

Themes and Techniques in Indian English Literature

Edited By

Dr Ram Avadh Prajapati

Dr Shruti Tripathi

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PERCEPTION PUBLISHING HOUSE

New Delhi ○ Bareilly ○ Aurangabad

Website- perceptionpublishing.in

Email Id- perceptionpublishingindia@gmail.com

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Parts of a Whole: An Analytic Note on Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*

Ms. Noble A. Paliath

Indian English Literature (IEL) or Indo-Anglian literature signifies the whole corpus of writings by writers in India who chose to write in the language of the ex-coloniser's, the so-called master's language, the language of the departed imperialists i. e. English and also in other native or co-native languages that are included in the catalogue of languages of India. The works of the members of the Indian Diaspora also forms part of this body of academic knowledge and is also all-inclusive of the wider territory of postcolonial literature. Though many an Indian English writer differ in their temperament, sensibility, treatment of content, portrayal of themes, and narrative technique, starting from the triumvirates, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, down to writers like, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala and the like, the trait of commonality shared among all the Indian English writers lies in their conscious, deliberate and systematic efforts to capture the very 'Indianness' in their literary outpourings. 'Indianness,' is the Indian way of articulating in English the reality of India, an indigenous way of storytelling, incorporating all the Indian myths, legends and folktales.

At the same time, there were a group of writers who tended to look at India through borrowed eyes with their western looking glasses (a perspective that is principally English in many ways) thereby projecting a non-Indian or foreigner's vision. Shashi Deshpande deliberately distanced herself from the foreigner's vision by figuring typical Indian women of the middle class as the principal characters. Shashi Deshpande is one among the renowned women novelists of contemporary Indian

Literature in English. She is definitely one of the much celebrated, much acclaimed, hugely influential, widely read and oft-quoted Indian Writers in English who left a signature in the broad and spacious literary firmament of the Indian Writing in English. Her fame to a great extent rests on the novels penned by her. Her novels generally lack novelty or the so-called newness, especially, in the handling of themes because as she says, "There was no thinking or worrying about the theme, technique or publisher. I simply wrote" (5). Though quite conventional in the matter of narration, she is one among the whole canon of the Indian English novelists, who brought about a major shift in the tradition of Indian English fiction. She in a way distanced herself from the ex-coloniser's vision by developing a fictional stance, of that of a representative Indian woman of the middle class. All of Deshpande's novels are about women's struggle in one way or the other: for life, identity and survival in the contemporary Indian society.

One is able to trace this kind of recurrence, this repetitive nature in the thematic model: the miserable plight of Indian women disillusioned with their married life, examining their past and present critically, the future choices they can make with regard to their temporarily preferred career and thereby arriving at a better understanding of themselves, (what you can call in sophisticated terms, such as 'self-realization' or 'self-discovery' or 'self-recognition') and those around them. Her characters are especially Indians. She is able to present Indian sensibility in a very realistic manner. All her novels end on a note of optimism-- though the characters initially pass through a crucial phase of mental stress, anguish and trauma... though they struggle for life... its meaning... survival... identity as wife, mother and all the more as a human being--- at the end... they expect a sea of positive changes in favour of them in the near future. The statements afore-mentioned, indeed, are not less true of a novel like *Roots and Shadows*.

Roots and Shadows is a 1983 literary creation of Shashi Deshpande. It falls under the genre of fictional writing. It is in fact the second novel inked by her. *Roots and Shadows* is basically an extended short story, something that can be read at a single sitting, as Edgar Allan Poe, the American writer, says. It

is specifically the story of the protagonist Indu's quest for self-identity and also touches upon the theme of the position of women in traditional Indian society. The entire text is organized into twelve chapters. The novel opens up with a Prologue and is followed by eleven chapters. The first two chapters, including the Prologue, *de facto*, serve as an introduction to what is to follow in the rest of the pages, enabling the readers to capture the essence of the novel. They unfold the events in the present which in fact are the finale or climax of whatever that happened in the past.

These chapters actually start off with the story where it should actually end. They set the tone and atmosphere of the novel as the readers get introduced to the complicated and convoluted relationships within a traditional joint family. The chapters give more of an idea regarding the central character Indu, and somewhat an idea related to other major characters like Akka, Kaka, Kaki, Jayant, Padmini (Mini) and Naren. The writer uses the technique of alternate chronology or an intermingling or intermixing of the past and the present, as the narrative unfolds, moving back and forth in time.

As Chief Seattle in his widely publicized speech, "The End of Living and the Beginning of Survival" comments, "All things are connected like the blood which unites one FAMILY" (31). Before reading the opening lines of the Prologue, a reader's eyes get hooked at the family tree, a diagrammatic representation cataloguing the different personalities of the joint family, the concept of the family taking shape, living... "an entity, a family, united by a strong bond, a common loyalty. It was 'we' now, not 'they' and 'us'" (16). This representation in a way announces to the prospective readers that, what they are going to encounter in the upcoming pages are a mix of intricate family relationships with all the "animosities, misgivings and conflicts" (16).

The story is told from the standpoint of Indu, the rebellious pivotal character, who recounts from her memory the chronicle of three generations of her joint family regulated and controlled by the domineering, authoritative and overpowering figure of Akka, her grandfather's younger sister and the matriarch of the family. Indu experiences an inexplicable delight when she openly retorts Akka's verbal assaults. At the very outset of the

story itself, one understands from certain verbal expressions the inner turmoil, mental trauma, agony and suffocation experienced by Indu as she refuses to fit into the set framework of the society. Indu refuses to play the role imposed on her by the society.

Indu is declared a non-conformist with her misty and blurred image as she fails to conform to the societal norms, which she feels strips women off, their real self and identity. She experiences a sense of non-belongingness to the world around her. She never feels a happy sense of participation. She never hesitates to raise her voice against the attempt of the societal members to subdue and silence women into nothingness. Her non-conformist attitude reaches its zenith when she rejects her family by drawing a magic circle around Jayant (her husband) and herself. To her utter disillusionment, she plunges into a terrible loneliness of the spirit. She realizes that her plight is in no way different from the predicament of an average Indian woman.

After a gap of ten years, Indu accompanied by Jayant, returns home to find her declared as the heiress of her property by Akka and has been burdened with the responsibilities of the family, the prominent one being Mini's wedding. "It was the day before the wedding" (13). The opening section of the novel delineates a household setting with all the subdued bustle... droves of women working continuously in the kitchen, against a deadline... they couldn't possibly meet... voices slurred with sleep... getting involved in turmoil of activities... leaving no duty undone. The typical image of women stereotyped by the society as perfect homemakers and child bearers come into play here.

Mini, the bride, is not even spared off the household chores even at the day of her marriage and is busy taking water for her father's (Indu's favourite Kaka's) bath. At this moment, we find a woman admonishing Mini for what she is doing. "You are a bride. You shouldn't do any work... Take a day off from the rules" (13). Marriage for Mini becomes a symbol of the change in her as she enters into a new phase of her life leaving behind all the playthings... as though she is fulfilling her destiny. Mini seems to be self-absorbed and contented because for her it was

marriage that mattered and not the man. Indu discards all the romantic pictures and ideas about marriage.

And hadn't the picture, not for Mini alone, but for most brides in this country, always been false? 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 generations might continue? (15)

Marriage, according to Indu, in the pre-marital phase... when she stayed 'single'... was conceived as a means where one could achieve complete happiness. But once into it... as an experienced person...she declares, "I cannot fantasise" (23) anymore. Not that she is satisfied or hopeless in her married life, but to be loved and all the more to be happy in life, according to her, are "exercises in futility" (23). Indu gives up her job as a journalist and decides to be a writer. The decision, however, infuriates Jayant. He was so confident of his influence on Indu and hoped she would make a change in her decision. He wanted Indu to comply with his dictates, accepting and attuning herself to his likes and dislikes and conforming to all his expectations. As the novel approaches the mark of a conclusion, where actually the reader starts the process of reading as per the structure of the novel, there is an ease in the relationship between Indu and Jayant that was not there before. The novel ends on a note of optimism with Indu being hopeful for setting the rest of her life on the right path. The final note is that of reconciliation, compromise and settlement where the universal truth is once again confirmed for the umpteenth time, "The whole world is made of interdependent parts...which is why no one can be completely free. All things are connected" (24).

Yes, the whole world is made up of interdependent parts. All things are connected in one way or the other. There is no complete escape from the world in which we live in, from the family that unites us all. It is to this kind of realization that Indu reaches not towards the conclusion, but...when she experiences momentary flashes of light...intermittently...in certain moments of epiphany. As Shashi Deshpande in *Roots and Shadows* jots down,

Salt here, chutney and pickles below it, vegetables on the right, dal in the centre, ghee only after serving the dal. The pattern was rigid and there could be no deviation from it. Once in a contrary mood, I had purposely changed it. The results had been catastrophic... 'Why can't we do it any other way? Why always the same way?' (24)

The lines quoted above foreground the attempt from the part of Indu, performing the star role, as the protagonist of the novel, labelled as a rebel, to stay aloof and detached from every societal attempt to compartmentalize things into a pre-established, pre-determined, pre-set, uncompromising and unchangeable order, full of do's and don'ts. *Roots and Shadows* is a multi-layered novel that touches upon themes like family, home, tradition, women's status, position and role in traditional Indian society, patriarchy, gender discrimination, marriage, adultery, inner conflict, alienation, self-flagellation and so on. The first two chapters including the Prologue and Chapter One tell events in the present which in fact are the result of the events that have been narrated in the rest of the chapters, i.e. chapters two to eleven of the novel.

Indu had lived in her ancestral home for the first eighteen years of her life. Once on hearing a malicious remark about her mother from Akka, Indu felt totally disoriented...with a sudden distaste, realizes that her home was no place for her and leaves it "full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially." (27) After a gap of eleven years Indu returns home when she receives Akka's urgent summons to come to her ancestral home... to find Akka on her deathbed and to Indu's surprise she is declared as Akka's heir. Indu always experienced a triumphant gleam in impudent retorts when she explicitly defied Akka's dictates. The relationship between Indu and Akka was wholly strained, strenuous and tensed. Indu hated the air of superiority associated with Akka, a rich, childless widow and the female patriarch of the family. Akka who came to the house long ago as a rich, childless widow literally presides over the destiny of her brother's children, ruling over them, their children and their grand children with an iron hand. She maintained her power and authority over everyone in the house. According to Indu, Akka was a kind of "stone wall...refusing-to-understand" (74)

everyone around her. Akka was often perceived to be indomitable, ruthless, dominating, narrow-minded, bigoted and inconsiderate, ejecting words of profanation and desecration.

Indu's uncle and wife, Kaka and Kaki, along with their four children, Hemant, Sumant, Mini and Sharad also live in the ancestral home. So do Atya, Indu's widowed aunt, and Akka's cousin Old Uncle and his grandson Naren. All these members frighteningly lived in that joint family... in fact they all led a life of life-long, continued parasitism and dependency. The only one member in the family who challenged her influence was Indu. She claims, "I had never been scared of her" (29). Indu often debated and argued with Akka knowing crystal clearly that "there would be neither repentance nor forgiveness" on either side of them. Akka's malicious chortle infuriated Indu to the core. Her anger and hostility left her untouched. Indu even hated that quality of arrogance in Akka's voice in spite of her weakness... She harboured a feeling of resentment and dislike against Akka. Akka for Indu was "mountain of negation" (74) personified.

It was then that Atya (Narmada), Indu's father's sister, told her Akka's story...how Akka's married life turned out to be a tumultuous one...how she coped up with her husband's extra-marital love affair...the mental and physical torture from her mother-in-law...how she was beaten and locked up in the room...domestic quarrels...days of starvation...reminding the readers of the plight of women in the Elizabethan period...of Virginia Woolf's fictitious creation, "Shakespeare's Sister"... Atya is full of surprise to see how Akka was herself so calm...getting control of the whole situation and is much grieved on account of Akka's death. With this newly acquired knowledge about Akka's bygone, bitter life experiences...Indu came to the realization that how ignorant...how incomplete... how strangely inadequate...was her knowledge about Akka.

It was only then that Indu started imbibing the very essence of what Akka herself was...why Akka "lived the way she did... why she behaved the way she did" (70). For Atya, Akka was a kind of parental figure. Atya seems to be deeply impacted... orphaned by Akka's death. Indu, however, feels awkward and

embarrassed when she is not able to empathize...share the grief with Atya, generated by Akka's death.

Kaka (Anant) was Indu's father's brother, one of her favourites in the ancestral home, the one who stood beside her when she announced her decision to marry Jayant. His loud laughter and roaring voice filled every corner of the house but was "reduced to a red-faced stuttering schoolboy, by Akka's venomous tongue" (30). He was also victimized by Akka's verbal outbursts. He was also one among the parasites who benefitted from Akka's wealth. An aura of warmth, a feeling of ease, contentment and indolence embraced the whole old house but he was not in a position to maintain the house, pay the taxes and... had to depend on others. There were conflicting opinions regarding the demolition of the old house. The prominent female voice that we hear is that of Sunanda Atya who wanted to preserve it for the sake of posterity. "Instead of spending so much money on that marriage, wouldn't it be better to spend it on this house...our father's house? When I think of how he loved it...And now they talk of pulling it down...I can't bear to think of it, Indu" (125).

Kaka was the one who stood to see the ancestral home being crushed to the ground. "He stood there...alone among the debris, a dust-covered motionless statue, until there was nothing left but heaps of rubble, piles of wood and dust" (21). He seemed to be greatly affected after the demolition of the old house. Literally, he shrank. All his laughter and jokes were like echoes from the past. Kaki, Kaka's wife and labelled by Indu as one of the strong ones, was one among the inmates of the ancestral home whom Indu held close to her heart. She never gave vent to her emotions. She revealed nothing. She was in full control of reality.

Old Uncle also seemed to be much pained and moved when Akka left. "I never thought Akka would go before me" (37). According to him, Akka was a poor woman but as strong as a horse. Old Uncle, a poor school teacher, after taking VRS owing to bad health, came to live in Indu's ancestral home as a poor dependent. Old Uncle, though a distant relation of Indu's family, was to her "a friend, a confidant, an ally." He had always been her refuge. When Indu was a child, he was always on her side.

When Indu left home swearing never to come back ever in her lifetime, it was Old Uncle who accompanied her to the railway station to see her off. He was frail, orthodox and a tradition bound man. Old Uncle always felt sorry for her daughter Saroja for he was not able to fulfill her wish to learn music. He failed terribly but compensated the failure by being soft with Naren. Despite her inclination to a few members in the family including Old Uncle, Indu for most of the time tended to be secretive and incommunicative of the inner dilemma and vacuity she faced. She never wanted her feelings to be displayed publicly especially to the family that she had so arrogantly turned her back on.

As for Naren, Akka was an old witch...a cantankerous, bad tempered, old woman who despised his guts as much as he hated hers. He even goes to the extent of remarking that if he had attended the funeral, the old woman would have yelled at him, calling him an 'ippy' (a person who grows long hair and wears dirty clothes). Naren, Saroja's son and Old Uncle's grandson "with a wild, unruly beard and a craggy face" (31) introduces himself as a waster of a grandson. He was one of the most restless persons in the world. He was fond of music. He was a man with a definiteness of purpose. "No one could shake him from his purpose" (164). He was a difficult person at least for some persons of the family. But according to Old Uncle, Naren led a good life.

Naren is one personality with whom Indu had had close relationships from her childhood. Readers award both Naren and Indu certificates of misconduct and adultery on account of the illegal, physical relationships they had to which only Mini, Kaka's daughter, had knowledge. "Twice, briefly, our flesh had touched. But that had, oddly, created no new bond between us" (155). Both Indu and Naren never felt guilty of what had happened. There were no uncomfortable, lingering feelings between them...no difference in the way they behaved with each other...everything returned to a semblance of normalcy... "same ease...same moments of understanding and laughter" (155). For others, Naren was a kind of amoral, fickle and irresponsible guy. Indu was full of appreciation for the simplicity of will in him. There was always a feeling of warmth and camaraderie between

them. Naren may be considered as the fictional double of Indu, their wavelength being the same, at times and not so often.

For Indu, Jayant, her husband was almost synonymous with the sense of completion. "...that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone" (38). Indu has always felt the invisible presence of a restricting bond between herself and Jayant...the very feeling...tormented her against which she futilely struggled. However, cracks appear in the veneer of their marital contentment and she never got a life that she expected...the freedom she thought she had gained by leaving the ancestral home and by making a love marriage was all illusion. She was thoroughly disillusioned.

I had thought I had found my alter ego in Jayant. 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 total understanding. Perfect communication. And then, I had realised this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. (108)

Indu recalls that she has surrendered herself to her husband Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict. She resorts to deception by putting up the façade of a happy married life. She discovers that in her relationship with Jayant what has really mattered is her willingness to conform to his expectations. Indu led a life of conformity and compliance with Jayant.

As I please? No, that is 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 is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought... isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared at me in the face...Without wants there is no I. (53)

"... I thought of Jayant and how far I was removed from him. And not in space, only" (38). She feels slightly embarrassed when she writes of the marked absence of the physical

relationship between her and Jayant. "The beds had to be made perfectly, the sheets tucked in without a wrinkle, the blankets folded into a perfect square, the pillows a straight line" (38). Indu realizes that she will not become a mother in this life as Jayant, "son of a perfectionist mother, shies away from the thought of a child of his own...And so, Jayant and I, tell each other...not now, we can't afford it, we don't have a reliable servant, I can't get leave...The truth is, I will have no child that is not wholly welcome" (44).

As Jayant says, "such a sloppy wife for such a fastidious man" (16). Indu dismisses the very societal tendency in viewing marriage and child bearing as the focal points of a woman's existence. "To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand-children... they were still for them the only successes a woman could have" (108). Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing a child. Indu felt contemptuous of such attitude being carried over even by certain women, internalizing and attuning themselves to the subtleties of the patriarchy, personified especially in women like Kaku, an old woman servant.

Govind, Indu's father, figures in the novel as a carefree man, a vagabond, wandering from one place to another rather aimlessly. As a motherless child, Indu was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. Indu's father always wanted to be so detached and objective that he left home when she was a fifteen-day old baby leaving her under the supervision of Kaka and others and never returned until she turned one. He was a non-conformist. He was a man "full of surprises" (148). He led the busy itinerant life of a photojournalist. He rarely found time to visit his daughter and his home.

He loved to travel a lot choosing his own way and asking nothing of others. Travelling might have seemed to him the best alternative to get away from the void created by the sudden demise of his beloved wife. He and his wife, Indu's mother, shared a tragically short but intensely happy life together. Love between them was sacred and pious. Indu remembers her father when she sees the word adamant (hard and stubborn). "I don't

know, but that is what Father is, despite his seeming softness, his apparent helplessness" (148). He is also labelled as a mischievous child by Indu...as one who is interested in stirring up troubles and unpleasantness among the family members especially when he felt that Naren was being excluded from the wide circle of their familial structure.

Padmini (Mini) is representative of the typical Indian woman who refuses to take a day off from the rules even at the day of her marriage. Indu's personal life experiences and her association with Mini had led her to the emanation, understanding and evolution of the concept of marriage as an institution. Indu rejects all the romantic ideas about marriage. According to her, this kind of notion was falsified, fallacious and erroneous to the core. "Behind the facade 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 generations might continue? (15) Mini was pre-eminently a realist. She has already internalized the fact that girls did not belong to their natal home... were taught to consider their preferences last...to put other's needs before theirs.

On seeing this inner strength and mental preparedness of Mini, Indu finally decides to finance Mini's marriage when she finds that she is ready to marry the man of Akka's choice, the finality in itself. As Mini believed, "A woman's life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, specially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. 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?" (17) Mini had no other choice than to surrender. She had accepted the reality with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of her inner strength. Mini is the other victim of Akka's patriarchal dictates.

Indu, the pivotal character of the novel, is better understood when her thoughts and her association with other characters are closely scrutinized. The concluding part of the novel delineates Indu as a completely transformed woman, a new woman with certain fixed resolutions and convictions about her future life. Indu decides to resign her current job as a journalist and resolves

to embark on the soul-fulfilling journey of that of a writer which she had "always dreamt of doing" (168). She clearly filters out things to be told and those to be concealed from Jayant thereby living a life "build on a foundation of dishonesty" (168).

Earlier, in certain parts of the novel, Indu remarks about taking decisions in life as per the expectations of her husband... Indu declares with crystal clarity of vision... Towards the end... she asserts, "Maybe Jayant would understand. Maybe he wouldn't. But even so..." (168) "...these words clearly indicate that she has decided to come out of the walled-in lives and is all set to live the life that she expects it to be and not what others want it to be...scaling down others' expectations. She resolves to live life on her own terms. She asserts, "Now I dress the way I want. As I please" (53).

Roots and Shadows is a novel with no closed ending. Its interpretation, possibilities and significance begins where it ends. The novel is all about Indu, an educated middle class lady who sets out on her journey of self-realization by overcoming and shedding all her inhibitions, impediments and mental blocks. Thus she moves on to the path of liberation. Finally she has resolved to retain her individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten her real identity. The novel is a significant study in the psychological working of women as it records with minute details how Indu falls on thinking and retrospection about the past which seems inevitable. We are almost able to see her thoughts. Indu feels that by marrying Jayant she has found the other part of her whole self. But in reality, her identity has been lost. She feels she has become a parasite on her husband. She is not able to identify her own self. She does all the things which Jayant wishes. She has adapted herself to the traditional values of being an ideal woman. This kind of self-surrender proves for the umpteenth time the universal truth that an average good woman regardless of the role she plays is always self-less and negates her to the point of extinction.

Tracing the trajectory of the history and condition of women since times immemorial one finds not a romanticized picture wherein women are glorified but encounters one that is essentially depressing and shocking. Hers history is one of

oppression and rejection. The hardships, sufferings, trials and tribulations that women had to endure both inside and outside their home lay unmentioned. Women created a world of their own where for most of the time they hid their emotions and responses as if they were bits of garbage. Women had found in themselves an immense capacity for deception. The above-mentioned statement cannot be equally applied to all womenfolk in general. There were women who silently conformed to the pre-assigned, traditional, set roles for women as mother, wife, daughter, sister, child bearer and so on. At the same time, droves of women incessantly clamoured for opportunities of greater self-expression. When this kind of hitherto held repressed feelings and desires found expression, droves of women moved into the level of activism, giving it a new name, Feminism.

Feminism, in essence, is a scathing criticism against the unfairness of division between men and women...a cry for equality of both men and women in all spheres of life. It is basically a revolt against the societal tendency to look down upon women. It resists discrimination of all sorts. Opposition to patriarchal authority is the hallmark of feminism. Patriarchal domination and age-old, forced silences of women are the twin areas of key focus in feminism. While power and authority became male prerogatives, powerlessness and subjugation were feminine characteristic traits. A strict list of do's and don'ts prevailed in matters of conduct and behaviour with regard to women. Women were taught to attach only secondary importance to their own wishes and interests. They learned to prioritize other's wishes over theirs. They were guests and not hosts in their ancestral home. Deshpande's intention is to present women as they are...to capture the inner turmoil of women enslaved within the four walls of domesticity.

Indu, however, debunks romantic notions about marriage and realizes that her desire to attain completeness in life by marrying Jayant proved to be detrimental in her life. Her name became synonymous with patience and sacrifice. She questioned the institution of marriage as a whole. She held all her emotions to herself. She bottled her feelings with the intention to remain secretive and incommunicative. Marriage was often perceived as a vehicle of female subjugation. It is generally seen that marriage

often plays its part in changing the perception of women. They undergo revolutionary changes once they are married and the transformation is "from shy, demure girls into assertive matrons" (15). Shashi Deshpande's women are found to be victims in marriage. She disapproves the gender dichotomy between man and woman in the society. She opined that both men and women being the two sides of the same coin, women should have equal rights and opportunities as men. She wants to break the wall of demarcation between man and woman erected so firmly by the society. She lays bare the very male dominated society in which women have no role or very less role to play.

Roots and Shadows foregrounds a clear divide that separates male and female domains. Men handled areas like decision making and exercise of power. Women were assigned the task of performing household chores and keeping things in order. Women like Kaki and Atya spent their life slaving for others without expecting even a word of appreciation. They were often silenced by an authoritative male voice in the very personality of Akka, the female patriarch of the family. Indu reconciles with Akka after she came to know the story of the traumatic experiences Akka went through as a daughter-in-law and wife. The authenticity of reconciliation and compromise between them is still a question mark.

Towards the end of the story, Indu is on her way to self-discovery and self-realization. She decides to act on her own terms. She becomes the very epitome of woman's inner strength. Indu herself was a victim of the patriarchal impositions but in the end she is ready to come out of her shells of silence. Indu has a better understanding of herself now. The novel ends with an affirmation of the individuality of Indu. *Roots and Shadows* end on a note of hope. The final note is that of hope and understanding of the hitherto held fallacious, pre-conceived notions and assumptions. The readers expect that Indu will be able to live the life the way she desired it to be... a life that is full of possibilities and opportunities... There are positive winds of change all around and she hopes her life with all its odds to get transformed one day or the other.

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* is a multi-layered novel touching upon umpteen and varied themes of contem-

porary relevance. It articulates many an issue of hot, contemporary and socially sensitive nature. Shashi Deshpande does not merely verbalize the female voice which has been silenced by an authoritative male voice but also suggests different ways to mitigate their silence. A reader gets struck by the deliberate, conscious and pre-drafted decentering of active male presences, a different breed of women who are least resistant to voicing forth their opinions, the centre of attraction and focus of attention being accorded to the womenfolk of the family, that wider significance attached to each and every individual female character in spite of their unheard and subdued voices in the forefront, their sacrifices going unnoticed, going unrealized, only, because they don't talk about them. All the characters, irrespective of their gender, find a place, space and significance in the novel.

Shashi Deshpande's novels show her profound infiltration into the inner recesses of the psyche of Indian women who are the victims of male controlled society. Her novels are a fine study of how women are subjugated, dominated, marginalized, and relegated when set in the wider context of society and life. Though caught between the forces of tradition and modernity, she has carefully woven and crafted a narrative in which she exhorts the women characters with inner strength and vitality to come out of their cocoon... not to lead a life of non-existence... to break the wall of silence which hitherto compelled them to forcefully fit into the patriarchal construction. At the same time, Deshpande is fully aware of the limiting, discouraging social forces that permit salt, chutney, pickles, vegetables, dal and ghee to be served only here and not there. A contrary move, she knows, will be catastrophic. But many a woman has dared to...

Shashi Deshpande's writings serve as catalysts to bring about positive social changes with respect to the betterment and empowerment of women. Simultaneously, Shashi Deshpande aims at both social and individual transformation. *Roots and Shadows* is of contemporary relevance as it problematizes an issue that is of eternal value and significance. The novel serves as an eye-opener in understanding the changing parameters of societal norms and attitude towards women. Even in the twenty first century, women's condition is not that safe and secure.

Nevertheless, Shashi Deshpande announces to the women around to come out of their built-in walls and speak for themselves. According to her, the one and only way to liberation is to awaken women by breaking their wall of silences. Shashi Deshpande wants women not to be shadowy presences in their families but to be roots with fixity, vigour and finality of their own. This in fact is the message conveyed by Shashi Deshpande in *Roots and Shadows*. As noted earlier in this session, "It is the end. But if one thing ends, something else has to begin" (30).

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