CHAPTER IV

ROOTS AND SHADOWS

Roots and Shadows, Shashi Deshpande’s second published novel, is the winner of Thirumathi Rangamal Award. Written earlier than The Dark Holds No Terrors but published later in 1983, it is a much acclaimed of Shashi Deshpande’s novels. It is about a female protagonist Indu who is an educated lady and represents middle class. Indu is a journalist and a writer. The novel deals with the theme of female subjugation. It depicts the way how Indu sets out on her journey of self-realisation and eventually sheds her inhibitions. Thus she moves on to the path of liberation. The novel entails the journey of Indu who attains her feminist identity by crossing over the impediments posited before her by the patriarchy. Talking about the protagonists of Indian women novelists S.P. Swain says, “Their heroines are all agog to retain their individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity.”

The narrator is Indu herself. The narrative technique exploited in the novel is that of flashback. The novel is a fine study in the psychological working of women as it records with minute details how Indu falls on thinking and retrospection about the past which seems inevitable. Deshpande shows herself as a master of the narrative form and her tryst with the pen is incredible. She writes with a luxurious exuberance and the diction is spontaneous, each word crafted and used in a proper way adding significance.

Indu is the wife of Jayant whom she had married according to her own will. She had lived under the oppressive silence of Akka and she always craved for escaping her influence. Thus when she meets Jayant, she is able to find her own individuality. Her joy has no bounds. With him, it is a new realization of her inner purity, of her sentiments getting new shape. It was like she has found something which provides her utter security. That is why she marries him irrespective of the fact that the man she is thinking of marrying is of altogether different caste and culture. All contradict her stand of marrying him but she is rock steady. Akka had strongly condemned her marriage, “Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages…it’s all right for a while. Then they realise…” Perhaps because Akka was against her decision of her getting married to Jayant, her decision got more firmed. It was with him that she could relive her own life. Her first meeting with Jayant was her first realisation that she has found someone who is very endearing and the one who understands her fully. She wants, “to belong, to be wanted,
needed, loved, desired, admired.” (RAS 34) With him she felt as if she has entered into a new phase of her life where there are no trials and tribulations, no restrictions; a space spreading the fragrance of freedom and equality; a space where she can assert her own self, “This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it […] I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone.” (RAS 38) But how unlucky she is! Her earlier notion, “And in Jayant I thought I had found the other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding. Perfect communication” (RAS 108) proves just an illusion and she comes to know, “And then, I had realised this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But, can perfect understanding ever exist?” (RAS 108) Understanding means nothing but a kind of a system wherein one believes not to be contradicted, not to be criticised rather being agreed to whatever one says. Indu realises that it was what they even believed in. For them it is, “… Don’t judge me. Don’t criticise me. Just appreciate me. See only my virtues, not my vices. My strengths, not my weaknesses” (RAS 108) and she finds herself befitting the role of traditional women; whom she hated for the fact that they are so submissive, so meek, and docile rendering themselves identity less; a role that she never had earlier imagined she would have to play. “Indu sprang out of the claustrophobic world with a courage I admired. She was free. But often to be free is to be lonely. I shared this bleak thought with Indu.”

She is not satisfied with her marital life; something is there which is stifling her; something that chokes their life; something grave that really exudes death signal for their nuptial life and their marriage seems to be on the rocks. After marriage she continues with her work of journalism as she does not want to be a passive entity doing nothing at home rather she, as the world is changing, wants to move forward in life so that she should not be a mere parasite on others rather be independent. But ironically enough she has to write only those things which she never wanted to. She has to manage her household expenses. She does not like the idea of writing the things she never believed in. But she keeps writing all the sham work even against her scruples. She steps into the shoes of those who only go for the kind of writing which has sound marketing value. She once interviews a lady who seems quite good to her but she is flummoxed to arrive at her truth. She bickers with the editor. But she is more pained at heart when Jayant whom she confides what has happened, turns quite hostile to her saying: “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.” (RAS 27)
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. Shashi Deshpane says in a ‘Talk on the Indian Woman—Stereotypes, Images and Realities, “The good woman—whether she’s the wife, mother, sister or daughter-in-law doesn’t matter—is always so self less that she negates herself to the point of extinction.” She feels like she has become a parasite on her husband. She has adapted herself according to the traditional values of being an ideal woman. As she reflects, “Am I on my way to becoming an ideal woman? A woman who sheds her ‘I’, who loses her identity in her husband’s?” (RAS 53) She is further prodded to realise:

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, 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 pressurised me into this. It’s the way I want to be. And one day I had thought… isn’t there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, without any shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face…Without wants there is no ‘I’. (RAS 53)

Reddy Observes in this context:

Her hard won independence seems only one ephemera when she honestly questions herself if she is indeed independent. Under the guise of independence, the rebel in her had conditioned herself to become as submissive as any other Indian wife. It shocks Jayant even when Indu talks of her female craving for physical union. Indu is at times quite passionate in the act of love making. Jayant could not digest the fact that a woman can be so enthusiastic in love making. Jayant represents a typical patriarchal man who is alarmed at the female sexual needs. For Indian society deems women as meek and passive. It is unbearable fact that a woman can be vociferous in the articulation of her sexual needs as sex is thought to be a taboo for Indian women. As she recollects, “it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I’m like that, he turns away from me. I’ve learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive. And unresponsive. I’m still and dead…A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it.” (RAS 82) A female’s quest for sexual pleasures is a taboo in the society. It is a restrictive action even in a marriage. A woman can
never openly talk of her sexual satisfaction even with regards to her husband not to talk of other men. Religion and morality can never uphold it. Sex is only a means of reproduction.

Indu reflects on the question asked by Atya about her being happy with Jayant. Indu’s answer truly informs the readers that she is not at all happy with him, “Who can say that? But I know I can’t be without him.” (RAS 69) Naren asks her why he married her when he does not care about her. Indu justifies, “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’re 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. And Naren, it was I who proposed to him.” (RAS 81)

Indu is confused as she does not know what she wants in life. She is amazed at the question of Old Uncle also when he asks the same. She keeps thinking what after all she wants and her mind goes back to success. She thinks,

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 suddenly one day, self consciousness had set in. And doubts...they castrate you...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. (RAS 100)

She thinks that she must know what is in life she wants. Without wants there is nothing in life. All human endeavour to live a satisfactory life would come to an end without any purpose, without any wants. It is only well defined goals that give life a sanctity. She thus is confused: “How can I live without knowing what I want? I must know. To live without fear...fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without the fear of failure.” (RAS 158)

Indu sometimes wants that she should leave him one day. Perhaps that would be the final solution of her problems. She often reflects about its possibility. Her mind oscillates on the possible results. Being a writer she has even written a short story about the same theme. In the story the woman walks out on her husband. When a common friend enquires about the reason she says, “Because I love him too much.”(RAS 86) But she is not able to bring the story to a conclusion. She believes that such a proposition can never be possible. Society believes that marriage is something that brings two people together. In Hinduism it is believed that marriage is
not about the unification of the bodies rather it is the union of two souls. Hindu marriage is not viewed as contracts which two persons-the groom and bride-sign; it is a spiritual bonding where seven circles round the fire are not mere an ostentation but a strengthening of the bond; seven pledges that both bride and groom have to comply with. It is a sentiment too strong with Deshpande who believes in its sanctity but is also aware of its seamy side. She knows that it is a trap where a woman finds herself most confined. Indu visualizes its pros and cons and comes to the conclusion, “What was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining, to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?” (RAS 14-15)

The same sentiment is articulated by Hemant, “A trap? Or a cage? May be 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?” (RAS 63)

The theme of marriage as a vehicle of female subjugation is very significant theme in Deshpande’s all novels and is one of the predominant themes in this novel also. Deshpande is realist to the core and snatches the semblance of fulfilment and the mask of romance that envelopes it away. She knows marriage is about commitment; a harmony which is not feasible to find in the modern society. It is an institution which has been the prime and potent weapon of patriarchy to maintain control and dominate women. Indu exposes the very futility of marriage, “But marriage...it makes one so dependent.” (RAS 101) There is no meaning in marriage. Deshpande’s heroines feel alienated and marriage seems to them a trap. Indu reflects that marriage is no surety of anything. Indu finds that marriage offers no love. Rather love is a big deception as she believes, “It’s a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is. They tell you it’s the greatest thing, the only thing in life. And you believe them and fall into the trap....” (RAS 144) She realise that only the truth is that of “The sexual instinct...that’s true. The maternal instinct...that’s true too. Self-interest, self-love...they’re the basic truth.” (RAS 144)

Repressed sexual feelings of Indu find open articulation in seeking extra marital relationship with Naren. She does not feel guilty about it. She finds Naren very compatible. He is the one in whose company she has not to make faces. She finds him very cordial and assuming as, “With Naren, I would never have to pretend. He would not be affected by my rejection.” (RAS 86-87) Naren cuddles her like a lover. He takes much fancy to her. He feels like a husband to Indu and announces, “Isn’t it wonderful to be greeted by such words? I feel like an old married man
coming home to a loving wife.” (RAS 132) Their bodies touch. “Twice, briefly, our flesh had touched.” (RAS 155) Her body is quite responsive to his body. She responds to his physical advances well as, “I lost all my senses except one, it was so magnified, as if little nerve ends had sprung up all over my body. And I was, yes, responding to him with ardour and warmth when I realised who it was.” (RAS 79) She was so responsive that, “I lay down impelled by his thrusting body, feeling at first a passive languor. Oh, blessed, blessed hardness. An ecstasy filled my body and I could not be still anymore…I clung to him convulsively, marvelling that I did not have to hold myself back.” (RAS 139) She feels utter sadness the day she finds Naren dead by drowning: “It was a sense of the utter loneliness, of the human spirit that overwhelmed me as I saw Naren lying there, detached, remote and far removed from us and all our emotions.” (RAS 159) She finds Naren very endearing, “Unscarred? Didn’t most of us have scars we never revealed? Except Naren who wore his proudly like an old soldier wearing his medals.” (RAS 135) P. Rama Moorthy observes:

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realisation that is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu’s exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence.6

Bhatnagar has a different opinion. In the Indian traditional family set up whatever Indu has done will never be accepted. She observes:

Indu’s casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian woman?7

Deshpande perhaps by having Indu transgress the boundaries of her marriage, tried to drive home the point that in society there is double standard. Men can take any liberty as far as sexual pleasures are concerned but a woman should always be chaste and monogamous. In Indian society it is assumed that even if the husband is of bad moral character, she should never think of another man but a man can transgress any limits.
She does not feel bad about having responded to Naren. She feels she has not done any act of adultery but in her heart of hearts she is perplexed as she reflects, “Adultery…what nuances of sin the word carries. I will now brood of my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery.” (RAS 142) But she tries to reason, “But I had committed no crime. Why did we make such a monstrous thing out of this?” (RAS 141) Indu thinks what she has done with Naren and the thought comes to her mind that she has cheated on her husband but she is able to calm herself as she has been cheating on her husband for many years by hiding her own true self. She muses,

What then, had I achieved by giving him my body? Apart from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren? (RAS 155)

It is Naren with whom Indu can be freely sharing her inner feelings. He asks her what happened to her married life. He asks her that there must be something that Jayant had not fulfilled which Indu wanted. He is so open, “What do you expect from Jayant, Indu?... You’re lying. You do expect something from him. Something he’s unable to give you. And because you can’t get what you want, you’re having tantrums like a spoilt child.” (RAS 144) Indu wanted to be a successful short story writer but she ended up being a writer for a magazine, writing fillers or interviewing famous ladies. Although she did not like the idea of such writing, she could not help it as there were pressures on her. She has to shoulder her family. Her stories had been rejected. But later on Naren did not like the kind of writing that Indu actually does in her career as a journalist. “The kind of writing you’ve been doing. I’ve read most of the things you’ve written. And now...interviewing society dames and showering them with adjectives.” (RAS 32) But Indu reacts, “What the hell should I talk about, tell me, Naren? Women’s lives and frustrations? Family and domestic quarrels? Love with a capital L, and marriage as the ultimate happy ending? Or maybe I’ll get bolder and write of menstrual pains and the pangs of childbirth, the ecstasy of orgasm...” (RAS 77) He suggests her to write about female experiences, about her own womanhood. Indu is amazed to hear the word womanhood and she goes back down to the memory lane and remembers, “My womanhood...I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. ‘You’re a woman
now...You can have babies yourself.’” (RAS 78) Indu felt much hatred for her own womanhood when she came to know about it. “And I, who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it.” (RAS 78) Indu does not like the atmosphere of the girls’ hostel as it is quite feminine. She cultivates hatred for natural biological functions of the female. Simone De Beauvoir writes:

> For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on.\(^8\)

In India, women are not allowed to enter the kitchen and other holy places during four days when they had menses. Indu was told, “For four days more you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything.” (RAS 78) Indu wonders whether that was the example of her womanhood. She wonders that womanhood means being unclean. “And that had been my introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. I was unclean.” (RAS 78)

Deshpande has universalised women’s subjugation. It is not only Indu who is being victim in marriage but her cousin too. Mini her cousin finds it difficult to get a groom for herself. Indu comes to know that women have no choice, they are rather victimised members of society. But whereas Indu is a modern lady who challenges traditions, Mini on the contrary succumbs to them. Mini has no choice in marriage. A woman is not given any chance to have her own will. It is a male dominated society whereby finding a groom for a daughter is the most uphill task. In Indian society, a woman cannot be married without dowry and here the insurmountable problems for the parents commence. A poor father who cannot even maintain his house and pay for its taxes, how would he arrange a hefty dowry for her daughter in order to get her married? It becomes all the more a convoluted process if would be bride is not pretty like a movie star; more dowry has to be arranged to assuage the lust of the groom and his family who crave for more and more. Many of parents are over and ears in debt and many commit suicide every day as they are unable to repay the debt they had borrowed. The situation is aggravating with every passing day. Deshpande being very realist has painted before the readers the same plight of the parents and their daughters. Indu does not believe in the romanticism that marriage offers. Marriage on the other hand is a vehicle of patriarchy to subjugate women and their free spirit. Not only Indu feels uncomfortable but many other characters in the novel are the victims in marriage.
Mini had no choice in marriage either. She just cannot say no to the man she is going to marry. Her would be husband is by no means a good choice. As Kaka tells, “He’s passed his S.S.C. Went one year to college, I think. Or maybe he didn’t really pass.” (RAS 54) He is not well educated. He is ugly looking and a bit stupid. Though Mini has accepted him but Indu feels, “And then it struck me that there was no joy in her tone.” (RAS 38) But Mini defends her choice as she is so fed up with the process of finding a groom for herself. Indu informs her that marriage does not mean anything so trivial as, “It means living with a man. You have to listen to him, endure his habits, his smell touch, his likes, his dislikes. You have to sleep with him, bear him children. Can you do all that with this man?” (RAS 116) Mini just stupefies Indu with her answer which carries the eternal wisdom, “What choice do I have Indu?” (RAS 116) After all Mini and many other girls like Mini have been told time and again, “Ever since we were small, we were told… You’ll be going away one day to your own home.” (RAS 117) It does not matter whether they have any suitable partners or not but marriage is in itself a well defined goal which they have to achieve. Indu reflects on the notion expressed by Mini.

If they would come to know that the boy belongs to old fashioned and traditional family, Mini was dressed up in traditional clothes. But the boy’s family used to find faults that she is not very modern. When they come to know that the boy is modern and she would dress up accordingly, they would say she is too modern for us. And Mini was rejected. She was so sad that she felt, “I had committed a great crime by being born a girl.” (RAS 118) When Indu talks to Kaka regarding the man they have selected for Mini, he defends himself, “What does that matter? He doesn’t need a job. They have plenty. He can live in comfort like a lord on what they have. And what’s the use of these degrees? Can they guarantee a job?” (RAS 54) On Indu’s request that they can wait for some time in order to find a suitable match, Kaka says:

We had to wait a long enough for this one. Padmini is past twenty four now. And there’s her horoscope. And the problem of finding a family with a status comparable to ours. And when everything clicks, there’s dowry hurdle. What am I to do? Let the girl stay unmarried? It’s all right as long as I’m alive. When I’m gone, can you see her brothers looking after her? May be the boy is a little ugly, may be a little stupid…but everything else is fine. (RAS 55)
In India girls are taken to be burden on their parents. The liability, as she is considered, is thought to be fulfilled when parents get their daughters easily married. Then they heave a sigh of relief. Kaki could not contain her gaiety as it was the day, the grand finale she has been impatiently waiting for, of Padmini’s marriage. “She was getting her daughter married. It was an achievement.” (RAS 15) That is why Kamala Kaki tells Vinayak Kaka that he should be very anxious of finding suitable matches for his daughters. She angrily announces, “Boasting about their size when you should be worrying about it! Don’t forget you have to start looking for husbands for them in few years. And you don’t even have any money to offer as bait.” (RAS 64)

Jayant feels that women have oodles of inner strength behind the façade of wailing faces, the reality is something contrary. Women are not weak rather they are strong enough. They can go through anything. But the idea had different implications for Indu. She could really find different meanings under the veil of strength. Looking through a different perspective than that of Jayant, she could perceive the suffering women. They are suffering endlessly and quite stoically they had to compromise to their situation. This is what looks like inner strength to others. But the reality is they have no other alternative left to them than to endure.

   Inner strength …I thought of the words as I looked down on Mini’s bowed head. 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 often wondered …have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality, with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength. (RAS 17)

There are many women who have no choice as they are being told to yield. Their very instinct has been trained not to defy the patriarchal codes rather to submit and silence their voices. Indu observes that her female relations have been blindfolded by patriarchal designs so that they may never see any choices.

   Indu is amazed at the fact that many of the women folk at her home like that of her maid have imbibed the patriarchal norms so much that for them the only criteria of success is only in the terms of being married, having born children and grand children. Without these for them there is no meaning in life. Indu is herself aware of how other women view her:
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 success a woman could have. (RAS 109)

At one stage it becomes all the more troublesome for Indu to go on with Jayant. Fortunately she gets a letter from her ancestral home that her grandfather’s sister Akka is on her death bed and she has wished to see Indu. She was uncertain about her decision whether she should go or not but a timely provocation by Jayant helped her make up her mind. He said, “Do you have to go? After all, she is…What is she of yours? Your father’s aunt, isn’t she? Rather a distant relation.” (RAS 28) Indu had left this house at the age of eighteen. Later on she married Jayant on her own as no one had approved of her marriage to a man of outer caste except her own father and kaka. She had never come back home afterwards. She reflects, “I had left home full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially. I had sworn I would never come back.” (RAS 27) She decides to visit her at her ancestral house after a gap of eleven years; breaching her pledge that she would never step inside the house again. She thinks, “And then Akka’s summons had come. It had been a welcome reprieve. A chance to get away. To avoid thinking about what was happening to me…to Jayant and me… and our life together.” (RAS 27) From this stage onwards there starts the journey of Indu towards self-realisation. She sets out on her own journey. She does not realise it earlier. This responsibility of handling the money seems a burden for her. She thinks of the ways how to put that money in proper use and it provides her a chance to review her own life and to come out of her own inhibitions. She sees the ugly truth of her family members of the ancestral house. Behind the semblance of peace and happiness was the stark naked reality of lust for money which has led them into being strangers to one another.

Back home, she is surprised to see Akka. She is lying on bed. Her eyes are gleaming. She can read what they say, “I made you come home, didn’t I? I brought you back home, didn’t I?” (RAS 27) She asks about why Jayant has not come. Indu answers he could not get leave and Akka replies, “I wanted to see him, what kind of husband you’ve got.” (RAS 28) Akka dies thus leaving the responsibility of her money to her. The fact that she is heiress to Akka’s money is too much a burden for her. She is confounded with so many questions as to which thing propelled Akka to announce her sole heiress of the money. Akka has taken a revolutionary step.
She has refuted other family members in announcing them their share of money. Indu could not understand why she has chosen her. But before she could talk to her, she was dead next morning. Indu reflects that for the family members it was a matter of hatred for her, “I knew how much it rankled in them, what Akka had done. They would never forget, never forgive me.” (RAS 152) She hates the family members for their meanness and greed. She says, “I despised them. They’re mean and petty and trivial and despicable. I had always told myself…I won’t be like them. I won’t live like them. And I thought…I’ve got away.” (RAS 146)

Staying at the ancestral home, Indu gets a chance to review her past life as the ghosts of the past were inevitable to avoid. Indu could not escape the bonding of the past as “That’s how it is. We flatter ourselves that we’ve escaped the compulsions of the past; but we’re still pinioned to it by little things. If not, why do I hesitate to have a cup of tea before washing and brushing? Why do I dislike the thought of a meal before I’ve had my bath?” (RAS 41) Her musings on the past enable her to come out of her fears. She comes to know the fate of Mini who is going to be married. Indu is really sad to know.

Indu’s childhood is laid bare before us. She is the daughter of Govind who married Indu’s mother out of caste. Akka did not acknowledge this alliance and never her mother as daughter in law of the ancestral house. Indu’s mother dies when Indu was fifteen days old. Indu was brought back to the house when she was fifteen only; a motherless daughter. Indu’s father Govind is a photographer whom no one considers a serious, mature and responsible person as he chooses an upbeat profession. He rarely visits Indu when she was a child and Indu reflects that it was perhaps because she was a girl and not a boy, “How else could he have parted leaving me, a fifteen-day-old motherless baby, with the family he hated and despised? He had not even come to see me until I was more than a year old. But that, perhaps, was because I was a girl. If I had been a son…” (RAS 148) Deshpande does not continue the dialogue deliberately as what she implies to state is quite an open secret. It is left to the readers to grasp. It is first of her experiences with a male’s psyche where a baby girl is never welcome. In Indu’s ancestral house, girls are the sole property of their mothers. They are the responsibility of their mothers which fathers never share. Indu reveals thus:

It was a tradition in our family that girls are left to their mothers; that a daughter was exclusively the mother’s business. When his girls were in school, Madhav-
kaka had never known what class they were in. But Sunil’s education was so scrupulously and harshly supervised by him, that Sunil had turned deceitful, with the connivance, of course, of his mother. (RAS 148-149)

But that does not mean that Indu is a neglected child. She has been intensely loved and wanted by her Anant kaka and his wife. They loved her so much when she was a child. But it does not mean that their love and affection for Indu has vanished into the dim forest now rather their genuine concern and love for her is still intact. On the account of Padmini’s marriage Kaki purchases the most expensive sari for Indu. Kaka told Kaki, “Buy a good sari for Indu.” (RAS 15) Indu has been the most favourite child of her Kaka. She was the cynosure of her eyes even earlier and still happens to occupy the same position. Kaki informs, “You have always been his favourite, you know.” (RAS 15) Indu reflects that in her childhood she was loved by Kaka, Kaki and Atya alike: “I think of my childhood, and of how I got affection from Kaka, understanding from Old Uncle, and loving care from Atya.” (RAS 23) Even now Kaka is really happy that she has visited them and says, “You don’t know how happy I feel to see you home. I felt guilty we never asked you to come home with your husband.” (RAS 50) It was he who supported Indu’s decision to marry Jayant and as Indu reflects he was, “the only one in the family who had come for my wedding. Apart from father, of course. Perhaps it was the first time kaka had defied Akka.” (RAS 46) She does not like the concept of nuclear families as she is bent upon thinking how in joint families one gets love from different relations. Her own life at her ancestral house has been full of love and care at the hands of Kaka and Old Uncle. “I think of my own childhood, and of how I got affection from Kaka, understanding from Old Uncle, and loving care from Atya; and I know why there is a faint tinge of pity in me for the small families of today.” (RAS 23)

Akka was a very traditional and dominating figure. She always towered over not only her but on all the members of the family. “Since the day Akka has come back, a rich childless widow, to her brother’s house, she has maintained an absolute control over her brother’s children.” (RAS 30) All the family members including Kaka shudder at her voice, “Kaka, even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka’s venomous tongue.” (RAS 30) In Deshpande she replaces a dominant patriarch and steps into his shoes. Indu remembers Akka as, “…there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate.” (RAS
69) She always rebelled against the domination of Akka. There was an inherent spirit in Indu to rebel. She recollects, “I had never been scared of her. There had been only resentment and dislike.” (RAS 29) She does not want to fit in the roles in which the traditional family members find themselves.

Akka, being traditional, never allowed her any freedom. She was not allowed to talk to boys in the school. Someone reported to Akka once about the incident where Indu was talking to a boy. Akka was furious. Akka is like Mrs. Quest of Doris Lessing’s *Martha Quest* in forbidding her meeting boys. She never imagined Akka would scold her so much and try to cease her liberty. But Indu was bold enough not to relent before Akka’s rebuking: “But Akka, that’s the library…it’s full of corners… And we were just talking. Is that wrong? It’s not as if we were holding hands, or touching and kissing.” (RAS 74) Indu comes to know that Akka even in her last days did not want to be hospitalized as she thinks, “God knows what caste the nurse are,” she said. “Or the doctors. I couldn’t drink a drop of water there.” (RAS 30)

Akka could never reconcile to the fact that Indu’s mother was a nice and generous lady. Traditional families in India generally have this perception about most of the women who are bold enough to move against the families and marry on their own, terming such women as impetuous. Akka could never recognize Indu’s mother as daughter in law of the ancestral house. Her mother’s name was never mentioned in the house. No one has ever named her mother since her childhood and even Indu was not aware whether she had one. “I had lost my mother at birth. There is nothing unique about losing one’s mother. But a child, in spite of losing its mother, gets some idea of her from others, from photographs, from conversations. But I…No one had ever spoken of her or even mentioned her name.” (RAS 48) It was accidentally when Naren had asked her about how her mother died that she had gone to Old Uncle and asked him about her mother. That day for the first she came to know she had even mother as she had not seen her in photographs as no one approved of her mother.

She left her house when Akka one day taunted that Govind was a nice man until he married Indu’s mother. Even Akka blamed her mother for enticing her father Govind out of his wits to marry her. Indu could not bear the insult inflicted on her mother. The very day she made her mind to go away from the house so that she can escape all that bickering and altercation that tore her soul away. This holds true in the context of most of Indian families where the blame does not
rest on a male but a female is made the scapegoat. Indu always felt stifled in such an atmosphere. She wanted to fly and dart away. The world of Indu at her ancestral home seemed overloaded with the overtones of traditionalism; values which are in the modern world obsolete and entail no inherent wisdom in them. When she left home it was Old Uncle, “who had come to the station to see me off when I had left. I had written a few times, then stopped. What could I say to an old man who had seemed so far removed from the life I was living.” (RAS 36)

Akka’s life was full of trials and hardships. She was married at the age of twelve to a man who was thirty. He was a, “bulky man with large coarse features.” (RAS 70) What she endured in her in laws’ house was unknown. She tried in vain to escape from her husband twice. But her mother in law, “whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. Starved her as well.” (RAS 70) She was sent to her husband again who was very harsh with her who was just a kid of thirteen years at that time and she was so scared that she cried and said, “Lock me up again, lock me up.” (RAS 70) Her husband was a womaniser. A scared child could never appease his lust. So he had always a mistress or two. Akka was unable to bear a child. And her mother-in-law always blamed her for this.

After fifteen or twenty years of their married life, her husband fell for another woman. He even tried to give Akka’s jewels to her and he could bring her home but for the fear of his mother. Then he had a stroke and he was immovable. He could not move and he survived two years after that. Akka took care of him in his last days. He even once uttered the name of the same lady but Akka did not listen to him. She did not allow the lady when she came to meet him twice to enter her home. Akka’s life was very unfortunate. She said, “Every night I’ve spent in this house, I’ve cried like this.” (RAS 72) Indu’s reflection on the past helps her to have a better understanding of Akka’s life. She knows that, “Akka…I thought she was just an interfering old woman. But she was more than that. She was a prop. One of the strong. A family…it’s like any other group. There are the strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak…And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That’s why she put the burden on me.” (RAS 145)

The sister of Indu’s father Narmada is no exception. She was married to a man who was as Narmada himself says, “a decent man”, (RAS 71) but she was unfortunate to get widowed before her age when she was in her prime youth. A widow’s life is nothing but a tale of suffering which brings in its train untold problems that no one can really predict. “What can a else childless
widow expect? Her in-laws had, true to tradition, ill-treated her after her husband’s death… her home, where she worked from morning to night, every day of her life, expecting nothing.” (RAS 42) Deshpande is very much vocal when she describes a woman’s life. Her keen observation had made her a master of the psychology of the women and she knows how Indian society treats woman if she happens to be a widow. Narmada did not have to face the trials and tribulation which a woman has generally to grapple with although she was warned by Akka at the time of her marriage that it is the time she has entered into a place where her own life of ease and happiness which she spent at her parental home would cease to exist and her new life demanding from her a lot of sacrifice would now commence where she needs to display much fortitude. Akka has said, “Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.” (RAS 70-71)

Akka’ equating marriage with that of punishment wipes off the façade of pretence that marriage has; of expensive and swanky clothes, saris, jewels, diamonds, pearls and the excitement, romance and infatuation that are associated with it, bringing before our eyes a realistic picture when the outer layers and wraps are torn apart and what remains is the kernel; the essence which is shabby and horrifying. One may contradict Akka’s vision as being biased and prejudiced baring before the readers half truth but there is no denying the fact that marriage subjugate and in newspapers and on Television there is no dearth of the material that clamours for the justice on the part of women who have been silent victims in this very institution of marriage. Narmada’ life has been of suffering though may not be the type of suffering where a woman is victimized but a suffering of widowhood, where the society adds all value to a woman when she is married and once her husband is dead there is no self respect and dignity. Narmada was brought back to her own home when her husband died as, “Her in-laws had ill treated her after her husband’ death.” (RAS 42)

Vithal was an orphan Brahmin whom Kaka picked up as he saw him homeless, loitering here and there in search of food on the roads. He stays with them and eats in different houses on different days. If he cannot manage to get anywhere to eat, he eats with them. He is a kind of good service to them and would do odd errands. The kind of life that mother of Vithal, lived again bespeaks of Deshpande’s firm belief that marriage wrecks a woman’s life. Vithal’s father was, “A dour, grim man who rarely spoke and never smiled, there was a streak of cruelty in him that came out in his
relations with his meek, silent wife. The boy as a child, had been a frequent spectator of scenes in which father had worked out his sadistic anger on the mother for the merest trifles.” (RAS 127) He was a boozy man who remained intoxicated with wine all through day and night. He used to lash her wife for no reason of hers. One day his wife, Vithal’s mother, ran away never to come back.

Marriage often has drastic effects over the women. This sentiment is too strong in Shashi Deshpande. She has wrought before us the reality, the stark reality of Indian society. It is generally seen that marriage often plays its part in changing the perception of women. They undergo revolutionary changes once they are married. Such changes would otherwise not have been feasible, if they had not been married. With marriage, a woman becomes more docile, shy and submissive and they also are transformed into more mellow being. They are thought to be mature. Marriage intrudes upon their girlish insincerity and nonchalant nature. They become seasoned. Padmini even before her marriage appears to have stepped into the shoes of a mature woman. She shows Indu her saris which she has bought on the account of her marriage in a very mature manner. It was an aspect of her which she has never witnessed. Indu visualises, “With an imperiousness that was a foretaste of the future Mini…..She pulled me along to Kaki’s room, wait here. I’ll get the keys.” (RAS 15) Indu is inclined into thinking that, “Very often had I seen marriage turn shy, demure girls into assertive matrons overnight?” (RAS 15)

Indu does not fit perfectly into the category of the traditional women like that of her aunts Narmada and Sunanda. Her aunts are very well verse in the knack of keeping the light of the marital bonding alive even though the storms of discords are blowing which pose great impediments. Narmada and Sunanda best know how to be submissive. But it is not the case with Indu. She does not digest the fact that Jayant wants her to be submissive. She finds that she has no individuality of her own. Whenever she sees the mirror it is not her reflection rather she is annoyed to notice a very queer reflection; one that seems quite that of a stranger. Indu reflects on the influence of Jayant over her which has always towered over her and made her as if she is non-existing entity:

Name changing is the process by which a man keeps his control over the women. After marriage, in Indian society generally the name of a married girl is changed and she is given another name. This process although speaks of love that husband maintains for the wife has deep roots in the
passing of patriarchal domination. One is left without any identity if the name is taken back. How beautifully male centric society maintains their domination over the female! It is what Gramsci calls “hegemony”: a kind of domination which is maintained without letting others be aware of the fact that the control has been maintained. Indu visualises how the name changing process leaves them identity less making them non-entity. “And in the process, their 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.” (RAS 110) But there are uneducated women who feel blessed and proud in having their names changed. They cannot grasp the paradigms of the male centric society and are willingly submit to their designs. As a woman doing household chores in the kitchen says proudly, “I have not just one, but two good names. One given to me by my father when I was born, and the other by my husband when I got married.” (RAS 110)

Another important point made in the novel is that of women who are not permitted call their husbands’ names. They are rebuked if they happen to call their husbands by their names even by mistake. Sunanda Atya chides Indu, “I bet you say your husband’s name pet.” (RAS 39) What an orthodox milieu! In developing country like India where on the one hand the country boasts of the outstanding progress made during the last sixty years of independence and on the other hand one finds women talking of such practices which are paltry to the core. It is basically a design of male centric society to subjugate women and instil in them the feeling that they are the other; the subjugated and marginalised for whom the security is only their husbands. Without husbands they have no identity of their own, no intrinsic value of their own; so the most important significant achievement for them is to keep their married life intact and that is possible only if they prolong their husbands’ lives. The society has gradually poured into their heart and soul this feeling that only their most important duty is to perpetuate their lives.

Cannot one see the relevance of all the rituals that one finds in the society? Most of them are intended for the women to keep so that their husbands are benefitted. Many of the rituals that women generally observe are to commemorate their husbands’ lives. Many other rituals and fasts in different sections of the society are intended for women with the sole purpose of establishing their dominance over the female. Indu feels amazed and bewildered at the use of such practices which hold no rationality. These are what seem futile to her. Being an educated middle class
women, one has is struggling to be a writer all this seems meaningless as she knows that there is no logic; no rationality; no scientific truth in all this mumbo jumbo. She rationalises in this way, “That’s just to frighten the women. To keep them in their places. ..... What connection can there be between a man’s longevity and his wife’s calling him by name? (RAS 39) What is paradoxical is that though the women are themselves victims they believe in such practices and obliquely help the patriarchs establish their influence over the females; the other selves. Once Indu had asked Atya the reason of worshipping tulsi and she answered that it meant good luck for her husband. Indu reflects on the reply, “Lots of good fortune. To Atya that means that I should not survive my husband.” (RAS 39)

M.H. Abrahms quotes Simon Beouvoir, “One is not born rather becomes a woman, it is society as a whole that creates this creature known as feminine.”\(^9\) Truly gender is not merely a biological construct. A process of differentiation on the basis of bodily structure and anatomy rather it is now a cultural construct. Society is ridden with the male centric ideology and hence it becomes all the more essential for it to instil in women a feeling that they are the other; subjugated; meek; docile; submissive without any will of their own and they need to fit in the same criteria that women right from the beginning has been made to fit in without any change. It is in the interest of the patriarch to inculcate this feeling in them otherwise the long standing walls of patriarch would crumble down and the patriarchal set up of society would lose its grips and slowly be replaced by more dynamic and powerful female; the matriarchs. History is a witness to the fact that no one in power would love to lose their strong hold. Hence men would never like to leave their powerful position. Indu was taught how to serve food with dexterity. She was told to adhere to a particular pattern of serving the dishes. Once she had deviated from the pattern and there had been chaos. “Since childhood the right method of serving food had been drilled into me. Salt here, chutney and pickle below it, vegetables on the right, dal in the centre, ghee only after serving the *dal*. The pattern was rigid and there was no deviation from it. Once in a contrary mood, I had purposely changed it. The results had been catastrophic.” (RAS 24) Old Uncle had advised her that it ought to have some pattern in life if life has to be led in an orderly way. …He has further exhorted that, “Can one not find freedom within this circle.” (RAS 24) Even further Indu was advised to, “I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked because you are a female. You must accept
everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, for a female to live and survive.” (RAS 144)

Indu has a better understanding of herself now. Old Uncle has made her realise, “That the whole world is made up of interdependent parts.” (RAS 101) There is no need of feeling aloof from the world. There is no shame in being dependent on others. “Attachment... we can’t escape it. It’s the law of life. You can never protect yourself against love.” (RAS 102) She comes to know that freedom can be achieved within the circles without crossing over the boundaries. Indu does not want any detachment now as earlier she has tried to seek when she was inspired by Naren’s sense of non-involvement. Rather what she wants now is involvement. With this newly dawned understanding she now knows what she has to do to the money. She decides to sell the ancestral house and to pay for Mini’s wedding though all members have tried to exert pressure on her so that she could help them.

Family members want that Indu should help them with the newly gained windfall. Sunanda Atya wants money for her son Krishna. She tells Indu, “You must help me. If he had a little money, he could start a small shop of his own. He’s a good at repairing things. Or if his father becomes a partner, he could find room for the boy there.” (RAS 128) Anant Kaka’s son Sharad wants to get Akka’s money so that he could use money for his business. He is averse to the idea of giving money to Naren, “But, really, Indu, instead of giving all that money to that roving waster, give it to me. Just try me, I say. I need it for a much better purpose. A noble one. Don’t you want to help me become a doctor? Once I’m a doctor, I’ll even look after Mini, in case she remains a spinster.” (RAS 105) Vinayak Kaka also has his eyes on the money. Though he does not say it overtly but taunts at Anant by telling his wife, “You have a husband who doesn’t know how to flatter and fawn and make others pay for your daughter’s weddings.” (RAS 64) Jayant has his own plans of using this money. Jayant advises Indu, “I don’t understand you, Indu. What’s the problem? Surely you don’t have to get involved with problem of every Tom, Dick and Harry in the family? What have they ever done for you? Not one of them bothered to see whether you were alive or dead these last ten years. Shake the dust of that place off the feet, my dear, and come home soon. We can make our plans when we are together.” (RAS 131) She tells Old Uncle, “I don’t deny the family. But this…this large amorphous group of people with conflicting interests…a family like ours now…it has no meaning.” (RAS 99)
Ultimately the house has been demolished. Indu decided not to give money to anyone except to fund for Mini’s marriage as Akka had wished. She did not keep the house intact. Rather it was sold to Shankarappa who dismantles it to dust to finally build a hotel over it. It was Indu who decided to use Akka’s money in such a way though Shyamrao has informed her that Akka would have detested the idea of using her money for just any person who is so insignificant and that too one who is an outsider and Naren who had sought her promise, “Promise me. Promise me you won’t help Vithal.” (RAS 22) but Indu believes that “It is not dead who need our loyalty, but the living.” (RAS 22) Kaka was blank when the house was shattered. He was so emotionally attached with the house. He did not want to dispose it off to Shankarappa. He stood there to watch the house being raised to ground, “alone among the debris, a dust covered motionless statue, until there was nothing left but heaps of rubble, piles of wood and dust.” (RAS 21) He with kaki lives with Hemant, their son in a small rented house. He died before the house was eventually destroyed. He was much associated with the ancestral house. But he had been lucky as, “He died before the house came down. His going left an unbearable gap in our midst. He was only a poor school teacher, who retired early owing to bad health and came to live with the family as a poor dependent.” (RAS 21)

It was a nice decision to sell the house as Kaka’s financial status has gone down with the passing of time. He is not able to maintain the expenses of house. He is the one who stays there so the major responsibility lies with him. Govind evades his responsibility towards the house. She is charged for his indifference, “I think it’s too bad the way he avoids all responsibilities. Is this house only ours? Are these duties only ours?” (RAS 47) Others even do not help much. They help when they want. He tells Indu, “I can’t even afford to pay the taxes on this now. Last year…no, two years back, I borrowed from your father.” (RAS 57) He further informs her that the lands that they were so proud had gone. He feels sad to inform her:

Who would have imagined it? Our own lands…for generations they were ours…and we had to hand them over just like that. I was hoping one of the boys would live there and cultivate some of the land. But no, they all want cosy office jobs. As it is, I’ve just managed to retain the mango orchards. That pays something. But the last two years even the mango crop failed miserably. (RAS 57)
For a certain period of time, Indu thinks about the prospect of getting Naren married to Mini as it would save the expenses to be incurred at the time of Mini’s wedding and eventually the ancestral house could be saved. But Old Uncle warns her, “You’re wrong if you think he really meant it last time. It was only his way of getting back at the family. he hates it, God knows why. How could I say this there, Indu, in front of all of them? But I must warn you…don’t take Naren seriously.” (RAS 99)

Indu enters into a new phase of life with new dawned awakening with the demolition of the house. The house has acted as a, “Yes, the house had been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now I felt clean, as If I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself. And free.” (RAS 167-168) thus she believes there is no use of crying on, “But why weep for a house, when so much more is being destroyed every day?” (RAS 167) She has come to know that her life is full of possibilities for both growth and grace as, “I felt as if I was watching life itself…endless, limitless, formless and full of grace.” (RAS 166)

She wants to go back home to set the things right. She cannot do without Jayant. She cannot leave him. She has to face him to settle her scores. She emphatically announces, “Yes, home. The one I lived in with Jayant. That was my only home. To think otherwise would be to take the coward’s way again. I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. (RAS 168) But her married life has been tumultuous as it was made on the pillars of deception and lies, “What kind of a home have I built? Now I would go back and see if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty.” (RAS 168) Now she determines to bring it on the lines of honesty however hard the path may look like. As far as Naren is concerned, she feels: “For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together." (RAS 168)

Indu remembers how she has killed her own personality and the reason is that she is afraid of telling the world that her marriage has failed. She has been afraid of telling it to Akka that she has failed in her married life which she so resolutely had arranged for her own self. That is why she has lived a life of pretence and of cowardice so that the semblance of it can be retained. Jayant wants her to submit to him and always do whatever he wants: “And I had found out that he too expected me to submit. No, not expected. He took it for granted that I would.” (RAS 145)

She comes to know that her own cowardice is responsible for her hellish life, “The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this…that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant,
to my marriage, not for love alone but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success.” (RAS 145) Indu has lived a life full of deception. She has never expressed her true feelings to her husband. She has never told him what she herself wants, “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.” (RAS 44) Indu complains that Jayant has not understood her. On this Jayant frankly tells her, “I know as much of you as you allow me to know.” (RAS 23) Indu reflects the truth of this statement and comes to know the reality. It has been true that she has not allowed Jayant to know more of herself. She has lived a life of pretence. She has done what he wanted and consequently she did not ever reveal her own identity. She has judiciously suppressed her wills, likes and dislikes.

After shedding her inhibitions and deciding firmly that she has to live a life of honesty with Jayant, she decides that she would give up her job of writing columns for magazines rather would take up writing of a book. She tells this to Jayant and he feels as if he had been cheated. He was all blank as if Indu has swindled her. As he always expected that she would silently will to his wills-doing what he wants-but to his dismay what happened was quite the contrary, “Yet, when I had first told Jayant about my plans… that I would give up my job and give myself to writing, he had been unbelieving. Then, confident of his influence over me he had been sure I would change. Later, when he realized this would not happen, he had been furious. And bewildered. As if I had cheated him.” (RAS 23) But Indu is not at all worried. She now knows what she has to do and attain in life. She is now not anxious about:

And I am writing now, the book that has been in me these past few years whether any publisher accept it whether it will win acclaim, appreciation, accolades…I school myself not to dream of such things. Rave reviews and worldwide fame, a best seller that will stun the world and generations-these exist only in the fantasies of immature minds and publishers’ blurbs. (RAS 25)

But then she is pained by the thought of bearing other pressures on her. It is all right if no publisher accepts the book but would it be possible for her to manage house then. She thinks of Jayant’s reaction if her attempts to get the book published fails. “But can I withstand other
pressures? The desire to be known to succeed for Jayant’s sake… Will they not impel me to compromise, to write the kind of things that are acceptable, popular and easily sold?” (RAS 25)

Indu is a realist. She believes that even after her decision to improve her condition, she has not achieved her aim of gaining complete happiness. She cannot keep imaging that everything is right. But to some extent she expects less from him. She is blessed with new understanding and as such, “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 be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness does come to us for the asking. But they can sneak up on us when we least expect them.” (RAS 23) He knows Indu better now as she has tore apart the veneer of keeping herself hidden. She has let her open now thus the part which was not visible to Jayant before is now transparent for Jayant to see. As such, “Now I think 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” (RAS 23-24)

Indu thus visualises:

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. (RAS 132)

Bhatnagar comments:

Thus Shashi Deshpande makes her heroines choose security through reconciliation. the ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude. 10

P. Ramamoorthi says:

The novel ends with affirmation of the individuality of Indu and also the principle of life which is endless. Through the image of the tree, Deshpande suggests that
Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace…but the very meaning of life itself. It is with this total understanding that Indu decides to go back to Jayant…at the end of the novel Indu realises that Akka is not a sadist. Indu has confronted her real self and she knows her roots; she need not be ashamed of her body and sexual needs; she has to decide what her job will be; she is capable of taking decisions not only for herself but others too, and life does not come to individual be it Indu and Jayant.
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