

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

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### ***Abstract***

*Shashi Deshpande explores the struggle of her protagonist in male dominated society. Shashi Deshpande has introduced the concept of new woman in her novels through her leading protagonist, who found herself in the state of dilemma. Her woman protagonist in her present novels explores the marital dissonance and finally rebels and breaks the shackles of traditional bond of marriage. Deshpande's heroines often explores the theme of emancipation through their presence. Shashi Deshpande portrayed different facts of human feminine psyche in her novel. Deshpande explores the psychological exploration of inner mind of Indian women in the Indian novels in English.*

***Key Words: Emancipation, Marital dissonance, Identity, Quest, Feminine psyche***

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

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**S**hashi Deshpande is one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga, she was born in Dharwad, in Karnataka in 1938. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics, then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law. She devoted early years of her marriage to the care of her two young sons. Later she took a course in journalism and for some time worked in a magazine. Her writing career began in 1970, initially with short stories, published in various magazines. Later, these were published in book form. She is the author of four children's books and six novels. She lives in Bangalore, with her pathologist husband. Shashi Deshpande never wrote from the point of view of "marketability", no exotic themes to attract the West, no adapting her s to target readership. She wrote of wimple day-to-day Indian middle class life. The locales of her novels are places which have a definite meaning and function. The writings of Shashi Deshpande, nine novels, six collections of short stories, four books for children and a screen play prove that she is one of the most prolific women writers in English in contemporary India. Shashi Deshpande shot into prominence when her novel *That Long Silence* was published by the British Feminist Publishing House, Virago. Recipient of a string of literary awards including the Sahitya Akademi Awards in 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence*, her works have been translated into a number of languages: German, Russian, Finnish, Dutch and Danish. Nevertheless, she prefers to remain an invisible writer not wishing to draw much attention, perhaps the reason being that as a writer Shashi Deshpande is rooted in reality.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a great literary force. In her writings, she has sensitively treated typical Indian themes and has portrayed contemporary middle class women with rare competence. They represent the overwhelming majority and struggle in the traditional world of the society. Perhaps the primary reasons for Shashi Deshpande to write are that it allows her to create her own world. Creative writing allows her 'a safe place' from which she can explore a wide range of experience, especially in regard to woman's status in society. She sensitively portrays the lot of women and their mute, convoluted self-abnegation in her stories. For the courageous and sensitive treatment of large and significant themes her works are regarded as outstanding contributions to Indian literature in English.

Shashi Deshpande has been writing fiction for more than fifteen years, but she shot into prominence when her novel, *That Long Silence* was published by the British Feminist Publishing House, Virago. It won the Sahitya Akadami Award in 1990. The novel has been translated into French and Dutch. Shashi Deshpande's earlier novel *Roots and Shadows* won the Thirumathi Rangamalai Prize for the best Indian novel. Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has been well received and translated into German and Russian. The collection of short stories entitled *The Legacy* is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University, U.S.A.

The novel, *Roots and Shadows*, published in 1983, deals with Indu's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom thus bringing her into confrontation with not only her husband but also her family and society at large. Against the wishes of her father and her family members she marries Jayant, a person of her own choice. Indu is a determined girl and longs for freedom and independence and leaves the house of Akka, the old rich family tyrant, to enter into another home where she would be independent and complete. She soon realizes the futility of her decision and that one can never exchange roots with another.

Since her childhood, Indu had been told that as a girl she should be weak and submissive and that a woman's life is nothing "but to get married, to bear children, to have

sons and then grandchildren." (128) An ideal woman is one "who sheds her 'I' who loses her identity in her husband." (54)

Indu in her very first meeting with Jayant, is swept off her feet. He gives her feeling of solidity and certainty. But she feels that she has been deceived and made to hide her feelings" as if they were bits of garbage." (41) It is a marriage that suppresses her femininity and her human demands. For Indu, it is both physically and spiritually dissatisfying. Jayant takes her for granted and expects her "to submit." She does it because she loves him. Indu's love-marriage degenerates into a mere psychological affair and makes her feel that she has abused her body's sanctity.

Indu's marriage with Jayant denies her fullness of experience. It brings her no satisfaction and happiness. It threatens to rob Indu of her 'self.' She speaks of her incompleteness thus: "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." (34) Gradually, like all other women, Indu performs all the activities which her husband likes her to do. "Marriage makes one 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 want. What he would like. What would please him." (54) It is because of Jayant, that Indu's life is both meaningful and meaningless. As she herself agrees, "It is not the way I want it to be." (54) She compares herself to a fluid which has no form or shape of its own.

Her marriage to Jayant has compelled in her a duality of life. As a result of her unhappy conjugal life with Jayant, Indu enters into a physical relationship with Naren, Initially, she feels: "I" m essentially monogamous. For me, its one man and one man alone" but later she offers herself to Naren twice. She thinks it to be no crime or sin to make love with another person besides her husband but this feeling is short-lived. Later on, she feels that she has cheated Jayant and her relationship with Naren is 'dishonourable' and 'dishonest.' Gradually, Indu submits herself to Jayant, not for love but to avoid conflict. She declares: "One hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this... That I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was



afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success.... And so I went on lying, even to myself... which mean that I, who had despised Devdas for being a coward, was the same thing myself. I had killed myself as surely as he had done.”(175) Indu is afraid to react for the fear of failure resulting in her suffering.

Indu tries hard to find reasons for the unhappiness in her married life and comes to the conclusion that “self surrender” and “self-abnegation” are her greatest enemies. She feels that she loves her husband “too passionately”(92) whereas Jayant never tries to understand what she really want or feels; there is no communication between the two of them.

Indu lacks satisfaction not only in marriage but also as a writer. She did not write what she herself want to write but what the editor wants her to write, in accordance with the demands of the public. She wants to leave her job but Jayant rejects the idea with the view that “we need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go.” She wants to ask “go where” but does not do so and hates herself for being trapped in such a fashion.

After ten years of marriage, Indu receives summons from Akka but is hesitant to go, Jayant also disapproves of the idea but she decides to leave for her ancestral house. But soon she realizes her mistake and wishes that she had listened to Jayant’s advice and not gone there. She has been entrusted with a great responsibility of being Akka’s heiress, leaving all the money and jewels to her. She is angered by this for she has wanted to remain detached from the family. Indu does not know what to do about the house-whether she should sell it or keep it. Or should she ask Jayant? Staying in this house, provides her an opportunity to reconsider her relationship with her husband and to find out what is wrong in it. She has never revealed her whole self even before her husband and has revealed only those parts which her husband wants to see. As a result she has not only wronged herself but also Jayant. She realizes that there is nothing shameful in her need for Jayant. Her love for Jayant enables her to lose herself in Jayant, thus creating harmony in their lives.

Indu is able to judge Akka’s choice of her being an heiress. She realizes that Akka knew that she would be able to show indomitable courage and strength thus fulfilling her responsibilities and that she must seek freedom within the bounds of obligations and

responsibilities. She decides to sell the house and not to enrich herself despite Jayant's intention, and makes a trust out of it. In her personal life also, Indu decides not to be different but to go back to Jayant, resign her job and devote herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of.

In the end she achieves freedom and does what she thinks she should be doing. She successfully conquers her fears and achieves harmony in life. She says: "I must know to live without fear... fear of being involved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without fear of failure." (191) She refuses to be influenced by Jayant who does not want her to leave her job. He is finally able to recognize her strength and her weaknesses which have been latent so far. Indu finds emancipation through her action and involve herself in freedom. This helps them to develop a better understanding between them, thus opening the door to happiness. Indu discovers that relationships are the roots of one's being and follow one like shadows.

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