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## **MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS: A CASE STUDY**

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### **Abstract:**

Marriage, a social institution, plays a vital role in the life of the people who are living in the society. Getting an ideal husband is the most important undertaking for her in her life. Marriage is something that allows her to keep her social dignity intact; it is something that frees her from the restraints and restrictions imposed on her at her parental home in the name of gender-distinction; it is something with which she opens up her new career by handing herself over to a new master, her husband. A woman has to adjust everything with a new man whom she does not know. This is a great tasks in their life. It is an ordeal especially for the woman as she is expected to adjust herself completely to a new environment of her husband's home. She accepts marriage as an escape route to achieve her freedom. She has to do everything according to the will of others. All women accept the role of a wife with a simple hope and need of winning her freedom and asserting her individuality. However, her tragedy lies in the fact that she sets herself from one cage only to be caught in another cage. Unfortunately, she has been deprived of true freedom before as well as after her marriage. Marriage has been an obstacle in her way of being a free and independent individual. Simone de Beauvoir, in Introduction to *The Second Sex*, rightly points out:

Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social foundations. (1974: 63)

Marital relationship as a social necessity is at the centre of Deshpande's novels. The woman hopefully looks at marriage as an escape route leading her towards attaining her freedom from the bondage imposed on her in her parental home.

**Kew Words:** Marriage, a social institution, undertaking, social ,dignity intact ,restrictions, adjust ,husband's home, independent .

## Introduction

The novel narrates Saru's inability to know what lies in store for her future. She finds no way out and has to proceed. Deshpande seems to suggest that one must proceed and confront whatever is at the end. Her narration is introspective and she philosophizes about human life, grief, happiness, the issue of self-identity, loneliness and the issue of son's importance in Indian society. She never leaves anything unsaid to evoke rich suggestions. *Roots and Shadows* portrays an independent woman from contemporary society who defies traditional roles and upholds her womanhood to assert her individuality. A woman gives her husband almost everything and still has a secondary role to play in a marital relationship. The functions assigned to her after her marriage are to satisfy her husband's sexual needs, to provide children to her family. Apart from her domestic duties, she has to look after everybody of her family. They may be her baby, or elders or relatives. Marriage even today has retained its traditional form in one way or the other. It is the beginning of a woman's greater sacrifices in the form of her name, person, self, identity, freedom, virginity, dreams and aspirations. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir's observation is worth noting:

“The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness – there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness – but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine”. (1974: 38)

In fact, the patriarchal domination is so deeply rooted in our culture that it is difficult for her to escape from the trap of her parental home. Jessica Benjamin observes:

“The anchoring of this structure so deep in the psyche is what gives domination its appearance of inevitability, makes it seem that a relationship in which both participants are subjects – both empowered and mutually respectful – is impossible”. (1995: 105)

Her observation clearly highlights a woman's sexual subjectivity and her recognition as an object used by a man to fulfill his sexual hunger. The tragedy of a woman lies in the fact that she has to submit to her husband's sexual desire

passively and ungrudgingly.  
Simone de Beauvoir opines:

“Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution . . .

. It has always been a very different thing for man and for woman”. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them . . .

A man is socially an independent and complete individual . . . the girl seems absolutely passive; she is married, given in marriage by her parents . . . In marrying . . . she takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his class; she joins his family, she becomes his ‘half’ . . . She gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required . . . No doubt marriage can afford certain material and sexual conveniences: it frees the

individual from loneliness, it establishes him security in space and time by giving him a home and children; it is a definite fulfillment of his existence. (1974: 42)

### **Objectives:**

The objective and purpose of this paper is to show the importance and power of women in our day –to –day life. The present paper is an honest attempt to attract the attention of the readers towards the fundamentals rights of women because they are equal to men and they always help and care us to lead a happy and peaceful life. The role of women is very remarkable for the all-round development of our nation.

### **Indu’s Relationship with her Family :**

Indu is the daughter of Govind who married Indu’s mother out of caste. Akka did not acknowledge this alliance and never allowed her mother as daughter-in-law in the ancestral house. Indu was brought back to the house when she was fifteen only; a motherless daughter. Indu’s father Govind rarely visited Indu when she was a child and Indu reflects that it was perhaps because she was a girl and not a boy.

Deshpande does not continue the dialogue deliberately as what she implies to state is quite an open secret. It is left to the readers to grasp. In Indu’s ancestral house, girls are the sole property of their mothers. They are the responsibility of their mothers which fathers never share. Indu reveals thus:

“It was a tradition in our family that girls are left to their mothers; that a daughter was exclusively the mother’s business. When his girls were in school, Madhav Kaka had never known what class they were in. But Sunil’s education was so scrupulously and harshly supervised by him, that Sunil had turned deceitful, with the connivance, of course, of his mother”.

But that does not mean that Indu is a neglected child. She has been intensely loved and wanted by her Anant Kaka and his wife. They loved her so much when she was a child. But it does not mean that their love and affection for Indu has vanished into the dim forest now rather their genuine concern and love for her is still intact. She was the cynosure of her eyes even earlier and still happens to occupy the same position. Even now Kaka is really happy that she has visited them and says:

You don’t know how happy I feel to see you home. I felt guilty we never asked you to come home with your husband.

It was he who supported Indu’s decision to marry Jayant and as Indu reflects he was:

The only one in the family who had come for my wedding. Apart from father, of course. Perhaps it was the first time Kaka had defied Akka.

Her own life at her ancestral house has been full of love and care at the hands of Kaka and Old Uncle.

I think of my own childhood, and of how I got affection from Kaka, understanding from Old Uncle, and loving care from Atya; and I know why there is a faint tinge of pity in me for the small families of today.

### **Marital Relationships in *Roots and Shadows***

Shashi Deshpande is the winner of Thirumathi Rangamal Award. “*Roots and Shadows*” is one of the most famous works of her life. Written earlier than *The Dark Holds No Terrors* but published later in 1983, it is a much acclaimed work of Shashi Deshpande’s novels. Shashi Deshpande is a very significant novelist who has successfully presented before us an enlightening study of various patterns of human interaction which determines the success/failure of interpersonal relationships. The socio-economic changes in post-independence India have changed the mindset and outlook of Indian women. The concepts of love, marriage and economic independence have changed. Women are gaining strength to raise their voice against oppressions but it must be remembered that they have failed to reject totally their social and cultural background. They find themselves caught between tradition and modernity. They are identified as daughter, sister, wife and

mother, they don't have any independent existence.

It is about Indu, who is an intelligent and a qualified lady who tells about the problems of the people who are living in the middle class society. Being a journalist and a writer she presents how Indu sets out on her journey of self-realization and liberation, and eventually sheds her inhibitions. The novel entails the journey of Indu who attains her feminist identity by crossing over the impediments posited before her by the patriarchy. Talking about the protagonists of Indian women novelists S.P. Swain says:

Their heroines are all agog to retain their individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity. (1998: 86)

The narrator of the novel is Indu herself. The narrative technique exploited in the novel is that of flashback. *Roots and Shadows* is a fine 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. Deshpande shows herself as a master of the narrative form and her tryst with the pen is incredible. She writes with a luxurious exuberance and her diction is spontaneous, each word crafted and used in a proper way adding significance.

Perhaps because Akka was against her decision of her getting married to Jayant, her decision got more firmed. It was with him



that she could relive her own life. Her first meeting with Jayant was her first realisation that she had found someone who was very endearing and the one who understood her fully. She wants, "to belong, to be wanted, needed, loved, desired, and admired." With him she feels as if she has entered into a new phase of her life where there are no trials and tribulations, no restrictions; a space spreading the fragrance of freedom and equality; a space where she can assert her own self.

This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it... I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone." But how unlucky she is! Her earlier notion, "And in Jayant I thought I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding. Perfect communication" proves just an illusion and she comes to know, "And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But, can perfect understanding ever exist?"

Understanding means nothing but a kind of a system wherein one believes not to be contradicted, not to be criticized rather being agreed to whatever one says. Indu realises that it was what they even believed in. For them it is, "... Don't judge me. Don't criticize me. Just appreciate me. See only my virtues, not my vices. My strengths, not my weaknesses" and she finds herself befitting the role of traditional women; whom she hated for the fact that they are so submissive, so meek, and docile rendering themselves identity less; a role that she

never had earlier imagined she would have to play.

Indu is not satisfied with her marital life; something is there which is stifling her; something that chokes her life; something grave that really exudes death signal for their nuptial life and their marriage seems to be on the rocks. After marriage she continues with her work of journalism as she does not want to be a passive entity doing nothing at home rather she wants to move forward in life so that she should not be a mere parasite on others rather be independent. But ironically enough she has to write only those things which she never wanted to. She steps into the shoes of those who only go for the kind of writing which has sound marketing value. She once interviews a lady who seems quite good to her but she is perplexed to arrive at her truth. She bickers with the editor. But she is more pained at heart when Jayant whom she confides what has happened, turns quite hostile to her saying:

That's life! 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.

Indu reflects on the question asked by Atya about her being happy with Jayant. Indu's answer truly explains her relationship with Jayant, "Who can say that? But I know I



can't be without him." Indu justifies her relationship:

It's not that he doesn't care. It's more like...like...we're on different levels. You know the stage setting they have for some plays nowadays? It's like that. We're on different planes. He chooses his level. And I...I try to choose the one he would like me to be on. It humiliates me. And Naren, it was I who proposed to him.

Indu is confused as she does not know what she wants in life. She thinks:

What did I want? Success at first. It was impossible, unimaginable for me not to succeed. Not to have been the best would have been unbearable. And suddenly one day, self-consciousness had set in. And doubts...they castrate you...They destroy your self-confidence. And there's always a way for whatever you do. So that the doing of it, the succeeding in it, is not enough.

She thinks that she must know what she wants in life. All human endeavors to live a satisfactory life would come to an end without any purpose, without any wants. It

is only well defined goals that give life a sanctity. She thus is confused:

How can I live without knowing what I want? I must know. To live without fear...fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without the fear of failure.

In Hinduism it is believed that marriage is not about the unification of the bodies rather it is the union of two souls. Hindu marriage is not viewed as contracts which two persons-the groom and bride-sign; it is a spiritual bonding where seven circles round the fire are not mere an ostentation but a strengthening of the bond; seven pledges that both bride and groom have to comply with. It is a sentiment too strong with Deshpande who believes in its sanctity but is also aware of its seamy side. She knows that it is a trap where a woman finds herself most confined. Indu sometimes wants to leave Jayant. Perhaps that would be the final solution of her problems. She often reflects about its possibility. Her mind oscillates on the possible results. Being a writer she has even written a short story about the same theme. In the story the woman walks out on her husband. But she is not able to bring the story to a conclusion. She believes that such a proposition can never be possible. Indu visualizes its pros and cons and comes to the conclusion:

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?

In *Roots and Shadows* we find the exploration of the inner self of Indu. She presents the symbol of new women who live in traditional and conventional society. Indu, as a woman, can think freely about her own self. As a woman and as an artist she is struggling to express herself. She also struggles to search her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality in creative writing. Her circumstances and predicament suggest that she is not enjoying the fruit of cordial interpersonal relationships and therefore, she finds herself unable to take any decision. She thinks:

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's mental disturbance suggests that she has been constantly subjected to subjugation and domination. With a heavy hand, her voice is silenced and her inner strength is crushed.

The house was silent, as if tired of its pretence 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)

The deepest need for Indu is the need to overcome her loneliness. Deshpande draws attention of the readers to the need of communication in all kind of relationships. She skillfully weaves diction, syntax and vocabulary with deep understanding of relationships. The following lines make a strong visual appeal:

Outside, here in the courtyard, they had lit huge wood fires on which gigantic pots of water are being heated for the baths. The logs hissed intermittently, sending up a sudden shower of sparks with a crackling sound. ... As the flames danced and leapt, I saw it was Mini. (1)

Again, the description of Champak tree which has to go with the demolishing of the house evokes powerful emotions of isolation and bereavement in Indu.

The tree whose trunk I had been unable to embrace even as a child. The sense of

mystery and wonder that it had aroused in me growing as it did out of the damp darkness within the house, emerging triumphantly above the roof into the sunlight. The evergreen leaves, the golden flowers, pervasive fragrance had, it now seemed to me, permeated all my life. (183)

In spite of the temperamental differences between husband and Indu, she always pretended to be what she was not. To her, the concept of interpersonal relationships appears to be a meaningless affair. Indu realizes that 'perfect communication and total understanding' are merely illusions. She feels that she is endlessly chained to a long dusty road that lay ahead of her and fails to find wholeness of her personality. Indu finally feels she is in cable to help Jayant. Gradually she realizes that she had forgotten the roots of her own family life and was feeding only on dreams and shadows. She feels a sense of hope for life as shadows disappear and she sees the clear light of day with realization.

No, there is no such thing, to accept it will be to deny the miracle of life itself... if not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will blossom, other fragrances will pervade. (7)

At last, we get a note of positivity and affirmation. Indu asserts her individuality as

a woman. She also realizes that life is a journey and we have to perform many duties in this life. Thus, Indu feels about the meaning of the life in the modern society. Through Indu, Deshpande has registered her awareness of control of feminine development by patriarchal family structure which produces in women dependency, insecurity and an incomplete feeling of their identity. Quoting O.P. Bhatnagar, Sarabjit K. Sandhu in his book *Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* says:

The novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. (1991: 86)

Like every other woman, she is ready to give up her identity for the sake of gaining completeness. However, such thoughts scare and terrorize her. It is the absurd existence that scares and terrorizes her. Dread comes out of the difference between authentic knowledge of her life and the inauthentic knowledge of her life that is thrust upon her. She plays her part a being-for-itself who is perpetually tormented by conflicting forces influencing her and continually moves from 'is' to 'is not' rendering her ineffectual. She suffers from situational paradox. When she is not happy with Jayant there is little reason for her to long for him for attaining completeness. But she craves for his company for achieving completeness. On



the other hand, she does not really want a sort of completeness that depends on another person's help. It is a peculiar obsession we find in the character of Indu.

### **Fulfillment through Relationships**

The writer focuses on the role of Indian women and their importance in the society. The Indian women in the past were denied opportunities available to women in other countries. Early marriage and Purdah system confined her to her home. Her identity was embedded in the matrix of her family. Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmila are the main female characters of her novels and they represent the middle class modern society. They are trying to change the system of the society but they have to face many problems because of the some of the people of traditional minded who want very dominating by nature. They attempt to redefine human relationship by taking newly acquired professional status into consideration. In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has depicted different aspects of middle class women's life.

A woman's role is not only confined to the centripetal needs of the family but also to its centrifugal needs. Indu realizes that she has to be more than a submissive housewife. She decides not to bear the sufferings she has to face in the family where she feels herself incomplete without having the wholeness of personality. In her quest for personhood and fulfillment, Indu had sought escape from family relationships. She tells that the role of women is very important and they can

change the atmosphere of the family. An educated woman can make her family healthy, wealthy and happy. The realization of the need to conform for survival and the awareness that conformity is the great destroyer of selfhood, and the only self that can be achieved is the self-born in interpersonal relationship makes Indu cry out in agony. She speaks about her own incompleteness thus, "This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself."

Indu comes back to her home due to tragedy in her family. She likes freedom and liberty. She likes love and affection. She is an independent girl. Everybody is unaware of it. And the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu. Indu is a lady, who always wanted to be free and independent. But now, a number of questions come before her, which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not a true love.

### **Dilemma between Tradition and Selfhood**

Indu represents of middle class society. She is a highly qualified lady but is not independent because of the conservation minded people of the family. She is helpless. In childhood, she has to live under the domination of Akka and other elders of the family and after marriage, she is forced to submit to the authority of her husband by

doing everything which pleases him. Indu remembers:

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)

Her parental home where she returns after so many years of her marriage gives her an opportunity to analyze her relationship with Jayant. She realizes that the conventional family setup has internalized her role as a self-sacrificing woman confirming to the expectations of her husband. It had made her forget her own desires and wishes which has ultimately made her frustrated and discontented. She feels that patriarchal society deprives women of their capacity to think in a rational and independent way. She had always been a victim of patriarchal society, who despite her education is helpless to wriggle out of her traditional feminine role.

### **Harmony and Understanding in Relationships**

One of the cardinal principles of interpersonal relationships is harmony and understanding. It also implies perfect

communication between two individuals. There should be no question of domination or subjugation. Indu is independent and refuses to be imprisoned by false notions and obsolete traditions. In her parental house, women were not allowed to have their say in important matters. Even Akka was not allowed to have her say in her youth. Indu thinks:

Akka... I thought she was just an interfering old woman. But she was more than that. She was a prop. One of the strong. A family... it's like any other group. There are the strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It's inevitable. And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That's why she put the burden on me. And now, it is an obligation. I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I am soft, I'll just cave in. Can I just put down the burden and walk away?... Can I enrich only myself? I can't... This is my family, these are my people. (159)

Deshpande wishes to convey that interpersonal relationship cannot be one way affair. In fact, these relationships become invigorating only when they are tinged with an element of harmony, affection and perfect understanding. But when the basic



needs of a person are ignored, there is only hate in relationships. That is why, perhaps, Indu tells Naren:

I despise them. They are 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? To what have I got away? Is that any better than this? Is there no more to life than this? Are we doomed to living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape? (160)

### 5.21 Summing up

Shashi Deshpande through her female protagonists artistically explores the meaning of interpersonal relationships which work within the boundary of marriage which is a social institution. She has also explored the honesty of these interpersonal relationships in order to present the value of faith and devotion which provide a solid foundation to the house of these relationships. Indian writer are attached with the idea of social commitment and social responsibility, Shashi Deshpande, too, is also no exception. Her novels are about women. Her novels tell about the condition of the women in the society. The role of the women in are society are also described in her novels.

The writer thinks about the situations of the women in the traditional society on one hand and on the other hand she also writes about the pleasures of the women in the modern society. She thinks that modern women are educated and they can lead a happy family with their husband and they can also make the members of their family happy and bright. Her novels help the modern women to search their own identity. They are good and religious. We should help them. They are independent and this is our duty to give them equal rights. This is their fundamental rights to get from the paternal family as well as husband's family. Women are struggling for their honour and self-respect. They are having many domestic problems but they never tell before their guardians. They have been struggling for their freedom.

In fact, interpersonal relationships are based on the foundation of dignity, simplicity and joyous explanation of each other's identity. Delicacy, Admiration and mutual respect lend a special charm to these relationships. Deshpande's fiction reveals a direct vivisection of gender issues and her deep engagement with interpersonal relationships.

### Summing Up:

The theme of marriage as a vehicle of female subjugation is very significant theme in her works. It is also known as the predominant themes in this novel. Deshpande is realist to the core and snatches the semblance of fulfillment and the mask of romance that envelopes it away. She knows

marriage is about commitment; a harmony which is not feasible to find in the modern society. It is an institution which has been the prime and potent weapon of patriarchy to maintain control and dominate women. Indu exposes the very futility of marriage as it makes one so dependent. She reflects that marriage is no surety of anything. Indu finds marriage:

A big fraud, a hoax, that's what it is. They tell you it's the greatest thing, the only thing in life. And you believe them and fall into the trap....

She realises that only the truth is that of, "the sexual instinct...that's true. The maternal instinct...that's true too. Self-interest, self-love...they're the basic truth."

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