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SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "ROOTS AND SHADOWS": TRANSFORMATION OF WOMAN IN
THE MODERN GENERATION

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ABSTRACT

The subjugation of women by the age old norms of the hegemonic society led women to endeavor in paralyzing the circumstances; the insights to raise their voice varied, but the one which is effective is writing as life is reflected in literature where readers are enlightened with the knowledge which can revolutionize and bring change in tradition. The reasons for feminism has its roots in the western world which is reflected in Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' which dates back to 1924 and Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' (1949) .These works have come as a reaction to the society where women are restricted to play submissive roles. Some of the significant themes which befit are: subjugation, marginality, patriarchal society, and many. When it comes to Indian context the major foundations are after 1960 which we can say it as post colonial tendencies for feminism where Indian women writers came forward to fight for the rights of women. As for the women novelists are concerned, we can name eminent writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Arundathi Roy, Manju Kapur, Shobha De etc. Shashi Deshpande is a prolific writer who has produced many works where some of them are categorized under feministic studies; the one to my interest is "Roots and Shadows" where she creates a middle class woman named 'Indu' who works for the benefit of her members of family playing multiple roles and loses her identity of a talented writer; the work allotted to her is of the designed role of a woman in the society. Owing to jeopardy, the educated Indian women of post colonial generation don't adhere to the age old norms of the society. The present paper focuses the place of Shashi Deshpande with reference to her novels especially the said one which is about the realization of a middle class woman who thrives for recognition in the society. Here the protagonist symbolizes a modern woman who is on the verge of transformation.

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The reasons for feminism has its roots in the western world which is reflected in Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' which dates back to 1924 and Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' (1949). These works have come as a reaction to the society where women are restricted to play submissive roles. Some of the significant themes which befit are: subjugation, marginality, patriarchal society, and many. When it comes to Indian context the major foundations are the end and after 1960 which we can say it as post colonial tendencies for feminism where Indian women writers came forward to fight for the rights of women:

It was mainly after the women's liberation of the late 1960's that the contemporary feminist ideology evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern. The focus of literary studies was shifted to women's writing with a view to re-reading, re-visioning and reinterpreting it in the right of long-existing gender bias and sexual politics in history, culture, society, family, language and literature. (Dobson196).

The concept of feminism is linked with the empowerment of women. In western countries empowerment of women is linked with personal recognition segregated from the society irrespective of their kinship where as a woman in India is associated recognition with cooperation from members of family and society. As for the women novelists who focused on the problems regarding women are Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Arundathi Roy, Manju Kapur, Shobha De etc. Shashi Deshpande is a prolific writer reflecting the role played by the middle-class educated women in the hegemonic Hindu society in majority of her novels. Her characters seem natural, and so come as typical stereotypes of the modern generation. Her novels bud natural and effortless throwing light on the common problems faced by women in the society. Deshpande does not make her women characters stronger than they actually are in their real life. She told her interviewer Vanamala Viswanatha that her "characters take their own ways" and that her "writing has to do with women as they are." Woman as presented in her novels a partial being, and is in need of someone to shelter her, be it her father, brother or husband. Indu the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, says, "This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself" (Deshpande 34). But from the stage of incompleteness the protagonist endeavors to a stage where she makes her mind to face the challenges which is the characteristic feature of woman of the modern generation. Boggled down by existential insecurity and uncertainty, women in her novels are in quest of refuge, which in *Roots and Shadows* is portrayed through the image of the house. In the current novel Shashi Deshpande artistically portrays the transformation of women in the modern generation. Indu the protagonist of the novel realizes the truth and makes strong decision to fight the problems and find a solution to them. Suman Bala writes:

Y.S.Sharadha, in her essay on *Roots and Shadows*, brilliantly traces the problem of marriage and affirmation of self through the protagonist Indu. As the story progresses, the meek, docile Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging and rebellious woman. She comes to grips with problems and discovers the meaning of life in her journey to individualism. (Bala13)

Roots and Shadows explores the inner self of Indu, who symbolizes the New Woman who is educated and who lives in close association with society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. She has the freedom to talk about anything she likes and is also free to think of her own caged self besides politics, corruption and what not. Married to Jayant, Indu freely moves with Naren and uses such words as "kiss", "deflowered" (Deshpande82-83) and so on in her conversation with him. Indu says:

We're gay and whimsical about our own people, our own country. We are rational, unprejudiced, and broadminded. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly, the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption, family planning. We scorn the corrupt, we despise the ignorant, we hate the wicked [...] And our hearts bleed, Naren, for Vietnam, for the blacks, for the Harijans [...] But frankly, we care a damn. Not one goddam about anything but our own precious selves, our own precious walled-in lives. (25)

Through the character of Indu, Deshpande tries to bring forward the voice of an educated woman for feminine urge in the form of creative writing, but they are always men to protest this. In this case we find

Jayant who disappoints Indu who contemplates to explore her notion .He says that Indu can do nothing against the whole system by writing:

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 (17).

Wife and husband are in the bond of marriage, but they are non linear in relation; one is the epitome of artistic selfhood while the other is in pursuit of materialistic desires. Indu silently bore the grudges of her husband. She simply followed her husband suppressing her desires but gradually she felt that she is self alienated from her ambition of becoming a creative writer. Thus Indu perceives herself as a shadow of the female self, a negative, and an object. Indu is hedged in, incarcerated, unable to "go on" through the ordeal of life, "feeling trapped" to and seeing herself "endlessly chained" (18) in the long dusty road that lay ahead of her. When she receives Akka's message she heaves a sigh of relief: "It had been a welcome reprieve. A chance to get away. To avoid thinking about what was happening to me [...] to Jayant and me [...] and our life together" (18).

With Jayant she urges a sense of completion and wholeness: "I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self" (114). But she did not really attain wholeness and integration of personality. She is often haunted by a "usual feeling of total disorientation" (33).As an outsider, she remains untouched by the milieu: "For some reason I was an outsider. The waves of sorrow, sympathy and comradeship rippled all around me, but left me untouched" (30). Indu suffers from alienation. There are references in the novel to her "loneliness", suggested through the images of 'dust and barrenness' (10) and 'dark room' (21):

Then we are out. It is dusty, a totally barren place. The glare and the heat are both fierce. I am alone now and move along people I don't know [...] I had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries [...] 'I am alone'. (10)

And, again, her disorientation finds expression when she says: "Our own people? Who are they? Where do I draw the boundary?" (11). Indu discovers that these family bonds are the root of one's being, which keep on dogging one like shadows but which one cannot flee from: "We flatter ourselves that we've escaped the compulsions of the past; but we're still pinioned to it by little things" (34). Even trifles and trivia which dog her like shadows uproot her from her social moorings. As a woman, Indu is hardly left with any choice. Her life is so acutely circumscribed that she cannot make quick decisions:

Inner strength [...] I thought of the words as I looked down on Mini's bowed head. A woman's life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered [...] have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? (6).

Indu recognizes the domination of men because of which the room of women is lost; she felt the subordination and marginalization of woman at the old house. The patriarchal society has brought disruptive temporal framework for women:

The house was silent, as if tired of its presence of liveliness. A few women who had been left behind, and who had been carrying on an interminable argument in the kitchen, their voices rising and falling monotonously, were now hustled out by an authoritative male voice (6).

Women thrive for love in the sacrosanctity of marriage. They remain silent in due course of repulsion of their perceptions. They can neither love nor hate but be content with "the gift of silence" (33) that marriage had brought them. In silence, Indu thrives for love but in vain:

Jayant and I [...] I wish I could say [...] But I cannot [...] I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness come to us for the asking (13).

A woman like Indu is to act and think according to the will of husband; the thoughts, actions, work need to cope with the directions of husband; what follows is only frustration. :

But my marriage had taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to hear. I had my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage (38).

In such a situation, Indu feels desolated from Jayant. To Ann Foreman women experience themselves as the fulfillment of other people's needs:

Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are essential structures of her oppression (102).

Indu is interested in creative writing – a means to articulate her feminine voice, to forge moments in art that are arresting and original. To this Jayant says 'No' because they need money and they have a long way to go. It is the authoritative husband who has the final say in this regard and not a meekly submissive wife like her.

Marriage is not a mere fixation of two lives but a conjugal bliss of fertility leading to happiness which comes through mutual cooperation and trust on each other. The mismatch of marriage yields unhappiness and frustration. Indu becomes an animal like creature suppressed in the hands of Jayant. Having lost harmony and integration, for peace, Indu exists as a suppression of hegemonic society. She does not believe in mothering. She believes that a woman should deprive herself of the satisfaction that comes from not only bearing a child but also playing a major role in his or her personal development. She says, "Having children [...] it isn't something you should think and plan about. You should just have them. And yes [...] end up like Sunanda Atya. Pure, female animal" (Deshpande115).

Indu in fact doesn't endeavor to act according to 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 (54).

Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman. It leads her to "aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose" (Beauvoir 500). Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high, for the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers a woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness:

She shuts behind her the doors of her new home. When she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland, the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted place ... (502)

Even in her professional life Indu has to curtail her freedom and submit to the dictates of the editor. Whatever Indu does, it is only to please Jayant. She herself says:

Now I dress the way I want. As I please [...] As I please? No, that's not true. 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. And I can't blame him [...] It's the way I want to be (Deshpande 49).

A woman's relating to other, needs tend to detract her from her own sense of identity. Indu feels as if she has become so fluid that she has no tangible space, no form of her own. It is Indu minus the 'I' which renders her an ideal woman – "a woman who sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in her husband's" (49), a woman who bears everything without a drop of tear. Marriage has reduced her to a state of "total surrender" (52). Through Indu, the novelist voices her own views on marriage:

It's a trap [...] that's what marriage is. A trap a cage? [...] a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other [...] isn't so wrong after all. And it's not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself? (60-61)

Indu loathes womanhood, which is thrust upon a girl, for its association with the idea of "uncleanliness" (79). The womanhood forced on women by the society compels them to hate the society and biological factors set on them. Hence she scorns the stage of womanhood which brings tribulations:

Tell me, Indu, why do you fight against your womanhood so much?"
"Do I?"

My womanhood [...] I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been brutally, gracelessly thrust on me the day I had grown up.

“You’re a woman now,” Kaki had told me. “You can have babies yourself”.

I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness [...] felt an immense hatred for it.

“And don’t forget”, she had ended, “for four days now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything” (78-79).

Indu’s is the paradoxical situation in which Indian women are tangled. In a traditional society women are supposed to be quiet; she shouldn’t express her views or move freely or think about domination or victory. Indu says:

As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive (158).

But as a woman of freethinking, Indu realizes the futility of such a hypocritical life:

And I [...] I had watched them and found it to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission. But still, I had laughed at them, and sworn I would never pretend to be what I was not (158).

As members of the subordinate sex, women are characterized by obedience and submission, and under male dominance they have to develop “a tendency to prevail by passive means” (Klein 167). Indu is scornful of love; to her “love is a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is [...] It’s false” (Roots173). She surrenders to him since she does “not want conflict” (159). She initially clung tenaciously to Jayant and to her marriage “not for love, alone” but because she was “afraid of failure” (159). She wanted to show to the family and the world that her marriage was a success and so she had put on the mask of an obedient and subservient wife:

And so I went on lying, even to myself, compromising, shedding bits of myself along the way. Which meant 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 (159).

Ever ready to please Jayant, Indu succumbs to his desires. Indu gradually realizes that she doesn’t exist for her but for Jayant, the dominating and the one who has servile attitude towards woman. She senses a prick of subjugation. As a disappointed woman she laments at her family and the hegemonic world where a woman is not give due care and set aside from others (81):

This is my family. There are my people. And yet [...] I hate them. I despise them. They’re mean and petty and trivial and despicable. I had always told myself [...] I won’t be like them. I won’t live like them. And I thought [...] I’ve got away. But to what, Naren? [...] Are we doomed to living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape? I’m afraid, Naren [...] I’m afraid [...] (159-160)

Indu ultimately realizes that she has been involuntarily covered her with a disguise of shadows, leaving her roots of origin far behind in the family and in Jayant. The bond which she adhered with Naren is a mere shadow of ignorance to her. He has no permanent place in her memory. Hence she decides to go back to Jayant. She hasn’t for success at her home. She realizes that she has to live with Jayant and fight for the cause of her:

But what of my love for Jayant, that had been a restricting bond, tormenting me, which I had so futilely struggled against? Restricting bond? Was it not I who made it so? Torment? Had I not created my own torment? Perhaps it was true [...] There was only one thing I wanted now [...] and that was to go home [...] the one I lived with Jayant. That was my only home [...] I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant [...] I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me [...] That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing (186-187).

Thus Indu's uncompromising and paradoxical femininity that slonged for self-expression finally leads to transformation and finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Shadows disappear from her vision and she sees the clear light of day with realization and discovery of her identity.

Woman of the traditional society do stick to the age old norms of the stereotype category but the woman of modern generation tempers to a paradigm shift of the contemporary society emerging to a bold and challenging woman. She resigns her job, thus defying the male dominance and the irony of a woman's masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of myriad reflections of struggle for harmony and sanity. She comes out of her socio-political hegemonies, and decides to lead a meaningful life with her husband. The home she had discarded becomes the place of refuge, of solace and consolation. It is Akka's house that offers her ample opportunities to know herself. It is here that she is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She begins to see life in a new light: "Yes, the house had been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now, I felt clear, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary uneven edges of myself" (186). Indu now disperses a ray of hope. Negating the idea of non-existence, she says:

No, there is no such thing. To accept it will be to deny the miracle of life itself. If not this stump, there is another. If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances will pervade other airs [...] I felt as if I was watching life itself [...] endless, limitless, formless and full of grace (184).

The novel ends with insights of reality of the place of women in modern generation. Indu asserts her individuality as a woman and also as a partaker in the endless cycle of life. Through the character of Indu, Deshpande has registered her place in portraying women characters of the contemporary generation as a reaction to the materialistic happiness inhabited by philistines like Jayant, and a patriarchal family-structure which produces in women dependency, insecurity, lack of autonomy, and an incomplete sense of their identity. Indu lives to see life with the possibilities of growth. Thus Indu symbolizes a modern woman who is on the verge of transformation.

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