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The Synthesis of the Dualism of Tradition and Modernity in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows

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Abstract:

The Tradition of Indian English writing is comparatively a new stream; still it has become a potent voice of Indian culture and civilization at the global level. The real Indian English novel flourished with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao who tried to provide a true picture of Indian society during an era of transition from slavery of independence. After independence, a reawaking came in Indian society to restore dignity and status to every individual irrespective of the limitations of caste or sex. With this change in attitude, novelists made efforts to portray women's position realistically. Earlier most of the Male writers presented female protagonist only either as idealized images of womanhood or the dumb shadows of male desires. However, novelists were inspired to make a bold and unconventional representation of woman's position through their writing and with their efforts, the tradition of novel in the last quarter of 20th century flourished with a distinctive identity. The novel of this period represents writer's awareness of women's awareness of women's individuality, their aspirations, and their inherent urge to break the resistance against all those inhibitions that were responsible for the inferior position of woman in Indian society. The impact of changing social forces started redefining the tradition myths of idealized images of womanhood. The contribution of Shashi Deshpande is of paramount significance. With her awareness of the plight of Indian woman caught in the cross currents of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of family and familial relationship and making desperate efforts to make alternate spaces, she explores new horizons in the realm on Indian English fiction.

Keywords: *Tradition, Transition, Reawaking, Womanhood, Flourished, Individuality, Idealized images.*

1. Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is one of those artists who instead of adhering to any established tradition of fiction, created her own tradition of fiction that provided her ample spaces to explore the inner world of female consciousness. In her novels one can find a reincarnated Indian woman with the female dilemma reinforced. Her concern for women is reflected in her novels which are deeply rooted in the line of socio-moral-sexual fiction. She occupies a prominent position among contemporary women novelists. Since her fiction is woman-centered; one can find feminine consciousness in all her novels. Her primary focus is the world of woman-the struggle of woman in modern Indian society. Her protagonists are educated, urban middle class women but women suffering in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. Her portrayal of their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, follies and foibles, exploitation and disillusionment, inner conflict and quest for identity make her novels possible to be looked at from a feminist point of view.

De Beauvoir points out, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...described as Feminine." (1)

1.1. Her Novels Explore Themes Like

Responsibility, motherhood, mother-daughter relationships, isolation and need for physical/emotional space, the awareness of the impossibility of a unified, monolithic identity and fixed narrative position. Most important, there is a move towards self-knowledge, which involves a long and painful process of introspection and analysis.

According to Deshpande everybody has to live within the society and maintain his/her relationship and there is no other way. She believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be. A through reading of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals a writer who is intelligent, articulate, and relatively free from prejudices regarding gender and at the same time highly sensitive to the issues involving women.

The novel, *Roots and Shadows*, was awarded the Thirumathi Rangammal prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. The novel features an educated, middle class woman protagonist's Indu, who tries to assert herself as an individual. The novel highlights the agony and suffocation experienced by Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid code laid down by society, she marries a man of her choice but it brings only problems as her

ostensibly progressive minded husband is no different from average Indian male. The novel highlights the gross inequalities between men and women in society.

1.2. According to M. Mani Meitel

"*Roots and shadows* is a symbolic representation 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." (79)

Roots and Shadows can be analyzed as a novel of the synthesis of the dualism of tradition and modernity. Indu, a middle class young, educated and dynamic woman, is the chief narrator who redefines the ideals of life through the 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 judgments, she was expected to safeguard the interests of all roots and shadows; ancestral home is projected as a manifestation of Indus's affinity with her traditions. Indu earlier left home to settle her life with unconventional ways but now she shares emotional affinities with her deserted past. She left the house as an orphan. In her second coming, she finds herself at the threshold of a great change. In spite of her own dreams, Indu was destined to accept the challenge of marriage without personal vision and voice. Shashi Deshpande accepts that in tradition framework, marriage is more a social obligation that being related with the choices of individual. She mentions:

"Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment, 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." (3)

Through Indu, Shashi Deshpande generalizes, "A woman'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.

The novel presents a typical facet of deprived womanhood through the character of Akka, who is the youngest sister of Indus's grandfather. Akka returns to her parental home as a rich widow after the death of her husband and starts looking after her nieces with care and attention of a truly compassionate mother. Akka's authoritative nature never allows people to peep in to her life and understand her.

Indu, a sensitive, educated and liberated woman questions and challenge Akka's authority and considers Akka a callous and dominating woman. She hates and challenges Akka's domination. She thinks that "there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate." (68)

Indu revolts against Akka and decolonizes herself by marrying Jayant, who is of a different caste and speaks a different language. On receiving the news of Akka's illness Indu comes back to the family only to find that Akka is dying. She only comes back with an overbearing vitriol against Akka. Akka feels that Indu is the right heiress and wills her entire property including the house in her name. Deshpande highlights the matrilineal aspects of tradition as property is handed over by Akka to her grandniece, Indu. Indu notices that even in the face of death there is a quiet dignity about her.:

Indu recalls after Akka's death, "There was a triumphant gleam in them. I could almost see her thoughts... I made you come home, didn't I? I brought you back, didn't I?" (27)

Indu comes to know about the pathetic story of Akka after her death, that "Akka had a terrible past hidden away in the vaults of the family narrative's past of marital rape as a thirteen-year-old wife, of betrayal, and of her revenge on a dying husband" (72).

This highlights the fact that irrational practices are still observed in our society and a woman is not allowed to be independent. At every stage she should be under the domination of someone: her father, her husband, or her son. Marriage is considered transference of the dominion over her from her parents to her husband. The facts associated with the life of Akka, provide ample evidence to decode the sexual colonialism popular in Indian society. It is accepted:

"Man considers it as normal behavior 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)

In Akka's death, one can find the end of "patriarchy" and traditional life but in retrieval of her past, unconsciously seeks a replantation of her desires that have no productive soil of old tradition. 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 Indus's life and therefore she resolute to come back to her parental home. This cycle of rejection, reunion and retrieval that the inner self of Indu was not so much fortified as was her external self.

In this state of chaos, she reflects on the episode of Indu'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. 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 see. To say to him something 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. 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)

Shashi Deshpande in *Roots and Shadows* admits that the perversion in woman's nature expressed in terms of obstinacy and rigidity is a sign of her resistance against tradition. In the process of the retrieval of memories, Indu tries to find out her old friend Naren who had left the house long back. Indu remarks, "Naren I know, is the most restless person in the world." (145) 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 fulfillment of her inner self that is beyond and above socially accepted norms. From an "outsider" she becomes an "insider".

Indu is disgusted with Jayant but she surrenders herself to the will of Naren. Jayant and Naren are two distinctive terrains corresponding with Indu's consciousness. Through Naren, Shashi Deshpande asserts that woman has every right to exhibit her sexual desires. The sexual relationship in the company of Jayant proves hollow and incomplete for Indu. In the company of Naren, it comes as a mode of fulfillment. However, having the roots in Indian traditional ways, she is torn between her duty to Jayant and her desire for Naren. She feels an intense desire to have the sensation of the masculinity of Naren. He mentions, "You look like a bird something its ruffled feathers". (152)

Indu is the first spokesman created by Shashi Deshpande to represent the authenticity of feminine sensibility beyond the tradition burden of guilt and shame. Shashi Deshpande treads a radical ground to seek a justification of man and woman relationship in the context of psycho-biological need. Male companionship is an inevitable need of the life of a woman.

Indu ultimately realizes that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. Naren, with whom she develops an adulterous relationship, is nothing more than a mere shadow to her. He has no permanent in her memory. Hence, she decides to go back to Jayant. She declares, "yes home, the one I lived in with Jayant. That was my only one. To think otherwise would be to take coward's way again. I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. What kind of a life can you build on dishonesty" (167).

→ Bhawana Dwivedi remarks,

"Deshpande brings out the problem of marriage as an evil social practice because right from the begging to the end it is the history of a woman's suppression, a long-drawn-out drama of negotiation in which she feels uncertain of her position, this is a deal in which the poor woman is literally bracketed with an animal, for she cannot exercise her reasoning or intelligence and express her genuine individual concerns." (13)

2. Conclusion

The novel *Roots and Shadows* passes through a complex structure in which narrative moves between past and present in which individual desires can seek harmony with socially accepted traditions. 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 shifting ideals of Indu in *Roots and Shadows* maintain that through the amicable amalgam 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.

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