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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662  
SJIF Impact Factor :3.967

EPRA International Journal of  
**Multidisciplinary  
Research**

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed  
International Online Journal

**Volume: 3 Issue: 4 April 2017**



**Published By :**  
**EPRA Journals**

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## INTERMEDIATE GROUND BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S ROOTS AND SHADOWS

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*Shashi Deshpande* conceives the fabric of her narrative within the edge of the real life experiences, escaping the shadows of romantic idealism. In the traditional society of India, woman is factually acknowledged as a shadow of male identity with little scope for the assertion of her choices. "Traditional role of women essentially affirm the subjugated status of women but Shashi Deshpande categorically tries to establish that woman is endowed with inherent potential to recognize her femininity and to assert her inward powers as an individual".

*Shashi Deshpande* travels in that terrain of human sensibility where externally imposed barriers become weak and insignificant. Her protagonists obviously venture to discover their female identity. *Elaine Showalter* calls it, the 'Female phase' which is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward, freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity" (*Showalter. A Literature of Their own: 13*). She explores and exposes the long smothered wail of the fragmented psyche

of her female protagonists, imprisoned within the shackles of domesticity, drifting between tradition and modernity. In spite of her concern with the traditional position of women, she reveals them as living individuals, struggling and endeavouring to make spaces to make of their own in the existing social order. In one of her interview with *Vanamala Viswanathan* she accepted that her "characters take their own ways" and that her "writing has to do with women as they are" and that are" (*Vanamala Vishwanathan. Literature Alive: 1987*). Her female protagonists rebuild their identity but concurrently assert to defend their bodily commitments they are essentially a part of their inner self. **Shashi Deshpande depicts the struggle of the educated, independent, middle class Indian women searching for a balance between her traditional role as a daughter, wife and mother in a predominantly patriarchal society.** In Indian society, the traditions recommended by legends and religious rules are the foundation of man and women relationship. The

different roles recommended for woman are sanctified by religious texts. The epic figures like Sita and Draupadi are glorified as the Idealised beings endowed with exceptional power of endurance to sustain their identity beyond the ordeals of society. In Indian social life, woman is conditioned to life with the support of male desires only. Sarah Grimke observes:

**“Man has dominated women to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all she could do to debase and enslave her mind” (Grimke: Equality of the sexes: 10).**

*Shashi Deshpande tries to construct that in the scheme of things, woman is not weak and insensitive and therefore with the gradual shift of needs and commitments, women can reorganize her energy to resist the forces hostile to herself respect and freedom.*

The novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983) is the first authentic and organized effort of Shashi Deshpande to probe into the various dimensions of feminine sensibility and its human possible. It was published in 1983. *Roots and Shadows* is a symbolic depiction of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle. “Roots” stands for tradition and “shadows” signifies the marginal culture. The dying tradition is soon to become shadows against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. Also it suggests that over the root is removed; life is bereft of the binding force given way to new possibilities.

**“Roots and Shadows can be analyzed as a novel of the synthesis of dualism of tradition and modernity”.**

Indu, middle class young, educated and active woman, is the chief narrator who redefines the ideals of life through life of her grandmother Akka. Indu visits her ancestral home after a gap of ten years to attend the function of Akka and also to settle the disputes related with the property of ancestors. In her judgements, she was accepted to safeguard the interests of all those who were associated with the ancestral house. **“In the novel Roots and Shadows, ancestral home is projected as a manifestation of Indus’s affinity with her traditions”.** Indu earlier left the home to settle her life with unconventional ways but now she shares emotional affinities with her deserted past. She moved out the house as an orphan. In her second homecoming, she finds herself at the threshold of a great change. Besides the settlement of property matters, she has to settle

the marriage of her cousin, Mini. She stands a foil to Indu; she accepts her home confined spaces with a limited horizon of life. In spite of her own imaginings, Mini was destined to accept the challenge of marriage without personal vision and voice. *Shashi Deshpande* accepts that in traditional framework, marriage is more a social obligation than being related with the choices of individual. She mentions, “behind the façade of romanticism, sentiments and tradition what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generation might continue” (*Deshpande: Roots and Shadows:3*). Mini’s silent submission to the decision made by the elders of the family, stirs several questions in the mind of Indu and it leads her to the retrieval of her own past with the trail of anguish under which she made struggle to break the bondages of personal relationship and her relationship with Jayant. She identifies herself with the present crisis of Mini. For her it is not a matter of the predicament of Mini only but it also professes the crises of entire woman race. It is the prerogative of male to choose and reject and the only religion for women is to accept what is chosen by men. Through Indu, *Shashi Deshpande* generalizes,

**“A women’s life...contained no choices. And my life especially in this house, I had seen the truth of it. The woman had no choice but to submit and accept. And I had often wondered...have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life time of disuse” (6).**

Indu comes to the realization that external strength is not a sure sign of internal strength of spirit. In spite of her external grace, assertiveness and urge for freedom, she failed to come out of barriers in which she was placed by nature and the tradition of society. *Shashi Deshpande* accepts that *the real strength of will is the only remedy to ensure a stable social position to women.* Indian woman is not devoid of the strength of will but social constraints suppress them in such a way that the realization of their will come too late. **In this respect within the locale of the family, Shashi Deshpande accepts that the real strength of will is the only remedy to ensure a stable social position to woman.** Indian woman is not devoid of the strength of will but social constraints suppress them in such a way that the realization of their will come too late. In this respect within the locale of the family. *Shashi Deshpande* makes a comparative review of three generations represented by Akka, Indu and Mini simultaneously.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's go back to her home was a symbolic return to her own deserted infancy when she liberated herself from her roots. The unfolding of each layers of her past was a realization of the reality that she tried to escape in the garb of her professional achievements. Her banish was prompted by the contempt for the monopoly of Akka the other grandmother but her vision modifies and the authority of Akka assumes a noble significance in her life. She accepts, **"But there is a difference between 18 and 29. At twenty nine both Akka and myself, I knew there would be neither repentance nor forgiveness on either side"** (18). Indu is called by Akka to her death-bed. Akka dies leaving behind all her property at the disposal of Indu. This responsibilities imposed on Indu, enables her to have an insight into the suffering of Akka. The revelation of the horrors of Akka's struggle as a young woman against the irrational tyrannical authority of her unfaithful husband and treacherous mother-in-law inspires Indu to make a reassessment of the conduct of her grandmother. In the background the suffering of Akka, **Shashi Deshpande highlights the issues related with the practice of child marriage and fate of windows in traditional society.** The suppressed sensibility of a young bride subsequently transforms into obstinacy and unseen rebellion. Akka as a child bride was subjected to violent sexual tortures of her husband and this brutality developed a sex-phobia in her life. Akka was a victim both of patriarchal authority and parental authority. Hence the humiliation of women is not a matter of gender discrimination only but is inherent in the entire social structure. Two times Akka tried to run away but her mother-in-law whipped her for that and locked her up for three days, with the additional punishment of starvation. Her mother-in-law turned her expression of aggression "inwards" towards her daughter-in-law. Akka was expected to make unconditional surrender to the sexual drives of her husband that were no better than animal mating. Akka's inability to conceive the child brings greater physical torture and mental sufferings in her life. When her husband takes a mistress, she has some respite from sexual demands. The facts associated with the life of Akka, provide ample evidences to decode the sexual colonialism popular in Indian society. It is accepted: **"Man considers it as normal behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical levels outside marriage, while it is ruthlessly condemned as adultery in case a woman indulges in it even though accidentally the slightest hint**

**of any deviation on her part which may not even involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts prosecuting her. This condemnation is dictated by man's interest in preserving his property rather than by any moral consideration"** (84).

Akka regains her strength and freedom only after the death of her mother-in-law and the paralytic stroke of her husband. Her weak, dependent and ineffectual identity transform into power and authority. *Shashi Deshpande* through the transformation of Akka affirms that the concept of Abala is only a relative ideology and not an absolute truth of female identity. Money and mental freedom modify Akka's spectrum of life. She too becomes emblem of parental authority governing and guiding the fortune of her grandchildren. Her presence and authority provide security to other women in the family who were the victims of identical financial crisis and the curse of barrenness. **In Akka's death, we can find the end of "patriarch" and traditional life but Indu in retrieval of her past, unconsciously seeks a replantation of her desires that have no productive soil of old tradition.**

**Shashi Deshpande never directs her criticism coloured with personal prejudice but seeks the spaces for the identification of the conscience of readers with the inner world of her characters. Indu declared her freedom against traditions in the form of her marriage with Jayant.** The marriage of personal choice was the method to resist the traditional hold of patriarchy but her married life with Jayant was another mode of treachery in Indu's life and therefore she resolute to come back to her parental home. This cycle of rejection, reunion and retrieval suggests that the inner self of Indu was not so much fortified as was her external self. She confessed:

**"This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself until I had met Jayant, I had not known it that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone".** (31).

In this state of chaos, she reflects on the episode of Mini's marriage and Akka's struggle and in background of the lives of these two women, she realizes that her personal life with Jayant is not much different than those of both of them. Mini reveals that her marriage has been decided, ignoring her desires. She even hesitates to pronounce the name of her husband. Mini desperately admits that for a woman, intelligence is always a burden. She further adds, **"The thing my marriage had taught**

me the gift of silence” (33). Akka faces all tortures in perpetual silence and after being a widow she dedicates herself to the household responsibilities. Indu finds that her responses are also conditioned to the choices of Jayant and in his company, she has lost her power of self expression, **“I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage”** (36). Indu and Jayant were divided on the issue of child birth as a “game” but Indu perceives it as a phenomenon that would ruin her autonomy. Even the company of Jayant was not shelter to her to make her free from the shadows of the insecurity of her orphanage. Jayant’s choices made such a strong hold on her mind that she never thought beyond his choices. It was her unconscious surrender of her real **“self”** to the will of Jayant. What Indu realizes comes to a woman, she finds herself incomplete, baffled and defiant. Indu confesses, **“When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant, When I dress, I think of Jayant, when I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants...Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own”** (49). Indu finds herself lonely and isolated. The irony is evident that in both stage of life, i.e., marital life with Jayant and childhood in ancestral home, she fails to construct her own self. She declares, **“The family was incomplete except for father. And Jayant, if he is counted as one of the family”** (56)

In the novel **Roots and Shadows** it was not a question of her dissatisfaction only but also of her male counterparts who suffered because of strong hold of traditions. Indu finds that like her, Hemant, her college friend is also dissatisfied with his married life. He calls marriage a “trap” where if once one entangled, entangled forever. The institution of marriage is the prime factor responsible for the hostile upsurge of personal relationship. **He calls marriage a “trap” or a cage, “A trap? Or a cage,” May be the comic strip version of marriage...a cage with two trapped animals, glaring hatred at each other...isn’t so good after all. And it’s not a joke but tragedy. But what animal would cage itself”** (61). Hemant is frustrated because in marriage the weight of dowry is more important than warmth of personal relationship. Akka also gives her consent to spent thousands of rupees in the marriage of mini.

**“Shashi Deshpande in Roots and Shadows admits that the perversion in women’s nature expressed in terms of obstinacy and rigidity is a sign of her**

**resistance against tradition”**. Akka got married at the age of thirteen and suffered the tortures both of her husband and the other members of the family. Shashi Deshpande consistently registers her aversion for the undesirable and painful sexual violence inside marital relationship. Akka records her own experience:

**“Her husband....He had a weakness for women. How could a frightened child satisfy him? He always had mistresses. And Akka could never give birth to a living child...Every time she had a miscarriage; her mother-in-law blamed her for it and made her for her”** (70).

In the process of the retrieval of memories, Indu tries to find out her old friend Naren who had left the house long back. Naren was her girlhood friend. At present, he is involved into all sorts of irregularities. Indu remarks, **“Naren I know is the most restless person in the world. In the company of Naren, Indu finds satisfaction because both of them were suffering with identical “Loneliness”**. In the company of Naren, her creative talent was recognized and encouraged. **Shashi Deshpande through her protagonist defends that each woman in her own way, demands the fulfilment of her inner self that is beyond and above socially accepted norms**. Naren appreciates the stories written by Indu. He encourages her to resume her career as a journalist and to reproduce the experiences related with the frustration of women. Indu as a writer in the process of narration of the apathy of human experience becomes aggressive and violent. She unknowingly identifies herself with those experiences and perceives the reflections of her own helplessness. From an **“Outsider”** she becomes an **“Insider”**. Like most of the postcolonial writers, *shashi Deshpande* is convinced that suppression and irrational hold of conventions give birth to a psyche of self persecution and it can seek its outlet in the form of violence, obstinacy or any other mode of distortion of human sensibility. Indu cries out:

**“Woman, women, woman...I got sick of it, there was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn’t go on. Better this than that...”** (78).

For *Shashi Deshpande* the exposition of the helpless of woman’s life in her writings comes not as a consolation but it induces a greater misery and suffocation. She visualizes the whole endeavour as a method of compromise with the plight in which, she was destined to survive. In provocation, she exclaims:

**“What the hell write about, tell me Naren? Women’s lives and frustrations? Family life and domestic quarrels? Love with capital ‘L’ and marriage as ultimate happy ending? Or maybe I’ll get I’ll get bolder and write off menstrual pains and pages of child-birth, the ecstasy of orgasm” (78).**

Indu’s inner conscience revolts against self imposed feminine delicacies. For Indu, realization of womanhood works as barrier that does not allow her free movements as a sensitive human being. The first realization of womanhood comes with the beginning of menstrual cycle when a warning was given by kaki, **“you are a woman? You can have babies yourself” (79).** The realization of womanhood was not an elevation of her position but it was a realization of her weakness that could never permit her to seek “wholeness” in a male dominated society. Indu’s reflections on her own inner state of mind suggest that these feminine issues are not to be idealized and they must be estimated in context of the mental reactions of women who are subjected to it. Indu is disgusted with Jayant but she surrenders herself to the will of Naren. Corresponding either Indu’s consciousness. Jayant and Naren are two distinctive terrains corresponding with Indu’s consciousness. If Jayant affords physical contentment to her, Naren is her hope for emotional fulfilment. Naren feels the deep sensational thrust inside Indu and he openly confesses, **“Why do you deny the fact that you’re a woman”.** “She also feels an irresistible current of sensation in the physical contact of Naren. He challenges her futile idealism. Through Naren, **Shashi Deshpande asserts that woman has every right to exhibit her desires.** It is a natural response to innate instinctive behaviour. The male companionship is essentially needed in feminine experience may it be Jayant or Naren. Indu maintains that her sensation and sexual excitement after the touch of Naren is a natural response to her passions that had long been suppressed under the burden of Jayant’s idealism. In the novel **“Roots and Shadows, Shashi Deshpande maintains that there is a wide gulf between love and sex, social conscience and biological sensibility, idealism and harsh reality”.** Jayant was the fulfilment of social idealism and Naren was the fulfilments of her personal desires beyond socially accepted images. The fabric of family and society does not permit the fulfilment of this essential self of Indu. She desperately reveals that even a woman has no right to express her passions openly in the company of her husband. Jayant was her personal choices still she was forced to accept his companionship

as a **“passive”** and **“dead”**. In the framework of social taboos, there was no space for her personal desires, neither in parental home, nor in the home of her husband. In both conditions Indu finds herself lonely and isolated:

**“But between the idea and reality, there is an immeasurable distance. To see, to feel a real man was far removed from the idea of love and it was to me then. And yet gradually the experience had fallen into place into those slots of vague longings and definite aching emptiness that had shamed me, and now that fulfilment was possible, it seemed so natural. And perfect. But there was even then, a small crack in the perfection. Jayant so passionate, so ready sitting up suddenly and saying, ‘No’, ‘No’ not now” (82).**

Indu’s turning back to Naren’s company was the first declaration of her own choices that might have brought contentment in her life. It was a method to avoid long heaped burden in which her **“Feminine self”** was lost.

In the novel **Roots and Shadows** narrative moves in two distinct directions. One phase is the record of Indu’s personal life involving her relationship with Jayant and Naren, reflecting the domains of her feminine consciousness. The second phase of the novel presents a vivid account of the farsightedness of Indu to settle the matters of family property. In both the situations, there was a test of her ability, desires and responsibility. Both Indu and Naren require personal choices and the realization of the social obligations. For the amicable settlement of family disputes, there comes the question of the disposal or demolition of house but the idea of demolition of house comes as a great loss to Indu. She identifies herself with the family property. She confesses:

**“The wall would crumble, the roof would crush down. Then...But what of the feelings, the emotions, and the passions of the house had shattered. I had been a fifteen days old motherless infant when I had been brought in this house. I had been brought in this house. I had lived eighteen years in it. Now all those eighteen years compressed themselves into one moment painful intensity and I lied those eighteen years all over again” (96).**

In the novel **Roots and Shadows** Madhav Kaka appears as an instrument of redemption. He seems to have a realization of the external and internal suffering of Indu. What she has lost in her relationship with Jayant, can’t be secured in her renewed passion of Naren. Marriage is a social formality and its culmination can’t be possible in the form of a

perfect relationship. Indu's own marriage is an answer to the false social myths and ideologies recommended for marriage:

**“Marriage itself is a difficult enough business. For two people to manage into one identity it's...almost impossibility. But given certain things in common...language, customs, rituals, backgrounds...all this make it easier” (98).**

Indu makes a proposal of marriage of Naren and mini and requests old uncle to conceive mini for it. He takes a philosophical ground for the conflicts in which they were surfing. He affirms that sum total of human experiences is only inevitable “nothingness”. He asks Indu about her own happiness in the married life but she is left without help and stands still without any positive answer. For old man marriage is **“Unavoidable”** and **“Inevitable”**. But Indu's conviction is entirely different reflecting her own vacuity within, **“faith, love, devotion...do they always have to be unbalanced, obsessive and unreasonable” (107)**. In context of his own relationship with Naren, he remarks, **“Attachment...we can't escape it. It's a law of life you can never product yourself against it” (108)**. Ever since the teaching of old man, Indu endeavours for detachment to avoid all ache and pangs involving attachment in her relations with Jayant. *Shashi Deshpande* in her discourse on female sufferings seeks profound philosophical grounds and this approach contributes to richness and permanence to her thoughts. Indu's crisis is a testimony to the fact that the balance in personal relationship is possible with a realistic perception of life beyond self conceived idealism.

Shashi Deshpande's acknowledgment through Indu affirms that the wholeness in the life of a woman exits through the synthesis of the ideology of feminist and individualism. Indu's interactions with her ancestral relationship with other grand aunts of ancestral family help her to recon template her position. It also gives a new vision to her relationship to Jayant. She talks in terms of emotional support and Kaku survives in the dungeon of darkness unaware even of her own name. Kaku was ignorant of her own name, “These women they are called Kakus and Kakis, Atya and Vahini, Aiji and Mami. **As if they have to be recognized by relationship because they have no independent identity of their own at all...**” (117). In *Roots and Shadows* besides the issue of female autonomy and identity, Shashi Deshpande simultaneously reflects on several social voices that collectively contribute to intensify the process of suppression of woman in the

**traditional society of India**. Kaku was a “Childless widow” with bare skull and short hair. She was given the status of a second class widow. Alike Indu is also shocked to see the position of Sunanda Atya who also came to attend the funeral of Akka. Indu was shocked to see her distorted features. *Shashi Deshpande* admits womanhood is not thrust by love; it is thrust through the realization, the conversion of innocence into guilt. In Indian fiction, *Shashi Deshpande* through her texts exhibits the reactions of woman against those feminine functions for which they are often glorified, **“distaste for the female functions”**. Indu expose the male hunger of Vasanta Kaku, Sunanda's husband. She says that, **“At fifteen you've woman enough to have an instinctive Knowledge of male hunger and child enough to panic at being the object of it” (136).**

Indu is the spokeswoman created by Shashi Deshpande created to represent the authenticity of feminine sensibility beyond the traditional burden of guilt and shame. It was her first assertion of absolute freedom, her own choice beyond the choice of Jayant and Naren. She feels herself **“Light hearted”** and **“Liberated”**. This external contentment of Indu however was not sufficient to sustain her inward sensibility. Her own sense of guilt against what she had done made her restless to share her innermost feelings with Naren. The image of seduction takes hold on her mind. Torn between her idealism of emancipation and biological need, made her an anguished person. She desperately confesses, **“I don't believe in love” It is a big fraud, a hoax, that's what it is.** *Shashi Deshpande* treads a radical ground to seek a justification of man and woman relationship in the context of psycho-biological needs. Male companionship is an inevitable need of the life of a woman.

**The novel Roots and Shadows passes through a complex structure in which narrative moves between past and present to come to a final conclusion in which individuals desire can seek harmony with socially accepted traditions.** Indu's moves from familial spaces to self chosen marital circumference and her further returning to her paternal home suggests that a woman conceives her freedom not in isolation but in acceptance of the wider social order. In the last phase of the novel after Naren's death and Indu's return to her home suggest that from illusion she turn back to reality. The other characters in the novel *Roots and Shadows*, like Mini, Sunanda Atya and Akka works as a foil to self chosen ideology of Indu. Indu's marriage with Jayant, return to Naren and again

longing for Jayant signifies the insecurity existing within the inner self of Indu. *The shifting ideals of Indu in Roots and Shadows maintain that through the amicable combination of the inevitable opposites of tradition and modernity, a woman can seek a safer mooring escaping the loss in the chaos and confusion of conflicting ideologies.*

**Deshpande likes to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity.** To her traditions are the values of harmony and co-existence that symbolize the Indian way of life and modernity is the assertion of independent individual identity. A sudden jump to modernity may be harmful to the Indian women because of the culture and civilization which basically differ from that of the western people. Keeping in view the long standing traditions of Indian society, she seeks solution of the problem by changing the mind-set of the males towards the females. **Though the protagonists in her novel achieve “selfhood”, they don’t negate the family or**

**society. Deshpande shows an aversion neither to tradition nor to modernity rather she believes in the reconciliation of the old and new, of the tradition and modernity.**

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