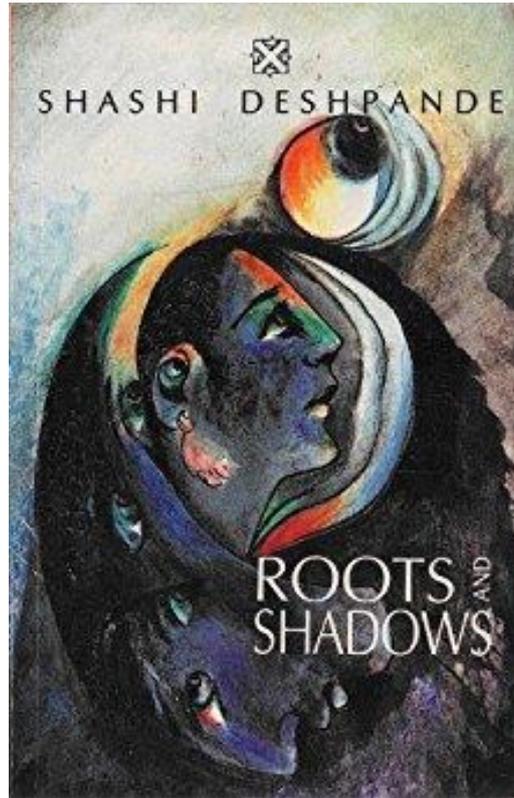


**Familial Relationships in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots And Shadows*
and *A Matter Of Time***

K. Kaleeswari, M.A., M.Phil.



Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande, the living dynamic woman writer in Indian English literature occupies a prominent position. She has treated the typical Indian themes very sensitively and has pictured the contemporary middle-class women with rare competence. Shashi Deshpande's novels and short stories depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian woman caught as if in a vice between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and the urge of self-expression, individuality and independence for the woman on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the woman to fulfill herself basically as a human being, independent of her various traditional roles as daughter, wife, mother and so on. A prominent strain of her novels is the depiction of the 'self' of her protagonists.

Deshpande's writing reflects an ongoing process of problematizing life's conflicts and compromises, resolutions and non-resolutions, ironies and affirmations, triumphs and tragedies, and so on. This way of looking at the human condition without any closures, concretizes major themes of her fictions as man-woman relationship, human desire, longing, body, and gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion and protest. She draws attention of her readers, to the dilemmas of women and the choices they make when they find themselves in the whirlpool of complex man –woman relationships. Though her women protagonists are consistently pressured in clumsy, knotty relationships, her women firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized traditions; stereotypically idealized identities. Thereby she casts a very hard look at the structural dynamics of the society functioning against the advantage of female.

Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relations she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. Shashi Deshpande has achieved reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. Though not an avowed feminist, she occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists who are concerned with the problems of women and their quest for identity. She sensitively portrays the lot of women and their mute, convoluted self-abnegation in her novels. For the courageous and sensitive treatment of large and significant themes, her works are regarded as outstanding contributions to Indian literature in English.

Roots and Shadows

Roots and Shadows was published in 1983. It won the Thirumathi Rangamalai Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-1983. The novel unravels the agony and suffocation. The protagonist, Indu, undergoes in the male-dominated tradition-bound society. Her attempts to liberate herself from the shackles of the age-old customs prove to be deceptive. Her idea of being a liberated woman seems nothing but illusion. To show her strong rejection of the traditions, she gets married to a person of her own choice. But soon she is unmasked of her garb of her liberated woman as, to her great surprise, she finds herself aping the model of the ideal Indian wife. She is also disillusioned by the orthodox thoughts and behaviour as well as the materialistic attitude of her so-called progressive-minded husband Jayant. She finds

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herself alone at every turn of life. *Roots and Shadows* as the title suggests, is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle. Indu, the female protagonist in the novel, is like a bridge between the 'Roots' and 'Shadows'.

Changing Scenario of Marital Relationships

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1983) present the changing scenario of marital relationships. Indu, the protagonist is brought to Akka's care when her vagabond father leaves her after her mother's death. Brought up under the care of Atya, Kaka and Akka, Indu from the beginning was expected to follow the tradition of the family. However, her intelligence, education and rebellious nature always brought her into conflict with Akka. Indu grows up questioning the conventions, which defined different patterns of behaviour for girls and boys. Refusing to be meek, submissive and sacrificing which were traditionally expected of a girl, she was constantly at war with Akka. In her desire to break free from such orthodox rules she decides to join a college in Bombay and stays in a hostel. She adheres to her decision not to go back to the traditional set up which suffocated her. Therefore, she stays in Bombay and takes up a job. However her meeting and subsequent marriage with Jayant brings her back in the framework of tradition which she had been running away from. She instantly falls in love with him and decides to marry him in spite of Akka's objections. He gives her a feeling of solidity and certainty. She wants to show her family members that she is a successful woman. She leaves her house to be free and independent and complete. She takes Jayant to be a modern, broad-minded and thoughtful person. But she is greatly deceived and disillusioned.

Consequence of Love Marriage

Indu's love-marriage suppresses her human demands. It is both physically and spiritually dissatisfied. It degenerates into a mere psychological affair and makes her feel that she has abused the sanctity of her body. She is not allowed to express her feelings. As Seema Suneel quotes, "Indu's marriage with Jayant denies her fullness of experience. It brings her nothing but a sense of incompleteness. It threatens to rob Indu of her 'self' (qtd. in Upadhyay 170) She expresses her agony,

This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it.... That was somewhere outside me, a part of me

without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone. (RS 34)

Her idea of being complete, independent and self-contained vanishes after the marriage like dew-drops after sun-rise. After a rebellious love-marriage, she slips into the conventional way of life. To her great surprise, and shock, she finds that Jayant has not only expected her to submit but has taken her submission for granted and she also, without being aware of it, submits herself to him step by step in the name of love. Then she realizes that it is not love but an adjustment as she never wants conflict in her married life. Her love for him makes her endure the discontentedness she feels in her marital relationship. Indu's marriage with Jayant has compelled in her duality of life. Indu who was proud of her logical and rational thinking is struggling hard to understand the actual cause which is destroying her married life. She was not able to express her ideas and feelings in front of Jayant who would call it only, "nonsense" and nothing else. There is a lack of understanding communication in the couple. By refusing to accept Indu's real self, her human self, Jayant forces in her a state of armed neutrality to life with him and mars the felicity of their relationship. She explains her frustration, her disappointment and her humiliation to Naren, her childhood friend to whom she can open up:

I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend I'm passive. And unresponsive. I am still and dead... Not a pure woman. Not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately and is ashamed of it. (RS 92)

An Ideal House Wife

Indu plays the role of an ideal house wife but that restricts, rather circumscribes, her self-development-firstly, by taking away her freedom of thought and expression and secondly, by denying her the scope of giving free play to her artistic potential. Indu works for a magazine but she is not satisfied with her job. She wants to go for creative writing. But Jayant comes in her way. He denies her the freedom to leave the job and do whatever she likes. Indu's struggle for selfhood, her struggle towards liberation of the mind, her struggle for an emotional and intellectual definition of herself as a self-actualizing person, is in a sense a fight against her womanhood. The conflict situation of Indu's marriage, her awakened consciousness, her confused psyche in the face of it and the consequent emotion-rooted

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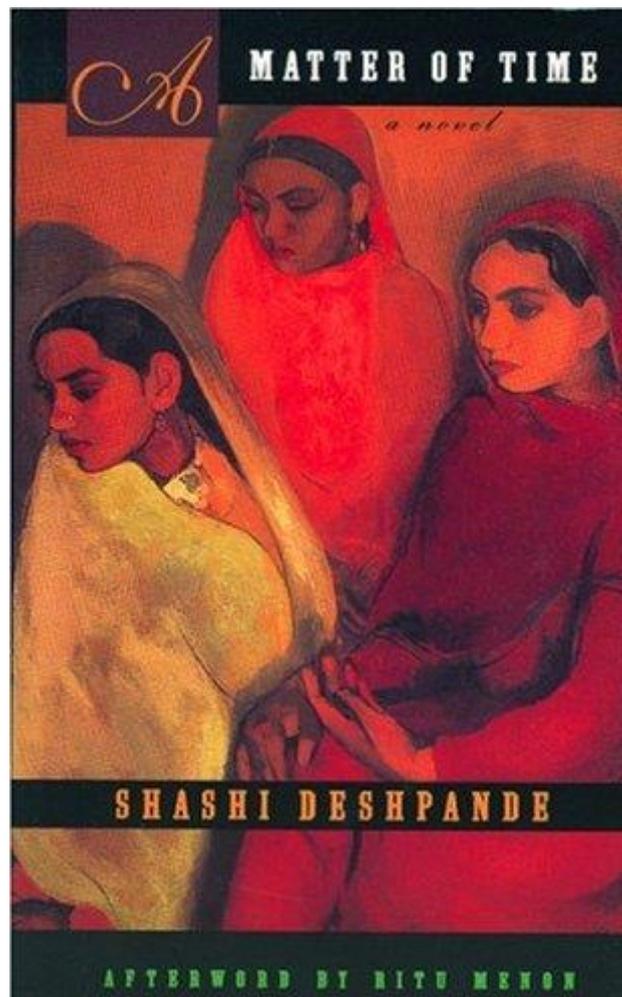
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ambivalent attitude towards love and marriage suggest how for a woman as a woman, realization of self can only be a self in conflict.

Thus through the character of Indu, Shashi Deshpande concentrates on the tortures and sufferings of middle-class Indian Women who are educated, sensitive and are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. Deshpande highlights the household conflict between wife and husband operating at the emotional, intellectual and sexual levels.

A Matter of Time



A Matter of Time is one of Shashi Deshpande latest novels, published in 1996. In it, Deshpande depicts the subtle process of oppression at work in marriage. The novel portrays a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. While the protagonists of her earlier novels cannot think of themselves outside marriage, Sumi, the protagonist of the present novel, finds herself unperturbed in such a crisis. She manages herself admirably and becomes self-dependent. One of the major concerns of Shashi Deshpande as a novelist is the

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depiction of the marital relationships among the characters she has portrayed. She depicts what happens to men and women in and after marriage, what they have been, what they have become and what is in store for them.? In her novel *A Matter of Time* Shashi Deshpande presents characters belonging to four generations corresponding to the time frame of about one hundred and fifty years that span the major portions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The changes in status of men and women and the changing nature of marital relationships are presented in this novel.

Epitome of Silent Suffering

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi, Kalyani's daughter who is married to Gopal appears to be epitome of silent suffering and passive resistance but is different in many ways from Kalyani. Sumi has been depicted as a proud girl with good opinion of herself. She believes in getting on with life and so self-respecting that when her husband, Gopal, deserts her no apparent reason, she does not even ask him the one question that she wants to:

What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because ...it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn you back on everything in your life?" (AMT 27)

Sumi's marriage is an example of love marriage. Before their marriage, Sumi and Gopal had decided that if either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be allowed to go. Sumi and Gopal enjoyed harmonious relationship during the early years of their marriage. It is strange for all that he walks out on his wife and children, but Gopal feels some inner emptiness because of which he deserts all this. The main reason for Gopal walking out on his family is his childhood experiences. His childhood experience was not normal. His father took his father's widow for his wife. Gopal used to think that he was born of that incestuous relationship. Secondly, seeing his half-sister, Sudha, reduced from her affectionate self to be a peevish and self-centered one after her surgery and the loss of her husband. Gopal realizes the truth that one is inescapably alone. Apart from all this, Gopal writing on article, the students' attack on him and his emptiness lead to his desertion. Though deserted by her husband Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her.

Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily.

Self-Sacrificing Women of the Older Generations

In her parents' home Kalyani and Shripati lead a strange life. Kalyani is the mute sufferer. Kalyani's character is a faithful representation of self-sacrificing women of the older generations. Through the portrayal of the second generation pair, Kalyani and Shripati, Deshpande depicts the predicament of women who are confined in the framework of traditional marriage and lead a life of self-denial and suffering. Kalyani's life is an example of forced incompatible arranged marriage in which a woman has to suffer endlessly. Even if marriage fails in giving happiness of any kind to woman, it is preferred because it gives a security and a sense of dignity to woman in society. Kalyani is the only daughter of her parents. She is not allowed to complete her studies because marriage is the main consideration for her mother. She has to accept her uncle as a husband in order to prevent the property from going away in the hands of others. This is the main reason of "the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that doomed it from the start" (AMT 143).

Kalyani and Shripati miss their son while going to her parental home. This happens at the railway station. The son wanders away as she is attending to the crying baby and Shripati has gone to check for reservations. In search of the lost son, Shripati "went about the city like a madman" (AMT 140) but no avail. This brought Kalyani's marital life to an end. Shripati stops speaking his wife: he "has not spoken to her since the day it happened"- about thirty five years ago. (AMT 140) Even this oppressive silence could not kill Kalyani's affection to the other members of the family. She is the anchor in an ill-starred family. Her daughter Sumi recognizes the great contribution of this 'self-punishing woman': In fact, noticing the complex relationships that Kalyani has with so many people, she [Sumi] is reminded of the spider she had seen one morning scuttling from point to point, drawing silken threads out of itself, weaving in the process a web with a beautiful design.(AMT 185). Kalyani endures almost forty years of this mentally tormenting relationship, trembling, shaking and fearing in his presence. A man so loathsome and despising towards her that his mere thought sends a chill down her back and yet he has full control over her, and she responds to his calls with every part of her being.

Sumi in her parent's house, she feels she is lost and has no place there. Herself-control prevents her from demonstrating her grief "... she fully realizes that trying a lacerated heart to one's wrist and showing it to the world is meaningless." (qtd. in Prasanna 54) Revealing an independent and individualistic spirit Sumi refuses to accept any kind of economic assistance either from her parents or from Premi, her sister. Working as a teacher, though on temporary basis, she wants to stand on her own legs and assert her identity. Sumi meets the disapproving comments from women like Shankar's mother, who says:

When are you going back to your husband'...' you should be with him'. Look at his state! It's all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that's not your home...Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you're done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if has-woman shouldn't have any pride. (AMT 161)

Sumi wonders the way, even today, the fate of woman being measured only through their marital status. A woman in the society gets respect only if she has her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistresses he has, their incompatibility, his cruel treatment of, or his stony silence with his wife. It is enough if they live together under the same roof because "what is a woman without a husband?" (AMT 167). Sumi looks for a permanent job, and with great determination learns to ride a two-wheeler, at her age, As soon as she learns to balance her drive, she throws up her arms in triumph of her success. Sumi's decision to learn to ride the scooter is her first step towards a more independent existence. She even decides to move out of her parent's house to live independently with her daughters and frantically searches for a house. Though her parents do not consider them a burden, Sumi is unwilling to stay there. Sumi picks up the threads of her life and shows her will-power and independence, she appears to be spineless woman and an indifferent moron, too dull to grasp the situation.

Sumi enters a world of creative writing. Her first attempt in writing a play entitled *The Gardener's Son* is a success. That gives her the courage to deal with more daring themes like female sexuality. She decides to write a story with Surpanaka the demon sister of King Ravana at the center. On Aru's eighteenth birthday Sumi tells the family of the job that she has got and of her and seema moving away to Devgiri. Aru is shattered but Sumi consoles her by saying that their family life would have been over anyway. The fact that Sumi dies just as

she is about to begin a new life, is a little hard for the reader to reconcile to the death being abrupt. But Sumi has established her identity and found a meaningful existence before she dies. In this novel both the Kalyani and Sumi are abandoned by their husbands Shripati and Gopal. Both the male members failed to play the role as husband and father whereas the three generation of women have built the family playing the role of wife, mother, daughter, grandmother and granddaughter.

To Conclude

In *Roots and Shadows* and *A Matter of Time* Deshpande portrays the familial relationships and the necessity for women to live within relationships. Family is the nerve centre of all human activities in her novels. In her novels she has given the outer and the inner self of her male and female characters in a psychological way. She always concerned about people, their predicaments and moral values. She gives the clear picture of marital relationships, mother- daughter relationships, father- daughter relationships. Both the novels examine the familial relationships within the marriage and make to understand that marriage is a divine one.

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K. Kaleeswari, M.A., M.Phil.
Department of English
The Standard Fire Works Rajaratnam College for Women
Sivakasi-626 123
Tamilnadu
India
Kpkali1992@gmail.com