CHAPTER-V

PSYCHIC TURMOIL OF WOMEN IN

ROOTS AND SHADOWS

Feminism does not believe in perpetuating male-created ideologies and struggles for the economic, social and racial equality of women; it challenges all such theories that sexually colonize and biologically subjugate women. An expression of the mute and suppressed female voice denied an equal freedom of self-expression; feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalization of women. Feminism strives to undo this tilted and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone and still go, unheard in a patriarchal world. Sarah Grimke observes:

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to ministry to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind…. (Grimke 1970:10)
In Feminism in Wilderness, Elaine Showalter describes three phases in the growth of feminist tradition “limitation, protest and self-discovery.” Shashi Deshpande’s novels are directly related to all these phases. They encapsulate her artistic vision of femininity. In her novels, she explores and exposes the long smothered wail of the incarcerated psyche of her female protagonists imprisoned within the four walls of domestically and sandwiched between tradition and modernity, between illusion and reality and between the mask and the face. These women, however, disown a ritualistic and tradition-bound life in order to explore their true self. Concerned with quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life. Deshpande’s heroines are all agog to retain their individually in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt graphically with the problems that confront a middle-class educated woman in the patriarchal Hindu society. In an interview (1987) Deshpande admitted that hers is not “the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles.” Rather her novels deal with the psychic turmoil of women within the limiting and restricting confines of domestically. Her heroines are not, like the women of Anita Desai, neurotic and hysterical – a Maya or a Monisha ever ready to face the “ferocious assaults of existence”, as
Desai (1979) herself told an interviewer. Deshpande does not make her women characters stronger than they actually are in their real life. She told her interviewer that her “characters take their own ways” and that her “writing has to do with women as they are.” Woman as presented in her novels is a partial being and is in need of someone to shelter her, be it her father, brother or husband. Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, says: “This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself (34).” Bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty, women in her novels are in quest of refuge, which in *Roots and Shadows* is portrayed through the image of the house.

*Roots and Shadow* explores the inner self of Indu, who symbolizes the New Woman who is educated and who lives in close association with society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. She has the freedom to talk about anything she likes and is also free to think of her own caged self besides politics, corruption and what not. Married to Jayant, Indu freely moves with Naren and uses such words as “kiss”, “rape”, “deflowered”, “orgasm (78)” and so on in her conversation with him, Indu says:

We’re gay and whimsical about our own people, our own country. We are rational, unprejudiced and 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 care a damn. Not one goddam about anything but our own precious selves, our own precious walled-in lives (25).

Through the character of Indu, Deshpande has portrayed the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potential for creative writing. Indu wants to bid adieu to her monotonous service but her husband, Jayant, does not approve of this idea. He is a barrier to her feminine urge for self-expression since he believes that a person like Indu can do nothing against the whole system by wielding her pen:

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 (17).

The temperaments of the husband and the wife are diametrically opposite to each others. One is sympathetic to the ills of the society, the ‘system’, 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. Despite these temperamental differences, Indu is quite submissive. She did not ask him, “To go where?” Instead she silently went back to her work, though hating it and hating herself for it. Here self-alienation increases as she becomes aware of the conflicting demands made on her by her desire to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine passivity and her ambition to be creative writer. Thus Indu perceives herself as a shadow of the female self, a negative and an object. Miller (1983:63) observes that “when one is an object, not a subject, all of one’s own psychical and sexual impulses and interests are presumed not to exist independently.” Indu is hedged in, incarcerated, unable to “go on” through the ordeal of life, “feeling trapped” to and seeing herself “endlessly chained (18)” in the long dusty road that lay ahead of her. When she receives Akka’s summons she heaves a sigh of relief:

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 (18).

A women’s role is not only confined to the centripetal needs of the family in which she lives but also to its centrifugal needs. It is here that a woman has to be more than a submissive housewife. She has to become a ‘society lady,’ as Shobha De would put it. Indu does not pride in her suffering. She cannot bear with the suffering she has to face in the family
and therefore breaks away from it and marries Jayant. In the family she was an incomplete being, without a sense of the wholeness of personality. But with Jayant she feels a sense of completion and wholeness, “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” (51). But did she really attain wholeness and the integration of personality? No. she is often haunted by an “usual feeling of total disorientation (38).” An outsider, she remains untouched by the milieu, for some reason I was an outsider. The “waves of sorrow, sympathy and comradeship rippled all around me, but left me untouched” (30). Her feeling of isolation from the milieu is almost Camuesque and one is reminded of what Meursault says in The Outsider:

Mother died today. Or may be yesterday. I don’t know. I had a telegram from the home: ‘Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours Sincerely.’ That doesn’t mean anything (Camus 1983:9).

Sartre’s Roquentin, unable to share the collective joy of the Bouvillois, stand alone, “But, after all, it was their Sunday, not mine” and feels “so far away” from others (1965:81, 224). It is this kind of total disorientation and isolation from which Indu suffers. We often find in the novel references to her ‘loneliness’, suggested through the images of ‘dust and barrenness (10)’ and ‘dark room (21).’
Then we are out. It is 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 (10).’

And, again, her disorientation finds expression when she says: “Our own people? Who are they? Where do I draw the boundary? (11)” Indu discovers that these family bonds are the root of one’s being, which keep on dogging on like shadows but which one cannot flee from, “We flatter ourselves that we’ve escaped the compulsions of the past; but we’re still pinioned to it by little things (34).”

Even the trifles and trivias which dog her like shadows, uproot her from her social moorings. As a woman, Indu is hardly left with any choice. Her life is so acutely circumscribed that she cannot make quick decisions:

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, especially 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 (6)?

Indu recognizes her displacement and marginalization as a woman and a process of ego-dissolution begins. She finds herself merging into others, experiencing a loss of boundaries. The authoritative and dominating male has not only suppressed the female voice but also brought silence, dullness and repulsion to the houses women live in:

The house was silent, as if tired of its pretense of liveliness. A few woman who had been left behind and who had been carrying on an interminable argument in the kitchen, their voices rising and falling monotonously, were now hustled out by an authoritative male voice (6).

Women like Indu can neither express themselves nor choose for themselves. They can neither love nor hate but be content with “the gift of silence (33)” that marriage had brought them. In silence, Indu pines for love – almost frantically:

Jayant and I…. I wish I could say…. But I cannot…. 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 me to be an exercise in futility. Neither
love nor happiness come to us for the asking (13).

Marriage is not the same thing to a man as to a woman. The two
sexes are different from each other, though one has the necessity of the
other. Simone de Beauvoir (1974:446) observes:

…. this necessity has never brought about a condition of
reciprocity between them; women have never constituted a
caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste
upon a footing of equality.

A woman like Indu is allowed no direct influence upon her
husband. She has to reach out beyond herself towards the social milieu
only through her husband. But does the husband allow it? He is
impervious and indifferent to her emotional urges. Instead, it is Indu who
has to eat to the needs of his inner urges and drives:

But 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 hear. I had my
responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage (38).

In such a situation, Indu feels alienated from Jayant. Women
experience themselves as the fulfillment of other people’s needs, “men
seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structure of her oppression.” (Ann Foreman 1977:102)

Indu is interested in creative writing – a means to articulate her feminine voice, to forge moments in art that are arresting and original. To this Jayant says ‘No’ because they need money and they have a long way to go. It is the authoritative husband who has the final say in this regard and not a meekly submissive wife like her. O.P. Bhatnagar 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 (“Indian womanhood; Fight for Freedom in Shashi Deshpandes Root and Shadows,” (unpublished paper).

Jayant betrays her hopes for harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. Nor is he ‘a sheltering tree’ to her. Instead she finds that she has relinquished her identity by surrendering before Jayant’s masculinity – by becoming his wife. Willingly she yields to the demands of marriage and moulds herself upto the dictates of her husband. But she never blames him, knowing well that it is men who ‘tear’ and women
who ‘bear’. Indu exists and yet does not exist. She does not believe in mothering. In an act of unreflecting defiance against patriarchy, she believes that a woman should deprive herself of the satisfaction that comes from not only bearing a child but also playing a major role in his/her personal development. She says, “having children…. it isn’t something you should think and plan about. You should just have them. And yes…. end up like Sunanda Atya. Pure, female animal” (115). Indu nevertheless originally tries to act up to the expectations of her husband:

Always what he wants, what he would like, what would pleas him. And I can’t blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be…. Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own (54).

Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman. It leads her to “aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose (De Beauvoir 1974:500).” Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high, for the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers a woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness:

She shuts behind her the doors of her new home. When she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the
forests were here. Now she is confine to a restricted space….

(“De Beauvior 1974:502”)

Indu plays the role of an ideal housewife but the role of a wife restricts, rather circumscribes, her self-development – firstly, by taking away her freedom of thought and expression and secondly, by denying her the scope of giving free play to her artistic potential. Regarding a woman’s role-playing. Rosemarie Tong (1993:208) observes:

Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing.

A married woman like Indu is left with practically no choice save what her husband wills and desires. She cannot unburden herself and her feminine instinct is curbed and suppressed. Despite all these, she is reluctant to admit failure and drags on with her marital life, which only imprisons her true self. She confesses to Naren: “As a woman I felt hedged in by my sex. I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me (87).”

Even is her professional life Indu has to curtail her freedom and submit to the dictates of the editor. Moreover the uncompromising Indu
surrenders at times before Jayant if only for show. The uncompromising stance that she subsequently assumes is ventilated through her dialogic imagination. Women like Indu are alienated from the product upon which they work, i.e. their body (A woman may say that she diets, exercise and dresses for herself, but in reality she is probably shaping and adorning her flesh for men. A woman has little or no say about when, where, how or by whom her body will be used. (Tong 1991:187)

Whatever Indu does, it is only to please Jayant. She herself says:

Now I dress the way I want. As I please…. As I please? No, that’s not true. When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would pleas him. And I can’t blame him…. It’s the way I want to to be (49).

A woman’s relating to other, needs tends to detract her from her own sense of identity. Indu feels as if she has become so fluid that she has no tangible shape, no form of her own. It is Indu minus the ‘I’ which renders her an ideal woman – “a woman who sheds her ‘I’, who loses her
identity in her husband’s, (49)” a woman who bears everything without a drop of tear. Marriage has reduced her to a state of “Total Surrender (52).” Through Indu, the novelist voices her own views on marriage.

It’s trap…. that's what marriage is. A trap a cage?.... a cage with two trapped animals glaring haired at each other…. isn't so wrong after all. And it’s not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself (59)?

A woman’s experience is primarily defined through interpersonal usually domestic and filial, relationships. Her identity exists “largely as being for others (needing to please, narcissist vanity and deriving security from her intimacy with others) rather than being-for-itself (Waugh 1989:43).” Indu experience herself as a woman given to physical narcissism in her self-reflexive concern with the body: often “looking in the mirror (49),” she tries to trim herself up to please Jayant and to please her narcissist self. She loves being “looked at (54).” In this context, it would be pertinent to note what John Berger has to say:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself…. She has to survey everything she is everything she does…. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another…. Men act and
women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at…. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger 1972:46-7)

Indu loathes womanhood, which is thrust upon a girl, for its association with the idea of “uncleanliness (79).” In order to assert her right to an independent existence, she longs to escape from the burden and responsibilities of womanhood. She fears her becoming a mother and scorns her “introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman.”

“Tell me, Indu, why do you fight against your womanhood so much? Do I?”

“My womanhood…. I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been brutally, gracelessly thrust on me the day I had grown up. You’re a woman now, Kaki had to me, “You can have babies yourself.” I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness…. felt an immense haired for it.”

“And don’t forget,” she had ended, “for four days now your are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything (79).” Indu
fails to establish emotional rapport with Jayant for “it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off (83).”

She confesses to Naren “When I am 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. And now, when you tried to kiss me, I thought…. this is Jayant. So that’s all I am, Naren. Not a pure woman. Not a too faithful wife. But an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it (83).

Indu’s is the paradoxical situation in which Indian women are enmeshed. Indu leads an ambivalent life. She cherishes within her heart deep and profound love but when the occasion comes to express it she retraces. This is because she is nourished and reared by a tradition-ridden society. She say:

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 (158).
But as a woman of free thinking, Indu realizes the futility of such a hypocritical life:

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 (158).

As members of the subordinate sex, women are characterized by obedience and submission and under male dominance they have to develop “a tendency to prevail by passive means.” Indu is scornful of love; to her “love is a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is…. It’s false (173).” She surrenders to him since she does “not want conflict (159).” She initially clung tenaciously to Jayant and to her marriage “not for love, alone” but because she was “afraid of failure (159).” She wanted to show to the family and the world that her marriage was a success and so had put on the mask of an obedient and subservient wife:

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 (159).
Indu problematic of “becoming” expresses Deshpande’s feminist polemics against sexual and gender roles imposed upon women in a patriarchal malist culture. Such ‘relative identity’, or rather the ‘received role models’, distort and problematize her self-perception. Such a world reduces women like Indu to a mere thing or a mind-less body, for her feminine instinct for articulation is suppressed. Ever ready to please Jayant, Indu acquiesces to his desires. Indu gradually realizes that she doesn’t exist for her but for Jayant, the archetypal male, imperialistic and subjugating. She feels in her sense of existential angst and insecurity. As a lacerated woman she rails at her family and the malist world where a girl is “never claimed” and is “set apart from the others (81).”

This is my family. These are my people. And yet…. I hate them. I despite the,. 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 the. 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…. (160)

Indu ultimately realizes that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. Naren, with whom she develops an adulterous relationship, is nothing more than a mere shadow

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to her. He has no permanent place in her memory. Hence she decides to go back to Jayant. It is she, she feels, who is to blame for the marital discord in their lives. She has created a hell out of a heaven. She, being a narcissist, “had locked herself in a cage and thrown away the keys (85).” She realizes that marriage had stunted and hampered her individuality because she had regarded it as a ‘trap’ and not a bond. Now she realizes:

But what of my love for Jayant, that had been a restricting bond, tormenting me, which I had so futilely struggled against? Restricting bond? Was it not I who made it so? Torment? Had I not created my own torment? Perhaps it was true…. There was only one thing I wanted now…. and that was to go home…. the one I lived with Jayant. That was my only home…. I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant…. I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me…. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing (187).

Thus Indu’s uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self that frantically longed for self-expression, finally finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Shadows disappear from her vision and she sees the clear light of day with the realization and discovery of her authentic
female self. Thus, as Bhatnagar puts it, “in the end comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.” (Bhatnagar 1998: 34)

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying the male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity. She come out of her emotional upheaval and decides to lead a meaningful life with her husband. The home she had discarded becomes the place of refuge, of solace and consolation. It is Akka’s house which offers her ample opportunities to know herself. It is here that she is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She begins to see life in a new light:

Yes, the house had been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now I felt clear, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary uneven edges of me (204).

Indu now feels a sense of hope for existence. Negating the idea of nonexistence, 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 (202).

The novel ends with sheer optimism. Indu asserts her individuality as a woman and she simultaneously participates in in the endless prospects of joy. Through the character of Indu, Deshpande has registered her awareness to arrest to feminine development brought about by an 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. Indu lives to see life with the possibilities of growth, she has discovered the meaning of life in her journey from individualism to a mature, compassionate woman who is sensitive towards her needs of growth as well as towards the benefits of society.
REFERENCES


