

Chapter III

From Subjugation to Emancipation

Women are seeking an identity and are crying to declare that they are just a being and can live in a world where men also live. They are trying to be more self-assertive and cognitive of their position and rights. But women's efforts and pursuits to extricate themselves from their sordid position and confusion in the male dominated society have further worsened their state. As a result they suffer from loneliness. Their constant search of self-autonomy and freedom proves meaningless.

Shashi Deshpande in her novel *Roots and Shadows* gives details of the development of a girl child, Mini; presents another facet of deprived womanhood through the character Akka; and shows concern with self-assertion and loneliness of Indu, the middle-class orthodox Brahmin girl.

Mini inculcates in her all the traditional feminine qualities since her childhood. Devoid of any aim she devotes herself to her family members. She is brought up under strict supervision, guidance and restrictions and is girl acquainted within the real duties of a girl. Her obedience, silence and submission never allow her to go beyond the rules and regulations set by the family for girls. She finds that life of a girl is devoid of 'choices.' Indu gauges the reason behind Mini's submission before her parent's decision of getting her married to a man who is neither educated nor mentally sound. A girl like Mini is always involved in the fetishes of traditions and household work has no other option but to remain satisfied with the things provided.

Mini accepts that ". . . I'm really good at . . . looking after a house. And to get a home, I have to get married. This is not my home, is it?" (117). Mini's psyche is fed with

this idea. Her parents growing concern to settle her marriage fills her with guilt for being a girl, guilt for remaining unmarried, guilt for being burden on her family. She feels humiliated when people reject her on the pretext of her physical appearance of the manner of her dressing. After being interviewed and rejected several times she loses all her buoyancy and enthusiasm towards marriage and her only wish is to get married at the earliest. She is conditioned to merge her aspiration and desire with those of her family members especially her father saving him from further complexities of her marriage. Indu states “Yes, any man. Any man who says “yes”. You don’t know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-Kaka running around after eligible men” (117).

Mini describes to Indu the efforts taken by her Kakas and Kakis as well as her parents to wheedle and lure the boy and his family. Every time she is rejected she feels a downcast and blames herself for putting her parents in distress. She expresses the reason behind her resolute silence and her inability to refuse the match fixed by her parents; “And finally, if everything was fine, there was the dowry. You know nothing of this, Indu. You’re lucky. You escaped all this. And now, when someone has agreed, can I refuse and make Kaka go through all of it all over again? Just because the man isn’t . . .” (118).

Mini perceives her husband’s house as her final abode and her husband as an oracle. Indian women accept their husbands with their flaws and try to live up to their desires and demands by transforming and moulding themselves. Women absorb the trends set by their predecessors, which dictate the qualities of a woman and find it difficult to free themselves from its bondage. Indu analyzes “. . . years of blind-folding

can obscure your vision so that you can no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices” (116-117). Indu on perceiving the stolidness in Mini towards her own marriage, requests her uncle to look for a better match. He rejects the idea though he too accepts that the man whom Padmini is to marry “. . . is a little ugly, may be a little stupid . . . but everything else is fine. The family is good, it’s known to us, they have money, she’ll be quite comfortable. And Akka has promised she would pay for the wedding expenses as well as the dowry if this came through. What else could I ask for?” (55).

Indu reflects Shashi Deshpande’s views that an arranged marriage is nothing “but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?” (14-15). To Indu

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 had 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.” (17)

Indu contemplates on the existence of inner strength in women and wonders how their whole life is spent slavishly without a word of appreciation for their services. As a young girl she too is advised by elderly women to inculcate in her the cherished feminine qualities. She recalls: “As a child, they had told me 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, they said, for a female to live and survive” (144).

Indu is a woman of free thinking; her thoughts are with the coming generation of women steeped in a scientific rational way of life. She has her own way to what people say: “And I . . . I had watched them and found it to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission. But still, I had laughed at them, and sworn I would never pretend to be what I was not” (144-145).

Indu finds no effort is spared to indoctrinate her to play the role of a meek and a submissive daughter, wife, and mother. Indu is a woman of determination and does not yield to the dictates of the patriarchal society. She exemplifies a woman in the transitional period that is torn between age-old traditions and individual views. It records how she defies the worn-out traditions, pushes aside all her fears about her imagined inadequacies and asserts herself as an individual. Indu returns to her ancestral place after eleven years to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant.

Akka is the youngest sister of Indu’s grandfather, who returns to her parental home as a rich childless widow; and since then saddles the whole family by establishing herself as a dictator and treating her family members as puppets. Narmada – Atya, daughter of Indu’s grandfather tells Indu about the traumatic and pathetic girlhood of Akka. She becomes the victim of the evils of patriarchal practices. At the age of twelve she gets married to a man much older than her. Childhood marriage stifles her childhood.

Narmada – Atya narrates about panic stricken Akka trying to escape her husband’s brutality. She narrates

. . . I heard that twice she tried to run away . . . a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law . . . whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. . . And then sent her back to her husband's room. The child, they said, cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, "Lock me up again, lock me up" But there was no escape from a husband then. I remember her telling me before my own marriage was consummated. "Now your punishment begins. Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels." (70-71)

A change in Akka's personality appears when her husband faces a stroke. This situation brings a change in her position. A feeble, fragile and timid person learns the technique of domination. She declares, "It's my turn now. I've listened to you long enough" (72). M. R. Varma and K. A. Agarwal in the book *Reflections on Indian English Literature* quotes Pallavi and Rashmi Gaur, who write "She becomes aware of the principle of survival of the fittest and grasped full control of the family in her own hands. . . . Akka in order to establish her supreme power over her family hides her weaknesses and emerges as a domineering woman and becomes the epitome of obduracy" (47).

When Akka returns to her father's house after the death of her husband she enforces a rigid code of conduct on women in the household. Akka symbolizes authority. Till her death, "she had maintained her power, her authority over everyone" (29). She is so obsessed with untouchability that she refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes.

The psyche of a girl child is moulded in a particular fashion to inculcate in her all types of feminine qualities. Shashi Deshpande focuses on the customs and the rituals meant for women to perform 'fasts' and 'prayers' to earn eternal wifedom as well as

peace and harmony for their family. Akka insists that a woman should never utter her husband's name, for it means not only disrespect towards him but also shortens his life span. Indu is expected to perform various rituals to ensure longevity of their husband's life and to secure good fortune. But she resents as to what connection there was "between a man's longevity and his wife's calling him by name? It's as bad as praying to the *tulsi* to increase his life span" (39). She is always accused of questioning the established norms for which her Old Uncle says, "For a woman, intelligence is always a burden, Indu. We like our women not to think" (40). Their social conditioning generates slavish attitude, which in turn creates compunctions in their psyche when they decide to change it or remould.

Akka is the surrogate mother of Indu and is very particular about how a girl should conduct herself in society. Indu, who is brought up under her control always questions her authority and wants to set herself free. Indu always defined her as a callous woman lacking compassion and mercy. Both Indu and Akka represent two different worlds. Akka represents old generation, tradition and authority, while Indu represents new generation, modernity and freedom. To be free is to be lonely and there is always the beacon light of love, which leads to the certainty of marriage.

The writer gives us a glimpse of the rigid system of marriage, which is decided not only on the basis of compatibility, caste, religion and dowry but also after satiating the demands of the groom and his parents. Indu is against the traditional mode of settling marriages because she sees Mini being pushed into an incompatible marriage by their elders. She accuses, "You're leaving out that great incalculable . . . human emotions" (95). Indu springs out of the claustrophobic world with courage and sets herself free.

When she opts for an inter caste marriage with Jayant, who is of her choice, she is segregated from the family for transgressing the traditional mode of settling marriages.

As a young female she leaves the house full of resentment and rebellion, determined to for herself and the family that it is not her home. It is a rejection of the family in the most emphatic terms. This particular place of her life gives her enough experience to know the world which exists outside the four walls. M. R. Verma and K. A. Agarwal in the book *Reflections on Indian English Literature* quotes the words of Pallavi and Rashmi Gaur, who write “But marriage invariably takes her back to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self- abnegation” (49). She is not able to free herself from the “shadow of submission” (145).

Indu’s husband betrays her hopes for harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. He fails to be her ‘alter ego.’ Indu finds that she relinquishes her identity by surrendering before his masculinity by becoming his wife. Shashi Deshpande writes that Indu always does “. . . what he wants, what he would like, what would please him” (53). Indu willingly bears everything and acts up to the expectations of her husband saying “And I can’t blame him. It’s not he who has pressurised me into this. It’s the way I want it to be . . . Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own” (53). Indu yields to the demands of marriage and moulds herself to satiate Jayant and prevents herself from retaliating, as it will certify her marriage as a failure. She decides to hide frictions of her marital life from her family. In order to show the world that her marriage is a success she puts on the mask of an obedient and a subservient wife. She tells herself

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 as success. Show whom? The world. The family, of course. And so I went on lying, even to myself, compromising, shedding bits of myself along the way. Which meant that I, who had despised Devdas for being a coward, was the same thing myself. I had killed myself as surely as he had done. (145)

Indu admits that she throttles her desires not because of her husband's pressure but because it is her own decision with which she gives up her identity and individuality. She experiences hollowness in her life even though shielded by the deceptively beautiful screen of her social graces and obligations. Marriage reduces her to a state of total surrender. She becomes a mere shadow of her husband for which she blames herself. Through Indu, Deshpande voices her views of marriage: "It's a trap . . . that's what marriage is. A trap? Or a cage? . . . 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?" (63). To Indu marriage makes her 'dependent' and defines love as "' . . . a big fraud, a hoax. . . it's the greatest thing, the only thing in life . . . the trap. . . .' . . . become humble and dependent'" (144). Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom.

However Indu cannot break herself free from the clutches of tradition and realizes that despite her education and exposure, she is no different from the women that circumambulated the tulsi plant to increase their husband's life span. She accepts that marriage is listening to husband, enduring his habits, his smell and touch, his likes and dislikes; and that a woman becomes cautious every moment about pleasing her husband.

She is scared as she is on her way to become an ideal woman by shedding her individuality and identity and to be as her husband expects. Her husband who is apparently an educated modern man is a typical Indian husband for whom she remains passive and submissive. All along, Indu plays the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. Ever ready to please Jayant, Indu acquiesces to his wills and desires and does everything to reflect his image. She gradually realizes that she doesn't exist for her but for Jayant. Had Akka not called her, she wouldn't have had time to think about her identity and selfhood, which she effaces just to prove that her marriage is a success.

Indu realizes that in the educated upper middle class the intrinsic value of even highly intelligent and capable woman is invariably affected by her social or married status, since the society treats her as an object and a possession, and never as an individual. Indu feels it's a crime to be born as a girl. She feels womanhood is a curse. She tells herself ". . . I had committed a great crime by being born a girl" (118). She tells ". . . I don't fit into the world" (98). She then questions "Where . . . do I belong?" (98). It is this search for roots that moves her to affirm her identity through the assertion of her feminine self ". . . *assert your self*. Don't suppress it. Let it grow and flourish; never mind how many things it destroys in the bargain" (122).

In order to assert her right to an independent existence, she longs to escape from the responsibilities of womanhood. She fears becoming a mother and hence she scorns her ". . . introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman" (78). To her even her womanhood is thrust upon her brutally and gracelessly, when she is told by Kaki that, "You're a woman now . . . you can have babies yourself" (78). She begins to hate herself

as she is told “for four days now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything” (78).

Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing a child. She believes that a woman’s job is only to reproduce and breed. This seems to be a blot on her feminine qualities. Hence she does not believe in mothering – an act against patriarchy. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Defying the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfillment in education and a career.

Indu works as a journalist for a woman’s magazine but gives it up out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine. Despite her reluctance, she continues the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. Through Indu, Shashi Deshpande portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality of creative writing. Indu wants to bid adieu to her monotonous service life but her husband, Jayant, is not one with her. When she tells Jayant about her disillusionment he sympathizes with her stating the same words as her editor: “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” (27).

Jayant is a barrier to her feminine urge for self-expression since he believes that one person like Indu can do nothing against the whole system by wielding her pen. Manmohan K. Bhatnagar in the book *Feminist English Literature* acknowledges the words of S. P. Swain who compares the temperaments of Jayant and Indu and writes that

“One is sympathetic to the ills of the society, the ‘system’ as Deshpande puts it, whereas the other is nonchalant. One is a writer in quest of an artistic selfhood while the other is a philistine, in pursuit of materialistic happiness” (51). Despite these temperamental differences, Indu is quite submissive. She silently goes back to her work, hating it and hating herself. Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience.

Indu compromises against her conscience with the values of a hypocrite society where success is counted sweetest. Indu, with all her self reliance and economic independence falls a victim by hiding her actions from the society in fear of being looked down upon and by failing to convince her conscience about her actions. Indu recollects that she surrenders herself to her husband Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict. She resorts to deception by putting up a facade of a happy married life, which she feels, takes its toll on her personality. She is often haunted by an “. . . usual feeling of total disorientation” (40). She expresses “For some reason I was an outsider. The waves of sorrow, sympathy and comradeship rippled all around me, but left me untouched” (37).

Indu’s suffering out of loneliness is suggested through the image of dust and barrenness and darkroom. She utters these words “Then we are out. It is a dusty, a totally barren place. The glare and the heat are both fierce. I am alone now and move along people I don’t know . . . I had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries . . . ‘I am alone’” (20-21).

Marriage is not the same thing to a man as to a woman. Indu is allowed no direct influence upon her husband, the future not the world. She has to reach out beyond herself

towards the social milieu only through her husband. Jayant is indifferent to her emotional urges. It is Indu who caters to the needs of his inner urges and drives. Indu narrates “. . . my marriage had taught me this too. 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” (43-44).

Indu, who considers herself smart, educated, independent and clever, comes to the painful conclusion that she is no better than her Kakis and Atyas. In such situations she feels alienated from Jayant. She is disgusted at the sight of strewn plates and littered remnants lying about after the meal – becomes conscious of the exemplary patience and courage women show to clear up the mess after every meal. She thinks that women like Kaki “. . . even ate off the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier. Martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools?” (68).

Several other incidents, which the writer narrates, prove Indu’s poignant awareness of the inequality that all Indian women reconcile with under compulsion. Indu finds it painful to think of her unenviable plight, as her marriage has not put her in a class apart. Indu feels in her a sense of existential angst and insecurity. Fear stricken and lacerated, she is “. . . setting . . . apart from the others” (80). She says to Naren

This is my family. These are my people. And yet . . . I hate them. I despise 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. But to what, Naren? . . . Are we doomed to

living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape? I'm afraid, Naren . . .
I'm afraid . . . (145-146)

Indu seems to have lost her selfhood, identity and needs. Even in privacy she is not able to shed her inhibitions, as Jayant hates display of passion. Jayant snubs her for which she feels humiliated. Indu ultimately realizes that she is chasing a shadow, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. She develops an adulterous relationship with Naren, which is a mere shadow to her. In a choked voice she tells Naren "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 am still and dead" (82).

Indu's belated realization is manifest in her private conversation with Naren when she expresses that it is the height of hypocrisy she practices just to flaunt that Jayant and she belonged to the smart young set. She tells

We are rational, unprejudiced, broadminded. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly, the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption, family planning. We scorn the corrupt, we despise the ignorant, we hate the wicked . . . And our hearts bleed, Naren, for Vietnam, for the blacks, for the Harijans . . .' . . . 'But frankly, we don't care a damn. Not one goddam about anything but our own precious selves, our own precious walled-in lives. (33)

Indu is conscious of the secondary position women have been condemned to. She is reminded of how a widow remains shaven headed all life after her husband's death for fear of getting ostracized. Her widowed Atya ". . . was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her" (111). She

becomes painfully aware of the fact that she is incomplete in Jayant's absence. She thinks "This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself" (38). Indu accepts that with Jayant she feels a sense of completion and wholeness. In her words "I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self" (108).

Indu misses Jayant and wants him to be beside her. She has become obsessed with Jayant: "When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him . . . Have I become a fluid with no shape, no form of my own? (53). It goes without a say that she is now an ideal woman, and does not have an independent identity of her own: "A woman who sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in her husband's?" (53). Indu also gets to know that her academic and economic success does not make any special impact on the other household women: "To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren . . . they were still for them the only success a woman could have" (109).

Indu reckons her roots in breaking away from the family but she ultimately discovers that these family bonds are the roots of one's being. These roots are the shadows, which one cannot flee from. Out of experience she says "We flatter ourselves that we've escaped the compulsions of the past; but we're still pinioned to it by little things" (41). She is left with no choice. Now Indu understands the reason behind Akka's waspish and governing attitude. Indu thinks that her elders should free themselves from the labyrinthine of rules and responsibilities with which they have enveloped themselves throughout their life. In her words "To fulfil one's obligations, to discharge one's responsibilities . . . can one not find freedom within this circle?" (24).

Indu comes to a point of realization that dissociation from the family is not possible and decides that she cannot leave her family in lurch after enriching herself with Akka's money. Akka gives her savings and wealth to Indu as she considers her to be mentally strong. Indu from her bitter experiences learns how an emancipated woman should be. She takes a firm decision on how Akka's wealth is to be put to use, with the thinking that her relatives would feel greatly offended.

Indu takes the ancestral home to be a 'trap,' which links her to the past she "had to move away from" (167). It is this house that she runs away from but still it is the one that she thinks of everyday. In course of introspection and self analysis she comes to realize that there is indeed a comfort in living as part of the family, whatever its level or quality may be. The home that she discards becomes the place of refuge, of solace and consolation. It takes no efforts to fall into rhythm of life at her family's house despite the number of years she has been away from it. Her return to the parental home makes her understand the present, offers ample opportunities to know herself, her inner life.

Indu pursues detachment throughout her life but she becomes aware that the detachment from the living is hard to achieve. This thought liberates her from the constraints of apprehension, which engulfed her since her childhood. She rebels to become complete and independent. She feels a sense of hope for life, for existence. She negates the ideas of non-existence. She says

No, there is no such thing. To accept it will be to deny the miracle of life itself. If not this stump, there is another. If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances

will pervade other airs . . . I felt as if I was watching life itself . . . endless, limitless, formless and full of grace. (165-166)

Shashi Deshpande through her character, Indu writes “Now, I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself. And free” (167-168). With this idea Indu closes the chapter of her relationship with Naren, her boyfriend who dies by drowning in a pool. Her infidelity fills her with guilt and she accuses herself for cheating Jayant by hiding her true-self and pretending to be what she is not.

Indu decides to go back to Jayant as “To think otherwise would be to take the coward’s way again” (168). She decides to go back to Jayant with the hope that she would do what she thinks correct and not be dishonest to her inner self. She reflects: “Now I would go back and see if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty. Nevertheless I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me” (168). Simultaneously she takes firm decisions in other matters as well “That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing” (168).

The meek, docile and humble Indu finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, defying the male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. She comes out of her emotional upheaval, to lead a meaningful life with her husband Jayant. Indu begins to see life in a new light. She discovers her roots – an independent woman; and the shadows are – a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She lives to see life with the possibilities of growth.

Indu asserts her position as a human being equal to that of man and does not want to submit herself to anyone’s dictates. This is the long and the short of her bitter struggle

through conflicting trends between the age-old traditions and emerging new ideas. The novelist seems to have carved out the character of Indu to effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian woman passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving social values. Suman Sandhu in the article “Emergence of New Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*” quotes Sarabjit Sandhu, who summarizes this aspect of the matter in the following words:

Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the west. (44)

Manmohan K. Bhatnagar in the book *Feminist English Literature* quotes O.P. Bhatnagar who rightly remarks: “. . . the novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with male-dominated society” (54). Rangrao Bhongle in the book *Native Responses to Contemporary Indian English Novel: The Inside View* accepts the words of K. Suneetha Rani who opines that “The storm and turmoil in Indu’s mind and life go unnoticed by the society which considers only the outward appearance of the reality. But the gap between thinking free and being free increases the intensity of the storm. She wants to free herself from the society and in her attempts she succeeds” (56). Shashi Deshpande explores the inner self of Indu who symbolizes the New women who are educated and who live in close association with society brushing aside all narrow social conventions.

Shashi Deshpande suggests that women should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. They should be mature and not care about the likes and dislikes of the living or the dead and follow their own conscience. The writer registers her awareness of the arrest of feminine development brought about by the economic system given to sheer materialistic happiness and inhabited by philistines like Jayant, and a patriarchal family-structure which produce in women dependency, insecurity, lack of autonomy and an incomplete sense of their identity.