

CHAPTER - IV

INTERROGATING THE ORTHODOX TRADITION: *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* represents how one's inheritance of roots and shadows of the past claim the person even after s/he denies them. Indu, the protagonist revolts against all orthodoxy and grows out to be a modern woman with considerable English education. But finally she finds herself in the same line with Akka, her surrogate mother, the domineering arbitrator of patriarchy. For in spite of her education and modern temperament she is forced to decide everyone's future in the family. Thus in the novel two categories i.e. tradition and modernity are invoked and contested in the personality of Indu. Indu herself also goes through a sea-change and matures into a confident woman in the process. The binary oppositions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and all contradictions oozing out of them are finally resolved as Indu emerges victorious with illuminated insight and full of strength to face 'come what may'.

Indu, a married journalist, is influenced by her husband Jayant's material pursuit of happiness. Indu who has a writer's instinct in herself feels stifled as she compromises to write for the system's profit. The strangulation of free writing is intolerable for her but her husband persuades her to go on doing the job for he believes that one person cannot do much against the whole system. Any attempt on the part of an individual is but making futile gestures. They need the money in life as they have a long way to go.

Indu like a faithful wife had obeyed him. She had quietly gone back to work. She has done the work hating it and as a result she hated herself. Each day she woke up with the thought that she can't go on. She felt trapped, seeing herself endlessly chained to the long shadowy and dusty road that lay ahead of her. Naren was right to comment that Indu maintained a family shown in the advertisements slides. He said she sounded like those families in the advertisement slides – 'Happy, smiling, healthy and in colour' (25). For Indu told him in order to please Jayant and to make marriage successful she had concentrated on insignificant things. She had perfectly matched the emerging new woman elucidated by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in her essay *Real and Imagined Women*:

The woman portrayed in these advertisements is attractive, educated, hardworking, and socially aware. (131)

So Indu had tried to decorate her real self with so many insignificant attributes going against the call of her true self.

The best places, whether you go out to eat or to cut your hair. Freshly laundered clothes twice a day. Clothes ... yes, we have to keep up with the latest trends ... (25)

Indu had changed herself so much that she was running after money and fame. Her soul cried out to Naren when she expressed the vacuity of her so-called happy life. She sighed they don't have friends but they have the right contacts and they know people whom one should know.

For Indu life became meaningful when she had met Jayant. Like any other Indian girl she too had been waiting to meet the person of her life with great expectations. Then one day she met Jayant and she thought she had found the purpose of her life. The day she had met him it seemed that a burden, the weight of uncertainty had fallen off her. She had felt absoluteness and a certainty instead. She had known that it was this man that she was waiting for. Indu soon realizes that she like any other Indian woman had wrong opinion about marriage and romanticism. As she later ponders over it while thinking about Mini. She thinks that the picture of marriage not only for Mini but for most of the brides in this country had always been false. Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, marriage was after all nothing but two persons, brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce only for the generations to continue.

Indu remembers the day when she had met Jayant. Like any other traditional girl she had woven the dream of perfect happiness. Indu's love, care and dependence on Jayant was so much that her every movement she was in thought of him.

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 please him. 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. And one day I had thought... isn't there anything I want at all? (49)

In this game of pleasing, she gradually became what she never was. She even resorted to lies in order to please and be a true Indian wife. She had found in herself an immense capacity for deception. She had learnt to reveal to Jayant only what he wanted to see. She said to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. She hid her responses and emotions. She had almost become like fluid with no shape and form of her own. She too thought in this way to be the ideal woman. She became a woman who sheds her 'I', and one who loses her identity in her husband's. She devoted herself completely to the task of becoming an ideal wife. For this she also decided that for her there should be only one man. She should be essentially monogamous: For me, it's one man and one man only. (81)

Such was her devotion that she thought that she can never be complete in herself. Until she had met Jayant she had not known it that there was somewhere outside her, a part of her without which she remained incomplete. Then she met Jayant and lost her ability to be alone.

This is the truth about her relationship. The dependent syndrome in her snatched her capacity to be alone. But every person is essentially alone. This is the truth of life. The individual self does matter a lot as relations with others matter. Indu tried to cage herself and wanted to done a 'self' of Jayant's liking. But soon she realizes the utter vacuity and callousness of such type of dependence. She finds that they are two individuals whose vibrations do not match. They do not sing in the same tune. It was not that Jayant and Indu did not care for each other. It was more like they were on different levels. He chooses his level and Indu tries to choose the one he would like her to be on. It anyhow humiliates her.

In spite of this humiliation Indu goes on with Jayant. Indu had even thought of blessed sexual happiness along with Jayant. When Jayant had touched her she had "burgeoned into a flower of exquisite felicity." (83) Her responses to him were very natural, so much beyond her and outside her. But there was a small crack in their otherwise perfect relation. Jayant was very passionate and ready but sitting up suddenly he denied having sex if Indu had taken the initiative. This crack gradually grew into a chasm. Gradually Indu discovered that it shocked him to find passion in her. It puts him off. When Indu takes the initiative, he turns away from her. Indu who was so passionate in loving Jayant was thus made to grope in the dark for fulfilment. As a result she learnt not to show off her real self:

A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately and is ashamed of it. (83)

Indu found the big fracture between her romantic ideals and practical realities. She could understand now that between the ideal and the reality there remains an unfathomable distance. On the contrary Jayant could never accept refusal from Indu. So even if Indu did not want, she pretended. She thought of Jayant and knew how unbearable he was. She feared to shatter him with withdrawal.

Indu knew whatever was going between them was not acceptable. She had found that Jayant had reached her body but not her soul which is never fair:

Jayant and I at the end of one of our moments of love-making. And I, aghast at my total self abandonment, had cried out. 'It's not fair.' And Jayant, staring at me in bland astonishment, moving off me without asking me why I had said that and what it meant. (127)

Thus they remained lying as two straight lines never fated to merge into one. Indu resorted to surrendering to him in order to avoid any conflict. She came to realize now that she did not do it for love as she had been telling herself. She did it to avoid any conflict. She was now an adept in the game of hiding the real feelings and emotions:

Do I not, with Jayant, hide my real emotions and urges and shelter behind a facade of caring-but-not-so-terribly-much? (130)

Perhaps all these pretensions, all these desires to satisfy the husband a woman associate her bodily desires with guilt and shame. This was same with Indu. It seemed to her that some ancient guilt still lies in her. She wondered how that makes people, even today to associate bodily desires with guilt and shame. Indu had once thought that her chasing for an alter ego was complete with Jayant. She had felt that in marrying him she had become complete. Earlier she had felt incomplete not only as a woman, but also as a person. In Jayant she had thought she had found the other part of her whole self. She had thought they had total understanding and perfect communication between them. But soon she had realized that her ideal of perfect communication was a hoax. She had realized that it was an illusion. She had felt cheated. But then again she had thought if perfect understanding can ever exist.

In spite of knowing that it is a vain search to have perfect understanding, she suffered. She suffered for she cared for her husband too much which in itself is a punishment as Old Uncle told her:

To care for anyone too much... It's all pain. A punishment. (107)

Even when Indu was in her home, she could not leave thinking of Jayant. Jayant was physically absent but reminded her of his existence in her life through sending a letter. The material hankering was clearly visible in his words. He had asked her to shake the dust of her place off and to return to him. He wanted to make their plans together which needed them together. These words clearly show his total callousness for his wife's feelings. In uttering these words he almost sounded like Shankarappa for whom Indu had thought:

How could a man be so insensitive to another's feelings? (185)

For Jayant's insensitiveness Indu had even thought of leaving him to stay alone and be just herself. That is the only way in which she can be herself- her whole self again. But she thought her dissatisfaction might have arisen from her too much expectation from Jayant. She remembers one of her friends saying:

You expect too much and you're bound to be disappointed. And so I'm grading my expectations down. Each month, each day, I expect less and less and less from him. (55)

Perhaps this was the answer for a healthy relationship. If we don't expect our chance of disappointment also scales down. Otherwise two human beings living under the same roof can never reach out to one another. It will always be a trap for individuals.

A trap? Or a cage? Maybe 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? (61)

Indu too felt stifled in the cage of the institution of marriage which outwardly seemed to be a happy union. So on Old Uncle's query if Indu was happy with him, Indu had answered that if he wanted to mean if her husband was the right person for her he was. But she sighs that marriage makes one so dependent. She too has become very dependent though she did not know about men.

It was old Uncle who made her understand that to be dependent is unavoidable and inevitable in a relationship. He has told that the whole world is made up of interdependent parts. So Indu is not an exception. Talking to Old Uncle she seemed to get meaning not only for herself but for everyone in the world. Indu had earlier thought how it was possible that one would give one's all expecting nothing in return. Old Uncle made her think that if all the bacteria in the world were to die, the rest of life would be unable to exist. He told her that people can't escape attachment. For it is the law of life. She can never protect herself against love. Indu could understand that being a human being it was almost impossible to reach the stage of no passions, no emotions – an unruffled placidity. Indu was given immense understanding as Old Uncle said to her. She understood that in spite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations in a relationship one goes on getting involved. That is the human predicament. Indu could understand that however much she wanted to escape her lot with Jayant it was almost impossible, for that's the coward's way.

Indu is an amalgamation of tradition and modernity. This is the reason that she is the emergent new woman. She has the qualities to overthrow orthodox traditions. It is, therefore, very important to trace out Indu's cause for surrendering to Jayant and later to Naren for sexual satisfaction. Indu a rebel at heart leaves her ancestral home but carries within herself the traditions of the house. So even after becoming independent economically, she submits to Jayant and is disillusioned of her romantic concept of marriage. She comes back home only to bathe in the light of knowledge. Here she interacts with her past and gains insightful knowledge. She even commits adultery but feels no guilt for it. As if this adultery was necessary for her to understand Jayant and above all to understand herself. Her writer's instinct which was so long stifled, finds new lease of life. She finds or rather discovers herself in the new light. She thinks:

There was nothing I couldn't do. Words, phrases, sentences, fell out of nowhere into my mind and arranged themselves with a beautiful precision, like ballet dancers. And I was filled with an exalted sense of confidence within myself.
(154)

In order to understand Indu's motives, her interactions with the past must be studied very minutely. Indu was brought up in the austere protocols propagated by her mother-surrogate Akka, who single-handedly ruled her father's house after coming back there as

a widow. Indu was at the mercy of ruthless, dominating bigot and inconsiderate Akka. Akka did not go to the hospital because she did not know the caste of the nurses and the doctors. She thought she could not drink a drop of water in the hospital. Akka did not accept Indu's marriage for she married outside of her caste. She believed that such marriages never work. For as they are from different castes, their languages are different, it can not last long. Such was the orthodox culture of Akka who believed in religion above human emotions. Indu remembers the concept of woman envisaged to her in that house. She had been told that a woman's life contained no choices. And all her life, especially in that house, she had seen the truth of that conception. The women there had no choice but to submit and accept. And Indu had wondered if the women were born without wills, or if their wills got atrophied through a lifetime of disuse. Indu had just done the same in her own life. She too had surrendered her will in the will of Jayant. Akka was such bigotry that she did not permit Indu's mother to learn music. She disapproved the fact that she had to learn music from a strange man. She had to sit and sing in front of strangers like '*those women*'. She disapproved because of family honour. She thought it was enough for her to sing one or two devotional songs and one or two *aarti* songs. She thought a girl from a decent family should not need anything more. Akka's words were like oracle in the family. No one ever dared to contradict her. So after Indu's mother's death no one talked of her in the family. Indu had lost her mother at birth. There was nothing unique about losing one's mother at birth. But a child often losing its mother gets some idea of her from others, from photo, from conversations. But to Indu no one had ever spoken of her mother or even mentioned her name. For her it had been a total blank. This blankness had left deep mark on her. And however incredible it may sound Indu had not even known of her mother's existence until Naren had said to her once, boastfully that his mother died by drowning. So did his father. He then asked her how her mother died. The mark was so deep that after being motherless Indu quailed at the thought of becoming a mother for fear of being disillusioned. Indu's father had shown utter hardness in leaving a fifteen-day-old motherless girl in the care of the family he hated and despised. He had only come to see her when she was more than a year old. So early in her childhood she did not get the love and affection of her parents. Being a traditional family the women had earnestly disapproved the fathers in the female role of caring for the child. It may be one reason for her father's detachment. Indu had even thought that as she was a female child, her father could do so. It was the tradition in their family that girls were left to their mothers. The daughter was exclusively the mother's

business. Certainly Indu was deprived of the care that a child should get. Indu was chiefly in the care of Akka and Atya – the two widows in the family. Akka was stern and strict for her while Atya fell in the category of givers. Even Atya never crossed the line chalked out by Akka. So the teachings that went in to the girl children in the family were that being a female they have to submit, surrender or give in. There is no other choice. As Mini puts it ever since they were small they were told that they'll be going away one day to their own home. They said it to Indu and Mini, never to Hemant or Sumant or Sharad or Sunil. Indu had seen the position of women in her home. From morning to night their sole duty was to ensure that cooking, feeding and taking care of the children and men were done in time. They patiently did the chores and never thought of reversing the duty. They were so shaped and moulded that for them the other way was anarchy. It was not that the female members like Akka, Atya, and Kaki wanted the girls to be submissive and meek. The males too had the same opinion. Kaka had once commented in a mood of anger:

Women and children should know their places. (48)

Once taunted by Sunanda Atya for being intelligent Indu had thought if being clever was a disgrace. She had sobbed out her hurt to old Uncle. He had made her understand what people want from women. He had said that for woman intelligence is always a burden. He declared that men like women not to think. The women in Indu's house patiently cleared up the mess with their bare hands after each meal. And women like Indu's Kaki used to take food in the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier. Indu wondered if they were martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools. As a child Indu used to watch the woman piously circumambulating the *tulsi*, standing devoutly in front of it folding hands and closing eyes. Out of curiosity she had asked Atya what was that for. Atya had told Indu that if one prays to *tulsi*, she will keep a woman's husband safe. To Atya good fortune meant that a wife should not survive her husband as she had. But to grown up Indu good fortune means many more things. But she too is pinioned to the ancient belief and culture. So she always longed that Jayant should be with her always - all the time and forever. So basically she is not different from Atya. So in thinking like this Indu too is a traditional woman who in spite of modern education and independence has not stepped much forward. The tradition is injected in her. So if she does not think of her as stern Brahmin, she has evolved her own class:

We Indians can never get away from caste. If we've rejected the old ones, we've embraced new ones. Do I think of myself as a Brahmin? Rarely, if ever. But I'm the educated, intelligent, urban, middle class. We have our own rules, our own pattern, to which I adhere as scrupulously as Atya and Kaki observe their fasts and pujas. (58)

Indu on coming back home also meets women who had seen her as a small child. Indu knew what mattered to them was that Indu was a childless woman. This is the society which wants women to have babies as soon as they are married. So Kaku, the old woman spoke to her contemptuously. Indu knew that those women had their own standards for judging others. They do not think of Indu or her academic distinctions, her career, her success, her money. None of these things would impress them.

This type of women was proud of having their names changed by their husbands after their marriage. Indu was brought up amidst them and somehow or other their way of thing was there in her too. Otherwise why could she not think of her existence without Jayant.

Even after growing up Indu could not accept her womanhood gracefully. This is reflected in her writing too. Naren had told her about her writing that had he not known who the writer was, he would have thought it was a man. Indu remembers what went wrong about her womanhood. The knowledge of her womanhood had been thrust on her the day she had grown up:

'You're a woman now,' Kaki had told me, 'you can have babies yourself.'

I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, baldly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had had all the child's unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it.

'And don't forget', she had cried. 'for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything.' (79)

So such had been her introduction to the beautiful world of woman. She was given the concept that she was unclean. She had also been a victim of child abuse. Home, within the boundaries of which a girl child is supposed to be safe, had been unsafe for Indu. At

the age of fifteen when she was learning to ride the bicycle, she had accepted her uncle's help. She had accepted the help gladly until she had felt his '*helping hands*' giving her the age old messages of male to female. At fifteen she was woman enough to have that instinctive knowledge of male hunger. But she was child enough to panic with the knowledge of being the object of it. She had avoided him ever since.

Amidst all these bizarre experience, Indu was fated to be different and successful. For it credit goes to her father who admitted her to an English School in order to make her different from others. So he had instructed that she must have to go to an English School.

Her father had asserted himself by claiming her for going to an English School Indu's vision had broadened and she had the strength to oppose even the domineering Akka. Akka had once scolded her for standing alone in the corner of the library while talking to a boy. She had made it clear how she deviated from the family tradition, for no girl from the family has been ever talked about. But Indu had gathered courage to withstand Akka's wrong allegations.

It was as if I had been accumulating. 'I won'ts' since my birth. Now it had become a mountain of a negation, giving me an immense strength to withstand.
(74)

She had shocked Akka by saying that she was not ashamed of as she had done nothing wrong. But Akka too had her weapon:

I don't know where you get it from. Your father was such a quiet boy.' - she had eyed me with her shrewd, calculating look - 'until your mother trapped him.'
(74)

Indu had always venerated the sacred love between her parents who had the courage to break the insurmountable barriers of caste and lived intensely blessed life together. Akka's word had been for Indu profanation and desecration. The same day she had written to father and made her plans for leaving.

Thus Indu left her home with immense hatred for it. The hatred was so deep that when Akka made her the heir to her property, she sensed something ill in it. She thought Akka did not spare her even when she was dead and had her last laugh on her. So talking to Naren she spat venom for Akka. She viciously said how she wished to poison her. The

rebel was always alive in Indu but it needed the necessary impetus. Indu was denied sexual happiness with Jayant for he could not accept a passionate wife. She had always wanted involvement not detachment. When Naren had touched her, she had felt as if she had found out 'one more piece of the jigsaw puzzle.'

On returning from Naren's home Indu had seen a great change in her:

The same trees, with the same crows cawing their silly souls, if they had any, out. And yet it all looked different. The change was in me. Suddenly I understood all those poets and writers who had gushed about the grass being greener, the sky bluer, and the flowers more beautiful ... all because of love.
(88)

And finally when she had sex with Naren it made her feel blessed. She had thanked Naren for it. Even after sex outside marriage, her conscience was not pricked for she had committed no crime. After this act she found herself with immense potentialities. No more she would have to take male's point of view and deny her femaleness.

Her sexual instinct had remained unsatisfied until she had met Naren. There was ease and comfort between them even after their act of adultery. For Naren too it was like performing some rite with solemnity and earnestness. As both of them had been true to their sexual instinct without any pretension, it did not appear to them as crime. It rather enriched Indu to face the world with boldness and certainty which was earlier lacking in her. They had done that for motives of their own:

Can I tell you, Old Uncle, how we made use of each other? Can I tell you we made love? Not for love, nor lust either, but for motives of our own. He ... ? To get back at the family? At me? And I? To get back at Jayant?' (179)

It was as if she got the answer of all her questions. She now knew that it was foolish to hanker for perfect happiness. Old Uncle's words that the whole world is made up of interdependent things also seemed to bear meanings. Finally after deciding to make a Trust out of Akka's property she was to go back home. Naren too was dead. With his death, Indu was overcome with grief and loneliness:

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. (176)

Indu's father had also sensed that something was wrong with her. He sounded like a knell when he asked her:

And when are you going back to Jayant, Indu? (163)

Indu knew her father well. It was her father's flashes of shrewdness which belied his apparent naiveté. Indu had tried to sound certain of herself and said that she would leave perhaps within a week.

Gradually interacting with her past, bathing in the blessed sea of sexual fulfilment and through introspection Indu came out with the solutions. Indu had decided to go back to Jayant and wanted to see if her 'home could stand the scorching touch of honesty.' (187) She had made up her mind not to tell Jayant about Naren and herself. For she thought it was not important:

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 at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I would not, could not enrich myself with Akka's money. That I would, on the other hand, pay for Mini's wedding. (187)

So far she was in her shell where she reduced herself day by day to a non-entity. In the process in the name of love and submission she was alienated from Jayant which is never an answer:

Alienation, I know now, is not the answer. On the contrary, too much of it and we can die of a terrible loneliness of the spirit. 'I am alone'... they seem to me to be the most poignant words in any language.' (10)

When Indu had first revealed to Jayant about her plans that she would give up her job and devote herself to writing, Jayant had been furious and unbelieving. But Indu could show her firmness and anger to make him understand that he can no longer influence her. It was her fault earlier for not revealing either her strength or weakness to him. But when she opened herself to Jayant they had better chance of happiness. There is an ease in their

relationship that was not there earlier. Indu is illuminated with knowledge and understanding. She no more fantasises to achieve complete happiness with Jayant. She thought of the cries that had filled her earlier. She wanted to be loved, she wanted to be happy. The cries are now silenced not because she is satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to her futile exercise. Neither love nor happiness come to people for the asking. But they can sneak up on anyone when one least expects them. Indu remembered how one day she came away tired, dishevelled and almost in tears from her writing thinking if her writing would remain still-born. It was Jayant who comforted her. Jayant had said putting his arms comfortingly around Indu that he would publish that. And Atya brought her a cup of tea. Indu never knew happiness was made up of such little things. It was Jayant to comfort her after Old Uncle's death. She had spoken to him about Old Uncle that he was one of the pillars of their house. Jayant had comforted her with something very revealing. He had said that such things happen. He had said that Indu herself was a pillar. Indu had got new perception. She now believes that it is not the dead who need our loyalty, but the living.

It is for his reason that she broke her promise to Naren. He had made her promise not to help Vithal but he was the first to benefit from Akka's Trust. Realisation dawned on her as she remembered Old Uncle's words:

The whole world is made up of interdependent parts. Why not you? (14)

She now knows that everything in the world is connected with each other so freedom has to be always relative:

'All things are connected.' Yes, they are. Which is why no one can be completely free. Freedom has to be relative (14)

Indu had thought twice in her life that she was free. First when she had left home as a young girl. And the second time when again she left the family after Naren's death to return to Jayant. Both times she found out that she was wrong in her pursuit of freedom:

New bonds replace the old, that is all. (14)

Indu thought of her childhood days when on reversing the rigid pattern of serving food she had met with catastrophic result. On trying to evade the rules Old Uncle had made her understand the importance of rules in one's life. So that life can have both dignity

and grace. One can always find streaks of freedom within these rules. The words returned to Indu loaded with meaning:

To fulfil one's obligations, to discharge one's responsibilities ... can one not find freedom within this circle? (15)

With all this understandings Indu finally resorts to writing for that is the only thing she can do. It is writing which can give her peace and satisfaction. The creative self had so long been suppressed. Now with maturity she can put her mind in black and white with confidence.