



EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most famous contemporary women writers in Indian fiction writing in English. She wrote many novels which focus Indian middle class women and their problems particularly in the Indian society. Her concern for women and their oppression is reflected in her writings which make her as feminist writer. She is best known for her realistic portrayal of Indian feminine sensibility and individuality. She depicted Indian women with their suppressed dreams and hopes, endurance and acceptance, troubles and sufferings, repression and oppression, twinge and agony, issues and problems, plight and difficulty etc. Her novel "Roots and Shadows" deals with the predicament of Indian women struggled between the two controversies convention and recentness. It portrays the inner chaos, irritation, disappointment and silence of the protagonist of this novel, Indu. This paper analyses the novel to find out the emancipation of woman in the life of Indu.

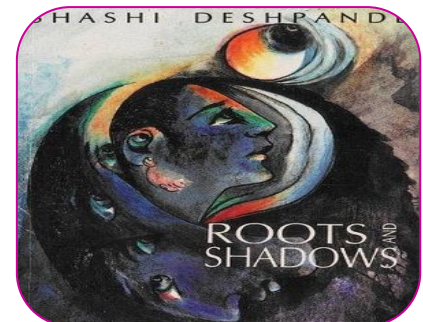
KEYWORDS: Emancipation, Marriage, Disloyalty, Oppression, Self-Realization, Feminism, Modernism, Patriarchy, Individuality.

INTRODUCTION

Women novelists have much contributed for the growth of Indian novels in English. Shashi Deshpande has also given a new dimension to Indian writing in English. She has obviously ventured a new consciousness of the psyche of women to explore intense awareness of woman identity and interest in feminine issues. Her novels focus on gender inequality, women's rights, violence in domestic life, discrimination and oppression. Her characters are well educated, talented and sensitive women. As Ramesh Kumar Gupta rightly says:

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and protagonist's place in it. (Gupta 42)

Her novels usually have women as the protagonists who are the representatives of Indian middle class women. In the novel '*Roots and Shadows*', the protagonist Indu is educated and occupation-oriented and middle-class woman, who is very sensitive to the conventional beliefs of the society. She has left home to study in the big city and she has become as a journalist. She has married the man whom she likes very much without consulting her family members. But she realizes that her freedom is deceptive. She rebels against Akka's power and decides to marry Jayant. She thinks that marriage would free her from all the restrictions and boundaries of the society. She accepts marriage as an escape route to achieve her freedom from the tradition imposed on her in her parental family. She accepts the role of a wife with a simple hope of getting her freedom and asserting her individuality. As Simone de Beauvoir states:



It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution. It has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them. A man is socially an independent and complete individual. (Beauvoir 445)

Indu leaves her parental home with a simple dream that her marriage would help her to fulfill her needs and demands. She has been dispossessed of true freedom before as well as after her marriage. Marriage has been a hindrance in her way of being a free and self-governing individual. She recognizes that her husband wants her to live according to his views and thoughts, visions and aspirations. She realizes her nonsensical decision,

I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness comes to us for the asking. But they can sneak up on us (23).

Indu returns to her parental home after eleven years to attend her cousin Mini's marriage to be performed in the traditional manner. Mini has all the traditional feminine qualities from her childhood. She does not have any aim in her life so she dedicates herself to the family members. She does not cross the boundary line of rules and regulations imposed by the society because of her qualities of conformity, calmness and compliance. As she was brought up under strict supervision and constriction, she adopted herself with real duties of a woman. Indu wants to find out reason why Mini is devoid of choices and she has spent her life without realizing her inner strength in her family. As Indu puts it:

"I had often wondered...have they been born without walls, or have their will atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength." (6)

This novel is an investigation of Indu's desire for the realization of her inner uniqueness and the declaration of her individuality and liberty. From her childhood, she was brought up to be humble, obedient, passive and submissive. She was advised by her family members to inculcate feminine qualities in her. But she has her own dreams and desires. As she says: "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. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive". She rebels against Akka, the head of a matriarchal family, who represents conventional beliefs and customs. She marries Jayant, a man of different caste with the hope to escape from her confined existence in her ancestral family with its rigid values and principles. She looks for marriage as an alternative solution to the limitations forced on her. As Ramamoorthi rightly points out,

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of the human existence. (Ramamoorthi 124)

After her marriage, she lay down her arms and surrenders herself enthusiastically to her husband in the name of love. She enters into a new world of her dreams with the hope of finding independence and freedom. She expresses her feelings with her own words: "I had thought I had found my alter ego in Jayant. I had felt that in marrying him, I had become complete. I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self, not only that but total understanding, perfect communication. And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated" (114).

Indu tries to defend her independence even in unpleasant circumstances and she is against decayed forces that cover her identity as a woman. The customs, norms and rules of the patriarchal society forbid her from showing her inner self. She has no freedom to express her own thoughts and visions. She has a lot

hurdles and obstacles to achieve freedom in an oppressive and tradition-bound society. She endeavours to search her real self through her innate potentiality in writing career. She wants to live a more secure, meaningful and independent life. Her marriage with Jayant dissatisfies her. As she says:

“What I feel for Jayant ... can I compress all of it within this word? It is much more, so overwhelming a response of the whole of me to him. Sometimes I wonder if I leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again”. (157)

Indu hates her womanhood as she was made conscious of her femininity by the elder women of her family. She craves to escape from the burden and independent of womanhood and she asserts her right to an independent existence. She dreads her becoming a mother and disregards her introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. In her march towards emancipation, she has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options. She fights against her own womanhood. As she rightly says:

“My womanhood..... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. ‘You are a woman now’, Kaki had told me. ‘You can have babies yourself’. I am a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, baldly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it.” (86)

Indu works for the advantage of her members of family playing several roles and loses her identity of a creative writer. She reviews the concepts of self, reliance and love. She has visions of her ideal of impassiveness and freedom and tries to achieve them. She listens to the voice of conscience but she faces many difficulties in her way as she is guided by the traditional norms of her family. She tries to find her true self and makes her efforts to come out from the obstacles and problems which she faced in the tradition bound society. She wants to live without having any intervention in her personal life. She becomes completely powerful to face the impediments. Deshpande tries to bring out the voice of an educated, suppressed woman in the form of creative writing. As Indu states as follows:

“Strange, that after all my dithering and agonising the solution now seemed to simple and straight. Yes simple, in spite of the fact that that I knew the opposition I would have to encounter” (166).

Shashi Deshpande has raised a tone of protest against a patriarchal attitude to women in a contemporary male-dominated Indian society. She suggests that Indian woman should learn to triumph over their worries and bring out their inner identity to the modern world. The protagonist of the novel takes a strong decision to fight the problems and find a solution to them. She attains her feminist identity by crossing over the obstructions enforced on her by the patriarchy. The novel depicts the way how Indu sets out on her journey of self-realisation and liberation. This paper explores the situations and experiences of Indu who wants to escape from rules of the society and fights for her liberty and individuality.

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