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WOMAN: THE DESIGNER OF HER OWN FATE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "ROOTS AND SHADOWS"

Mrs.S.Selva Priya¹

¹Department of English,
Nadar saraswathi College of Arts and
Science,
Theni, Tamil Nadu, India.

Miss.G.Shahila²

²Department of English,
Nadar saraswathi College of Arts and
Science,
Theni, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

In the Indian women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statement. The two are witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Feminism is defined as cultural, economic and political movements, which are focussed towards legal protection and equality for the women. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. Feminism not only talks of equality and rights of a woman, but about compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterparts. Shashi Deshpande is a very recent author in Indian writing in English; in her novels she has tried to draw a realistic picture of the women. Her novels are mainly based on woman lives and their problems, particularly in the Indian context. She explored the realities behind the women. Also she created mass awareness to the women through her writing. The novels of Deshpande abound in women characters in search of an identity and a self of their own. "Roots and Shadows" A novel deals with an educated middle class woman's attempt to establish an identity of her own. "Indu" the protagonist of the novel, being a modern and a self-assertive woman, she is aware of her individuality and self-dignity. Her quest to attain that becomes the central point of the novel.

DISCUSSION

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian woman writers writing in English who realistically deals with inner world of the Indian women in her novels. Basically, she writes about the condition of women and their life in the fast changing socio-economic surroundings of India. *Conveying the essence of the Indian Socio-cultural ethos in a foreign language has not inhibited her from using English as the medium of her fiction.* As a sensitive artist, Deshpande portrayed the lot of

women and their intricate and tortuous self-abnegation in her stories which are considered as outstanding contributions to Indian literature in English. Most of her novels are written from the point of view of the protagonist who is usually an educated woman generally a married woman and a mother. The protagonists of her novels are not heroines with amazing qualities, but identifiable as the woman living next to our house. The frustration and problems faced by an ordinary Indian wife-a marriage and their struggles to seek their identity is the usual focus points. In

Deshpande's work often overlapped as in the case of her real life. She reflects a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class woman and her personal as well as psychological problems from a woman's perspective in most of her novels.

In her novel "Roots and Shadows" 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 the male dominated society" the theme of the novel is the identity crisis felt by Indu, her struggle to define her true self and discover a human being in her. Hence the novel surely voices feminist concerns. The novel tells us the story of Indu, the trials and tribulations in the course of her life's journey which finally culminate in a kind of awakening or self-realisation of her value. Finally, she was able to wipe away all the shadows that she had thought about herself and says, "I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing" (Deshpande, Roots (265). Indu is a woman who rejects rituals that are relics of the past. She is a modern woman who views everything with intelligence and reason. As a representative of the contemporary educated and thinking woman, she stands in sharp contrast to Akka, the head of the family as well as the mother surrogate in the novel. To the woman of the older generation, a woman's life is nothing, "but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children "(Roots 128), and the ideal woman is the one who does not have own independent identity. Indu is against all these conventional beliefs which consider woman as a mere tool for gratifying man's lust. That is why she rejects the concept of the traditional-bound institution of marriage and goes in search of an autonomous self even if it was hard to achieve. Conformity, according to Indu is the greatest destroyer of freedom and self-hood and she bursts out:

This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself; there was somewhere outside me a part of one without which I remained complete in myself, there was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained complete, then, I met Jayant, and lost the ability to be alone..(Roots 34)

The woman, in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the paternal family. Assuming the role of a wife will help her in winning much freedom. The joint family of over twenty members with different tastes and temperaments headed by Akka forms the setting of the novel. Akka is an insensitive and meddlesome kind firm lady, especially for the women of the family. The women of family never uttered their husband's names and they just obeyed them without

any questions. They moved round the tulsi plant with prayerful devotion. But the sensitive and the progressive-minded Indu cannot digest all these things and she considers them as mere nonsensical. **Intelligence was always a burden for a woman.** She could not think rationally and act accordingly even if the masculine ideas were foolish. Sending a cup of coffee to the room of a woman, learning music etc was prohibited in the ancestral house of Indu and she resented all these suppression. She found it very difficult to adjust with these traditional ideologies that consider woman as a mere plaything in the hands of the elite section of the society. She took a firm determination in her mind that she would never pretend to be what she was not. When Akka violently scolds her for talking with a boy in the library and talks ill of her dead mother, she decides to put an end to her association with the family and leaves the old house where she was brought in as a motherless child of fifteen days. **Staying in a hostel, she completes her college education and starts working as a journalist.** Then she meets Jayant and falls in love with him. Despite the objections from the family, she decides to marry him hoping to find fulfilment and a sense of wholeness with the marriage. But, to her horror, she realizes that she had willingly surrendered to him and chose her plane of thinking according to his. Realisation comes to her after a short time and thereafter she even thought of leaving Jayant to discover her true self. He does not allow her to resign the job even though Indu tells him that she cannot get any satisfaction from the work. He wants her to maintain the job for the sake of money. The fact that Akka had nominated Indu as her heiress and hence shouldering much responsibility on her comes as a great surprise for all of us. During her brief stay in the ancestral house, she renews her association with her cousin, Naren submits to him twice. **This extra-marital affair helps Indu to break herself free from the emotional bond of marriage and she realizes that a woman has her own individual liberty even within the limited boundary of marital life.** After Naren's tragic death, she returns to her husband. Indu believes that what had happened between herself and Naren is her personal matter and need not be disclosed to Jayant. Having acquired enough courage, Indu resigns her job and decides to become a creative writer. The novel ends where Jayant offers to publish her forthcoming book if she finds any difficulty to find a publisher. If Indu left the ancestral home as a rebel, she came back as a transformed lady. By addressing the particular issue of the protagonist, the novelist opens our eyes to very many crucial problems suffered by the women folk of our day. **A quest for self-identity and its realisation is of prime importance to any**

human being, be it man or woman. If that liberty to the quest of self-realisation is denied, it marks the negation of everything. Indu is a representative of the modern woman who aspires for freedom to talk anything they like and do anything they wish for. Married to Jayant, she moves freely with Naren and uses such words like “love”, “missing”, “kiss” etc in her conversation with him. The novelist is trying to present the inner struggle of an artist, who is eager to discover her real through her inner and instinctive potentiality, i.e. the power of creative writing. Indu feels that womanhood is a curse. Being a female, she can neither assert nor demand. She finds herself in a lost world where she can't place herself properly. **She is trapped in all spheres, whether domestic, social or professional. At the end of the novel, Indu had reconciled with her husband and they show better understanding in their relationship.** The final mood of the novel is one of harmony and synchronization of the opposing and conflicting selves, which is essentially an Indian attitude.

The novel ends with a note of affirmation as we find Indu had asserted her own individuality as woman and she could also discover her true self. The novel depicts not only the story of Indu, but it also unravels the life story of Akka who was destined to undergo a horrible life in her husband's house and that of Mini who passively obeys the commands of the elders and marries a person of their interest. Even if Indu's thinking and behaviour appear as discourteous and disrespectful on many occasions, in the end, comes the realization that freedom lies in having the course to do what one believes is the right

thing to do and the determination to do it. **The predicament of Indu is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where we demand for equality and freedom to every citizen.** She had to commit adultery to come to terms with her married life. She was able to escape from the roots of her ancestral home and her relations there and released herself completely from the shadows of that existence.

The novels of Deshpande expose the dilemma of Indian women. The problems and sufferings of woman and their quest for identity thus become the major themes in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and it is not wrong to label her writings as feminist fiction. They are perfect examples of the ways in which a girl child's particular position, social reality; identity and psychological growth determine her personality. By delineating the life-story of Indu in the space of twelve chapters in **Roots and Shadows**, the writer has indeed tried to convey a very valuable message which can bring a drastic change to the stereotyped air of female subservience and male dominance, especially in the context of the male-female diastema of the Indian society.

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