



Insight into the Role of Women in the Novel *Roots and Shadows* of Shashi Deshpande

Dr. Chhayababen Narayanbhai Vankar
M.A, B.Ed., Ph.D
Ahmedabad, Gujarat (India)

Abstract: *The present paper is an attempt to study the various roles of women as portrait by Shashi Deshpande in her novel, Roots and Shadows. Being an Indian female Deshpande herself plays various roles in the Indian society and she presents her own experiences and minute observation of the Indian women in her most of the works. In the present paper, various roles of female characters of Indu, Narmada, Kamala Kaki, Sumitra Kaki, Atya and Sunanda Atya are examined in the Indian male dominated society context.*

Keywords: *Role, Women, Old tyrannical matriarch, Unsatisfactory*

Abbreviation: *Roots and Shadows: RS*

Roots and Shadows is the first novel of Shashi Deshpande. It deals with the issues of Indian women in the male dominated society. Deshpande presents with vivid details a large Maharashtrian Brahmin household, and the myriad women characters, their greed, jealousy, hopes, fears, disappointments, and their anguish in the present novel. Indu is the protagonist of the novel. Apart from her, we have characters like Narmada, Kamala Kaki, Sumitra Kaki, Atya and Sunanda Atya. Women have to play various roles from her birth to death i.e. daughter, beloved, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, grandmother and mother-in-law. All her conducts at the various stages of life have been decided by the males in the society. They are the puppets in the hands of males in the home and out of the home as well. Indu is an educated middle class woman. She wants to make her new identity in the society. She rebels against the male domination in the beginning of the novel but at the end of the novel, she surrenders herself to Jayant, her husband.

From childhood, the girls have been taught that they have to be obedient to their parents and their husbands after marriage. As Indu tells Naren, her cousin that:

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, because "you are a female" (RS 174).

During her childhood, she had obeyed Akka and after marriage, she has to obey Jayant and his family. Though Indu is an educated female, she cannot break herself free from the clutches of tradition. She realizes that despite her education and exposure, she was no different from the women that circumambulated the Tulsi plant to increase their husbands' life span. Even her husband who is apparently an educated modern man is a typical Indian husband for whom she has to remain passive and submissive.

Indu plays an active role of an Indian wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. In the initial stage of their marriage life, she was enjoying her life as a wife but with the passage of time, she experiences the bitter taste of life too. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. She compromises against her conscience with the values of a hypocrite society where success is counted sweetest. Had Akka not called her, she wouldn't have had time enough to think about her identity and selfhood, which she had effaced just to prove that her marriage was a success. Her realization is manifesting in her private conversation with Naren her cousin to whom she bares all. Indu, who had considered herself smart, educated, independent and clever, comes to the painful conclusion that she was no better than her Kakis and Atyas. Several other incidents in the novel prove Indu's poignant awareness of the inequality all Indian women had to reconcile with under compulsion. The hard work of performing the countless household tasks makes their life miserable. She is painfully aware that she is not different from the women at home. All the time she misses Jayant and wants him to be beside her. She feels miserable and incomplete in Jayant's absence. Jayant who hates any display of passion on Indu's part denies her even the most basic sexual need in marriage. Even in the privacy of their bedroom, she is not let to shed her inhibitions. She tells Naren:

Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and says, 'no, not now', when I had taken the initiative (RS 91).

Being so hurt by Jayant she feels humiliated and disillusioned. In a choked voice, she tells Naren:

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 am still dead (RS 92).



Therefore, her lot is not much different from the other household women. Like them she too has become 'still and dead'. She rebels to become complete and independent, but painfully realizes that she is neither of the two. Indu tries to follow her own conscience but fails miserably under combined pressure of the tradition-bound society and the fear born of stigma attached to such an independent attitude and existence. She is not satisfied with her marriage life and she does not get enough love and sympathy from her husband.

She shares all her personal affairs with Naren and she also attracted towards him not once but twice in the novel. She indulges in the act with much wild abandon and cherishes it later without any guilt consciousness. Thus, she keeps extra marital affair with her cousin itself. She has decided not to disclose this to her husband, Jayant as she feels it has nothing to do with him. Deshpande through this incident wants to make satire on the male dominated society. A man can keep relation even after his marriage with a girl but a married woman cannot any type of relation with men and if she does so, she is considered as a characterless woman in the society. Girls from their childhood have been taught that their husbands are the only Gods and they are bond to serve them in any situation and circumstances. Deshpande makes satire on the double standard prevailing in the male dominated society in India. Indian wife must be loyal and honest to her husband in any situation. She cannot utter even a single word against him whether he is right or wrong in any matter. At the end of the novel, Indu returns to her husband and she breaks her relation with Naren because she feels that she must be loyal with her husband.

Indu, a journalist in *Roots and Shadows* finds her job very routine and unsatisfactory. The editor wants her to write what is acceptable to the public and so she cannot really write what she wants to. She is unhappy with her career which forces her to be false to herself. When she is sour about the way she is forced to paint false journalism, Jayant, her husband, takes it easy and advises her to compromise. She finds it difficult to compromise with her honesty and decides to resign her job. Jayant firmly disapproves of any such move and Indu helplessly continues in the same job, hating it at the same time. Akka's choice of Indu as her heiress gives her new courage and strength. She introspects her married life and realises the need to seek freedom within the bounds of obligations and responsibilities. She refuses to be influenced by Jayant who does not want her to leave her job. She decides to resign her job at once and devote herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of Indu, thus, finally asserts herself as a writer. She realizes that her roots are to be an independent woman and a writer while her shadows are to be a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer.

Apart from Indu, we have another leading character of Akka, the old tyrannical matriarch Akka. She is rich and childless and decides to stay in her brother's house after her husband's death where she has absolute control with her bitter tongue. It reduces Indu's grandfather Kaka into a tongue-tied, submissive character. Akka, representative of the old order, is so obsessed with untouchability that she refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes. She is also very particular about how a girl should conduct herself in society. Her character is totally different from that of Indu in terms of wife.

Padmini is another character of the novel through her character Deshpande also highlights the problems that middle-class families encounter in their search for suitable grooms for their daughters. Like Padmini, for the other Indian girls also, it is marriage that matters and not the man. The search for a man is so difficult that parents become anxious and desperate and at one nod from the man settle the marriage. Indu wonders about Padmini's acceptance of a man who was no match for her.

Thus, in the present novel through the various female characters, Deshpande has focused on the pathetic and tragic situation of women in the male dominated society. All the above-mentioned women are in the quest of real identity in the home and outside the home. They have to perform various roles from childhood to death with certain social responsibilities. It is very strange that all the restraints are made for the women whereas there is no restraint for the male in home or outside the home in the male dominated society. Shashi Deshpande has minutely observed this pathetic and bitter condition of the Indian women and tried her best to portray in her literary works.

Work Cited

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*, New Delhi: Disha-Orient Longman, 1983.