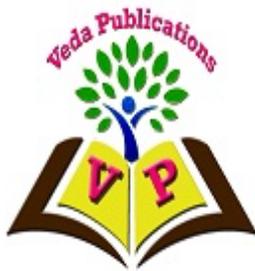




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTIVITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INDU'S CHARACTER IN SASHI DESHPANDE'S 'ROOTS AND SHADOWS'**

Dr. Manoj Kumar Kalita

*(Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Nalbari Commerce College, Nalbari, Assam.)*Email: rsnationaljournal@gmail.comDoi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12311>**ABSTRACT****Article history:**

Received on : 21- 08-2025

Accepted on : 19-09-2025

Available online: 29-09-2025

Sashi Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983) deeply explores the individual subjectivity of the middle-class educated women who are called the new women. These new women are constantly trying to live as independent individual by developing a separation from traditional beliefs and taboos. These new women give equal weightage to their personal as well as professional lives and this is true to the woman protagonists of Sashi Deshpande. Her protagonists- Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence* and Urmila in *The Binding Vine* are career women who belong to the middle-class working class. They have been shown trying to define human relationship in a new perspective considering their newly acquired professional status. In the present paper, a critical analysis of Indu's character who is the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* will be done in order to explore her journey to individuality through many turns and twists in her life. In *Roots and Shadows* Deshpande tells the story of every educated middle-class woman through the depiction of Indu's character. The novel depicts how Indu tries to overcome the patriarchal values that are fed to women. In the novel, Sashi Deshpande presents a new India where new subjectivities are developing in the society through the projection of Indu's character.

Keywords : *New Women, Tradition, Patriarchy, Relationship, Marriage, Crisis, Individual Subjectivity.*

Author(s) retain the copyright of this article

Copyright© 2025 VEDAPublications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License



INTRODUCTION

Roots and Shadows (1983) is a novel written by Shashi Deshpande who won Sahitya Academy Award for her novel *That Long Silence* in 1991. The novel is Shashi Deshpande's fourth novel for which she won Thirumathi Rangammal prize in 1984. The words of the title are significant where the word "Roots" stands for tradition and "shadows" signifies the marginal culture. The word 'roots' also symbolizes the truth of life and 'shadows' symbolizes that which is false in life. *Roots and Shadows* was started by the author as a detective novel, but she later changed the theme as the story approached. The author uses the first-person narrative mode in the novel. The novel foregrounds the dynamics of an Indian, Brahmin, joint family and all its conflicts, compromises and idiosyncrasies. In a different layer, the novel examines the position of women in a traditional Indian patriarchal family. The story is narrated from the perspective of Indu, the protagonist, through her memory. So, the story moves forward and backwards in time. The novel focuses on Indu's interactions with others in her large family and the manner in which this helps to resolve their future and her own emotional crisis. The novel deals with many typical Indian themes such as marriage, joint-family system in India, infidelity, class and caste relations, feminism, modernism, etc. The entire story of the novel revolves around the female protagonist Indu.

Roots and Shadows assumes significant importance as a novel because it deeply explores the individual subjectivity of the middle-class educated women who are called the new women. These new

women are constantly trying to live as independent individual by developing a separation from traditional beliefs and taboos. These new women give equal weightage to their personal as well as professional lives and this is true to the woman protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. Her protagonists- Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence* and Urmila in *The Binding Vine* are career women who belong to the middle-class working class. They have been shown trying to define human relationship in a new perspective considering their newly acquired professional status. In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has projected different aspect of the middle-class women's life and without fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination, she has taken a balanced view of life from a woman's point of view.

OBJECTIVES

In the present paper, a critical analysis of Indu's character who is the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* will be done in order to explore her journey to individuality through many turns and twists in her life.

METHODOLOGY

This study relies on primary and secondary sources and brings out a descriptive analysis of collected resources. Regarding primary sources, the novel '*Roots and Shadows*' has been studied thoroughly. Some other texts written by Deshpande have also been studied. For secondary sources, books and research papers written by different writers on Shashi Deshpande's fictions and on other relevant subjects



have been studied and the ideas have been incorporated within this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smita Jha (2012) in her research paper on "Indu in Dilemma: A Critical Study of Sashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*", writes that there is no visible or invisible war between the sexes. She observes that home is where one starts from, and that the happiest kind of home is one which rests upon liberal or liberalized domesticity. It is this kind of domesticity that holds the key to Sashi Deshpande's image of a perfect household, and it is essentially for this very reason that Indu has been made to realize the truth of life after so many turns and twists in her life.

Ashok and Rajaraman in their research paper on "Identity Motifs in Sashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*" writes that Deshpande has very minutely and exquisitely identified the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu, who 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. They observe that there was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a "Pativrata", "a Sati," and something, which has to be protected by man, but now she is a changed person who is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality.

Priya Sharma (2021) in her research paper on "Man Woman Relationship in Sashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*" elaborates why men try to subdue women. She states that power politics operates in man and woman relationship and that

man and woman relationship in Indian society is not balanced and judicious. The male efforts to subdue woman is a part of male insecurity. A man lives in a fear that if he does not impose his authority over woman, he would lose his importance and in order to maintain it he tries to subdue woman.

Rajesh Reddy B L (2017) in "Predicament of Women in Sashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*" explain the inner feelings of Indu after her marriage with Jayant. Marriage has been presented as a way to lose one's identity. Indu feels that by marrying Jayant her identity has been lost. She is not able to identify her own self. She does all the things which Jayant wishes. She has adapted herself according to the traditional values of being an ideal woman.

W.S. Kottiswari in "Postmodern Feminist Writer" states that Indu's journey is an assertion of the self beyond the restrictive structures of familial and social norms. The India presented in *Roots and Shadows* is one in which new subjectivities are emerging in India. Indu's uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self longs for self-expression. It finds its roots in the home and with her husband. The authors observe that Indu's experiences teach her the truth of life and make her aware of roots and shadows of life.

DISCUSSION

The novel begins with Indu's return to her ancestral home after long ten years. Indu's husband, Jayant is with her. Jayant was never invited to the house as he belonged to different caste and spoke different language. Jayant is visiting Indu's house for the first time. Indu was in love with Jayant and Akka, the ruler of the house did not approve of their relationship.



Akka was a powerful woman who ruled over her family strictly. However, Indu's uncle and wife- Kaka and Kaki, who lived in the same house with their children Hemant, Sumant, Mini and Sharad supported Indu's relationship with Jayant. Therefore, Indu married Jayant without caring for Akka's approval. Compared to Akka, all males in the novel- Anant, Govind, Madhav, Vinayak, and even old uncle are weak. A picture of Akka can be imagined from these words- "Since the day Akka come back, a rich childless widow, to her brother's house, she had maintained an absolute control over her brother's children. Kaka, even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red-faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka's venomous tongue." (Roots 22)

For the first eighteen years of her life, Indu lived in the ancestral house in a joint family. As Indu's mother died very early and her father, Govind was a photographer who travelled from place to place, Indu was brought up by her uncle and wife- Kaka and Kaki very affectionately as their own child. Indu was a dissident from a very young age and she questioned the existing rules followed by the matriarchy of the family. She therefore broke rules and taboos. One day, Akka said something bad about Indu's mother which hurt Indu. For this, Indu decided to leave home and went to town and continued her studies staying at a hostel. After completion of her education, Indu became a journalist and started working for a magazine. There she met Jayant and married him without the consent of Akka. Though she was successful in getting married with Jayant, slowly she realized that her married life was not as happy as she expected. The happiness of her conjugal life

depended on her submission to Jayant's will. In order to keep Jayant happy, she sacrificed her likes and dislikes. In the company of Jayant, she seldom finds opportunity for self-expression, "I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him something but what he wanted to hear. I had my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage." (Roots 36) As soon as Indu gathers her consciousness of the authority of Jayant, she finds herself humiliated, baffled and nervous. She confesses, "When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant when I dress, I think of Jayant, when I undress, I think of him, always what he wants. Have I borne fluid with no shape, no form of my own." (Roots 56) She calls marriage a 'trap'. Such a realization generates the psyche of discontent and rebellion. In the meantime, Akka was bedridden and so she sent a letter inviting Indu to the ancestral house.

Though Indu did not like the rules and taboos that Akka imposed on the family members, she finally decided to respect Akka's invitation. Indu came home after a gap of ten years. On reaching home, Indu found that Akka was bedridden waiting for death. Just before her death, Akka revealed to Indu that she had chosen Indu as her heir. After Akka's death, Indu came to know that Akka had made arrangements for Kaka's daughter Mini's marriage to a very rough and bad-mannered, under-educated young man, with a lot of property. She also came to know that Akka had agreed to finance Mini's marriage. Here Indu did not like Akka's decision of Mini's marriage with such a person. For her it was injustice as the man was not at all a match for her. Indu even asked Mini about her decision and when Mini also gave her consent to the



marriage, Indu had no option and as wished by Akka, Indu financed Mini's marriage. As Akka left all her money to Indu, all the relatives were anxious about how Indu would use the money. There were a lot of quarrels and arguments on the use of the money. Many people came to ask for financial help from Indu. Many people suggested differently regarding the use of the money.

During this visit, Indu met Naren, the son of an old Uncle. They were childhood friends. During this visit, she re-opened her friendship with Naren. Naren was not liked by anybody in the ancestral house as he was a vagabond. Initially, Indu rejected Naren's proposal for physical relationship. But gradually she tried to convince herself that sexuality is the need of the body. It has nothing to do with the emotions. After this Indu offered herself to Naren. She did not feel guilty of her adultery. She even did not think it important to tell Jayant about all these. "She decides she would not tell Jayant about Naren.... That was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I would not, could not enrich myself with Akka's money. That I would, on the other hand, pay for Mini's wedding." (Roots 187)

In it, Indu assumes the role of violent sexuality. Her physical relationship outside marriage with Naren becomes a defining moment in her life. (Kottiswari 111) Her interactions with Naren help her to regain her inner strength. She nowhere felt that she was guilty in having the extra-marital affair with Naren. "There is a reason why she is involved in an

affair with Naren. Jayant is like any other male figure having a typical patriarchal attitude. He tries to control Indu in every aspect. Indu surrenders totally to Jayant. When she is feeling unhappy, with her conjugal life she is made heiress to the whole property. Thus, she gets an opportunity to be away from Jayant." (Manohar 103) The author tries to depict the female autonomy in the matter of sex and for this the author depicts the extramarital relationship between Indu and Naren. This extramarital relationship is a self-choice where Indu does not feel guilty. Indu's urge for physical relationship with Naren is the result of Indu's desire to fulfil her emotional crisis. Indu freely moves with Naren and uses such words as 'kiss,' 'rape,' 'deflowered,' 'Orgasm' (78) and so on in her conversation with him.

When Indu gets involved in physical relationship with Naren, she feels a sense of fulfilment of her sensational urge for sex which had long been suppressed under the burden of Jayant's patriarchal attitude. Indu feels that a woman has no right to express her emotional needs and passion in front of her husband who is of patriarchal chauvinism. Though Indu married Jayant at her own choice, she always found herself 'passive' and 'dead' in the company of Jayant. Jayant never acknowledged Indu's potential as a woman, but Naren understood that womanhood in her. This made Indu weak towards Naren and her attachment with Naren indicates that Indu had been suffering from a painful emptiness in the relationship between Indu and Jayant. Her weakness towards Naren indicates that Indu longs for those spaces from Jayant that can ensure her dignity and identity as a woman. To her



marriage seems to be the silent acceptance of her fate as a dominated being. She confesses, "I had felt that in marrying him, I had become complete, I had felt incomplete not as a woman but as a person. And in Jayant' I had thought, I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that but a total understanding. And then I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But can perfect understanding ever exist." (Roots 115)

According to Indu, the concept of 'love' is false. For her 'love' is a big fraud. To her there is no such thing as 'love' in real life, and 'love' is not the only thing in one's life. She never believes in 'love'. She thinks that if somebody believes the concept of love, he or she is trapped in the web of the false concept of 'love' and makes him or her weak and dependent. Being asked by Naren 'What is truth?' Indu answered: "The sexual instinct That is true. The maternal instinct...That is true too. Self-interest, Self-love ...They are basic truths, you remember Devadas? 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 disgusting!" (Roots 173)

In the novel, Sashi Deshpande has depicted two sets of women. Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamala Kaki, Atya, and Sunanda represent one set while Indu alone represents the other set. The author presents Indu as against the women of older generation. There is vast difference in attitudes towards their own life. According to the women of older generation, "a women's life is nothing, but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and the grand-children." (Roots 128) These women of older generation also

believe that "an 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." (Roots 54) But on the other hand, women of the new generation find reason everywhere. They do not compromise with emotions. These new women try to listen to their inner self, they act according to the call of inner conscience. Indu, who represents these new women, establishes a detachment with the tradition and customs of the society and searches for self-individuality by revolting to tradition. But unfortunately, Indu could not get success in all her attempts, rather she fails miserably and this may be either due to the impact of the culture and tradition or all these combined together.

Indu, the protagonist, is caught between culturally determined stereotypes of carriers of tradition and continuity and that of the liberated deviant in the western world. (Kottiswari 109) The novel explores the challenging journey of Indu to assert her individually and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with the family, with the male world and the society in general. The novel revolves round a Brahmin family who live together in the ancestral house, built years ago by Indu's great grandfather. The family is ruled once by a tyrant Akka, whose impending death occasions a gathering of dispersed family members and amongst them is Indu who did never come to the house for last ten years. "*Roots and Shadows* deals with a women's attempt to assert her individuality and her freedom. Deshpande's theme is identity crisis faced by Indu, the intelligent and sensitive married protagonist. Like Saru in *The Dark Holds No*



Terrors and Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Indu too searches for release from the constraints of the traditional and tradition-bound institution of marriage in search of an autonomous self." (Ashok and Rajaraman 1)

After Akka's death, Indu is the heir of the ancestral property. After Mini's marriage, Indu sells the ancestral family home to a local businessman, Shankarappa. Shankarappa demolishes the house and builds a hotel in its place. Naren's father, Old Uncle, dies before the destruction of the house. Kaka and Kaki go to stay with their eldest son, Hemant. Another Aunt, called Atya comes to stay with Indu and Jayant. Thus, the story of *Roots and Shadows* end. Searching for individuality, Indu ignored her familial relationship. But her experiences throughout her life, makes her realize that relationships are roots of one's being and that without relationship life is futile. Indu ultimately realizes that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. She also realizes that Naren, with whom she developed an adulterous relationship, is nothing more than a mere shadow. He has no permanent place in her memory. Hence she decides to go back to Jayant and to confess her sin. Indu's self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self's struggle for concord and saneness. She comes out of her emotional confusion, and decides to live a meaningful life with her husband Jayant.

CONCLUSION

Through Indu's story, Deshpande tells the story of every educated middle-class woman. The novel also

depicts how Indu tries to overcome the patriarchal values that are fed to women. Indu's physical relationship with Naren shows how she has learned to overcome such barriers. She is not guilty of the relationship. She never feels that she should tell Jayant about it. But finally, Indu realizes that all these are shadows only, and the roots are her family and husband. Indu's travails are an assertion of the self beyond the restrictive structures of familial and social norms. In the novel, Sashi Deshpande presents a new India where new subjectivities are developing in the society. Indu's adamant attitude and her consistent individuality quest for self-expression which finds in her ancestral home and with her husband Jayant. Indu's experiences teach her that one should always listen to the voice of one's conscience and should be faithful to it. Freedom within marriage is possible if one challenges to do what one believes is right and resolutely follows it. This alone can bring harmony and fulfilment in life. She has challenged her real self and she knows her roots. Ultimately Indu discovers the meaning of life in her journey to individuality.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, Malti. Ed. *Women in Postcolonial Indian English Literature*, Atlantic Publishers, 2011.
- Das, K. and D. Patra. *Studies in Women Writers in English*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2012.
- Dass, Veena Noble. *Feminism and Literature*, Prestige Books, 2017.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*. Oriental Longman Ltd., 1983. Print.
- Gopichand, P. Ed. *A Spectrum of Indian Fiction in English*, Aadi Publication, 2011.
- Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling, 1984.



Jha, Smita. "Indu in Dilemma: Critical Analysis of Sashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows." *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol 1, issue III, 2012

Kottiswari, W.S. *Postmodern Feminist Writers*, Sarup and Sons, 2013.

Manohar, Dr. Murali. *Indian English Women's Fiction: A Study of Marriage, Career and Divorce*, Atlantic Publishers, 2007

Mishra, Krushna Chandra. "New Perspective on Indian English Writers. *Roots and Shadows: Sashi Deshpande's Moral Prescription for a Reformed World of Relationship as the Basis of Traditional Indian Dream of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Edited by Malti Agarwal. Atlantic Publishers, 2011.

Naik, M.K. and Shyamala A. Narayan. Ed. *Indian English Fiction: A Critical Study*, Pencraft International, 2009.

Nayak, P.M. and Dr. S.P. Swain. Ed. *Feminism and Indian Writing in English*. Macmillan & Co., 1996.

Priya, Sharma. "Man Woman Relationship in Sashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, vol VIII, issue IV, 2021

Reddy, Rajesh B.L. "Predicament of Woman in Sashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, vol IV, issue II, 2017.
