weaknesses and emerged as domineering woman and become the epitome of obduracy.

She rebelled against Akka, her conventional world and her rigid values and marries Jayant to attain freedom, she seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage inevitable in the parental family. She thinks by fitting herself in a new role of a wife to attain her freedom. Indu experiences only disillusionment in sex and suffered a silent sexual humiliation with Jayant. Indu seeks fulfillment in education and career, works as a journalist for a woman's magazine, but gives it up for she was disgusted about women and their problems, and works for the other magazine. She was physically and spiritually dissatisfied with her husband, who takes her for granted and expects her "to submit". Indu

struggles hard to understand the life in reality, the actual cause which is destroying her married life. She feels that her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance is being destroyed in the presence of Jayant. And when she talks of such feelings to him, he would call it only "nonsense" and nothing else. This becomes the crux of the problem. Jayant never bothers to understand what she really wanted, what her feelings are.

Jayant betrayed her hope for harmony and integration for peace and happiness. He failed to be her 'after ego'. Neither is he 'a sheltering tree', to protect her in weal and woe. Instead she finds that she had relinquished her identity by surrendering before Jayant's masculinity, by becoming his wife. Willingly she yields to the demands of marriage and moulded herself up to the dictate of her husband. But she never blamed him for it is men who 'tear' and women who 'bear'. Indu exists and yet does not exist. There are women in our society who hated the rearing of a child. They are simply sex objects who produce children and leave them to their helpless lot. Indu's one such woman who does not believe in mothering. She was a woman who 'hears' and not the one who 'rears'. In an act of unreflecting defiance against patriarchy, she believed that a woman should deprive herself of the satisfaction that comes from not only bearing a child but also played a major role in his/her personal development. In this sense she was an anti-radical feminist. Indu, true to her feminine virtues, played the role of an ideal housewife but her role of a wife restricted, rather circumscribed her self – development. Regarding a woman's role-playing, Rosemarie Tong observes:

Sometimes women play their roles not so much because

They want to, as because they have to in order to survive

Economically and / or psychologically – virtually all women

Engage in the feminine role playing. (Tom 1993:208)

She considered love to be a big fraud, a hoax, a trap – a process of making one humble and dependent. To her "self love", "self interest" appeared rational and meaningful. Indu strived for fear expression and acceptance through an extra-marital affair with her cousin, Naren. Impressed by Naren's air of detachment, she felt she might achieve her freedom and fulfillment if she can become detached like him. Indu experienced a sense of freedom in her relationship with Naren. She felt a need to open up to him, and therefore, she talked about herself and her

failures. The newly acquired sense of freedom that Naren's friendship gave her, made her gave into her natural impulses. She anatomised each and every action in terms of situation that paved way for her involvement with Naren, After Naren's death, Indu discovered through old uncle that beneath the veneer of his care-a-damn attitude, Naren was a person with strong feelings, expectations and disappointments and that he preferred disappointment and suffering to negition of feelings Indu's musings on life and her problems also revealed the truth that she had been running after shadows (illusions) in search of happiness, and that the source of her unhappiness is her roots (tradition).

With the realization that she loved and needed Jayant, she decided to get back to him taking care not to be influenced by him in career matters. She wanted to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty and she decided to be her true self in her relationships with Jayant, she didn't want to be like the one whose feelings are suppressed just to please Jayant. She achieved freedom and did what she thought she should be doing. She also decided not to share with her husband her affair with the dead Naren as she thought that this had nothing to do with Jayant.

Thus Indu's uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self that frantically longed for self-expression, finally finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Shadows disappear from her vision and she saw the clear light of day with realized and discovered of her authentic female self. The novel ends with a note of affirmation. O.P. Bhatnagar commented at the end of the novel, "Thus Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of

victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing idea and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude."

Conclusion

The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of a new dawn. The novel expounds the indelible mark carved on the psyche of women by the conventions and norms established by the society which restricts them from exhibiting their true self. Even modern, educated women consciously drape themselves with these traits and find themselves in a fix. These traits which have become the roots of femininity always casts its shadows in women's life. Shashi Deshpande seems to suggest through 'Roots and Shadows' that a change in the upbringing of girl-child is required. Only then she would be liberated from the mores preserved for women since ages.

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