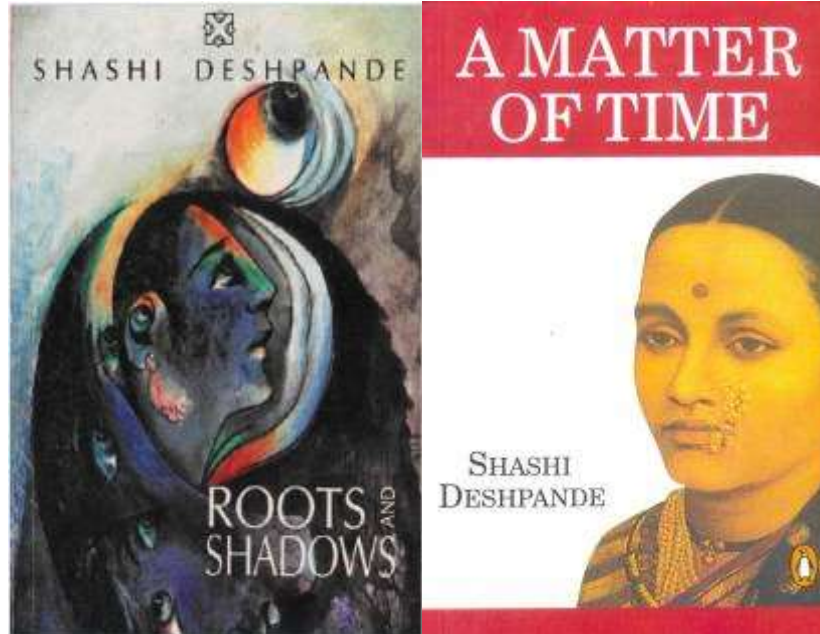


Intricate Domestic Ties in Shashi Deshpande's Novels *Roots and Shadows* and *A Matter of Time*

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Human Relations

In life everybody has to live within relationships, for there is no other way. The underlying theme in Shashi Deshpande's novels is human relationships, especially the ones that exist between father and daughter, husband and wife and also between mother and daughter. A survey of her novels reveal the various aspects and various dimensions of familial relationships: mother-daughter, father-daughter, brother-sister relationship with in-laws, and the much focused husband-wife relationship which is the foundation and core of the Indian family from where many new relationships take shape and develop. The joint family includes many more relationships like uncle-aunt, both paternal and maternal, their children and their ties with them and the grand children's bond with their grandparents, and so on. The purpose of this paper is to

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examine how these relationships have been portrayed in a very realistic and transparent way with the joys and sorrows that accompany everyday life and nobody can escape what life offers and this in turn has an impact on the individual's future course of life.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. She primarily reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings, rooted in the culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, and they give artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her feminism rooted in the native environment tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook.

Surrogate Mother

The novelist uses the cinematic technique of flashback for narration and *Roots and Shadows* opens with Indu, middle-class orthodox Brahmin girl, returning to her ancestral place after eleven years in order to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the 'old rich family tyrant'. Akka, the surrogate mother of Indu, is a domineering woman in the novel. She is a childless widow and symbolizes authority. Her word is a law in the house and no one dared to object and question her authority. Till her death, she had maintained her power, her authority over everyone. Indu has been brought up under her authority and control. But she always questions her authority and wants to set herself free. Both Akka and Indu have incompatible temperaments and they represent two different worlds. Akka represents the old generation, tradition and authority, while Indu the new generation, modernity and freedom.

Hindrance to Freedom

Indu finds her surrogate mother dominant and a hindrance to her freedom. At every stage she feels she is muffled and frustrated. She comes to the place to find her original roots and discovers dark shadows falling on her life. When she studies in the college, Akka doesn't allow her to meet the boys and cultivate friendship with them. She hates and challenges Akka's domination. Indu leaves her home full of hatred for family, for Akka especially and she swears

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that she would never go back. Thus, she rebels against Akka's authority, world and her values and marries Jayant and enters another house to be independent and complete.

Comfort of the Family

Indu thinks that marriage has given her freedom, but ironically enough, soon she realizes the futility of her decision. Indu's return to her parental home comes as an eye-opener to her. It is here that she really comes to know Akka and others in her family. She realizes that there is indeed a comfort in living as part of the family, as Indu, who had lost her mother at the time of her birth, did not lack a mother's love till the others had told her that she had no mother. The gap had been so fully and completely filled in by what the family gave her - tender and loving care from Atya, deep affection from Kaka and perfect understanding from old uncle. There remained no gap at all. This is one way in which the familial conflict is partially resolved. The re-entering of Indu into the ancestral home makes clear to her what is wrong with her marriage. The home she had discarded becomes a place of shelter of solace and consolation to her. It is Akka's house which offers her ample opportunities to know herself.

Marriage and a Life of Submission

Indu too was advised by the elderly women as a child to inculcate in her the treasured feminine qualities as it is the only way to survive in male dominated families. But Indu has her own dreams and promises herself not to become their model.

She is independent, intelligent, logical and rational but after her marriage, she becomes a submissive woman whose identity is only an extension of her husband. She is shocked to realize that she is turning into an "ideal", Indian wife, obeying her husband's wishes and fancies. She lives up to the expectations of her husband:

Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him? And I can't blame 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. (RS 54)

Distressing Sacrifices

Even in her ambition of being a writer, she is forced to make the most distressing sacrifice, when she is required to suppress faces and present a glossy picture to the readers. She loses her interest in writing creative articles. She is all the more angry, when her husband asks her to compromise and commands her not to resign her job. He says, "That's life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don't we? Don't forget, we have a long way to go" (*RS* 17).

Indu is quite submissive. She does not question him but instead she silently goes back to her work, though hating it and hating herself for it. Indu has avowed never to obey the rules to the concept of the ideal woman as represented by her aunts and other tradition-oriented female relatives who do not have an independent identity. But Indu realises that with her marriage to Jayant, she has in fact conformed to the notion of the ideal woman, performing modest rituals.

Impact of Conventions and Norms

Roots and Shadows expounds the unforgettable spot imprinted on the psyche of women by the conventions and norms recognized by the society which restricts them from exhibiting their true self. The manner and means of their development inculcates in them submissiveness, silence and passiveness which has a strong hold on their psyche. Indu is an adventurous explorer whose feet are treading forward but eyes are looking backwards into the past. The Indian woman still cannot decide whether what she thinks about herself is important or what others think about her is. In the process, she tries to reach a meeting point of both and fails miserably in her attempts. In the inferno created by herself she continues to be tormented throughout her life and is finally taken away by the wind becoming a handful of ash, without even leaving any mark or memory (*Rani*, 53). Even modern, educated women consciously swathe themselves with these traits and find themselves in a fix. These qualities which have become the roots of femininity always casts its shadows in women's life.

To Make Sense of Relations with Husband

In *A Matter of Time*, the family narrative opens up when one evening Sumi's world is torpedoed as her husband Gopal walks out on her and their three daughters, Aru, Charu and

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Seema without any explanation. Sumi too doesn't ask for one. Sumi along with her daughters return to their ancestral house where her mother Kalyani had been living in an oppressive and strange silence, striving to make sense of her relation with her husband who hasn't spoken to her the last thirty five years. The secrecy of their long silence has its roots in a sad tale of loss and anguish. Shripati detained his wife responsible for the loss of their four-year old mentally retarded son.

Newer Understanding in Stifling Atmosphere

It is in this stifling atmosphere the characters evolve and come to a newer understanding of their lives. Kalyani gives vent to her long suppressed feelings as her relation with her daughter and grand daughters' develop, opening up the gates of her memories through which the family legacy pours out. In a world dominated by men and in which marriage and sons are the only things that matter, Manorama is unable to see the good that is in Kalyani, nor is she able to enjoy her granddaughters, Sumi and Premi. paradoxically it is Manorama who is a victim and not Kalyani. It is this that Kalyani realizes in the end, when she tells Aru:

For so many years I thought I had nothing. My mother didn't care for my children either. Daughters again, she said. And when you were born, a daughter I wondered how she could have been so blind. Now when I look at, you, my three granddaughters, especially at you, I think I am luckier than my mother. She's the unlucky one who didn't know how to enjoy her children and grandchildren. (*MT* 226)

A Representation of Self-sacrificing Indian Woman

Kalyani's character is a faithful representation of self-sacrificing Indian women of the older generation. Sumi too appears to be an embodiment of silent suffering and passive resistance. She shows limitless patience and accepts her misfortune but at the same time maintains her fresh Sumi finds comfort in taking up her job Aru as the eldest, too tries to be the man of the family. She insists on taking her mother to the dentist and tries to fill the blank Gopal has left.

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The focus of the narrative contemplation in *A Matter of Time* is provoked by the vision that man can choose his own path but the responsibility of his choice falls on the shoulders of the woman. Kalyani and Sumi are abandoned by their respective husbands, Shripati and Gopal. Shripati had never openly declared his reasons for abandoning Kalyani. Gopal also could not tell his wife the reasons for deserting her. Though the family suffers from this irresponsible act of man, no one punishes him for his selfish act. Both the male members have shattered the lives of the family failing to fulfill their roles as husband and father, whereas the three generations of women have built the family playing the role of wife, mother, daughter, grandmother and granddaughter.

A Matter of Time presents three generations in the same family and under the same roof. They have their own values and mindsets and "a finely individualised unconventional relationship" (Sree, 84) with each other, with which they act and react in a meaningful way. As **Arundhati Roy** has said recently on the occasion of receiving the Booker Prize, India lives simultaneously in several centuries.

Women as Protectors of Family

Thus, *Roots and Shadows* and *A Matter of Time* centre around the family relationships and the necessity for women to live within a relationship *because without women's contribution, family can be collapsed*. Shashi Deshpande presents a woman's view, what she is in a family and what the family means to her. Her writings grasp a widespread plea that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India. Her major concern emerges from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirror to our lives.

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