

Tradition and Modernity in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

This paper presents the tradition and modernity in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande displays the possible ways, through which the women can escape from the stern nature of tradition. Jaya does that more effectively than Indu. She takes upper hand immediately after her husband's losing the prosperous job. This fact comes into being when she refuses to handover the key of the new apartment, but she does not dominate him too much. As a cunning modern woman, she knows that her too much of domination upon him will be dangerous to her survival in the family. At the same time she cannot hide the intention of being autonomous and having a respectable identity. This inner motive is common in both the protagonists. At the last part of the novels, they decide to quite the conjugal life as it seems to be the real obstacle for their emancipation. But they do not find in the attempts. Their separation from their respective husbands do not provide enough room to enter in to her aspired life. At last they discover the basic fact that familial relationships are the roots of every woman.

KEYWORDS: tradition, modernity, relationships, survival

Shashi Deshpande, a modern feminist voice, has been celebrated for her realistic depiction of the Indian social ambience. As a feminist, she looks into women's lives and their predicaments. She is of the opinion that the contemporary Indian women struggle a lot due to the prevailing traditional concepts. Of them, marriage proves to be destructive in the lives of the modern Indian women, who are given good education for the last four decades. After the Britisher's political colonialism, a lot number of girls have been sent to many countries all over the world to obtain quality education. Further, the Indian universities are also preoccupied with providing good education to women. As a result of this, the women of the recent times begin to question the existing traditional values, which are not easy to break. A kind of tension is created when the rigid nature of society and the modern thoughts of the new Indian women collide with each other. The literary products, being the reflective tools, exhibit the existing conflict. The objective of this study is to expose the conflict between tradition and modernity in the Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows*. Jaya and Indu, the respective protagonists of *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* share a few common traits. Both of them have possessed good skill and they have hailed from a middle class family; they aspire to produce creative writings; they face a lot number of problems owing to the institution of marriage; they do not get proper

emotional support from their respective husbands; they try to come out from the conjugal life; finally they realize the fact that the Indian women are destined to find happiness within the familial frameworks. Above all these the protagonists' constant clash with the rigid structures of the Indian tradition.

That Long Silence and *Roots and Shadows* disseminate the typical behaviour of the modern thoughts of women, which are seemingly radical. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is not able to be comfortable after her marriage with Mohan. Her life, according to her, is totally broken due to the institution of marriage, from which no woman in India can escape. She could predict her servitude even before her marriage. Still, she enters into it as she knows the reality. If a woman negates the institution of marriage, she will be considered trivial. The protagonist, being intimidated by the danger of the society's behaviour enters into the conjugal life, which is not constructive to her future, for the very concept of conjugal life reinforces the power of patriarchy and aggravates the mere survival of the second sex. Chandra Nisha Singh observes the prevailing danger of marriage for women:

The institution of marriage is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually; hence, it is treated as an ideal form for a civilized social organization and for the propagation of the spices... The phallogocentric hold on the institution determines her code of behaviour and the boundaries of her space, exclusion and invisibility become strategic devices for patriarchy to foreground the image of ideal feminist. Patriarchy permits no alternatives to marriage and holds in pity and contempt those who attempt to thwart it. (50)

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the fact that the Indian women's mental framework is not similar. As an unmarried girl, Jaya knows the real danger of marriage. Hence, she is hesitant for entering into the conjugal life. On the other hand, Indu, the protagonists of *Roots and Shadows*, assumes that her self – arranged love marriage will provide her liberty, but her marital life with Jayant does not fulfil her expectation. She offers love and service to him, but she is not able to get any kind of emotional support from him. Hence, mere disappointment prevails in her life. Both of the protagonists are peeved by the existing gender partiality. Their inner thoughts are replete with modern thoughts, which urge them to move away from the conjugal life. At the meantime, they are intimidated by the stern nature of the traditional values.

The twentieth century women are given enough skills through their education. They want to exhibit the skill for getting enough popularity and economy, which can assert one's individual identity. Jaya and Indu manifest this typical behaviour of the twentieth century Indian women. These two are able to receive fame through their creative writings and their writing prompts them as professionals. Their earnings excel that of their men. They are proud of being the women of good economic status. Mohan and Jayant, being their conservative husbands, are peeved by the women's great success as professionals. So that they begin to chide the

women whenever they get opportunities. Knowing the behavioural framework of their men, the two women tend to please their men as much as possible in many possible ways, but they are not able to continue it after certain extent. They reveal their decision of quitting their jobs, for they know the ultimate reality of the Indian environment that the tradition will always overpower modernity and the tradition will never like a woman's surpassing their husband. Hence, the protagonists' quitting the jobs can be viewed as their meek acceptance of the notions of the tradition.

Shashi Deshpande is indignant that the men are not willing to give up the social status, which has come through their women's economic prosperity. On the other hand, they want to sustain the male – superiority concept in the familial structures. They are able to be successful in doing that for some extent, because the women's thoughts are replete with the stereotyped concepts of the society, which ensures the domination of men. This betokens the modern women's hesitation in questioning the tradition, which tends to protect patriarchy. Jaya plays second fiddle to her husband ignoring her education and economic status, for the society has taught her certain values. She dares not to transgress the border of women. She herself says, "I had learnt it at last – no questions, no retorts. Only silence" (TLS 143). By using the third person narration the novelist informs the environment of her society: "She had grown up in the atmosphere where, it is taught that a husband is like a sheltering tree" (32).

The protagonists of *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* develop humility against the male – dominated society though they do not exhibit it categorically. Due to the unsatisfied existence with their respective husbands, Jaya and Indu find reassurance through some other men. Jaya's friendship with Kamat helps her to come up as a great writer. She likes the encouraging words of him. She remembers the words even after his death. His usual advice to her is, "Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape... take yourself seriously, woman" (99). Indu goes a step further. She develops extra – marital relationship with Naren as she does not receive the expected love from Jayant, her husband. The interesting thing in her part is that she celebrates the extra – marital relationship instead of feeling sorry for it. She does not bother about the tradition, which will consider her act as trivial. On the contrary, she is not willing to wipe out the memory of her relationship with Naren. She feels, "I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately I went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don't need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado" (RS 168).

This passage asserts a modern woman's typical radical thoughts. Jaya and Indu, in the early part of the novels, tend to showcase their passive revolt without going beyond the familiar surroundings. These two women are indignant that Mohan and Jayant love the bodies of their respective wives and they never bother about the emotional sides of the women. Hence, Jaya and Indu could feel

only the physical intimacy with them and they regret the absence of emotional touch. Jaya explains the way, where in that happens between Mohan and her:

Yet there was a curious (and cruel) comfort in thinking that perhaps he had learnt at last what had I found out long ago, the fact that is the act of sex that really affirms your aloneness... but, lying there, my body still warm and throbbing from the contact with his, it had come to me in one awful moment – that I was alone. The contact, the coming together, had been not only momentary but wholly illusionary as well. We had never come together, only our bodies had done that. (TLS 97 – 98)

The aggressive nature of Jaya and Indu is exhibited in the middle part of the novel. They try to repair the impact of the protest in the latter parts of the novels. Shashi Deshpande does not aspire her gender to be separated from their men, but she expects harmonious union of the two opposite genders. She manifests the ultimate reality that women do not receive fair treatment and their education and prosperous economy are not respected though they decorate their families in many aspects. As a feminist, Shashi Deshpande displays the possible ways, through which the women can escape from the stern nature of tradition. Jaya does that more effectively than Indu. She takes upper hand immediately after her husband's losing the prosperous job. This fact comes into being when she refuses to handover the key of the new apartment, but she does not dominate him too much. As a cunning modern woman, she knows that her too much of domination upon him will be dangerous to her survival in the family. At the same time she cannot hide the intention of being autonomous and having a respectable identity. This inner motive is common in both the protagonists. At the last part of the novels, they decide to quit the conjugal life as it seems to be the real obstacle for their emancipation. But they do not find in the attempts. Their separation from their respective husbands do not provide enough room to enter in to her aspired life. At last they discover the basic fact that familial relationships are the roots of every woman. Bhatnagar observes Shashi Deshpande's usual concept of reconciliation: "The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude" (128). Thus the novels *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* display the novelist's realistic explications of husband – wife relationship.

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