



## Quest For Identity In The Novel Of Shashi Deshpande: with special reference to 'Roots And Shadows'

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**Abstract:** *The crisis of identity has always enjoyed a defining significance in the thematic framework of the Indo-Anglian novels. The novels of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao redesigned the techno thematic fluoric of Indian English fiction and laid the foundation of the new Indian English fiction. We can take the glimpses of quest for identity first in the novels of Bankim Chatterjee's Raj Mohan's Wife, in 1864. This theme dominates the Indian English fiction. This theme of quest for identity in the English fiction can be divided into three groups on the basis of thematic content-the historical, social and psychological.*

**Key Words:** Identity, Enjoy, Framework, Indo- Anglian, Foundation, Thematic Content, Historical.

Identity is very important for an individual for survival. Without identity he/she is like an animal. Human identity in itself is very delicate consideration. Except for the three basic needs (food, home, cloth), quest for identity is also the essential need of human life. In India, women have to live in multiple identities to define and identify themselves. They have no separate identity of their own. They are suffering from these issues since centuries and emergence of feminism has given healing touch to this sensitive predicament faced by women. A number of literary women writers have selected this theme for their writings to expose the real condition of women through their various characterizations from the social strata.

Shashi Deshpande, a feminist of modern era and the winner of Sahitya Academy award for her novel *That Long Silence*, has also selected identity crises as a central theme for her fiction. In her writings Deshpande is highly concerned with women's problems and their search for identity. In her novels, the quest for identity depends on the emotional, cultural, and social stability. Shashi Deshpande considers the subjugation of women both cause and symptom of fundamental imbalance in society. Women's loneliness, humiliation, mental agony, formed their predicament which resulted in disharmony of marital life and estrangement of man-woman relationship. These are the essential features in Shashi Deshpande's fiction. Throughout her

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fictional work her protagonists ask simple fundamental questions, about individual and society. Women are shown for the most part as forging for, meaning life for themselves struggling, searching, ignoring and achieving. Her fiction is socio-realistic and positive. She projects the most common of human encounters, the role of woman in the society, with the recurrent theme of women's anguish and her quest for happiness.

Deshpande's women characters are middle-class women with their predicaments. They are well educated, modern and independent. Her descriptions of Indian middle class women are very authentic. She has not written about the celebrities, great personalities and epic story from history but she has simply chosen the ordinary woman of today. Her women are from the common class of the society. They are simple in their hopes and aspirations. Her heroines are not Queens, Princesses or other towering personalities, but they are common women of common relations. They live and die in their relations silently. She has beautifully described the picture of Indian homely women in her novels. She does not aim at drawing the sentimental tears and dilemma of a woman. But she tries to show the reality, hidden behind the beautiful curtain. And our society has laid a layer of women empowerment on that ugly cum beautiful curtain. As a conscious social worker, indirectly, Deshpande has tried to raise that ugly curtain and wants to expose the reality



hidden behind that. Her aim is not to exaggerate or to highlight the women's predicaments and issues in any extraordinary manner. But she wants to make the people noticed about women's problems and emotionally deprived status. And such issues and predicament leads a woman in search of identity. As a girl she is known only by the name of her father's name. And after marriage she is known only by the name of her husband. She has no identity of her own.

Deshpande's female characters are not suffering from any type of psychological or neurotic problems. Neither are they suffering from domestic violence nor economic problems but they are, in search for identity. They have an earnest desire for self-existence. They raise their voice and protest against the inequality and injustice against the women placed in the society. In her works Deshpande defines freedom for the Indian women within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. The protagonists of Deshpande's novels are modern, educated, and Independent women. Their search for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme. In *Dark holds No Terrors* Sarita's quest for identity leads her into a difficult situation where she feels herself unable to decide what to do. She finds herself in beginning point from where she has started her journey for new life. In *Roots and Shadow* Deshpande has presented efforts of protagonist Indu. Indu is a well-educated young woman who tries to sort out her personal problem through a temporary comeback to the old house, her parental home. In *That Long Silence* Jaya interrogates her personality as well as her past life to come out from her present predicament. In *The Binding Vine* Urmila the protagonist, is portrayed as a helper of others. The women characters of this novel are suffering from male domination. Shashi Deshpande's novels have an identical structure and plot- construction based on the real experience of real people in the society. Her female characters have carved their own way and left their home in the quest of self-identity.

We do not find an autobiographical element in Deshpande's fiction. She does not mix

her personal experience in her writings. Her real objective is to highlight the inner-world of women. Her novels are full of feministic approach. Her fair sexes are larger than life. They are the real not the fancy. Her protagonists are not the day dreamers but they are the silent observers of life. The novelist has presented them authentically. Her female characters are taken from the society directly. They are created on the real ground of panorama. They are not regional but they are universal in approach. Her novel revolves around the geography of a woman. She admits her empathy with the fair sex. She has feelings of sympathy for the suffering women. We can notice this in her statement:

"As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman would write my books-they are written from the inside, as it were. Just as a woman cannot get deeply under a man's skin, so too a man cannot fully appreciate the feminine experience." (Mathews, P. 138.)

Her deep sympathy for woman is not limited to her fiction. In her essay, "Of Kitchens and Goddesses", Shashi Deshpande experiences an epiphany for women. She suddenly feels that female space is rigidly confined. She realizes the condition of women limited to domestic routine only.

"Perhaps it was at that moment that I stepped over the threshold and into the kitchen. For, as if the focus had shifted, my vision suddenly changed. And, instead of that safe warm heaven of my childhood, I saw other kitchen, where women were chained to endless, tedious labor, crouching for hours before a smoking fire." (P. 138)

The novel *Roots and Shadows* by Shashi Deshpande, won Thiruannathmal Prize. The novel infect is and extended quest for identity. The protagonist Indu, is a middle class orthodox Brahmin girl, who returns to her ancestral home after ten years to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. In the novel 'Roots' stand for tradition and 'Shadow' signifies the marginal culture. Deshpande has reconciled the past experience and the present action and contemplation which help to develop her characters.



Protagonist Indu is an intelligent, sensitive and educated woman who is in the centre around when whirls centrifugally the state of her mind, her emotional life, the family, her personal values, history and her profession as well. Indu is an intelligent and sensitive named woman, a journalist by profession; who is brought up in a traditional orthodox family. She struggles for freedom from the bondages of age old customs and rituals. After ten years she returns to her parental house, as dying Akka, summons her, she accepts her call as a chance to get a way to avoid thinking about what was happening to -me To Jayant and me - and our life together.

Her sense of identity and her interaction with her family members help her to resolve her personal problems. The novel depicts the transitional state of contemporary Indian society and the new Indian women who resists her tradition and bondage at home. This novel moreover discusses the sense of self identity lacking in the marriage custom. Live in,

"Marriage makes me so dependent, 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, what he would like, what would please him. It is the way I want it to be ..... have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own." (Roots and Shadows, P-49)

The urge for identity can be traced from the statement of Indu as she says and complains painfully, "He had not even come to see me until more than a year. But that, perhaps, because I was a girl. If I had been a son ---- ." (P-179)

Various stages in woman's life are reflected through other characters. Akka a child widow, turns out to be domineering woman in her brother's house only to assert her identity as she has suffered in her marriage, half witted 'Kusum' who happens to be Akka's companion, falls prey to the male dominance and committed suicide. Life of these characters reflects deteriorating social standards and they terrible inner urge of woman to find her self-identity. The novel deals with the note how Indu,

the main protagonist learns to see her life, her individual identity, dependent of Jayant, her husband.

"The women had no choice but to submit, to accept ---- have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life time of discuss? And yet Mini, who had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality, with a grace and composure that's place, eloquently of turt inner strength". (P-6)

Indu insist, "Don't judge me, don't criticize me. Just appreciate me see only my virtues, not my vices, my strength, not my weaknesses." (P-126) Above lines shows the keen desires of a woman to be accepted as she is, to appreciate her strength and understanding her weaknesses and give her the identity she deserves. Parvati Bhatnagar tends to analysis the novel in the light of the protest by the female characters against the restrictions imposed upon them. According to her:

"The novel deals with a woman' attempt to assert to her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with the family, with the male world and the society in general." (P.132)

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