

Perception of Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*

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Abstract

Feminism is fairly late in the improvement of the twentieth century English literature. Women are forever subjugated, suppressed and marginalized by men. They have been mistreated and oppressed in all walks of life. After independence, many Indian women novelists have raised their voice in opposition to the mistreatment of women. Among these women writers emerge the names of Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and so on. Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique place in the postcolonial Indian women writers in English. Deshpande presents the sensible depiction of the male-dominated middle-class society of India. Her central characters are trapped between the tradition and modernity, but they try to hit a balance between the two. This paper is an attempt to analyze the novel Roots and Shadows from the feminist perspective. It discovers the pain and suffocation of the central character, Indu in the male-dominated civilization.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, Perception of Feminism, Marginalized, Oppression, Mistreatment, Identity, Individuality.

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Deshpande presents the sensible depiction of the male-dominated middle-class society of India. Her central characters are trapped between the tradition and modernity, but they try to hit a

balance between the two. Deshpande is very practical in the sense that suggests marriages are not based on love but convenience. This paper is an attempt to analyze the novel Roots and Shadows from the feminist perspective. It discovers the pain and suffocation of the central character, Indu in the male-dominated civilization. She tries to flee from this to find her real ‘self’, but every time she is misled. After a long time and much introspection her voyage ends with the understanding that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots behind.

Indu lives in a joint family with her Kaka’s (Uncle) and Atya’s. She is taken to this house when she was only fifteen days old child. In this house ‘Akka’ her father’s Atya is a governing person. She rules over the house. Akka came to this house as a childless widow with her possessions and old uncle. As a girl child in their joint family, Indu always educated to be dutiful, meek, meek and unquestioning. Indu is an educated modern Indian woman who has her own way of livelihood. She is torn between custom and patriarchy and rebels next to the principles and gets married to Jayant whom she loves at the age of eighteen. From this point of marriage, her life is filled with dishonesty and delusion. Indu leaves her house to be liberated, self-governing and complete. She wants to show her family members that she is a modern and victorious woman. Indu gets shattered seeing the so-called modern image of her husband, Jayant. She realizes that like any other man, Jayant supposes her to conform to his outlooks, while he remains resistant to regulations. Her plan of being complete disappears following her wedding. After this deception and disappointment, she went back into the conservative ways of existence. She acts like the conventional Indian wife. She says: “Marriage makes me so dependent. 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, what he would like. What would please him? It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be ... Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own” (*R&S* 2).

Indu fails to remember her individuality by becoming his conventional wife. Women are forever acknowledged by a relationship like Kaku and Kaki, Atya and Vahini, Ajji and Mami, have they no autonomous individuality of their own? Indu makes alteration in the name of love but she understands that she has in fact misleading herself. Indu works as a journalist but is not contented with her job. She wants to go for artistic writing, but Jayant was not ready for that. In her professional life, Indu has to limit her freedom and submits to the orders of the editor. Indu smothers her conscience and leaves her middle-class principles behind. She presents herself in the name of love but she realizes that it is not love but alteration. Her husband’s character compels her to screen her true ‘self’ from him: “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” (*R&S* 2). In such situations, Indu is called upon by her grand aunt Akka who is now lying on her death-bed. After ten years Indu went to her ancestral house. Akka was dead making Indu as her inheritor. For the last ritual of Akka every family member came there. Indu comprehends many things in her stay with that family house.

Due to her perplexed state of mind, she enters into the physical relationship with Naren, Old Uncle’s grandson. In their early days they were friends. Indu liked Naren’s modern way of living. Naren says, “I didn’t want to belong. I didn’t want to be envied. I didn’t want to be admired. I just

wanted to live the way I felt like, the way I desired” (R&S 2). Indu likes his aloofness, his wholeness and desire to live similar to him. Again, Indu offers herself twice to Naren. But later she feels guilty due to the old Sanskar and she resents it. Such behaviour of Indu shows her split personality being cultured middle class educated women. Indu is a woman, who initially loved Jayant but by inviting Naren in her life, cheating her husband Jayant. She wants to be free from all this, but she finds herself involved in marital life. She expresses her confused state of mind before Naren: “So, that’s all I’m Naren. Not a pure woman. Not a too faithfull wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately and is ashamed of it” (R&S 2).

Indu is always in a confused state of mind. She needs to run away from the trouble and responsibilities of womanhood. She thinks that marriage is a trap. In the meantime, she obtains the letter from her husband Jayant. He wants her to not recall all the family bonds and come back to his home. Old Uncle tries to clear the perplexity in her mind. According to him, it is inescapable, unavoidable, and inevitable because the entire world is made up of inter-reliant parts. He says, “If all the bacteria in the world were to die, the rest of the life would be unable to exist” (R&S 2). Indu is completely emotionally involved to her ancestral house and also to her husband, Jayant. On the one hand that house and the members of the house have turned out to be a part and parcel of her life; and on the other hand, she can’t live devoid of Jayant.

One morning she receives the news of Naren’s passing away. Naren was dead like his parents by drowning. Indu took the resolution to sell that house and also to pay for Mini’s wedding. At last that house was sold to Shankarappa. Now, she came to know that that ancestral house had been a trap, binding her to past. After selling of the house, Indu says, “Yes, the house had been a trap; too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now, I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself” (R&S 2). Eventually, she realizes that she has been chasing shadows leaving her roots in Jayant. She observes marriage as a trap and not as a bond of love. Now, she realizes that we can’t run away from attachment as it is the law of life. Finally, shadows disappear from her vision and she sees the clear light of day with the awareness of her real ‘self’. This is the ideal and sensible realization and equilibrium between tradition and modernity.

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