TRUE MODERNISM ONLY AS AN ENRICHMENT OF TRADITION AS PROJECTED BY SHASHI DESHPANDE FROM A FEMINIST ANGLE IN HER FICTIONAL WORLD WITH REFERENCE TO ROOTS AND SHADOWS: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper beautifully portrays the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women in Shashi Despande who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs, culture and traditions but influenced by the scientific knowledge from the west. It also examines the very basis of feminist criticism with female issues caught between tradition and modernity. Sjashi Despande has depicted the middle class women who struggle hard to settle in their lives and obtain status like men. In the novel Roots and Shadows central female character is Indu who struggles throughout her life and she leaves her home for her further studies in Bombay when she was eighteen years old. She finds the environment of her house much stifling as she is told by her Kaki when she attains womanhood, “For your days you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything” (79) and that’s why she leaps towards modernity. Even after marriage, she has to surrender to her husband, Jayant not just because she is afraid of him; in fact she is frightend from her defeat in the marital bond.

Key-Words

Deshpande, Women, Gender Discrimination, Prejudices, Struggle, Patriarchy.

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Feminism is said to have emerged as one of the most powerful, social, cultural and political movements in contemporary North America. The story wave of feminism in the 1960’s and 1970’s helped in theorizing and woman’s discourse. The term ‘Feminism’ was coined by Fourier, a forerunner of socialism, when socialist thought was prompting fresh analyses of social organization with a focus on woman’s rights. Throughout the 19th century arguments continued about the proper sphere of woman and during the period, woman obtained some legal and financial rights and began to have access to certain professions and in the 20th century, women wanted tried and expected to have wider opportunities.

‘Feminism’ has become a highly important issue in contemporary thought giving rise to feminine voice paving the way for challenging the male-divided orthodoxies about women’s nature, capacities and roles. The general radical climate of the 60’s did generally nourished woman’s movement and the 70’s and 80’s got distinguished by the second wave of ‘feminism’. In the 1980’s, ‘feminism' emerged as a thought system, a positivist approach to life, a step towards sanity in human relations and perhaps the only mode for preservation of human existence on this planet. Feminism was committed to the cause of struggle for equality for woman bringing home the point that woman are of equal human value in their own way. As Lindo Gordon puts it. “Feminism is an analysis of woman’s
subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it” (Singh 8). Thus, the very basis of feminism is ‘reforming’. Feminist criticism emerged as an offshoot of the woman’s liberation movement, sharing its polemical force and activist commitment. The feminist criticism protested against the exclusion of and the movement provided the impetus. In the words of Elaine Showalter, “Feminism spoke to our lives and our literary experience with the fierce urgency of a relation or a Great Awakening” (P 5)

The treatment of women in the feminist phase from 1920 was taken a new turn with woman since 1970. Women have stated gaining access to certain seats of power. There are three broad trends that may be distinguished in the range of feminisms. i) Women want to be seen as being the same as men; ii) they want to see themselves as in opposition to men; iii) they want man and women to be equals. Feminism is also defined as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. Critically speaking, feminism is used as a tool with aim of providing an altogether new awareness of the women’s role in the modern complex world. In brief, Feminism offers a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking the study of literature with real life contexts.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. It does significantly provide insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of food for discussion. Through the eyes of women writers, one can see a different world and with their assistance, one can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. In any appraisal of the Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writings of its women seems essential and indispensable. A host of women writers, beginning especially with the 70’s started dealing with women in their writings. A different trend of writing began not only questioning woman’s sex-role expectations, but also employing openness in disclosing their sexual problems. Society, religion and culture are in the long run, doubted by the heroines of these writers and condemned as oppressive. At the same time, and transcend to the horizons depicting a revolutionary spirit as a result, they are caught between tradition and modernity.

The writers themselves experience their struggle between these two opposing poles. Their art represents neither tradition nor modernity, but is intensely personal. That is why, their feminist tendencies become the outcome of their subjective experiences as woman. Hence, Indian feminism as represented by these writers is not the filtered version of western feminism but born out of their own personal experiences that is why their writings resemble both kinds of experiences, that of tradition and modernity. Most of the Indian woman novelist like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandeya, Anitta Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shobha De and Shashi Deshpande have dealt with woman issues. The novels of Kamala Markendeya represent women on a quest for autonomy in a Patriarchal dominated society, while Anitta Desai’s novels are “a documentation radical female resistance against
a Patriarchally defined concept of normality” (Krishnaswamy 237). While the novels of Nayantara Sahgal talk about women as oppressed by merital relationships, by political circumstances and by accidents of history, the novels of Shashi Despande deal with female issue caught between tradition and modernity.

Having emerged as a notable feminist writer and also as a great literary force in the modern literary scenario, through her writing, Shashi Despande has reflected a realistic picture of contemporary middle class women. Her novels project both similarity and contrast to western feminist works. Born and brought up in Dharwar, a small but intellectually very lively town in North Karnataka, she was the daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar named Adya Rangacharya generally described as a Bernard Shaw of Kannada Theatre. She had her early education in Dharwar and graduated in Economics in Bomabay and then obtained a degree in Law in Bangalore and also did a journalism course at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Her writing carrier began in earnest in 1970. She has to her credit her publications of such collection of short stories as; 1) The Legacy, 2) It was Dark, 3) The Miracle, 4) It was the Nightingale and novels such as; 1) Roots and Shadows 2) The Dark Holds No Terrors 3) If I Die Today 4) Come Up and Be Dead 5) That Long Silence.

As a widely a read person well-acquainted with other literary minds and greatly influenced by even such English witres Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Eric Jonos, Bronte Sisters and Jane Austen and stimulated by writers like Simon De Beauvoir and Virginio wholf, Despandey's writings deal with the Indian middle class women's turmoils convulsions and frustrations and their silence as a means of communication. Rooted in the culture in which she lived, she could see the ordinary experiences, vividly, rending the ordinary with the intelligence and in sight. Her fiction is, no doubt, women-centered. The female protagonists in his novels are the young girls who can be led astray, for example in Come Up and Be Dead, married women who suffer silently, for example in That Long Silence and the working women who, most of the time, are out of the family getting in direct contact with the society for example, The Dark Holds No Terrors.

As Shashi Despande’s vision of the Indian women tends to be optimistic, though somewhat radical, she would like to call herself as a humanist feminist. The predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a traditional society and she does neatly trace out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught. Though economically dependent on her husband, woman is an appendage to man or family. Generally speaking, woman today plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors and participates in all the hither to male dominated spheres. Here in her fictional world, Sheshi Despande presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phases, underlying reasons for deep-rooted social problems. She is good at making a mixture of
both ‘humanism’ and ‘feminism’ in her fiction and has succeeded in presenting a realistic picture of the woman in the middle class society.

The underlying theme of all her novels is focused on human relationships. The vitality of her characterization stems from her own sense of perception and her experience of living. One can see in her novels not the fictionalized but her perceived and felt ‘human relationship’ like that between a father and a girl, between a husband and a wife, etc. Feminine consciousness is much pronounced almost in all such novels as The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence. Her characters like Saru, Indu and Jaya are depicted as individuals trying to make sense of their lives to find a pattern in the past and a direction for the future. Shashi Despande’s strength lies in portraying uncertainties and doubts of women who cannot see themselves as heroic, but who want to make life possible. Deshpande gives her own definition of the ‘human predicament’ thus: “Inspite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations, you go o getting involved that’s the human predicament” (Roots and Shadows 120)

In the fictional world of Shshi Despande, the women reflects the ever suffering, self-effecting and self-sacrificing female who may be called an ideal woman balancing relationship with her husband. Whatever may be her suffering, she strives for an ideal relationship with him representing thereby the typical womanhood. In the earlier days, the voice of women used to go unheard and unsung in the patriarchal world. In spite the fact that the present world is said to have gained not only legal but also social freedom to voice her problems protesting against injustices done to her. Shashi Despande, being the author of the 70’s and 80’s, endowed with the power of understand so-called modern middle class woman, mixes ‘humanism’ and ‘feminism’ in her portrayal of Indian woman.

Roots and Shadows does explore the inner struggle of Indu, who represents a modern woman being educated and in contact with society and dealing with such critical problems as love, sex, marriage and individuality. The novel is an attempt to show how her individuality brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. Indu is portrayed as a feminist in her approach towards life. Indu comes back to her ancestral place to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change, though everybody is aware of it and the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu. Indu has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be a free and baffled, she is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stronghold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wanted to show her family that she was a success. She goes back to her parent’s home to find out the roots but she finds the Shadows instead. It becomes a time of reckoning of her, she thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage, her
own marriage based on love etc., after illuminating interactions with the varied personalities in her family, she works out their futures and also her own future. She decides to go back to find out her own home. Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generations. Thus, the novelist has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set up. One set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra, Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya and the other set is represented by Indu. To the old generalization, Woman’s life is nothing “but 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” (RS 128). And the ideal woman is the one who doesn’t have her own independent identity: “A woman who sheds her ‘I’ who loses her identity in her husband’s” (P 54), whereas the new generation reviews everything with reason. Indu analyses the ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve them. She tries to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But unfortunately in all her efforts, she fails miserably either due to the impact of all the culture and tradition, of fear of stigma or timidity or all these combined together.

Besides being an educated young woman, Indu is very much sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become independent and complete in herself but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. Indu learns the truth about herself, dismissing all the shadows enveloping her real self. She can no longer cheat herself saying that she will do things for the sake of saying that she will do things for the sake of Jayant, her husband. She shall not remain a doll or a puppet but she will take decisions for herself and affirm her being. As Simon de Beauvoir puts it, “the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of the ‘other’ will die in them” (Beauvoir 73). Indu, a middle class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka, “left home full of hatred for the family, for Akka especially” and she had sworn, “I would never go back” (P 20). Indu who had lost her mother at birth identifies, throughout the novel, Akka as a mother figure. She rebels against Akka, her world, her values and marries Jayant against the wishes of Akka. Akka said her marriage, “such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages.. it’s all right for a while. Then they realize...” (P 74). Akka, the mother figure in Roots and Shadows is a domineering woman almost as the symbol of in the family. Indu is much in the same mould of Akka. In the beginning, Indu refuses to accept Akka as her role model and rejects Akka’s orthodoxy, rituals and carves a life of her own with hope that escaping from Akka, she will gain independence and freedom to live and act as she pleases, But she finds dominant Akka and her family to be a great hindrance to her goal of attaining independence and completeness at all levels in college life, maintenance of friendship and relationship etc., Later on, Indu leaves one house and gets married to Jayant who is her own choice. It is found that Indu leaves me house and enters another to be
independent. In marrying Jayant, Indu has found her alter ego and her life rather complete. She says: “I had become complete, I had felt incomplete, not as a woman but as a person. And in Jayant, I had found the other part of my whole self” (RS 126).

Jayant had forced her to realize that self is an elusive centre, that one could never exchange roots with another. Marriage threatened to rob Indu of herself. She knew that “the ultimate truth” was “one’s own self” and that is what really matters. Indu’s agony is rooted in her intellectual dilemma of knowing “what I had was nothing” and of knowing “what I had to have” (P 117). The root of all her psychological problems is her love-hate relationship with Jayant. Indu is only human in her distaste for love that is non-real and absurd, and love that lacks the humanizing influence in the context of marriage in a masculine civilization, a civilization that perpetuates myths created by male-oriented societies and makes marriage for the female partner, both physically and spiritually dissatisfying. Indu articulates her sexual confusion thus:

“Jayant.. too expected to submit. No, not expected . He took it for granded that I would and I did it, because I told myself, I loved world took away the taint from the deed. And remembering how I surrendered to him step by step I realize now, that it was not for love did not want to conflict” (P 174).

Indu's love-marriage degenerates into a mere psychological affair that makes her feel as if there was something shameful in total commitment, as if she has abused her body’s sanctity. Jayant, archytypal Indian husband is shocked to find a passion in a woman. By refusing to accept indu’s real self, her human self, Jayant forces in her a state of armed neutrality to life with him and mars the felicity of their relationship. Jayant has made an “anachronism” of her and created confusion in her mind about her womanhood.

The conflicting situation of Indu’s marriage, her awakened consciousness, her confused psyche rooted ambivalent attitude towards love and marriage suggest how for a woman as a woman, realization of self can only be a self in conflict. Talking about her predicament in her relationship with Jayant, Indu says:

“What I felt for Jayant, can I compress all of it within this world? (love). It is much more so overwhelming a response of the whole of me to him. Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself” (97)

The novelist has skillfully picturized the pathetic state of Indu by creating a situation in which young modern women who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join modernity, are entangled. According to Indu, one should listen to dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. Unfortunately, she herself has failed to do so either for the fear of failure or timidity. This fact makes her see herself as a sinner and causes deep suffering. She tries her level best and struggles hard even to understand the actual cause
destroying her married life. One way she finds it to be the idea of self surrender and self-abnegation. Instead of leaving Jayant, she goes back to change. Her mind unrolls thus:

“I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. What kind of life can you build on foundation of dishonesty .... I knew I would not tell Jayant about naren and me” (P 205)

One can certainly see the continuation of failure as per new effort is still rooted in timidity and dishonesty. The suppression of her intellectual and physical desires comes out when she meets Naren. Naren was a challenge to her. She accepted it and let herself go. At one point in the novel, when Naren tries to make love with her, she declares: “I am essentially monogamous. For me, it’s one man and one man alone” (RS 89)

But later, she offers herself to him twice. Indu tries to reason out each and every action. Her mind starts musing over reasons for giving her body to Naren. And further, her mind on the matters of sin, crime, right and wrong can also be seen.

Indu does not believe in love. To her, there is no such thing as ‘love’in real life. Though it exists in books and movies. According to her, it is a big fraud. It is not the only thing in life. And if somebody believes in it, he or she trapped and becomes humble and dependent. The concept of love is false for Indu, so Naren asks her what the truth is, for which she answers thus:

“The sexual instinct.... That is true. The material instinct... that is true too. Self-interest, you remember Devdas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love, but I could have bucked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! How distinguishing (P 173).

Indu feels very much attached to Naren as she thinks that it is not only Naren who has achieved the state of detachment. Indu longs to be detached and independent but to no avail. She feels ashamed of herself when she does not see things in a practical form. She tells Naren as:

“I am still and dead. And now when you tried to kiss me, I thought....This is Jayant. So that’s all I'm, Naren. Not a pure woman not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much, too passionately. And is ashamed of it” (P 192).

On the one hand, she is ashamed of her not being a pure woman but on the other hand, she hates her womanhood. After experiencing some of her married life, she looks down upon marriage as ‘a trap’. Indu constantly fights against her womanhood because it was thrust o her gracelessly and brutally the day she came of age. She realized that she had surrendered before Jayant not for love as she had imagined. She had surrendered because she wanted to avoid conflict in order to show to the family that her marriage had been a success.
Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes. The society continues to be male-dominated and attitude towards women continue to be the same. Women on their part are becoming more and more conscious of the various emancipation movements. Hence their predicament is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude, that too, touching the core of modernity deviated from tv addition. The novelist has made her heroines like Indu choose security through reconciliation. Thus, *Roots and Shadows* ends with affirmation of the individuality of Indu and also the principle of life which is endless. Through the image of the tree, Shashi Despande suggests that Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace, but the very meaning of life itself”. Indu goes in search of integrity only to realize that she lacked it herself. Indu sprang out of the world with courage she proclaims her identity to be free in all respects. Shashi Despande evidently says;

“To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to be dominate?... Oh! Yes, you can’t escape the shadows the clearer the light, the darker the shadows. They follow you everywhere“ (Dhawan 35).

The novelist presents Indu as a feminist. There are feminist characteristics in her. Indu broke away from her family out of resentment and married for love in order to assert her freedom. For Shashi Despande as for her sensitive and intelligent woman, Indu, though modern, essentially Indian in sensibility. The struggle of Indu to give Shape and content to her individual existence in a sexiest society culminates in a crisis and ends in compromise. “Defeat is relief”, and freedom only relative. For woman, there is no escape from relationships: “New bonds replace the old, that’s all” (P 16).

To conclude, Shashi Despande has very beautifully portrayed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian woman through the character of Indu. Who has raised many basic questions regarding modern woman who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs, culture and traditions but influenced by the scientific knowledge from the west. There was a time when the Indian woman was uneducated, illiterate, ignorant and was considered as an honourable woman and even considered as a thing to be protected by a man. Now, she has started becoming aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Indu is found to be representing this very woman. And now it is the part of the society to encourage or condemn or cooperate with her in her efforts to establish her identity in the society. Thus, Despande’s vision of Indian woman tends to be optimistic, though radical. No doubt, the novelist has achieved a synthesis between tradition and modernity through the portrayed of characters like Indu in her fictional world to bring horue the point that "modernism is
not a negation of tradition; true modernism is only an enrichment of tradition, an extension of its frontiers” (Chand 99).

Works Cited