

Changing Roles and Struggle of Women in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*

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**Abstract**

Shashi Deshpande's '**Roots and Shadows**', published in 1983, depicts the conflicts of its protagonist Indu : as a writer with her career as a commercial writer, as she is unable to write according to her own desire ; and as an individual with the family as well as society, as she is unable to act according to her own self. Indu belongs to a middle class tradition – bound Brahmin family dominated by Akka, a female patriarch who exercises complete authority over her brother's family of four generations. Akka was a rich childless widow who too had suffered a lot in the hands of her husband as well as her mother – in –law during the short span of her married life yet, instead of being soft and mild to others, she herself had been dominating in her brother's family.

**Key Words:** Female patriarch, Identity crisis, Upliftment of women

**Roots and Shadows** is a novel of self realization and assertion of individuality. It opens with Indu observing the preparations of her cousin Mini's marriage at her ancestral home. Jayant, her husband, has also come with her for the first - time after their marriage to attend the wedding ceremony. There she gets enough time to reflect on her past, and she remembers how she spent her childhood till she was eighteen at that place, with her uncle; Anant Kaka and his wife, Kaki; her aunt Narmada Atya; Akka's and Indu's grandfather's cousin Old Uncle; and his grandson Naren and many others in a large family of three generations. And perhaps it would have been the same till her marriage if she had not been scolded by Akka for talking to a boy in the library as if it was a sin to do so, and if Akka had not made pejorative remarks about her mother's love for her father. Indu was asked to promise that such a thing would not happen again and when she remonstrates, Akka hurts her by saying: "I don't know where you get it

from. Your father was such a quiet boy, ...until your mother trapped him." But Indu considered her parents' love to be sacred. As she herself says, "Ever since I had known it, there had been to me something sacred in the love between my father and mother, who had overcome the then almost insurmountable barriers of caste and lived a tragically short but intensely happy life together. Akka's words had been profanation and desecration." (74)

Akka's wealth bestows upon her the power to have all important decisions in her hands. To Indu, her sharp and biting language that she used and the fear and authority that she exercised was just like a disease. Indu observes her as 'ruthless, dominating, bigoted and inconsiderate' <sup>(1)</sup> So, lastly she decides to return to her roots to become her real self — an independent identity and an independent writer, and to shed her shadows of the role given by traditional society as a daughter, a wife and a commercial writer. As Shashi

Deshpande herself writes in one of her essays:

“Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing different roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing clearly women’s writing.”<sup>(2)</sup>

It was at that moment that she decided to leave that house and she informed her father through a letter about it. So, she left her ancestral home full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially, with the consent of her father. As she herself accepts, “There had not been many people in my life I had cared for. Atya, Kaka and Old Uncle in the family. Hema in school and college. And then Jayant. The day I had met him, a burden, the weight of uncertainty, had fallen off me. There had been an absoluteness, a certainty instead. I had known then ...it was this man and none other.” (50) So after completing her studies she left the hostel and married Jayant, with the consent of her father, though the family was against it because he belonged to a different community and Akka was against this marriage. She gets busy in her life with Jayant and her career as a journalist in a magazine.

In the beginning she was happy and contented but soon after she realized that she could not get the desired freedom and

completeness for which she had fought and gone against her family. She had a recurring dream that is symbolical of her alienation and loneliness. As she herself accepts, “I had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries and found myself the poorer for it. Alienation, I know now, is not the answer. On the contrary, too much of it and we can die of a terrible loneliness of the spirit. ‘I am alone’... they seem to me to be the most poignant words in any language.” (20-21)

Earlier she had thought idealistically that it would bring her completeness but she gets disillusioned when she realizes : “I had thought I had found my alter ego in Jayant. 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 total understanding. Perfect communication. And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But, can perfect understanding ever exist?” (108)

So now she thinks realistically on the basis of her experience and comes to the conclusion that such expectations are meaningless because they cannot be fulfilled. Reflecting on her past she remembers, “Jayant and I... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize. I think of the cries that had filled me earlier... I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness come to us for the asking.” (23) She is full of grief because things were not the same as they were in her imagination. She could

not get what she had hoped. She expresses her sorrow in this way : “This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant I had not known it... that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone.” (38)

She feels that she cannot be happy without him either and she feels herself dependent on him yet she is not ashamed to accept that she needs him because she is reminded of Old Uncle’s words that “The whole world is made up of interdependent parts. Why not you?” and she realizes now that all things are connected in this world and therefore, no one can be completely free. She is reminded of her desire for freedom and her illusion of achieving it. “But twice in my life I had thought that I was free. Once, when I left home as a young girl. And the second time, when, once again I left the family after Naren’s death and returned to Jayant. Both times I found out how wrong I was. New bonds replace the old, that is all.” (24) So, she tries to find happiness by doing her duty and adhering to the things she considers to be right. She is once again reminded of her Old Uncle, “There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. We can always find measures of freedom within these rules.”(24) And it meant nothing to her then but now it meant a lot and she herself comes to the conclusion, “To fulfill one’s obligations, To discharge one’s responsibilities ...can one not find freedom within this circle?” (24)

She is reminded of an interview that she had done of a woman who had been given an award and an important office in recognition of her social services; specifically, of her services in the cause of

the upliftment of women. Later she comes to know that she used to misuse ignorant, poor, needy women in the name of ‘upliftment of women’ in order to gain name – fame, power and money. Indu was unaware of the reality when she wrote up her interview and was surprised to know it before going to the publisher. When she discusses the matter with him she is compelled to write according to the publisher and the taste of the public. She expresses her uneasiness in doing so near Jayant and her desire to resign her present job to be able to write freely. He shows sympathy but says, “That’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go.” (27) Frustrated from both her life and her job, Indu finds herself unable to go on and feels relief when Akka’s summons came. She decides to go to her ancestral home for the first time after her marriage, considering it to be an escape from her present situation. After reaching there she realizes that till now she had always acted according to Jayant’s desire – “But my marriage had taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. 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.” (43 – 44) All her actions are guided by the thought of Jayant as if she is on her way to becoming an ideal Indian woman. In the result, she herself suffers from identity crisis and feels loss of existence. As she realizes : “When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. ...Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him. And I can’t blame him. It’s not he who has

pressurized me into this. It's the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought... isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become so fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face. ...Without wants there is no 'I.'" (53) She realizes that she has become his follower. Though he does not compel her to do so yet he expects that she will do only the things that he would like her to do. She compares her life with the stage – setting of a drama. She herself accepts that "It's not that he doesn't care. It's more like... like... we're on different levels. You know the stage – setting they have for some plays nowadays? It's like that. We are on different planes. He chooses his level and I ... I try to choose the one he would like me to be on. It humiliates me." (81)

She is reminded of the lessons taught to her in her childhood by elder members of her family that she must be obedient and submissive. When she asks why, they reply, "Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl... It is the only way... for a female to live and survive." (144) And Indu had laughed at them and sworn she would never pretend to be what she was not. But after meeting Jayant she found it to be true because he not only expected her to submit but also took it for granted that she would change because of his influence over her. It shows the traditional mindset of a male – dominated society. Surprisingly, Indu readily does so and at first she thinks that she is doing so because she loves him, but later she realizes that she did so because she did not want any conflict nor did she want to show the world that marriage to the person of her own choice was a failure. So she compromises according to the situation.

Shashi Deshpande has very beautifully portrayed two generations of women in a tradition bound Indian family and has shown the conflict between the two. The older generation is represented through Akka including all her brother's daughters and daughter – in – laws; i.e., Narmada Atya, Kaki, Sumitra Kaki, Kamala Kaki, Sunanda Atya; and the younger generation through Padmini (Mini), Indu, Lata, Geeta etc. of whom Indu is the representative of modern women. She compares herself with the older generation of women and is reminded of Narmada Atya who said that at first she did not like Indu's mother because she was not of their caste. But she realized her importance after her death because Indu's father became like a wanderer and he had to leave his fifteen day – old motherless baby (Indu) with the family. Though Indu took it otherwise. She thought that her father considered her to be 'their business' because she was a girl and it would have been different if she had been a son. After seeing the topsy – turvy life of her brother, Atya told her, she did not mind that Jayant did not belong to their community. There is an instance when Indu thinks about her Madhav Kaka who was of the opinion, "Marriage itself is a difficult enough business. For two people to merge into one identity, it's almost an impossibility. But given certain things in common... language, customs, rituals, background... all this makes it easier." (94 – 95) She thinks differently and feels that he is leaving out the great incalculable... Human emotions. Later she thinks about her own rules and pattern and realizes : "We Indians can never get away from caste. If we've rejected the old ones, we've embraced new ones. Do I think of myself as a Brahmin? Rarely, if ever. But I'm the educated, intelligent, urban, middle class. We have our own rules, our own pattern,

to which I adhere as scrupulously as Atya and Kaki observe their fasts and pujas.” (61)

She finds similarity with other ladies of older generation of her family because she realizes that she is not different from them as she also wishes Jayant to be with her ‘always, all the time, forever’. She thinks about them “to whom the greatest calamity is life without a husband. What difference does it make if our reason for thinking this way is different?” (39) At times she becomes angry with those women because of the way they behave. She was full of disgust to see the aftermath of an eaten meal – strewn utensils and scattered remnants and felt uncomfortable to see the women cleaning or eating in the same plate. She puts it, “...for a whole lifetime, the women patiently cleared up the mess with their bare hands after each meal. And women like Kaki even ate off the same dirty plates their husbands had eaten in earlier. Martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools?” (68) And she hates women and their status. When Naren tells her that her earlier job would have been better to present her own stuff through, she contradicts that her present job is better than that because she felt engaged, limited by sex, and got sick of writing about only women’s lives, frustrations, family life, domestic quarrels, love and marriage as the ultimate happy ending. Reflecting on her past she remembers how she was full of hatred for womanhood due to the way it had been introduced to her. She expresses her hatred in these words : “I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, baldly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense

hatred for it.” (78) And even long after that she could never get over her distaste for the female functions.

While talking to Atya she expresses her feelings about Akka that she wanted to dominate and it was the sole purpose of her life. She wonders about what kind of life she had led with her husband. It is at that moment that Atya tells her the sad story of Akka’s married life. Atya told Indu that hers was a mismatched marriage. She was just twelve when she got married while her husband was over thirty. He had a weakness for women and always had mistresses. She could never give birth to a living child due to the kind of life she led. Even her mother – in – law was not good to her and blamed her for it and made life hell for her. Then he had a stroke after fifty and she looked after him because he was bed-ridden and unable even to wiggle a toe but she kept him spotless. Atya was sent there to help Akka and there she observed her pitiable condition. Even at that stage when he was unable to speak he wanted to see one of his favourite mistresses. Akka understood it by his gesture-posture and here for the first time she showed her objection openly and refused to let her come saying, “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.” (72) That night Atya heard Akka crying and asked her the reason. It seemed to be ironical to Akka who was used to crying since she came to her in-laws’ house. She expressed her feelings through a hysterical laugh saying, “Every night I’ve spent in this house, I’ve cried like this. And tonight, for the first time, someone is asking me what’s wrong. It’s funny, funnier than any joke.” (72)

So there are many other women in the novel who suffer silently and adapt themselves according to the situation. For example, Atya is a childless widow who was denied all rights and she accepted it as her fate.

Shashi Deshpande gives reference of the custom of shaving the widows head after her husband's death. Indu observes the obscenity of Kaku's (maid-servant) bare skull and thinks, "And I understood why Kaka had, when Atya was widowed, so stoutly resisted the idea of her becoming a shaven widow. He had won, but at the cost of Atya's status. She was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her." (111)

Indu thinks about the name of women like Kaku who are known by a relationship and have no independent identity. She observes that such women belonged to a different world and different breed and were riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition. They were a world of darkness in themselves but still unaware of their own darkness. "As if they have to be recognized by a relationship, because they have no independent identity of their own at all. And, in the process, their own names are forgotten. How does it feel not even to have a name of your own? There are women who are proud of having their names changed by their husbands during their wedding ceremonies. To surrender your name so lightly..." (110)

It is ironical to see that Kaku has a different concept of a successful woman and she looks down upon Indu because she has no children. Indu thinks : "I knew these women had their own standards for judging people. Nothing about me ...my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money... none of these would

impress her. To her I was just a childless woman. To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand-children ...they were still for them the only successes a women could have." Saroja, Old Uncle's daughter, is yet another example of a victim of this type of thinking. Her earnest desire to learn music was thwarted by Akka who said to her, "What – learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like *those* women? Are we that kind of a family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know?" (54)

Shashi Deshpande has tried to show the social restrictions imposed on women in almost all her novels through women artists. As she herself admits :

"I've always been interested in the woman artist, the woman creator. From Indu, the journalist – writer, to Jaya, the writer who tried to silence herself and Mira, the poet, ...who was silenced by society,... Any act of creation outside the family was considered wrong for women, therefore any such act was an act of rebellion. And it's amazing how, inspite of all these taboos there have been women writers, painters, musicians etc." (3)

She is of the opinion that boundaries of religion and caste are meant just for the lay men / ordinary people. Just like Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, who declared 'my religion, my caste is my music', (4) Shashi Deshpande also crosses the boundaries of religion and caste by saying : "...all creative people would echo this — we belong to the race of writers / painters / musicians etc." (5)

There is an instance when a discussion is going on between Indu and Old Uncle. He shows his love for the family and asks Indu, who is frustrated due to the conflicting interests of the family members, her concept of family. Old Uncle says that nowadays it is easy enough to dissolve the tie between husband and wife, so, just an individual is left and should one live just for one's own self? Alarmed by her reply, "That's what really matters... one's own self." He asks, "Now what have you got, child? Do you believe only in success? One must earn so much, spend so much... is that all that matters? Tell me Indu what do you want?" (100) She had no answer to his question. She understood that it was not a question related to a single person yet she was disturbed. She thought, "What did I want? Success at first. It was impossible, unimaginable for me not to succeed. Not to have been the best would have been unbearable... And doubts. ...They destroy your self-confidence. And there's always a why for whatever you do. So that the doing of it, the succeeding in it, is not enough. And so, I had found myself on the verge of a complete bankruptcy. What I had was nothing. What I wanted to have, I did not know." (100) Time and again she is haunted by this question but she gets no answer. As she makes one of her characters say, "What a large, what a cosmic question that is. I will have to live the whole of my life to know what it is that I want. And even that may not be enough." (158) But she thinks that she must know what she wants, to live without the fear of failure.

She is overcome with a sense of utter vacuity and finds everything, that was so important once, to be ridiculous, unreal and worth nothing. She thinks like a philosopher : "It was not mysticism either,

that led my thoughts this way, for I could not believe in the other world. How could I, when this world itself, ...this one I could see, hear and touch... seemed so unreal?" (100) She feels that she cannot share her problems even with Jayant because of the emotional gap between them. He would not understand her problem and instead of comforting her he would call it all nonsense. So, she is once again devoid of an answer when Old Uncle asks her with concern whether she is happy with her marriage. She says, "If you mean, is he right person for me, yes, he is. But marriage... it makes one so dependent. I don't know about men, but..." and she leaves the sentence incomplete. (101) Then he tries to console her by giving reference to Huxley that the whole world is made up of interdependent parts. She was never in favour of sacrificing her individuality and compromising with her principles. She thinks, "Long ago it had frightened me... my capacity for total self-surrender. It's not only tragic, it's foolish. That's what I had always thought. Self-abnegation had seemed to me to be an exercise in futility. But when I did it for Jayant..." (56)

She observes Old Uncle suffering for his grandson Naren and tells him how she hopes she will never have a child. But he comforts and encourages her by saying that it is cowardice and one cannot escape and never protect oneself against love. He tells her that he does not want to get involved in their affairs yet in spite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations, one goes on getting involved and that is the human predicament.

She is reminded of Old Uncle's death when she felt as if one of the pillars of their house had gone. She shared her feelings with Jayant and at that moment he

makes her realize her own importance that came to her with Akka's money by saying, "Ah yes, that happens. But then, new pillars take the place of the old. You're a pillar now yourself, don't you know?" (21)

When she reached her ancestral home ten years after her marriage for the first time Akka was on her death-bed. She chose Indu as her heir. Here Indu had her self-realization and she comes to know her actual position. "Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting for me. A role that I could, perhaps, act out more successfully than the one I had tried until now. For, had I not, so very often, felt myself just a mouthing, grimacing puppet, dully saying the lines I had to, feeling, actually, nothing? Had I not felt myself flat, one-dimensional, just a blurred figure merging into the background? Whereas here I would stand out, sharp and clear. I would be most emphatically myself. Indu." (132)

Even a single member of the family was not happy to know about Indu's nomination as Akka's heir yet all of them try to please her to take advantage of her money. Naren shows a great deal of surprise for Akka leaving her all her property. He shows his anger and accuses her, saying, "You leave home swearing eternal enmity against the old woman. And she hates you too. And then you come home after ten years and suddenly she dies, leaving you all her property. Come on, Indu, come clean. What did you do? Undue influence? Poison?" (84)

But Indu feels that Akka has given her the burden of the whole family as she has to decide the future of each and every member of the family; she alone had the power to save her ancestral home; moreover she has to come out of her own personal crisis. She says to Naren, "...Will

Mini get married? Will Sharad become a doctor? Will Sunil go into business? Will Vasant – Kaka get his partnership? Will Sumant get his flat? Will Vinayak – Kaka buy that house? Will Kaka have his heart broken? Ask Indu. Only Indu has the answers to all these questions... There's us. Jayant and I. Will we get our bungalow in the suburbs? Will we go abroad? Or will we do that thing we could never afford so far... have a child?" (84)

Anant Kaka tells her about his daughter, Mini's would-be husband. He is anxious because of the orthodox traditions of the society as he has to match her horoscope with the bridegroom's, find a family to match his status, moreover, offer the demanded amount of dowry as well. It is due to the age-old tradition that treats a girl as a commodity in the marriage market. Above all, Mini is not self-dependent, so he is worried who will look after her after him. Though Indu does not consider it a suitable match for Mini, she accepts it silently because of the disgrace she had to suffer in the society otherwise. Anant Kaka expresses his anxiety in these words, "And when everything clicks, there's the dowry hurdle. What am I to do? Let the girl stay unmarried? It's all right so long as I'm alive. When I'm gone can you imagine her brothers looking after her? Maybe the boy is a little ugly, maybe a little stupid... but everything else is fine. The family is good, it's known to us, they have money, she'll be quite comfortable." (55) Anant Kaka praises Indu because she is self-dependent and earning a lot of money while none of his sons are competent and successful as her. He uses the word 'succeed' for her and she thinks, "Why does that word have such unpleasant connotations for me? I, who am so integral a part of a success-oriented society?" (58) She thinks about 'love' and feels lack of



warmth in her relationship with Jayant. Then she is reminded of a friend and realizes that perhaps her expectations are too high that is why she gets disappointed. So, she decides to lessen her expectations. Once she thinks, "What I feel for Jayant... can I compress all of it within this word? It is so 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. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again." (86) She thinks about marriage and considers it to be a trap or a cage. As she asks herself, "A trap? Or a cage? Maybe the comic strip version of marriage... a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other... isn't so wrong after all. And it's not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself." (63) No doubt they love each-other too much; still there is a crack between them as he thinks that a woman should have no passion, and is not ready to satisfy her desire. So, she suffers silently and, in result, develops sexual relationship with Naren. He provides succour to her in the time of emotional crisis. Later she realizes her mistake :

"And now, I thought, the enormity of what I have done will come home to me. Adultery... what nuances of wrong doing... no, it needs the other, stronger word... what nuances of sin the word carries. I will now brood on my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery." (142) When she comes closer to Naren, she shares her feelings with him as a friend. She tells him about her relationship with Jayant and says, "And now, when you tried to kiss me, I thought... this is Jayant. So, that's all I am, 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." (82)

When Naren asks her about her husband, she feels that she is unable to understand him completely. Earlier she had thought that she was wise enough to read and understand him. But later she felt trapped due to the emotional gap between them. As she herself admits, "I don't know, Naren. I wish I did. A man like any other. Many others. And I was so proud of my logical and rational thinking. But there, my trap was waiting for me after all." (82)

Still she feels that there was a difference between her relationship with Jayant and her relationship with Naren. She feels that there was no depth in her relationship with Naren. She feels that there had been no infatuation either. She regrets that she had achieved nothing from this relationship but she had wronged Jayant. And the next moment she feels that she had cheated him even before that, by not making a true relationship with him.

Mini's father, Kaka, tells Indu to ask Naren for his consent to marry Mini and when she asks Kaka if he considers Naren to be the right man for Mini, he exclaims irritably, "Right man, right man... Who can guarantee who's the right man? After all, we can do only so much. The rest depends on the girl's luck." (121) So, he leaves all other things on her luck without caring for her desire. Mini's mother, Kaki, expresses her suppressed grief because no one cared for her desire and no one asked what she wanted. When she comes to know that someone advised them that Naren would be a suitable match for Mini, she tells Indu to ask Mini about her marriage. "Who knows anything about me, child? Has anyone ever asked me what I want? That's why I'm telling you... ask Mini what she wants. It's not good

enough, your saying, or her father's saying... let her marry Naren. Ask her what she wants." (113) It means that she considers it important to know her daughter's desire. But when Indu asks Mini what does she think about her marriage she replies passively, "Why should I think of it? I'm past twenty four. I have to get married. What else is there to think about?... What choice do I have Indu?" (116) "It is her compulsion that she has to accept whatever she is getting. As she herself honestly admits her own drawbacks, "Of course I'm marrying him because there's nothing else I can do. I'm no good at studies... There's only one thing I'm really good at... looking after a house. And to get a home, I have to get married. This is not my home, is it?" (117) It is the way she is taught in her family that she does not consider her father's home her own. She always tries to be upto the mark to all those who come to see her for her marriage. Still she gets rejected. So she was fed up with all that. She shares her feelings with Indu, "...if we heard they were old fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, "She's not modern enough." And if I dressed up well because someone said the boy wanted a smart wife, they would say, "She's too fashionable for us." Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or something... And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl... And now, when someone has agreed, can I refuse and make Kaka go through all of it all over again?" (118) So, she does not want to trouble her parents and herself over her marriage anymore and is ready to compromise and marry the man who agrees to marry her in spite of any drawback that he has. As she says, "And I don't care. He'll look after me. And no one can say to me, "How old are you? And

not married yet! What a pity!" I'm tired, Indu. I don't care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married and he becomes my husband, none of his flaws will matter." (118)

Indu realizes that to Mini, it was marriage that mattered, not the man. She thinks, "A woman's life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, specially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered... have they been born without wills or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality, with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength." (17) We find that, on the contrary Indu was well educated and was able to marry the man of her own choice. Yet her Sunanda Atya often satirized her saying, "You are too clever for me." (39) When she expressed her hurt near Old Uncle he consoled her saying "For a woman, intelligence is always a burden, Indu. We like our women not to think" and further added, "It's always going to happen to you, Indu. People are afraid, resentful of brains. Take it in your stride. And Pity them." (40)

Jayant was confident of his influence over Indu so when she finally decides to resign her job, he becomes furious and bewildered. It was not according to his wish. So he feels cheated. Now Indu thinks, "...he knows me better, my strengths, which I had hidden from him, as well as my weaknesses. Perhaps, because of this, we have a better chance. There is an ease in our relationship that was not there before."(24)

Jayant also makes it clear during Mini's marriage that she was indomitable like

Akka. And it was the reason that she chose her as her heir. Indu also realizes that in a family there are strong and weak members. The strong have to dominate the weak and it is inevitable. Perhaps Akka considered her to be strong and that is why she gave her the responsibility by leaving her all her property. She feels a remarkable change in herself from her life here before marriage and now when she was the owner of Akka's property. Now she had adopted the power of decision making which had no place in her life earlier. She thinks, brimming with self-confidence, "And I was part of all this, yet distinct from it. It was one of those moments when I felt raised above all humans, with a joyous sense of power within me. There was nothing I couldn't do... And I was filled with an exalted sense of confidence within myself." (141) Now she decides to dominate them as if she wanted to show Akka her capacity to rule over them successfully. She thinks, "There! I can do it too. It isn't very difficult, is it? See, Akka, I can play your game as well. Domination... it comes easy once you know the way." (87) She decides to maintain self-control and not to exhibit any of her weaknesses. She does not want to rule like Akka and decides to rule differently. "I would dominate, as much as Akka had, but more discriminately, more judiciously. It would not be my likes and dislikes, that would count. And by doing this, I would (may be, why not) free myself of all doubts, all pressures." (133) She feels that everyone is angry with her for what Akka had done yet she decides that she would do nothing in anger. Though she hates them too, she is not ready to leave her family and enrich herself only. She did not want to be like them that is why she turned to Jayant. But

she was not happy with him either. So, she bursts out near Naren :

"I had always told myself... I won't be like them. I won't live like them. And I thought... I've got away. But to what, Naren? To what have I got away? Is that any better than this? Is there no more to life than this? Are we doomed to living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape? I'm afraid, Naren... I'm afraid..." (146)

She is reminded of Arjuna's word 'Svajanam' while speaking to Krishna and she was full of anger for her own people, blood-relatives. Earlier she had felt comfortable when she came back to her ancestral home but soon she feels that this comfort was not permanent either. As she thinks, "And I... I have turned about and made myself comfortable here now. But that's only for a time. This is an interlude. I don't really belong here any more. And yet I don't fit into the world I have left behind me, either. Where then do I belong?" (98)

While talking about the devotional songs and their composers Naren tells her, "Did they, those composers, immerse themselves in God out of disgust for humanity? Or, was that love of God just an extension of their love for human beings?" (154) Indu feels it easier to love God who is unseen, unknown than to love people around us and it seems her escape from reality.

Naren says praising Akka, "After all, she believes in something and nothing can keep her from acting according to those beliefs. That's something, isn't it?" (166) So, Indu also decides to act according to her own will to have peace and harmony in life and thus, the final reconciliation takes place between Akka and Indu.

Finally, Indu decides to spend money for Mini's marriage, to resign from her present job, to go back to Jayant and tell him about

her decision. She decides to make amends with life positively on her own terms and conditions.

**Notes and References:**

1. Deshpande, Shashi, *Roots and Shadows*, (Orient Black Swan Edition 2011) p-30. All further textual references are from this book, from this edition.
2. Deshpande, Shashi, "Of Concerns and Anxieties", *The Literary Criterion*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1984.
3. Deshpande, Shashi, 'A Writer of Substance', an interview with Chandra Holm, published in *Indian Review of Books*, May 2000, p-5.
4. Deshpande, Shashi, Quoted in 'A writer of Substance' May 2000, p-5.
5. *Ibid.* p-5.