



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 8. Issue.4. 2021 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
EN/15A  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

MAN AND WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S  
*ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

Dr. Priya Sharma

Assistant Professor

Department of English Language and Literature  
College of Arts, University of Bahrain, Kingdom of Bahrain



Article information

Received:18/11/2021  
Accepted: 27/12/2021  
Published online:31/12/2021  
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.8.4.223](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.8.4.223)

ABSTRACT

In feminist discourse, familial relationships carry a significant position and allows one to study the varied dimensions of man and woman relationships. In her novel *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande realized the concealed and vague pattern of women's predicament in their personal relations. In *Roots and Shadows* she has manifested a grand edifice to expose and to speculate on the nature and structure of man and woman relationship. The novel reflects the emotional bondage that a woman has to carry in the institution of marriage which in turn imposes her to follow the restrictions laid on her by the society. This paper discusses Deshpande's reflection on the man and relationship in her novel *Roots and Shadows*.

Keywords- Man and woman relationship, social – structure, imbalance, emotional bonds

In the realm of feminist discourse the nature, structure, ideologies, moral commitment and the fabric of familial relationship carry significant position to study the dimensions of man and woman relationship. The balance of man and woman relationship essentially depends on the technology of gender binary operating within socio-cultural practices. Simon de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*:

“The term masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form ... In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as it indicated by common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity ... A man is in the right in being a man, it is a woman who is in wrong.” (Beauvoir: 15)

This observation explicitly suggests that the imbalance in man and woman relationship is integrated in the scheme of things. Man is given the position of the master and woman is placed in the position of subjugation. Biology, cultural practices, religious myths, historical perspectives collectively contribute to determine the nature of man and woman relationship. The institution of marriage that decides the nature of man and woman relationship has become a mechanism of oppression and subjugation. Jenet Redcliff Richards admits that, “Women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex.” (69) In ancient India, there are ample evidences of the social relationship of man and woman where woman as a mother was given the first place, “The mother is the first form, and the father is the later form. Progeny is the linking. The act of procreation is

the joint or the linking. Thus for linking progeny..." (Sri Aurobindo : Eight Upanishadas, 172) Marriage has not been looked upon as a subordination of one sex to the other but a common pursuit of an elevating dharma. Yaganvalkya, the famous legendary sage admits, "Not for the sake of wife... but for the sake of the self is the wife dear to us." (Sri Aurobindo : The Synthesis of Yoga, 99) The mythical idealism of 'Sati' and 'Sita' significantly contributed to determine the passive identity of woman in Indian society. After such glorious traditions, with foreign invasions women were deprived of their right of education, participation in public activities, and also the right of independence and self-expression. Manu, the codifier of Hindu law declared, "A woman does not deserve independence." (A.T. Embree : Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. 1228) In spite of this inhibition, woman was confined to domestic spaces as the angel of home. The protective domestic spaces have become the symbol of oppression, protecting and confined spaces. Sexual politics became a part of power politics and within the institution of marriage woman has been left to survive as the shadow of man. Such condition of the institution of marriage promotes sex politics and oppressive mechanism in personal relationship. The partial control within the institution of marriage induces the psyche of contempt, withdrawal, alienation, aversion, rebellion and even of violence. Betty Freidan admits, "For a woman as for a man, the need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individual actualization – is as important the sexual need and serious consequences when it thwarted. Women's problems are in this sense byproducts of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities of human being potentialities which mystique of feminist fulfillment ignores." (202) With the shift of social dynamics the traditional values of marital harmony, were questioned and social thinkers moved in the direction of more dynamic and rational relationship that could have ensured emotional bonding, self-fulfillment and the appropriate spaces for personal choices. J. Krishnamurti admits:

To be related implies contact, not only physically but psychologically, emotionally and intellectually. And there can be relationship only when there is a great affection. I am not related to you and you are not related to me, if what is between us is merely intellectual, verbal that is not a relationship. (Krishnamurti : 58)

It evinces that the traditional social practices, cultural ideologies, religious myths have been instrumental in determining the nature and paradigms of man and woman relationship. In this structure of personal relationship, women survive as an insensitive and silent being without her will and without her choices. It encourages the mechanism of oppression.

Shashi Deshpande realized the obscurity of women's predicament in this pattern of personal relations. In her novel she has constructed a grand edifice to expose and to speculate on the nature and structure of man and woman relationship.

The novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983) is a narrative account of the plight of an educated and sensitive woman who is caught in the whirlwind of tradition and modernity. Indu, the protagonist makes struggle to make her own spaces beyond the paradigms set by the order of patriarchy. According to M. Mani Meitel :

"Roots and Shadows is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle 'Roots' stands for tradition, is soon to become "shadows" against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. Also it suggests that over the root is removed, life is bare fit of the binding force given a way to new possibilities." (Subverting Phallogocentrism : 79)

Indu in spite of her rearing in a traditional family redefines the ideals of life with the strong inspiration of her grandmother Akka who was a pillar of power and authority in the family. After the responsibility to settle the matters of the property and also to settle the marriage of her cousin Mini, Indu is amazed to find absolute surrender of Mini in the matter of marriage without any choice of her own. In the background of Mini's marriage, she reflects on her own life conditions and comes at a bitter realization of the obscurity involved in man and woman relationship inside the institution of marriage. She finds that marriage is socio-mechanical bond of two persons in which man is obviously given an authoritative position. She mentions, "Behind the facade of Romanticism, sentiments and tradition what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after the cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generation might continue." (Roots and Shadows: 3) Mini's silence stirs Indu's consciousness to reflect on the nature of her personal relationship with Jayant. She realizes that in man and woman relationship. "It is the prerogative of male to choose and reject and

the only religion for women is to accept what is chosen by men.” (Agarwal: 52) Indu in context of her personal life and the silence of Mini and other married women of her family generalizes the situation, “A woman’s life ... contained no choices. And my life especially in this house. I had seen the truth of it. The woman had no choice but to submit and accept. And I had often wondered... have they been born without wills, or have their wills been atrophied through a life time of disuse.” (6) Indu in her return evaluates the married life of her grandmother Akka who had always been expected to make “unconditional surrender” to the sexual desires of her husband. Indu realizes that sexual relationships are no better than animal mating. Indu expresses her strong aversion for the sexual colonialism existing in male female relationship. She realizes this oddity and therefore she admits:

“Man considers it as a normal behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and physical levels outside marriage, while it is ruthlessly condemned as adultery in case a woman indulges in it even though accidentally the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not even involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts prosecuting her.” (Roots: 84)

Indu asserts her own choice to make her marital life more happy and conducive. However her married life with Jayant proves to be another mode of treachery. She finds that her personal life with Jayant is no better than that of Mini and Akka. What Mini accepts in context of her marriage, “The thing my marriage had taught me the gift of silence” (33) is also the reality of the life of Indu. Her responses conditioned to the choices of Jayant. In the company of Jayant, she seldom finds opportunity for self-expression, “I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him something but what he wanted to hear. I had my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.” (36) As soon as Indu gathers her consciousness of the authority of Jayant, she finds herself humiliated, baffled and nervous. She confesses, “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. Have I borne fluid with no shape, no form of my own.” (56) She calls marriage a ‘trap’. Such a realization generates the psyche of discontent and rebellion. Shashi Deshpande is convinced, “suppression and traditional hold of conventions give birth to a psyche of self-persecution and it can seek its outlet in the form of violence, obstinacy or any other mode of the distortion of human sensibility.” (Agarwal: 57)

Shashi Deshpande in her treatment of the idea of man and woman relationship condemns the imposition of male consciousness on female sensibility but she nowhere denies the significance of the presence of ‘male’ in the life of a woman. Indu is disgusted with Jayant but her female sensibility and emotional thrust seeks fulfillment in the company of Naren, his childhood friend. Naren makes her realize “why do you deny the fact that you’re a woman.” It suggests that Shashi Deshpande speculates the situation in terms of alternative relationship. Indu admits that her sensual urge for sexual fulfillment after the touch of Naren is a natural response to her passion that had long been suppressed under the burden of Jayant’s chauvinism. She expresses her despair on the fact that a woman has no right to express her passions in the company of her husband. In the company of Jayant, she always finds herself ‘passive’ and ‘dead’. She feels an “aching emptiness” that was the cause of shame and disgust. For a while, Naren in Indu’s life comes as a substitute of Jayant because Naren acknowledges her potential as a human being. Indu’s longing for the company of Naren shows that in the shelter of her husband, she aspires for those spaces that can ensure her dignity and identity. To her marriage seems to be the silent acceptance of her fate as a subjugated being. She confesses:

“I had felt that in marrying him, I had become complete, 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. Not only that but a total understanding. And then I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But can perfect understanding ever exist.” (Roots: 115)

Indu in order to rationalize her position evaluates the status of other women of her family. She finds herself disgusted to find one of her Kaki (Aunt) who survives in the darkness of ignorance and even seems to be unaware of her own name. She found that one of her Kaki was a “childless widow” with bare skull. After her husband’s death, she was deprived of all the pleasures of life. Similarly Indu is shocked to the distorted features of Sunanda Atya. In all these evidences, one common conclusion emerges that woman in marriage loses her

autonomy, physical self and even privacy. The realization of femininity in matrimonial ties breaks the innocence of a woman, "A female not as she was meant to be but as she became in the process of adopting herself to her circumstances and environment ... As a child she had learnt that being a female she could neither assert, not demand or proclaim." (132) Indu denies the burden of conventional marriage and Jayant's overpowering influence but she retains her femininity. The positive response and emotional ties in the company Naren provokes her suppressed sensibility. In Naren's panting emotions, she find sex as an expression of supersensibility that has a power to sublimate human spirit. In contrast of this elevated state, in the company of Jayant she finds sex as a hollow shame. Her body fills with joy with the male touch of Naren and she becomes impatient to feel the sensation of Jayant's company and with the power of her spirit makes a confession. "I don't need to erase anything, I have done." (152) However, Shashi Deshpande admits that the bonds of marital relationship never permit the absolute emancipation of female self. She decides to reconstruct her own marital life and declares, "Yes home, the one I lived in with Jayant. That was my only one. To think otherwise would be to take coward's way again. I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant what kind of life can you built on dishonesty." (167) Shashi Deshpande admits that in traditional marital relationship, a woman finds herself at the edge of perpetual loss and nothingness.

The nature and structure of man and woman relationship occupies a significant position in the realm of feminist discourse. In the study of this relationship it becomes important to reveal the gender binary operating within the socio-cultural practices. The analysis of man and woman relationship in the novel of Deshpande suggests that she has concentrated on the complexity of man and woman relationship and have explored its various dimensions. Shashi Deshpande believes that woman's position can be best defined in the context of man and woman relationship. She has explored complex and varied nature of man and woman relationship in her novel *Roots and Shadows*. In *Roots and Shadows* man and woman relationship has been depicted at two diverse levels – marital and extra-marital. Deshpande tries to project that marital relationship is an obsessive burden and does not provide consolation and solace to the protagonists. The extra-marital relationship is depicted in the novel as a matter of self-choice which asserts female autonomy in the matters of sex and it also acts as a consolation for the emotional crisis of the protagonist. She agrees on the fact that sex perceptualize male colonialism not only within the limits of marital bonds but also outside marriage. She has focused on the forced relationships which dismantles a woman psyche and body. Deshpande projects that power politics operates in man and woman relationship and that man and woman relationship in Indian society is not balanced and judicious. The male efforts to subdue woman is a part of male insecurity. Man lives in a fear that if he does not impose his authority over woman he would lose his importance and in order to maintain it he tries to subdue woman. Deshpande's approach in the matter of man and woman relationship is emotional, familial, and sentimental and it acts within the marital bonds. Indian society is tradition bound and Deshpande depicts man and woman relationship as master and slave relationship.

#### WORKS CITED

- Agarwal, Beena. *Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande*. Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2009. Print.
- Aurobindo, Sri. *Eight Upanishads*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1983. Print.
- Aurobindo, Sri. *The Synthesis of Yoga, Sixth Edition*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1976. Print.
- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. NY: Penguin Books, 1984. Print.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*. Bombay: Oriental Longman Ltd., 1983. Print.
- Embnee, A.T. *Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I the Beginning to 1800*. NY: Columbia U P, 1988. Print.
- Freidan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. reprinted. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971. Print.
- Krishnamurti, J. *On Relationship*, London: Victor, Goranez, 1994. Print.
- Meitel M. Mani "Subverting the Phallogocentrism, Feminine Discourse in *Roots and Shadows*." *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*. Ed. R.S. Pathak. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998. Print.
- Richards, Janet Redcliffe. *The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry*. London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1980. Print.