

IMPACT OF HOUSE AND FAMILY BOND IN ROOTS AND SHADOW

G. Suneetha,¹

Research Scholar,
Acharya Nagarjuna University,
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

Prof Madupalli Suresh Kumar,²

Department of English,
Acharya Nagarjuna,
University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known Indian women novelist in English. Her fourth novel is *Roots and Shadows*. Unlike the earlier novels where characters play vital role, this novel reveals the importance of place – the place of birth that gives the sense of origin of roots. The roots are the strong thread, which cannot be broken easily or forgotten. It is an old – fashioned ancestral home in a small town. The house has a glorious past and sheltered people of four generations. As a motherless child everyone pampers Indu since her childhood. The heroine Indu's long for freedom made her leave Akka's tyrannical house and marries Jayant against the wishes of family members. After her marriage with Jayant she endures inner conflicts in her personal and professional life. At that time she gets a call from Akka, to settle the property matters. The house once she had rejected becomes the place of refuge and consolation to her. Here she begins to see life in a new way. At the end Indu disposed of Akka's wealth and she decides to go back to her husband and continue her writing the way she wished.

Keywords: Old house, roots, sheltered, inner conflicts, refuge, disposed.

Shashi Deshpande has appeared as an outstanding novelist on the literary scene. Sources tell that *Roots and Shadows* is the first book written by Shashi Deshpande even though it is published late. It is a family drama narrated from a woman's point of view. The narrator is Indu, an educated modern woman. The house is always an important object in Deshpande's fiction. Her novel *Roots and Shadows* open up with the representation of the glorious activities of early morning that every human being comes across in any Indian house. It describes closely the turmoil of various activities inside house bring back Indu to the reality that she returns to the house. The feelings of Indu, which she expressed, are as follows:

Slowly the fragments came together.... the sparrows, with their noisy chirping, sounding like school children let out for the break; someone coughing and gargling loudly as he performed his morning ablutions; the tinkle of teacups and the hiss of the primus stove; a child crying;

water running into a bucket.... all of these forming a whole. This is our house. I am home (34).

The setting is a large old – fashioned ancestral home in a small town in South India near Bombay. The house has a splendid past and a cheerful atmosphere prevails in the old house. A marriage is to be celebrated. The ancestral house has unmistakable stamps of the age of old tradition. Indu describes the house in details and compares the house of a mixture of both old and new style and says:

It was my grandfather who had first lived in the house. His father had built it, but he had died before he could live in it. My grandfather had made extensions and renovations, but his garish taste and love of solidity had made the house into an odd combination, like a good looking woman dressed in execrable bad taste (44).

An ancient house is being neglected completely that the plastering wore off here and there with lack of maintenance. A family chart is given in the beginning denotes the main character Indu's family lineage of four generations and this chart is helpful in identifying each character without much confusion. There are about twenty people existing in the old house. Anant Kaka, the eldest son of Indu's grandfather, is the owner of the house. He has three brothers- Govind, Madhav and Vinayak. Govind is Indu's father. He has two sisters Narmada and Sunanda. Anant's children are Hemant, Sumant, Sharad and Padmini. His father was a landlord but after his death Anant only showed interest in his lands. Grandfather's younger sister whom everyone called Akka lives with them. She and Narmada are childless widows. Sunanada Atya's husband neither has a stable job nor a house of his own. Madhav and Vinayak have jobs in Bombay. They visited the old house only during functions and festivities. Old uncle, a retired teacher also lives in the old house. He lost his health and wealth by his drinking habit. His grandson Naren is well educated. He lives in another house, no one like him for his carefree behaviour. He is a little older than Indu. Akkaruled the house. She cleverly made everyone to stay together. ShubhaDwiwedi is of the opinion that money plays a vital role in the life of a person. She says,

The fact that money not only confers freedom, but also access to power, grace, prestige and an altogether confident and positive attitude towards one's own self and one's capabilities is an overt statement made by the narrative. Akka, a rich, childless widow becomes a tyrant and dominates too much authority on family matters. Atya and other family members eulogize her as a leader, who assumes happiness to everybody. Akka becomes indispensable to the family while the enforced subjugation and poverty of other women of the family results in their mental, moral and physical inferiority" ¹.

Indu was motherless child and her father did not shoulder the responsibility of rearing her. Narmada Atya and others look after her when she was just fifteen days old. Everyone shower their love on her. Indu yearns for freedom and always has a determined mind. She hates Akka's authority and her traditional values. So she leaves the house at the age of

fifteen for higher studies and then settled as a writer. She proposed to Jayant and married him of her own choice and much against the wishes of Akka and others.

She loved Jayant too much but when Jayant is shocked to find passion in her with her initiative in love making. Indu starts hiding her feelings and emotions. When Indu is enduring all the inner conflicts, she gets summons from Akka, her aunt to settle the property matters. Her determination of never to return to the old house crumples when she is called by Akka. Another theme she dealt in the novel is family bond. In life, sometimes a necessity arrives when one goes in search of solace in times of crisis. Deshpande wants to highlight the idea that nothing exists in isolation but everything is interlinked. The roots are interconnected even though it spreads far and wide that also explains in the words of old uncle, a cousin of Indu's grandfather. "The world is made up of interdependent parts" (14).

Indu's returning to the house is similarly with coming to the terms with herself. The house provides her time and space to challenge her own predicaments and struggles with her husband Jayant, with Akka and also with herself including her own body. Through the eyes of Indu one type of aliveness comes in house. This house is not just a place to stay but a place which helps and guides her to revitalize herself.

The house that had a celebrated past is at stake now. Akka died suddenly and left all her wealth to Indu. Everyone knows that Indu takes her own decision and will not listen to anyone. But each one is keen to know her decision. Anant Kaka wishes that Indu would help him for Padmini's marriage. He also wishes not to sell the house. Others are bothered about their becoming homeless. She is viewed as the new matriarchal figure like Akka. A struggle arose in Indu whether to help Anant Kaka by selling the house or to keep the house so that others can stay as long as they want to. Jayant has his own plans. He says, "Shake the dust of that place off your feet, my dear, and come home soon. We can make our plans when we are together" (142).

A faint desire rose in Indu to buy the house, live there and do the kind of writing, she always desired for. Indu, as the inheritor of Akka's property comes a decision after much excruciating over the matter. This house provides the tenderness and warmth to Indu that she was missing with Jayant. Indu takes a hard decision to demolish the house in spite of all her emotional attachments with the house. In a way, by demolishing the house, Indu paves a new way for the coming generation to be active and to do something and earn on their own. It means she expects that the next coming generation should be independent. Destroying the house for her sake is not destroying the past but it is the receiving of the future with a change. This resolution helps Indu to free herself from all the dark corners of life. Thus the house influences on Indu's life and her relationships with other family members. The house that Indu had left in anger ten years before turns out to be a place which provides her strength for her bright future. She decides not to buy the house but to sell it to Shankarappa, who wants to destroy the old building and builds a hotel instead. The novel begins with traditional way of life and ends with a change. The novel begins with the marriage of Mini being celebrated in that pompous house. Towards the end of the novel the house collapses. It has a natural end –

a death. As a matter of fact its end may be compared to the human death – the death of Naren, occurring at the same time. Old uncle believes that man's life ends on his death and there is no life after that, so he tells Anant, "He's [Naren] at pace now... we don't need to worry about him. It was a clean end there when we gave him to the fire. A good life" (182).

Shankar appears repeats old uncle's voice. Indu understands that Shankarappa politely rejects Indu's suggestions of retaining the house with trivial repairs and announces that demolishing of the home and construction of a hotel ignoring the sentiments of the inmates. He says:

Don't you think Indu-akka, it's better to raze it to the ground than to see strangers living in it? It has a good life, this house. And now a clean end. Even a man can't ask for more than that! (185).

The author, believes that there is no life after death. Her views of life's end and death are different. The views are put forward in the words of Naren who claims that there is no such thing as non-existence. There is existence everywhere or else there would be no wonder in life. Referring to the old champak tree in the old house, he exclaims, "If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances will pervade other airs" (185).

The truth is that if one house is demolished another comes up. Indu always visualized of this house and many a times felt that this is her home. Naren's philosophical words shatter this idea. She realizes that the house is a trap for her, building her to the past, which she clings to, desperately. What is necessary is to free herself from this bond. She thinks of Jayant and her home in Bombay. She could not call it her home because of her attachment to the old house.

At the end Indu disposes Akka's wealth. She spends money on Padmini's wedding and with the rest of the money she opened a trust to help the poor students in their education. Indu decides to go back to her husband and continue her writing the way she wished. It is Akka's house, where she comes out of her emotional turmoil and decides to lead a meaningful life with her husband. To home she had rejected becomes the place of shelter and consolation to her and it offers her plenty opportunity to know herself by rethinking about her. It is here she starts to see life in a new way.

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