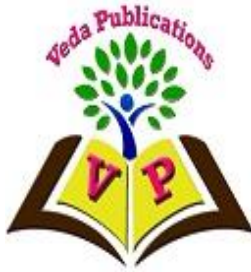


**CAUSE AND REASON IN *ROOTS AND SHADOWS***

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Shashi Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* alternates between past and current events, as well as between the cause and effect. Like the "shadow," the past follows everywhere, and since the "Roots," which stand for the past, are ingrained in the present, it is impossible to break free from its hold. Being so appropriate, evocative, and striking, the title aids the reader in understanding the main ideas of the book. The study throws light on the impact of the past experiences on the present reactions.

Keywords: *Love, Marriage, Past, Roots, Shadows*



The 1982–83 Best Indian English Novel Award was presented to Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*. The protagonist of this book is an educated working woman who returns to her home after a twelve-year gap, much like in *Dark Holds No Terrors*. In this book, the author uses the characters of Indu and Akka to illustrate the idea that physical torture and financial hardship are key factors in preventing a woman's spontaneous growth. The title "Roots and Shadows" indicates that what the characters are or do is the 'Shadow' or result of his past experiences which represents 'Roots'.

The novel narrates the life of Indu, a thoughtful, motherless, youthful writer raised in a Brahmin orthodox joint family. The heroine returns to her ancestral home as the story progresses. The parental home teaches her about the value of human life. Here, she discovers her 'roots' as an independent woman and writer, and her 'shadows' as a daughter, mother, and commercial writer. She marries Jayant, defying Akka, her traditional world, and her rigid values. Ironically, she realizes the futility of her decisions.¹.

The narration alternates between the present and the past, focusing on specific events from the past that are too deeply etched in the protagonist's mind. The memories of past episodes and events intertwine to paint a picture of Indu's childhood, marriage, and return to the ancestral home. The narrative style, which is simple and intimate, connects the past and present within an intense and complex framework of familial relationships. In fact, very little action takes place outside the ancestral house for Shashi Deshpande. "The family is a timeless and universal institution; everything begins here, and everything

that happens outside the family reflects what happens inside."²

The novel begins with the day before Indu's cousin Mini's wedding. Mini represents the customs and traditions ingrained in her in that ancestral house which in itself is in the words of Indu, a closed world with not less than twenty of us³. She observes:

They had told me that the life of a woman is devoid of choices. And I had witnessed the truth of this throughout my entire life, especially in this house. The woman had no choice but to surrender and accept. I've often wondered... if they were born without wills or if they atrophied due to lack of use? (Deshpande 6)

But Indu was different. She was an educated woman who showed her anger and resentment against the family restrictions. Indu marries Jayant, her chosen man from a different caste, in defiance of Akka, the conventional world, and rigid values. Having a deep contempt for the suppression at home, Indu had left the parental residence. I had left home with a strong dislike for my family, particularly Akka. I swore I'd never return? (Deshpande 18)

Indu says:

I had turned down the family and attempted to form a magical circle around Jayant and myself. I had limited my boundaries and found myself the poorer for it. Alienation. (Deshpande 10)

Thus, despite the fact that Indu had 'consciously' and 'physically' kept herself away from the ancestral house, the house had always been with her over the ten years.



Ten years I remained away from this house. And yet, every day for the past ten years, I arose to the same sounds. For a few sounds of each day, I returned to this house." (Deshpande 34)

Indu wonders whether "our ancestors are going to have the last laugh on us after all" (Deshpande 35)

In order to attain freedom from the restricted life dominated by Akka in the ancestral house, Indu desired to be self-sufficient and free. However, Akka and her family members posed a significant obstacle to her success. When she was in college, Akka forbade her from meeting the boys and developing friendships with them. Hence, when she met Jayant for the first time she felt a burden, the weight of uncertainty, had been lifted from her shoulders. Instead, there had been absoluteness or certainty. I knew then... it was this man and no one else. (Deshpande 46)

Indu looks for marriage as an alternative to the inevitable bondage in her parents' household, claims Anita Singh. She therefore eagerly awaits the role of wife with the hope that assuming a new role will enable her to appreciate her independence.⁴ Indu's exaggerated desire to achieve complete personhood" is suggested in her words when she says,

The fact that I will never be complete within myself is my deepest sorrow. Until I met Jayant, I had no idea... I became unable to be alone after meeting Jayant. (Deshpande 31)

Marriage, which Indu had thought would provide her freedom from her roots, turns out to restrict her freedom. She believes that marriage is always a convenient arrangement that benefits men over women. Marriage had taught her the gift of 'silence' and 'immense deception'. She had learned to divulge to Jayant...what he wanted to see, to say to him...what he wanted to hear. I hid my feelings and reactions like nothing more than trash (p-38). The 'root' of her deception in marriage is the way how Akka responded to the news of her marriage. Akka had burst out at her marriage thus:

Such a marriage is doomed to fail. It's okay to have different languages and castes for a time. They realise. (Deshpande 68)

Hence Indu realises that it is for this reason that she wants to conceal the bitterness in her marriage. Reality had taught her that it was not love in marriage that sustained it but mere adjustment. She never wanted to show any of her displeasure or strife in her married life to anyone. She bore everything silently only to show her victory over the practices that she had rebelled against in the ancestral house. She wanted to 'show off her success in her life. She says:

As I thought about it, the monstrous ghost of my own cowardice haunted me. I realized that I had clung to Jayant and my marriage out of fear of failing and a need to prove to them that I and my marriage were successful, not just out of love. (Deshpande 159)

She had to show the family that she was happy. Hence, she kept lying, even to herself jeopardizing



everything connected to Jayant, and had now shed bits of herself along the way. Despising Devadas for being a coward, she had become one herself. She had killed herself just as surely as he had.

She recalls how she had mocked the women for practicing the custom of performing Tulsi Pooja for the longevity of their husbands, refraining from using one's husband's name as it reduces his age, and for them, their happiness was in the happiness of their husband. Now, after marriage, Indu realises her 'roots' have cast their 'shadow' on her. She too was not different from other women. The only difference is her reason for believing so. After her marriage, she, too, did what her husband desired...

When I gaze at myself in the mirror, I remember Jayant. When I get dressed, I imagine Jayant. When I disrobe, I think of him. What he would like or desires at all times. What would satisfy him? I can't blame him, either. I wasn't pushed into this by him. It's just the way I want it. And one day I wondered... if there was anything I wanted at all. Have I lost my own form and become fluid? A brutal truth was staring me in the face at that precise moment... no one is without desires.'. (Deshpande 49)

Indu feels that there is nothing of love' as such between husband and wife, rather love' is only a means for human contact. She recalls how before marriage she had yearned for love. She says,

I remember my eyes were watering earlier... I want happiness and love. The cries have now subsided. Not because I have lost all

hope, but because it seems futile to make such demands now. (Deshpande 13)

Whenever Indu expresses such feelings to her husband, he dismisses them as 'nonsense' and 'nothing else'. Jayant makes no attempt to comprehend her feelings. Thus, they don't actually communicate with one another:

Love that's a word I am not familiar with. It seems like an overused word to me... Sometimes I wonder if I'll abandon him... it's the only way I can be myself again. (Deshpande 88-89)

This brings to mind Virginia Woolf's well-known conclusion that women need a room of their own and five hundred pounds in order to write poetry or fiction... Material possessions are necessary for intellectual freedom. (Deshpande 162-3). Indu feels like a fluid which has no shape of its own' (Deshpande 49). She says that -

Hating myself, hating it. Every morning when I wake up, I think... I can't go on. I saw myself shackled indefinitely and felt trapped. (Deshpande 18)

It was at this juncture when she was wishing for an escape. Akka's summons had come (Deshpande 18). Similar to Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu also returns to her patriarchal house after twelve years and finds a solution to her problem. Indu says,

The reprieve had been much needed. A chance to escape. to keep from contemplating what was happening to me... Jayant, and our shared life. (Deshpande 18)



Akka leaves all her wealth to Indu and by this monetary strength, Indu achieves herself and leaves all the 'shadows' behind. Indu says, that I had finally been able to write the way I had always wanted to. (Deshpande 187)

At the end of the novel, we learn that while Indu is relieved and happy, others are shocked by the demolition of the ancestral home.

I felt free and light at the same time. Indeed, the house had also served as a trap, holding me back in a time I needed to move on from. I felt as though I had removed all the extra rough edges from myself. And free.' (Deshpande 186)

The ancestral house which symbolically stands for the 'roots' is at the end of the novel going to be demolished which initiates the movement of crossing the home boundaries leaving the 'shadows' behind. The story of the novel fluctuates between the past and the present actions, cause, and reason. The 'Roots' that stand for the past are ingrained in the present and hence one cannot get away from the clutches of one's past which like our 'shadow' remains with us. Indu's return to her paternal home is an indication of this. The title is very apt, suggestive, and eye-catching, in fact, helps the reader get an insight into the central concerns of the novel.

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