

## **Roots And Shadows: The Bold Treatment Of Unconventional Issues**

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**Abstract:** *In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the strength, courage and unconventional steps taken by the main protagonist of the novel. The novel **Roots and Shadows**, is about change and revolt. It presents the dilemma of a woman as a daughter, sister, beloved and wife. Akka the most dominating lady in the novel saved the Roots of the family by casting off the Shadows, through Indu. Family legacy which has been transferred by Akka to Indu is the main Root which has to be alive, and others who only want to take money and property are merely like shadows. Indu goes ahead and proves that despite of being out of the family for ten years she had a place in Akka's mind especially in the sense of ruling and binding people together after her death. At the end she proves herself a disciplined and generous heiress.*

**Keywords:** *Culture, convention, subjugation, successor, tradition.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Ever since Indian writing in English has begun, new development in ideas and changes in writing occurred one by one. With the growth and changes all over in the globe, writing in India also took bounce. Now it is on its glorious peak, shining and introducing so many landmark pieces of work in literature. Initially stagnate subject matter brought monotony and people with increasing ratio of education and literacy demanded more striking themes to read. Gradual changes came in the writing pattern and with the inception of modernism hallmark work elevated the standard of writing. Modernism perfectly changed the thinking, observation, acceptance and behavior of people. It entered on the ground with utmost new concept in art, literature, music, and sculptor. It was a break from old traditions, conventions and rules, to religion, from early decade to the present century. In India new modern writers, including women writers, also undid themselves from the conventional writing. The fragile presentation of woman's condition, her status, poverty, famine in various parts of the country and many other issues were withdrawn by the new writers. On the other hand to achieve the attention of readers and place in literature modern woman writers crossed the periphery, and started writing on some specific hidden issues related to the women.

ShashiDeshpande in her most succeeding and ultimate novel **Roots and Shadows**, (1983) exhibited the journey of its rebel protagonist Indu. This novel has proved author's versatility and fertility of mind, as a novelist. The novel was awarded by the ThirumathiRangammal prize for the best English novel in 1982-83. This inducement gave her strength and number of novels, short-stories and other non-fictional works of Deshpande got published thereafter. Her technique of writing, pattern of unfolding fishy things and deep probing of character's psyche uplifted her standard among the other well-known Indian novelists. Most of her novels are having story of Joint family. It is quite difficult to get into the relational bonds in a large family, but Deshpande almost in her every novel combined the relations perfectly. Her flawless dare of narrating the life of each character made her essentially different. How the life of one character is interlinked to another, is her primary concern to delineate in the story. The crystal clear depiction of each character's personality connects them closely to their readers. The novel is full of unconventional issues and daring steps of Indu, the female protagonist of **Roots and Shadows**, who leaves her home to gain the popularity and independence. She finds herself unfit in every role and to compensate her guilt of not being successful she begins the search of her lost female identity, "the female phase which is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward, freed from the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" (Showalter 3). She also gets married to a non-Brahmin and to hide the distance in relationship with her husband she develops illicit terms out of marriage. It is an endemic feature of Deshpande's heroines. Extra marital bond is their escape from the reality of wedlock. In long run it also does not provide solace to them and again the journey of escape ends from where it had begun. Similar condition comes with Indu. But her purpose and journey doesn't end with guilt, it ends with this thought that, "I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. For that was not important" (**Roots and Shadows** 87).

### **The Bold Theme Of The Novel**

Shashi Deshpande is one of those prolific writers who followed the modern pattern of writing. Her new outlook towards society brought popularity to her credit. She dealt with the various themes in her novels like issues related to women, crisis within the families and relationships, caste, class and other social problems. Her heroines sail their life according to their will and conscious. She has presented every novel with outstanding theme but few of them are having unimagined stories like marital rape, treachery of a wife, and denial of conventions and traditions by woman to assert her 'self.' She has presented a destructive divided 'self' and its search as a whole. She also developed and employed a new writing technique in her novels which brought a freshness to the reader. The Psychological presentation of characters is the main hold of her novels which develops gradually in a philosophical way. Most of her novels concentrate on family relationship and its authenticity. Deep analysis of her writing reveals that beneath the traditional surface of these family relationship a hidden turmoil exists. It suddenly appears in the form of anger, jealousy, tyranny, domination, cheating and break in relationship. This tendency of her characters drags them far away from their actual families. But later, when they do not get satisfaction anywhere they try to recapture the previous position. At the end the self-discovery, self-introspection and self-revelation brings harmony in their life.

*Roots and Shadows*, basically explores the hidden inner conflict of a woman who remains reticent in her few personal matters. In this novel again a woman is in the center and she is narrating her life experience within the family and out of the family. The story of the novel completely based on Indu's life experience, her struggle for success and problem of her marital life. Indu, a journalist, well-educated intelligent woman gets a chance to respite from her own baffled routine of life. Therefore after a long break of ten years she once again goes back to see her old conventional family, on the pretext of Akka's summoning. The novel has a large family with so many members including outsiders also, and Indu is one of them. She spent her childhood in this house but never felt it her own, and after her stay of eighteen years she leaves the family. She gets education, Job and husband of her own choice. Her education and independent 'self' changes her life, vision, and way of living completely. It gives proud and jealousy both to her family members. The novel is about conventions, tradition, culture, prevalent superstitions in the society and social taboos. The subjugation of woman and domination of man is also visible in the family. The family is passing through a transitional phase also new generation is trying hard to shed old conventions and tradition gradually. They have their own beliefs, ideas, way of living, thinking, habits etc.

This huge joint family presents every colour of life. The subtle interplay of jealousy and frustration completes the definition of an extended family where all type of people are living together for their own personal benefits. Reactions, despondency, altercation and retaliations reach on culmination when matter related to property and money has discussed. The reality of relations, love and respect for each other comes out clearly. Indu, then feels herself as a scapegoat in this battle of family because now she has to resolve the problem of everyone.

The offshoots of culture in the novel are covering the whole family through rituals, ceremonies and other functions which are being held on massive scale. It also seems as a medium of get together with outsiders and with those family members who are staying far away. Their opinion about each other, malice and tit-bits bring charm in the novel. In this novel Deshpande portrayed the real picture of society, family and mentality of people living in it. So many sensitive issues have been discussed by her. There are rebels also, denying the authority and rules of society and culture.

### **Past And Present Mixing Memories And Desires**

Indu's homecoming was an indirect rejection of new relation with Jayant including his domination and obsession, and with it she embraces the old forsaken relations. She feels nostalgic on coming back to home after ten years of elopement. She reminds her past in the house. The care of Atya and domination of Akka are like two paradoxical memories to her. She was only fifteen days old when AnantKaKa brought her home and since that day Atya looks after her as a mother. Indu a motherless child lost her mother during her birth. And her father never gave serious attention to anyone after that. Indu's father had a love marriage which was completely out of convention her mother was a non-Brahmin and no one preferred her in the family. But Atya's revulsion comes out one day and she says to Indu that she always wanted her mother to be alive for her father at least, "she could have made him happy look at him now! Ever since he lost her, he's been a wanderer. And with his brains, he could have gone far" (*Roots and Shadows* 43). It was Akka's domination and rude behavior which propelled Indu to leave the home. She possessed the power in her brother's home and ruled over the family. Indu addressed Akka with so many metaphors like, "ruthless, dominating, bigoted and inconsiderate" (22). Indu in the presence of Akka could not assert herself, as she used to restrict her. Indu even cannot talk to boys, it was her order. Akka's shypocrisy and fake traditional woman's role made Indu peevish. She wanted to do something in her life and Akka puzzled her by creating many hindrances in her way.

But in her homecoming episode both Akka and Indu are quiet changed. Akka on her death bed wants to see Indu not alone but with Jayant. When Indu reaches to see Akka she asks, “Why hasn’t your husband come? Why didn’t you bring him with you?” (199) it was surprising for Indu that Akka acknowledged his existence after three years of her marriage. At this moment Indu wanted to argue with Akka but it was Akka who again hushed up Indu, leaves the talk incomplete and assured her that, “we will talk of it tomorrow if you want.” (20) For Indu it was injustice she wants to make things clear. Perhaps she wants to tell the truth of her decision of leaving the family or perhaps she wants to know Akka’s feelings for Jayant and herself. It was Jayant who gave future security to Indu. Indu looks a happy possibility in Jayant and gets married to him. The affinity comes in this new bonding. But Akka did not please with this marriage because Jayant was a non-brahmin boy. Culture, religion, tradition and family taboos lies in the breath of people in India, therefore, in Akka’s sense Indu’s intercaste marriage was a kind of disrespect to the family. Akka a conventional, superstitious woman observes that, “such marriages never work. Different caste, different languages.... It’s all right for a while. Then they realize” (RS 68).

Akka led her life with such out dated conventional theories. She was callous and very particular about caste. Caste issue is sensitive for everyone, and Deshpande in her every novel deals with it. Akka lived with such thoughts and applied it on everyone. Caste, at times seems deciding one’s fate, which is quite ridiculous and it is a hatefull creation of orthodoxy. In Akka’s sense if anyone goes against the system is not allowed to come back to mingle up with the family. Akka has maintained the full rigidity against Indu and her father. Akka made herself tough and rigid with this thinking. During her illness she denied to get admitted in the hospital she said, “God knows what caste the nurses are. Or the doctors. I couldn’t drink a drop of water there” (21). She had totally been obsessed by caste. This rigidity offers death to her. Indu hates her way of judging people by caste. But Atya has different vision about Akka. She narrates Akka’s life history to Indu that she was only twelve when she got married to a man of thirty years and as a child she had no meaning of marriage. Her ruthless mother-in-law kept torturing her for long. Once she tried to run away from there but could not succeed. Her mother-in-law punished her, locked her up in a room to starve and later sent her to her husband’s room. As a child she doesn’t have the meaning of such marriage and she cried out, “lock me up again, lock me up” (70). She had no liberty, no mean of entertainment. Social taboos are only made for woman not for man; she has to tolerate everything which infuriates Indu. Every woman has fear of expulsion and desertion if she breaks the law. But Indu doesn’t care about it she thinks that she will never let Jayant know about it because now:

I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage (RS38).

Through Akka and Atya’s tragedy Deshpande is dragging the attention of everyone towards, child marriage the prevalent evil in society. Such evil practice was very popular in the society earlier. Akka’s resentment completely comes out after her mother-in-law’s death, and paralytic stroke of her husband gives her chance to take her revenge. Akka’s husband also used to keep a mistresses. Akka was childless so after fifteen and twenty years of marriage he took up with a woman that was unbearable to her. Her frustration appears out completely during her husband’s unmovable condition. She shows wrath to him and crushes his desire to see the woman to whom he loved very much. She suddenly transforms herself and sheds the role of merging, agonizing wife. And one day she tells him, “listen to me. It’s my turn now. I’ve listened to you long enough she came here twice. She wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just for a short while. I threw her out. You’ll never see her again” (RS 71).

This change gives power of domination to Akka. Akka did not merge herself to the identity of fragile female. She overpowered everyone but in Atya’s sense she was generous also, otherwise it was hard to stay in the old house as a widow. She was ray of hope to everyone with her wealth security. She had a great contribution in running the family and maintaining the old house. In true sense she was the pillar of the house. Atya is also a victim of traditional and conventional laws. Through Atya, Deshpande succeeds in presenting an ugly glimpse of widows ranking in the society. Indu narrates that when Atya comes as a widow in the old house Kaka resists, “the idea of the becoming a shaven widow” (118). But with this change and break from convention Atya had lost her status, “she was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her” (118).

### **Dilemma Between Tradition And Selfhood**

In such a huge traditional family, Indu reminds, in her childhood once she had tried to change the serving method of food purposely and, “The result had been catastrophic” (14). Old traditions and conventions are not allowed to be changed. In the same house Indu flourished her love with her distant cousin Naren. Indu discloses that she hates womanhood and to defy this she always has gone against convention. From her first menstrual cycle she started receiving warnings that, “you’re a woman now, you can have babies yourself” (79). Indu feels like living in imprisonment for those four days and everyone treats her like an outcaste. She even doesn’t have right to “touch anyone or anything,” (79) because she is unclean. Simone De Beauvoir opines:

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on (335).

Indu doesn't want to compromise with tradition and culture on the basis of her identity as a female. She shed the role performed by her Kaki, Atya, Mini, Akka and other female in the family. She wanted to show her extra-ordinary potential. She aggressively says to Naren that, "I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me" (79). She also leaves the Job of a journalist in a magazine because she got fed up of writing only about women. Deshpande through Indu perhaps wants to show her own resentment of being labeled as a feminist writer. Indu did not want to write about women's conditions, problems, pity and their position as a subordinate in the society. So she shifts from one work place to another and tells to Naren:

Women, women, women. . . I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourself in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn't go on (RS78).

Indu's marriage with Jayant was her success. But on the other moment she realized her trap that it's not easy to live within marriage. Her marriage suppresses her 'self' completely. She gradually gives up the 'I' and submitted herself to Jayant. She explores that Jayant never compelled her to submit but it was she who wanted to show everyone her marriage as a success. She surrendered to him, "step by step, I realize now, that it was not for love, as I had been telling myself, but because I did not want conflict" (RS 159).

The sense of lost identity fills her with despise against Jayant. She, at this moment undergoes through a paradoxical phase. This ambivalent attitude towards Jayant takes place in her mind. She hates Jayant but on the other hand cannot live without him. Just after their marriage like every Indian woman Indu also submits herself completely, and her sole motif used to be to please Jayant. It was Jayant who psychologically obsessed her. But materially he was not forcing her to do things according to him. It was her deliberate act because, "It's the way I want it to be" (49). Later she asks herself that why she is making all these efforts to please him? Then she realizes that she is behaving like those traditional women of her family to whom she used to see with disgust. In her sense their act of worshipping *Tulsi* plant for husband's long life was ridiculous. And she also has started molding herself in the line of a traditional wife who only wants to entertain her husband. She wonders, "have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own" (49). Jayant in her need and passionate hours of love did not give her space. He loves her according to his desire, need and time. In this way she starts repressing her sexual needs, and her husband, "effectively desexualizes Indu in refusing to accept her sexual personality and indirectly moulds her identity according to his perceptions" (Sree 32). She feels as if Jayant has destroyed her dreams of happy secure marital life. Jayant never tried to understand her feelings. Jayant's such vile behavior develops feeling of inertia in Indu.

### **Rejection Of Conventions**

Indu can be said one of bold heroines of Deshpande's novels. Just to avoid her suffering and struggle she comes to find out the answers of her loneliness to old house. Here she meets to her childhood friend Naren. Naren is the grandson of old uncle and lived his life as an outsider in the family. He is an orphan. Indu meets him after a long break. A very irregular, indisciplined and careless man Naren again pleases her. Indu loves to stay in Naren's company. She shares her dissatisfaction in marital life and an image of an unsuccessful writer with him. Naren an educated boy understands her, argues with her and later reveals some truth of life to her. Naren teaches her the lesson of detachment also. Even in her discussions with old uncle she finds the same air of detachment. She understands that involvement brings suffering and humiliation which is called, "human predicament" (109).

He also tells her that life will be more miserable in the crises of miseries, so ups and downs in life are like its part. Old uncle and Naren both worked as a healer to Indu. Indu finds her inner fulfillment in Naren's company. She reveals to Naren that outwardly she is successful but from inside she is totally alone, rejected, drab and disturbed. Naren is her hope; therefore twice she renders herself to Naren. Physical love with Naren gives her pleasure and satisfaction. It is surprising that Indu has no guilt of what she has done. After every act she becomes normal and feels that it is nothing like any crime. She thinks that she will never disclose about her affair to Jayant. Indu's character shows her fearlessness and assertion of desires:

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence (Rama Moorthy 124).

Deshpande presents a wide chasm between love, sex and morality. Indu's act in her sense is not bad because she has suffered the pain of being lonely. She knowingly takes Naren's help in soothing her and displays her desire to satiate. In this personal matter, her physical union with Naren, she keeps conventions and culture aside. Because she thinks that her own satisfaction is necessary to be completed:

Shashi Deshpande treads a radical ground to seek a justification of man and woman relationship in the context of Psycho biological needs. Male companionship is an inevitable need of the life of a woman. Indu's

failure to resist her urges and to seek their culmination in the company of Naren, is her ultimate realization of the real womanhood (Agarwal 64).

She defies the conventional role of a dutiful wife and behaves like an opportunist, and works according to the demand of time. Through Indu, Deshpande displays the most courageous and reactionary woman. She uses her right of exhibiting her needs and demands, and Naren as a medium for it. Indu and Naren are like counterparts. Naren tells about the strange and rude behavior of family members towards him. He was expelled by everyone, since then he left staying with them. It was as if I have done any crime, he says. But later he thought, "I just wanted to live the way I felt like, the way I desired" (114). Since then Naren is living an irregular life, or enjoying instability and uncertainty of living but he leads his life as he desires. Naren himself is a rebel he is denying all the conventions, morality, virtue and ethics. He is also not a free flowing man. He is arrogant and rigid. He doesn't go to attend Akka's funeral because Akka hates her, he tells to Indu, "if I had gone to the funeral, I wouldn't have been surprised if she had got up and yelled at me. I don't want you here, you ippy!" (24). Indu is an opportunist and Naren is a freedom lover.

Indu hates the way people impediment the growth of a girl child, as a result she starts undermining herself and accepts her role as everybody's assistant in the family. Therefore, Indu wants to break the system of abusing girl child. Indu states that how she had been preached by everyone:

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, for a female to live and survive (RS 158).

This stereotyping of a girl child is prevalent in the society. She is being taught that she is made for household work, and their world is limited. Indu gets deeply hurt when she finds same feelings and mentality in Jayant. Deshpande through Indu, "has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the west" (Sandhu 109-10).

Akka a traditional and conventional woman never let anyone to go out of culture. Indu did not tolerate Akka's domination. But Akka in her senses leaves all her property for Indu. It was shocking for everyone. Revulsion and objection of new generation infuriates Indu. She can see the unduly hate for her in the eyes of Sumant, who never accepted Indu as a family member. Each member has different opinion about Akka's decision. But everybody wants security and advantage in any case. Sunil her another cousin controls himself hardly, and burst out, "I think it's damned unfair. Why should all of Akka's money go to Indu? She has no right at all, if you ask me. She isn't part of the family now, is she?" (93) This weird property matter reveals every hidden face to Indu. Everyone, especially women of the family to win the favour tried to please the new heiress. For Indu it was only Naren who was far away from this family politics, therefore, she surrenders to him.

On the contrary Mini, her cousin, accepts marriage as a blessing. She doesn't have any problem with the boy, she accepts the truth that, "husband is a sheltering tree," (TLS 32) and she starts nourishing it. She feels that her guilt of taking birth as a girl will make her free by accepting this marriage. Because, she inculcated this belief in her mind that she is like a burden to her parents. Though the match is not suitable in the sense of other people but for Mini and her parents it is more than their expectations. It's the way to redeem one's sin of being girl. In VirndaNabar's words, "the girl as an alien in her father's home, it is man-made laws and social strictures that make her so. Right from birth, a girl is made to feel like a bird of passage in her father's home" (160).

Mini accepts the fate like Sunanda, Narmada, her mother, Akka and other widows in the family. Deshpande has given the glimpse of rural and urban attitude. Sumitra loves to exaggerate things and to show herself city woman speaks English. Relative who come from city have no match with rural people of old house. But when property matter opens they all have the same voice. Indu's deep research gives her strength to become authoritative. She truly wants to act like Akka, and it was an opportunity to assert the power. Indu decides that she will dominate more than Akka which wouldn't depend on her liking and disliking. Now she decides to play the game of good and worst, and thinks that only deserving will get permission to stay in her kingdom. Till now everyone had given clue to Indu that what they think about others so she decided few things to change. She wanted to arrange a better match for Mini, she wanted to stay in the old house so that she can start writing again, she wanted to buy the house and at last she wanted to provide help to Vithal and to let the weak go out of the house, like SunandaAtya. But all these plans of Indu are out of others happiness. Indu, at last diverts herself from all these plans, and pleases everyone. She also puts the proposal of Mini and Naren's marriage to avoid the payment of dowry. Naren in Indu's view is well educated man who has sense of understanding things. But other thinks that he has neither money nor property and his education has no value. Everyone rejects him and speak against Indu:

Here the novelist exposes the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in society. The easily available Naren is not considered a suitable match for their daughter; instead they pay a handsome dowry for one who has nothing but his family's social status (Sharma 25).

Indu realizes that nothing will change here. Things are standstill since her childhood, and the mentality of people is also same. Only she moved from this place. But in other's life no novelty or change came, the same emptiness and boredom they all are facing. It was only Atya, Kaka and old uncle who after the death of Akka, were trying to keep the fabric of family alive. Mini's father loves Naren but her mother never liked him. And, due to her disliking for Naren Kaka did not accept his proposal.

Naren's sudden death by drowning shatters Indu, she was attached to him, so on seeing his dead body she feels lonely without him. All the family members were claiming for his body but Indu with listless face finds that, "it was the sense of utter loneliness of the human spirit that overwhelmed me as I saw Naren lying there detached, remote and far removed from us and all our emotions" (RS 176). Perhaps Naren wanted to teach her the lesson of self-control. And she perfectly learnt it. Naren gives her the secret of life that life and death has an unending cycle, one death replaces by another life. Indu feels, "I was watching life itself . . . endless, limitless, formless and full of grace" (184). Naren fills her with positivity. She at last decides the deal, settles the property matter and agrees on the matter of selling old house to Shankarappa. For Kaka's relief she keeps Akka's promise alive and tells him to fix up the date of Mini's marriage and she'll pay for it. The old house gets its end after housing four generation, watching many deaths, crying and enjoying people together. It also dies with so many memories. Shankarappa declares to build a hotel on it.

## II. Conclusion

With the settlement of every affair, the fact of reconciliation enters in Indu's mind. She realizes that Jayant is her need and she is incomplete without him. This long break from Jayant provides a chance to her to restart life with him. She feels that now she recognizes her inner self. Her rebirth and realization takes place with the demolition of old house. She feels that she is living under the haziness of illusion but somehow she dispels it and now wants to go back to Jayant. Her sudden changed decision related to, pending property matter, and her own life gives her strength to solve it. She decides to go home, "yes home. The one I lived in with Jayant. That was my own home," (186) her choice of safe side shows the sharpness of her mind. But she decides that few things she'll keep secret in her no man's land. She will never reveal whatever happened between Naren and her. One thing she would tell him that, "I was resigning from my job," (186) this liberal and independent announcement of Indu declares her own desire of what she wants:

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked existence (Swain 95).

Indu weaves the fabric of her own intricate relationship with Jayant, contemplates and goes back with the positive renewal of life. The whole things in the novel transform one by one. Akka renders her legacy to Indu and with Indu everything changes. Her life undergoes through a transitional phase, but she buries the memories of Naren and their past. This change though snatches Naren from her but it also made her present better. Her self-discovery, self-recognition and revived relationship with Jayant gives her safety and protection for future. Indu after this self-discovery goes back to the life as its successor.

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