

# Exploring Body Politics in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows

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## Abstract:

Political, cultural, economic and historical account of the Indian tradition explain that women have been marginalized after the advent of Islamic invasion and the British colonial rule in India. Women have been denied of their economic, social and cultural rights. Under the control of British colonialism, capitalism and materialism, the body of the women became a site of political debate. Body which has its origination in the biological realities, in the process of its becoming, it attains the valency of power structure. The power structure inscribes its codes and oppressive rules through the process of signification on the body of the women. This ecriture on the body translates the biological body into a cultural object. The oppressive reality of capitalism transforms the essence of the body into an object or a finished commodity. The paper in the context intends to examine the reality of body politics in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*.

**Keywords:** Political, Cultural, Capitalism, Historical, Body, Power.

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* describes the role of Indu in her large family and her relationship with other members of the family controls and construct her realities and identity. It also resolves the problem of her personal life. The novel has dealt with some of prominent sociological concerns which shape the body and the identity in Indu. Indu's body is the ramification of the interplay of several sociological, sexual and economic realities. Within the structure of the sociological realities, family, marriage and infidelity are some of the important factors that constitute the identity of Indu. Her body is also designed y those sociological factors. Family from the very beginning of her childhood days inscribes some imperceptible rules which assign valency or signified to her biological body. Louis Althusser in his *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* has explained that the body is constructed by the play of two important forms of the power structure namely; ideological and repressive. The repressive structure of power involves judiciary, police and army which control the existence of women's body. Similarly, the ideological apparatuses involve family, educational institution and religious institution which control the stasis and praxis of the women's body. Further, Deshpande has also underlined the idea that economy plays important role in the constitution and construction of the women's body. The economic conditions that involves capital, labour and the means of production entail profoundly upon the body of the women because the women does not control these realities therefore she is controlled by these realities. Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* has explained that one is not essentially a woman rather one is constituted or created as women. (64). Further, Mary Woll Stonecarft in her *A Vindication for the Rights*

*of Women* has explained that women have been controlled by patriarchy because the structure of power controls their mind or consciousness, the structure of their thought, ideology and the streams of their thought process. They do not have access to the control over the means of production, neither on capital nor on human labour. In addition, they are bereft of social rights. As they are not allowed to choose their social space, their marriage, their profession. And they are also not allowed to control the entire decision-making process. Further, Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* has explicated that the women are compelled to lead the miserable life because their psychology, economy and social conditions are controlled by the power structure. Thus, feminism voiced for the social, political, cultural and economic rights of women so that they may lead a meaningful life. Feminism as a political, cultural and economic movement was confined within the domain of bringing equality to women at different fronts of social, economic, cultural and economic realities. After 1960s, it was experienced that the women are compelled to lead miserable life not only because they were denied of those social, political and cultural rights rather the burden of their body be very strongly upon them. For addressing the realities of women in society feminism was gradually replaced by the politics and aesthetics of body. Giving birth to a new domain of critical inquiry entitled gender studies. Gender studies explore and examine the semiotics and politics of the body. The term politics refers to the interplay of power structure onto the innocent biological body so that it is transformed into a political and constructed body. Sigmund Freud in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* has explained the concept of Id, Ego and Superego, further dividing them into two principles namely; pleasure and reality principle. Superego that constitutes the world of the reality principles on the name of morality circumscribes the women's body. The structure of morality, society and social codes surreptitiously write upon the body of the women. Further, Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* traces the historical progression of the women's body. Foucault argues that the body of the women is the site of political debate because on the body the powerful inscribe its inviolable rules. These rules are codified on women's body that translates the body into a cultural product. Furthermore, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, a pioneering text of Queer Studies explores those elements which determine human sexuality. Sedgwick has argued that both the body of the women and her desire are constructed by the powerful structure that is controlled by the hegemonic power. Further it is elaborated that both sexual identity and desire are controlled by two views namely; minoritizing and universalizing. The minoritizing view expounds that some bodies are innately born as gay or lesbian. Whereas the universalizing view delineates that body is constructed by several sociological, economic, cultural and linguistic realities. Similarly, Toril Moi in her *Sexual Textual Politics* has elaborated that the women have been denied their economic, linguistic and psychological rights which have constituted her into objects. In addition, Julia Kristeva in her famous essay "Women's Time" has explained that the body of a women is always constituted by those stereotypes which have been created by the social structure. *Roots and Shadows* represents the reality of conflict between the subjugative and subversive patriarchy and the desire of self-expression, individuality and independence. Indu experiences domestic crises that propels her to explore her identity. However, it yields no result. Her relationship, social background and family structure controls her body. The title of the novel represents that she is controlled by the root of her family. Her family comprises, father, mother, brothers and grand-mother. Indu experiences complex relationship with the members of her family. Her father holds her body and her mind. He represents typical patriarch who does not allow the fulfilment of Indu's desire. A systematic exploration of her psychology unravels the impact of her father's totalitarian control over her mind and her body. Indu is constrained by different aspects of family and social realities. This constrains her existence and the independence of her

body. Further, her marriage proves to be another burden upon her body. The structure of power acts like roots upon her body because it always holds her and does not allow her to move away. Further the repressive apparatuses also weigh heavily upon her body and they are coterminous with her existence as body stands like a shadow of her root.

The aforementioned discourse, debate and discussion on the politics of the body in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* has clearly explicated that the politics involves the interplay of power structures upon the body which guide the materiality of the body. Indu's body politics is controlled by social, economic, political and linguistic factors.

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