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EMERGENCE OF 'NEW WOMAN' IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL 'ROOTS AND SHADOWS'

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Abstract: Deshpande is an amazing writer who writes about women's problems, and about their sexuality in an open manner. She is primarily concerned with the silence, subdued-anger and suppression of women under patriarchy. Her tactful understanding of the suffering of women and its root cause, amalgamated with her skill to delineate them authentically, makes her a novelist of rare expertise. Her obligation as a novelist is to give ample freedom to her characters who would lead their own lives with as little interference with their decisions and actions as possible. The purpose of this research paper is to find out 'New Woman' in Shashi Deshpande's novel 'Roots and Shadows'

Index Terms- Sexuality, New Woman, hypocrisy, formidable, conservative.

Introduction: Shashi Deshpande is a prolific writer of fiction in which she portrays a deep understanding of female psyche, particularly that of educated, urban middle-class women with no doubt. As a distinguishing women writer she is bent on presenting the realistic characters. She rarely delineates women as what they should be; she rather has interest in depicting the women as they are. She tells in an interview "My characters take their own ways. I have heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with woman as they are" (Vishwanath 235).

Definition of 'New Woman':

A woman is 'New' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman. Seen from this angle, even a rebel or a revolutionary woman cannot be called a 'New Woman' on this account alone. The woman is 'New' when she analyses and reflects upon her status essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which include social, moral and spiritual fields.

The duty of 'New Woman' is not merely confined to these lines. Every woman, at some time or other, does the same but perspectives are conditioned by the thought patterns handed down to her by moral, intellectual and social order, which have been formed by man. The 'New Woman' not only reflects on her status as woman in the order of things but at the same time she does not blindly follow the thought patterns handed over to her by this male order. She attempts to evolve her own thought process, her own intellectual pattern.

A 'New Woman' also explores the entire domain of her personal life, her social and personal relationship, her role as daughter, sister, wife and mother in a new frame of reference which she has evolved for herself. She also evolves her moral code in the light of which she evaluates the social norms set by the society. Woman, having been suppressed for long years, is tempted to level her score with man in the present social structure by demonstrating her capability of beating man at his own game of gender dominance. The 'New Woman' under the garb of modernity, conceals moral and spiritual needs. 'Roots and Shadows' is the first full length novel of Shashi Deshpande. The novel features an educated, career-oriented middle-class woman protagonist Indu, who, like her other counterparts in the novels of Shashi Deshpande, finds herself strangling under the clutches of our tradition-bound society. The novel deals with Indu's endeavor to assert herself as an individual. This hard-process leads her into the confrontation with her family and society as well. Indu's childhood is shaped by the conservative social norms and expectations of her community. She witnesses the limitations placed on women, their restricted roles, and the suppression of their desires and aspirations. Indu's own journey is marked by her attempts to break free from these constraints and discover her individuality.

Since her childhood Indu had to bear injustice of orthodox society whose men were given privilege and women have to lay the role of submissive daughter, sister, wife and mother, even her chaperone Akka imposes her conventional thoughts on Indu. She stops her from making friends with boys. Not only Akka but also the other elderly women of the family compel her to remain within feminine limits. In the words of Indu; *As a girl they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be meek and submissive "Because, you are a female"*. (R.S 174). Indu despises such orthodox conception of Akka as she feels her mother's dominating nature as a hurdle in her path of freedom.

As the narrative progresses, Indu's relationship with her aunt Sarla becomes a central focus. Sarla is a rebellious and independent woman who challenges the societal norms and expectations of femininity. Through her interactions with Sarla, Indu begins to question the traditions and values she has been raised with, and she starts to envision a different life for herself.

The novel begins with the marriage of Padmini or Mini, Indu's cousin. The marriage has to take place in a traditional way in their ancestral home. It makes Indu retrospect about the events which bring her home after a gap of eleven years. Indu, at the age of eighteen, leaves home to live life her own way and returns on being summoned by the old matriarch, Akka, who is on her death bed. Akka makes Indu the beneficiary of all her property and this makes a turning point in the life of Indu and disturbance in the lives of the other members of family.

'Root and Shadows' by Shashi Deshpande, revolves around her female protagonist Indu, who ultimately evolves to be a 'New Woman'. The experiences of Indu in 'Roots and Shadows' are not different from other female characters of Shashi Deshpande. Indu utters. *"This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself (RS 34). She bewails the thought that she had found in Jayant, her husband, "The other part of my whole self", But she comes to realize "This was an illusion. But can perfect understanding ever exist?" (RS 115). She asks. Deshpande has been genuinely interested in issues dealing with the lot of women in India. Matrimony is often regarded in India as the wholesome part of a woman's life. Consummation in the form of marriage is the only goal of a woman in India. Even sometimes, she is not concerned about who her husband is and what he is doing?*

Indu speaks of Mini, *"To her it was marriage that mattered, not the man"* (RS 4). Mini, cousin of Indu, was happy because her marriage was going to take place but she did not know even a bit about her would-be husband. Deshpande's protagonists are women who struggle for their voice in the male construction of society. Marriage for them is an opportunity to relieve themselves from the burden of parental family. But as soon as the turmeric of their hands fade, they become disillusioned and their love intoxication is off.

Indu says, *"Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generation might continue?" (RS 3). What makes matter worse for Indian women is that they have no choices before them regarding marriage. As the saying goes in India that marriages are made in heaven.' Roots and Shadows' Justifies it.*

“Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country ...what choice do I have? It is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals but years of blind folding can obscure your vision so you no more see the choices years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no longer move out of your cage of no choices” (RS 125).

The story of *'Roots and Shadows'* revolves around Indu, the female protagonist of the novel. The writer uses first person narrative in her novel. The writer sets the story in an Indian Brahmin Joint family which is full of different kinds of people. Indu's mother dies at the time of a delivery and his father Govind leaves her in the care of his old aunt, Akka and her brother, kaka who live in their ancestral home.

Akka, a matriarch, rules the house with a whip. Indu grows up as a rebellious and quarrelsome kid who wants to have her own way in her fancy and understanding. She finally leaves home at the age of 18 and marries Jayant, a man of her own choice. To earn her livelihood like a *'New Woman'*, she works as a writer in a magazine and wishes to take up a different form of writing of her own choice. She is a doting wife and as dutiful and obedient as the ordinary wives in Indu. Inside her deep psyche she resents the dependence on her husband and conceals her feelings of hypocrisy and emotions from her husband. At the age of 29, she returns to her paternal house as Akka is on her death-bed. Indu is astonished to hear that Akka wants to bequeath all her property to her and hides this fact from the rest of the family until her final rites. Indu's cousin Padmini or Mini is going to get married on the expense of Akka. Indu is distressed about her relation with Jayant, her husband. He restricts her attachment with Indu. Y.S. Sunita Reddy Remarks, *"Indu's dilemmas are representation of the larger predicament faced by women in modern India"* (Reddy 46).

Indu as an educated modern woman having scientific attitude, protests against such traditional superstition like a *'New Woman'*. Indu too like the other women protagonists of Deshpande is caught in the web woven by age-old customs and traditions, though through education and learning, Indu breaks free from the clutches of tradition. In spite of that Indu loves her husband very much and wants him by her side all the time, but her husband, Jayant, is no different from the ordinary Indian male. He wants his wife to be passive and submissive. Indu has been playing the role of perfect wife in the novel to keep her husband happy and satisfied, yet there was something lacking that was stifling her. Her reunion with Naren presents her opportunities to express her frustrations. Indu is a character of modern perspectives, for she does not like adhering to trodden-path blindly. Once while serving food Indu was instructed to do, it in a certain pattern but Indu objected to its saying, *"Why can't we do it any other way? why always the same way?"* (RS 14). Indu sophisticates herself to face the social challenges. She pines for living her life as she desires without having any internal or external hindrances in her personal life:

In the beginning the novelist portrays her as fearful, panic-stricken and helpless woman and ends on a platform of boldness and determination who resolves to take the steering of her life into her hands. The novel unravels the permanent mark inscribed on the psyche of women by traditions, norms and conventions of the male-dominated society which restrain them from showing their true self. The mode and style of their evolution imbibes in them submissiveness, silence and passiveness which hold a strong grip on their psyche.

Indu, the protagonist of the novel, tries to escape from this exploitation and discovers her real 'self'. Her disappointment of life with Jayant frustrates her and helps her to reveal her whole self which she expresses in the following words:

What I feel for Jayant. Can I compress all of it within this word? It is much more, so overwhelming a response of the whole of me to him. Sometimes I wonder if I leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again (RS. 88).

The close analysis of the novel highlights the protest by Indu against the prohibitions imposed on her by society. It portrays her confrontation with the family, and with male-constructed society. Sharad, a cousin of Indu speaks of her,

"Formidable, big sister, Formidable, you should listen to them talking about you. You are the standard set up for us luckless youngsters. We are always measured against your stature ...your first classes, your medals, your writings, your job" (Rs 40).

Indu desires to establish image of modern woman and is no longer under the control of male-dominated society and matriarch like Akka. Her dreams are of detachment, to her surprise, she finds herself engrossed and attached in many ways, her mind grapples between two extremes; on the one hand she is so attached to her house which becomes the part and parcel of her life and on the other she longs for self-identity, liberty and fulfillment in life. In her depression, Indu commits the crime of adultery with one of her cousins and close friend Naren. She, thus evolves the traits of 'New Woman' who is not satisfied with her partner, chooses another without any sign of guilt and repentance. Indu decides to fund the marriage of Mini from her own resources. She is not greedy of money and property and helps everyone in the hour of need.

Thus, 'New Woman' is a role model for women to follow. Deshpande, through her characters, proposes that women in society have unlimited chances of happiness if they learn to overcome their shortcomings. The larger predicament of woman in contemporary Indian society, especially in the changing scenario of western education and economic independence have completely shaken the roots of age-old Indian culture and social values. Indu due to her modern perspective married a man of other caste. Indu, a 'New Woman' is interested in creative writing, art and social services, but Jayant, her husband does not give his consent for her writing. He betrays her hopes and desires for peace and prosperity in life. It is this realization that allows Indu to take this kind of firm decision that she takes pertaining to her career and her future towards the end of the story.

Conclusion- Shashi Deshpande writes most of her novels in first person narrative and it is generally the protagonist who narrates the story. She is limited entirely to her own thoughts and feelings and first-person narrative suits well when the writers seek to explore the personality of the protagonist. Shashi Deshpande is thus, one of the important Indian novelists. She is gifted with a rare literary taste with mature experience for her fictional concerns and arts. She has carved her own place in Indian fiction. Her real contribution lies in the delineating the plight of middle-class Indian Women and those women who are modern, career-oriented in their outlook. Deshpande is well aware of this segment of society. In the words of Indu, "But I'm the educated, intelligent, urban, middle-class... (RS 58).

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