



# Wealth as a Determinant of Power: A Case Study of Matriarchy with Reference to the Novel Roots and Shadows

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In the captivating novel "Roots and Shadows" by Shashi Deshpande, we delve into the intricate life of Indu, a young woman who finds herself at odds with the constraints imposed by her traditional upbringing by the matriarch Akka, the prominent character in the novel. The research aims to assess whether wealth plays a significant role in granting power, regardless of an individual's gender. In addition, it examines the impact of societal power structures on individuals' rights and treatment. By exploring the dynamics of patriarchy and matriarchy, the research seeks to shed light on how these systems may contribute to discrimination and suffering experienced by characters. Furthermore, the investigation into the role of money as a determinant of power is a compelling aspect of the study which has been compared with other similar characters from various novels. The major issues related to the dominance based on power are analysed.

**Keywords:** *Traditional Upbringing, Complexities, Societal Power Structures, Patriarchy, Matriarchy, Discrimination.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender and wealth are two factors that have long played significant roles in determining power dynamics within society. In the context of literature, these themes are often explored to shed light on the complexities of human relationships and societal structures. One such exploration is found in the works of Shashi Deshpande. Through the characters and their experiences, Deshpande delves into the question of whether gender or wealth ultimately determines domination. The paper examines the portrayal of matriarchy and patriarchy in these novels, highlighting the influence of wealth as a key factor in power

dynamics. The novel "Roots and Shadows" begins with a captivating storyline that revolves around the protagonist, Indu, who returns to her native village after a decade of being away. The anticipation of her homecoming is heightened by the fact that Indu has received a letter from her ancestral house, which acts as a catalyst, unraveling a web of secrets and hidden truths that have been buried for years. This sets the stage for a compelling narrative that explores the complexities of family history, personal identity, and the power of nostalgia. Through the detailed descriptions of the ancestral house and the revelations contained within the letter, the reader

becomes emotionally invested in Indu's quest for self-discovery. Additionally, the letter delves into the joyous occasion of Mini's marriage, providing a stark contrast to Akka's bedridden state. It beautifully captures the emotions surrounding this event, from the excitement and anticipation to the bittersweet moments of saying goodbye. On her way back, Indu finds herself overwhelmed with nostalgia as she recollects the incidents that took place in her ancestral house.

## 2. SEMINAL CHARACTER OF THE NOVEL

One of the memories that stands out in her mind - the marriage of Akka, at the tender age of thirteen to a thirty-year-old man. The wealthy man treated Akka with utmost cruelty. In the initial days of their marriage, she was locked in a room, deprived of food and water. Despite her inner strength and bravery, Akka succumbed to a sense of inferiority and made the heartbreaking decision of confining herself. In her state of confinement, Akka's spirit slowly withered away. Akka, a brave woman, who has faced numerous tribulations, has emerged as a symbol of bravery and resilience. In a situation, where many others would have succumbed to despair or panic, Akka's unwavering determination to live her life as she desires has shaped her into a woman who can withstand any challenge. Akka's story is one of resilience, sacrifice, and unyielding strength. Despite enduring years of hardship and mistreatment, she remained steadfast in her duties and responsibilities. Her husband's infidelity and disregard for their marriage vows did not break her spirit. Instead, she chose to care for him when he became paralyzed, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to her marital duties. One of the primary factors that contributed Akka's resentment was the mistreatment she faced from her husband and mother-in-law. In a society where women were often seen as inferior and subordinate to men, Akka was subjected to the oppressive expectations and was under the control of her husband. Her mother-in-law, who held traditional beliefs and upheld patriarchal norms, further added to Akka's suffering. The constant pressure to conform to societal expectations and endure her husband's infidelity took a toll on Akka's mental and emotional well-being. The lack of support and understanding from her husband and mother-in-law left her feeling isolated and trapped in an unhappy marriage.

After his death, Akka inherited all his property, which could have allowed her to live a luxurious life. However, she made the selfless decision to return to her ancestral home and dedicate herself to caring for the well-being of her community.

## 3. TRANSITION FROM SUBJUGATION TO MATRIARCHY

The factor that contributes to Akka's transformation into a matriarch is the changing circumstances in her life. Back in the ancestral home, where she lived as a girl who never questioned anything and accepted the choice of her father to get married to an elderly man, who never had an opinion of never treating his wife as a human, Akka became a dominant member of the home as she possessed the wealth of her husband. As the family grows and evolves, new responsibilities and challenges arise. Akka finds herself taking on more responsibilities, such as managing the household finances, making important decisions, and ensuring the well-being of the children. These changing circumstances force Akka to step up and assert her authority, as she realizes that her actions and decisions have a significant impact on the family's overall welfare. This newfound role as a decision-maker leads Akka to establish certain rules and expectations to maintain order and ensures that everyone in the family is well-cared for. One of the main reasons for Akka's desire to be a dominant figure over the elders in her family is her need for control and independence. In the ancestral home, Akka held a position of dominance, exerting control over everyone in the family, including Indu. However, when Indu's father, Govind, married an outcaste woman, he was cast out of the family, as per the conventional rule that outcaste women are considered impure by the Brahmin community. The dominance of Akka in the ancestral home created an environment of control and subordination within the family. Akka's position of authority allowed her to dictate the lives of those around her, including Indu. Her power was not only derived from her position as an elder in the family but also from the economic state and caste-based norms that were deeply ingrained in society. In this hierarchical system, women like Akka held significant influence over decision-making processes, especially when it came to matters of marriage and social status. Indu's upbringing under the care of Akka, who

accepted her despite her outcast origins, laid the foundation for her happy and fulfilling life. Akka's broad-mindedness and acceptance of Indu as part of the Brahmin family allowed her to grow up in an environment free from discrimination and prejudice. This nurturing environment provided Indu with the stability and love, regardless of their social background. She was given the same opportunities for education, personal growth, and exploration as any other child in the family. Akka's acceptance of Indu not only shaped her identity but also instilled a sense of belonging and self-worth within her. One of the main hindrances that Indu faced in her journey was the hypocrisy displayed by her Akka, who herself claimed to be a proponent of traditional gender roles. Akka's constant pressure on Indu to conform to societal expectations of a traditional woman's role became a constant source of frustration for her. Despite Akka's claims, she herself did not adhere to these roles, often engaging in activities that were deemed unconventional for women. This double standard left Indu feeling confused and resentful. It made her question the validity of these traditional roles and the hypocrisy of those who enforced them. Instead of fostering support and understanding, Akka's actions only served to hinder Indu's growth and perpetuate the limitations imposed by society. Indu's frustration grew, and she became determined to break free from these constraints and create her own path.

Akka's adherence to the caste system can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the caste system was deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the society she lived in. It had been practiced for centuries and was considered a fundamental aspect of Indian tradition and identity. As such, individuals like Akka were raised to believe in the inherent superiority and inferiority of certain castes, accepting their assigned place in the social hierarchy without question. Furthermore, the caste system provided a sense of order and structure in society. It ensured that each individual had a designated role and responsibility based on their caste, which created a sense of predictability and stability. Akka's acts of kindness towards Indu reflect her remarkable character and serve as a reminder of the transformative power of empathy and compassion. Despite their differences in caste and social standing, Akka consistently shows kindness towards Indu, going against societal norms and expectations. Indu, who

was deeply offended by the rules of Akka, made the decision to move out of her ancestral home. The departure of Indu from the ancestral home after being offended by the rules of Akka had significant repercussions on both individuals and the family. Indu's dissatisfaction with the imposed rules and her desire for personal growth and independence led her to make the difficult decision to leave. This decision, coupled with the sense of betrayal she felt towards Akka, strained their relationship and caused a ripple effect on the entire family. The consequences of this departure serve as a reminder of the importance of open communication, understanding, and compromise within families. It also highlights the significance of individuality and the pursuit of personal growth within the framework of familial bonds. The story of Indu and Akka serves as a cautionary tale, urging individuals within families to foster trust, empathy, and respect in order to maintain strong and harmonious relationships. In conclusion, the departure of Indu from the ancestral home after being offended by the rules of Akka had significant repercussions on both individuals and the family. Indu's dissatisfaction with the imposed rules and her desire for personal growth and independence led her to make the difficult decision to leave. This decision, coupled with the sense of betrayal she felt towards Akka, strained their relationship and caused a ripple effect on the entire family. The consequences of this departure serve as a reminder of the importance of open communication, understanding, and compromise within families. It also highlights the significance of individuality and the pursuit of personal growth within the framework of familial bonds.

#### 4. A NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

Akka's lack of trust in others stemmed from her awareness that the people in the ancestral home obeyed her solely because she was the owner of the property. This realization led her to question the authenticity of their actions and the sincerity of their intentions. Akka understood that once she transferred ownership to another individual, the power dynamics would undoubtedly shift, and she harbored doubts about how the people would react to a new authority figure. Akka's decision is not just about finding someone to take care of the physical aspects of the property, but also someone who can uphold the values and traditions that the house represents.

Through her unwavering belief in Indhu, Akka acknowledges the importance of continuity, stability, and the preservation of cultural heritage. She trusts that Indhu will not only maintain the order and harmony that Akka has established but also adapt to the changing dynamics and navigate any challenges that may arise. In entrusting Indhu with the ancestral property, Akka ensures that the legacy of the house will be upheld and that future generations will benefit from the values and traditions it embodies. The decision reflects Akka's deep understanding of human behavior, power dynamics, and the importance of finding a reliable and capable successor. Akka's scepticism towards others is overshadowed by her unwavering belief in Indhu, making her the clear choice to carry on the responsibilities and ensure the well-being of the ancestral home. Through this decision, Akka sets a precedent for the continuation of trust, loyalty, and stewardship within the ancestral home for years to come. The concept of home and hearth holds a significant place in our lives, symbolizing warmth, comfort, and stability. However, when the matriarch of the family passes away, the foundation of the home tends to crumble, leaving behind an invisible presence that lingers in the form of memories. This intangible force, reminiscent of a Jungian archetypal mother, continues to reign and shape the lives of those who remain.

##### 5. PARALLELS FOUND IN OTHER NOVELS

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, we are introduced to the character of Celie, who endures years of abuse and domination at the hands of her stepfather and later her husband. Celie's lack of financial independence is a key factor in her subjugation. As a poor, uneducated Black woman in early 20th century rural Georgia, Celie has limited opportunities to earn her own income and assert her independence. Her husband, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, controls the family's finances and uses his economic power to maintain control over Celie. He belittles her and treats her as a mere servant, reinforcing the patriarchal structure of their relationship. Celie's lack of wealth further entrenches her marginalized position within society and leaves her vulnerable to further mistreatment. In contrast to *The Color Purple*, Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* explores the dynamics of dominance within a relationship where the woman holds the economic

advantage. The protagonist, Saritha, is a successful doctor who earns more than her husband, Mano. However, instead of empowering Saritha, her wealth becomes a source of conflict and tension in their marriage. Mano, feeling emasculated and insecure, resorts to dominating and ill-treating Saritha to regain his sense of power. This dynamic highlights the complex interplay between gender and wealth. While Saritha's financial independence challenges traditional gender roles, it also exposes the fragility and insecurity of men's masculinity when faced with a reversal of power dynamics. In Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, the character of Jaya, a middle-class housewife, is caught in the web of patriarchy. Despite her intelligence and desire for independence, she finds herself constrained by societal expectations and her husband's dominance. Jaya's lack of financial independence exacerbates her vulnerability within the patriarchal structure. Her husband, Mohan, holds the power and controls their relationship as the primary breadwinner. This power dynamic is exemplified when Jaya is forced to ask Mohan for money even for necessities, creating a sense of dependence and subordination. Jaya's inability to challenge this domination is largely rooted in her economic reliance on her husband. The ill-treatment Saritha faces from Mano due to her success and the respect she receives is not solely an issue within their relationship. It reflects larger societal factors, including patriarchal norms and gendered expectations. By understanding and addressing these underlying dynamics, we can strive towards a more equitable society where individuals are not judged or mistreated based on their gender. Breaking this cycle requires challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for equal opportunities and recognition for women. The impact of Saritha's ill-treatment goes beyond the confines of her relationship with Mano. It has a detrimental effect on her mental and emotional well-being. Constant belittlement and emotional abuse can lead to feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem. Saritha may begin to question her own abilities and accomplishments, internalizing the negative messages communicated by Mano.

## 6. SUMMING UP

The economic conditions play a vital role in shaping power dynamics at both the individual and societal levels. The influence of financial stability extends beyond the ability to control and dominate others, impacting access to resources, opportunities, and the ability to challenge existing power structures. Recognizing the significance of economic conditions in understanding power dynamics is crucial for addressing inequalities and striving towards a more equitable society. The characters of Akka, Sarith, and Jaya exemplify how economic conditions strongly influence power dynamics within society. Akka's economic status plays a vital role in her ability to dominate others and assert her authority. Her wealth provides her independence, freedom, and societal recognition, allowing her to break free from traditional gender roles and challenge stereotypes. This highlights the significance of financial stability in shaping alignment of force, going beyond the traditional notions of matriarchy or patriarchy. Jaya's lower economic status places her at a disadvantage and limits her opportunities for dominance. Her financial vulnerability may subject her to exploitation and make it difficult for her to assert herself within relationships. The lack of financial resources and access to opportunities further perpetuates her marginalized position in society, emphasizing the importance of economic conditions in shaping power dynamics. In the case of Saritha her earnings stand as an obstacle however she manages to lead a peaceful life with her earnings. Every character in the aforementioned works paints a vivid picture of the importance of money in the life of an individual. Societies prioritizing dominance must recognize that, although it may sometimes be related to gender, it more commonly relates to one's financial status. As financially empowered women strive to control men, feminism has become a stale topic of discussion. Even though they are aware of the difficulties that come with having power, financially stable, powerful women prefer to pursue dominance over equality. Instead of becoming role models, they encourage men to start a campaign against them. Evidence exists to support the claim that women make appropriate use of their freedom. In case of Indu she was left to take decisions about her but she realises that the decision taken were not right. At the end of the novel, she decided to go back to her husband

Jayant, even though they had similarities. She refuses to adopt Akka's way of life, which entails distributing property among family members to exercise authority. Those who had previously taken care of Indu seem unconcerned with her situation when the land is divided, demonstrating a clear distance from her existence. Thus, wealth has been a determining force of Power which can be proved through the Case Study of Matriarchy with reference to the novel *Roots and Shadows*.

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