Chapter 4

Doves with Cut-off Wings: Marital Crisis

Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* initiates the chapter on ‘The Married Woman’ with the statement:

> Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution. (145)

Both Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni very extensively deal with the issue of marriage in all their works. In their married life women endure several injustices perpetrated by a male dominated society. Their dignity and strength derive from their belief in certain manifestly Indian verities, which include maintenance of family relations and the sacrosanct nature of marriage.

They deal with the psyche of the modern women, who wish to talk about the upheavals that the meeting of traditional concept of wife and the changing modern gender roles is causing in their lives. Their definition of self is thus at stake, and their desire to preserve traditional mores despite the inherent gender inequality places them in an uncertain position. The contradiction is clearly seen between the attachment to traditional roots and the desire to be progressive even with relation to the age-old custom of marriage.

Modernity itself is a site of contestation which has not spared marriage and marital relationships. For Indian women the ‘modern’ is often identified with the
‘western’ which is usually considered taboo because of its so-called liberality. They prefer the combination of modern, progressive and traditional rather than insist on only being progressive. Being modern for them would be disengaging themselves from the ‘norms and limits’ set by the society. Some aspire to break the norms, so for them the modern is a positive value. But there are others for whom modernity is a threat, a disruption of their secure world. Tradition and modernity are both subject to change as Pankaj K. Singh writes about tradition and modernity in *Re-presenting Woman*

Tradition, however, need not be identified with orthodoxy since to have relevance for its people it has to be flexible and alive, adapting itself to the changing realities. Rather than a chronological phenomenon modernity is a matter of attitude and arises when consciousness, individual or social, breaks away from established norms, conventions and beliefs, questioning them or an extreme step rejecting them, possibly to reconstruct them afresh…Doubt, question, subversion and reconstruction could be described as the paradigms of modernity. (Singh 7)

As the present chapter deals with the portrayal of marriage it would be relevant to discuss gender and patriarchy in the Indian context. It must be admitted that most issues of social life have a ‘gender’ aspect. Similarly female subordination is now understood as more complex than was originally realized. Feminist anthropologists; have pointed out that there is no such thing as universal female subordination. Subordination was never uniform even within the same period of history. The term gender initially was used to “distinguish sex as a biological category from the social and cultural distinctions that being a man or woman entailed.” (Oakley
86) Gender, according to this view, is the cultural expression of sexual difference. Any society at any time stipulates a set behaviour for each sex which every man and woman has to follow. This distinction between sex and gender became a major tool of feminist theory and politics in the west. The meaning, scope and significance of ‘gender’ has enlarged over the years. Gender can be recognized as involving three elements which are not autonomous but interacting. “There is the aspect of meaning and signification; there is the organization of men and women in social relations and there is also the component of personal identity. Correspondingly, there are three levels of experience-social, psychic and symbolic.” (Krishnaraj 9)

Patriarchy has been a convenient tool of analysis to explain gender inequality, to explore how its basic essentials articulate with culture, class and ethnicity and to capture the depth and pervasiveness of women’s subordination. The theory of patriarchy as developed by radical feminists nevertheless helped to bring the private into the realm of public discourse and action. To criticize marriage is not of course new, since nineteenth-century socialists, and indeed many feminists at that time, were opposed to marriage laws that denied women legal rights, just as they were opposed to an economic system that forced women into loveless marriages and kept them tied to cruel and perhaps dissolute men. The radical feminists went further however, alleging that

marriage is at the very root of woman’s subjection to the man because through it man controls both her reproduction and her person. Few aspects of marriage and the family remain unscathed in this attack, although perhaps it is the position of the wife as ‘unpaid domestic labourer’ and the traditional sex roles within marriage and the family that come under the heaviest and most frequent fire. Romantic love is
another favourite target since it is seen as a way of trapping women into accepting their own oppression. (Banks 230)

The woman’s experiences of life as a member of a gender biased society formulate her psyche. Modern critical theories lay emphasis on psycho-analysis because gender differences are now based on the mental make-up more than anything else. Indian women today are also aspiring towards equality and liberation. They have not lost sight of the reality that no easy solution is possible in patriarchal societies. However, they are no longer submissive and are ready to endure and prevail over society with their inner strength and integrity.

Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Divakaruni have very vividly brought out the marital problems of their protagonists who are placed in different situations and belong to different sections of society. Shashi Deshpande deals with the position of women within the traditional family structures. Her protagonists are projected as strong, yet traditional women who assert the power of womanhood. Their feminine strength is conclusively proved by their ability to distinguish and espouse right against the wrong. Their dignity is continuously reinforced by the traumatic emotional and physical experiences. They question and protest even though they finally bow down to situational pressures, in a powerful patriarchy. Deshpande feels that even registering their skepticism has an impact on society, though her protagonists finally conform. As Rosemary Tong observes regarding role-playing in a woman’s life that the role of wife restricts and circumscribes women’s self development:

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. (207).

Divakaruni writes about marital relationships in India and how they change when the shift to new geographical locations is made. It comes with ease and skill because she is situated on the bridge between two worlds herself. “It is entirely natural that one’s sensibilities are defined by one’s location and background, entirely natural, therefore that perceptions differ, as do expectations.” (Deshpande, Writing from the Margin 47)

Divakaruni who has been born and brought up in India has witnessed the trends in matrimony in India. Her experiences as a teenager in India are reflected in some of her (online) articles which discuss the criteria for would-be brides. “White Complexion Pink Cheeks” discusses the obsession of Indians with a fair complexion and “Uncertain Objects of Desire” discusses the change in attitudes reflected in the matrimonial ads in leading Indian dailies, reflecting the effect of modernization not only in the natives but, also on the Indians living in the diaspora. As she points out in her article “Uncertain Objects of Desire”, “In India, a country that straddles the old and the new, a good place to look for signs of shifting values might be the matrimonial columns of The Times of India.”

A comparative study of the manner in which Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande take up the issue of marriage in their works, a detailed study of Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande and Vine of Desire by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is fruitful. Both novels take up entirely different tales- the first deals with the experience of a professional Indian woman whose marriage is threatened by her feeling that her husband is no better than an average Indian male. In Divakaruni’s
novel two marriages are discussed and assessed and finally both fail due to one reason or the other. In *Roots and Shadows* the protagonist Indu returns to her roots – her ancestral home and her observation of various generations and their attitude towards marriage determines Indu’s final decision about her own. This novel brings out the hopes, fears and disappointments which the women experience in their marital lives. Yet when it comes to making a choice between breaking up and returning to the husband, she comes back because for Deshpande running away is not an act of courage. Whereas in *Vine of Desire* Anju and Sudha are women who adopt a defiant stand and do not return to their husbands, or even to the men who love them. They wish to survive independently of the male influence. Anju cannot forget and forgive the infidelity of her husband and Sudha does not want to be a prisoner at the hands of men who apparently wish to come to her aid, but would finally exercise complete control over her. She would rather bring up her daughter alone according to her own wishes.

The novel *Roots and Shadows* begins with the marriage of Mini, Indu’s cousin, which is performed in a traditional way in their ancestral home. This makes Indu retrospect about the events which led to her returning home after a long gap of eleven years. Indu being a rebel had left home at the age of eighteen to live life on her own terms but she has returned on being summoned by Akka, who is on her death bed. Akka an old aunt of Indu’s who was made to suffer due to the infidelity of her husband makes her sole beneficiary of the whole property. Through the character of Akka, Deshpande successfully portrays the paradoxical situation that results out of the inability of the woman to raise a voice against any atrocity inflicted on her in marriage. She can neither revolt against the oppression and the sexual discrimination she has to undergo nor can she assert herself as his wife. Akka gets even with her
husband when he is incapacitated by a paralytic stroke by not allowing his mistress, whom he adores, to meet him. She performs her wifely duties by taking care of him for two years in his invalid condition. Ironically, she who had once yearned to be liberated from the marriage bond, on her return to her father’s house enforces a rigid code of conduct on the other women in the household. She insists on their not uttering the ‘husband’s name’ as it would shorten the latter’s life span. Indu being an educated woman resents such traditional practices but like other protagonists of Deshpande she is caught up in the age old customs and traditions. Despite being torn between her exposure to the world outside and the clutches of tradition, she eventually realizes she is no different from the women who circumambulate the Tulsi plant and believe that woman’s good fortune lies in dying before her husband. Shashi Deshpande in her essay *Writing from the Margin* states that “no literary tradition could save us from being marginalized in India, because the literary tradition itself would exclude women. This is because of the very deeply ingrained belief, still very much practiced, that women have their own place.” (154)

Akka represents the old order, and is fanatically obsessed with caste and the moral conduct of girls. Even when she is on her death bed she refuses to go to the hospital because as she puts it, “God knows what caste the nurses are or the doctors. I could not drink a drop of water there.” (Roots and Shadows 24) She also puts her foot down when Naren’s mother wants to learn music, saying:

What, learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like THOSE women? Are we that kind of family? Isn’t it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know? (55)
At one point in time in her life she herself is a victim of gender oppression but she perpetuates the same victimization as far as her influence extends. Women live in the midst of a vast diversity of discourses, and are simultaneously located in several sets of social relations. It is these multiple relations that are taken into account. As Deshpande aptly remarks in *Writing from the Margin*;

> The women in my novels, like the women in India today, or indeed like women or humans anywhere, have so many forces working on them – and all at the same time. There’s history and culture, there’s religion and customs, there are individual and family faiths and beliefs, family traditions and histories. And last not but the least, there are people around us and their expectations and our relationships with them. (160)

The issue of child marriage is also taken up by Deshpande through Akka in the novel. Akka becomes a child bride and is now a dominating and dictatorial matriarchal figure. Indu often recollects inhuman treatment endured by Akka as narrated by Narmada Atya’

> She was just 12 when she was married. And he was well past 30. Remember him still…Six months after her marriage, she ‘grew up’ and went to her husband’s home. What she had to endure there, no one knows. She never told anyone…But I heard that twice she tried to run away – a girl of 13. Her Mother-in-law, I heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days, starved her as well. 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. (77)

Akka, as a child bride, could not rise up in revolt, but on the other hand had
continued to suffer and later in life help to perpetrate such oppression. The question
that arises is did she have a choice there?

The young girl meets one crisis in passing from childhood to
adolescence; it is another and more violent crisis that plunges her into
adult life. To the disturbances easily provoked in woman by a too
abrupt sexual initiation are added the anxieties inherent in all transition
from one state to another. (Beauvoir 476).

But later the same child bride even derives pleasure in informing her paralyzed
husband that she threw his mistress out when she came to meet him. Akka’s life very
poignantly describes the plight of many a married women in traditional societies. Her
confession to Narmada that she has never spent a single night of her married life
without shedding tears points towards the trauma and suffering that change the
attitudes of woman towards traditional attitudes. As Ipshita Chanda in
*Conceptualizing the ‘Popular’ and the ‘Feminist’* states that

Women through their negotiations of the social structures in the course
of everyday life are agents of change. The women’s movement’s
activity hinges upon this fact, and its rationale is the process of giving
direction to this change in keeping with feminist ideology. (23)

Though, she further states, that in practice it becomes difficult to implement,
these changes, because of the sheer diversity of the condition of women, their
responses and the factors that influence them. There are several incidents which reflect that Indu in *Roots and Shadows* has always been playing the role of a perfect wife to keep her husband happy. Simone de Beauvoir aptly states that

In marrying, woman gets some share in the world as her own; legal guarantees protect her against capricious action by man; but she becomes his vassal. He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his ‘half’. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband’s universe. (449)

Indu has her own set of emotional outbursts which prove that she has been exercising extreme control over herself in order to protect her marriage. It becomes difficult for her at one point of time to accept her compromise in this matter as she has all along been fooling herself that she is different from her Kakis and Atyas. The most glaring example is when she is unable to get her husband’s Jayant’s support when she tells him how frustrated she is with her work. Indu, expects her husband to understand her standpoint when she tells him about the hypocrisy of her Editor and the social worker she had interviewed. But Jayant ignores and replies: “That’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget we have a long way to go.”(19)

Indu therefore continues writing for the magazine despite hating every moment of it. She ignores her conscience and writes only that which will be accepted
by the editor. She is also stifled by the fact that she has left her middle-class values and become a part of the rat-race. But her reunion with Naren offers her an opportunity to vent her frustrations about having become a part of the success-oriented society. She shares with Naren her experiences of her artificial life with Jayant;

We belong to the smart young set. Do you know what that means? Fresh flowers in the house everyday…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…we don’t have friends, but the right contacts and “people one should know.” Who entertain us just as often as we entertain them. And when we get together …oh, you should listen to us Naren. We talk with nostalgia of places abroad. We are gay and whimsical about our own people…our own country. We are rational, unprejudiced, broad minded. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly, the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption and 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 goddamn about anything but our own precious selves, our own precious walled in lives. (28)

It is evident that Indu is exercising extreme control over herself in order to keep her husband happy and to make her marriage work, even though she is educated and economically self sufficient and inclined towards a feminist stance. Her affair with Naren shows her disillusionment with her husband Jayant’s materialistic attitude to life, and his resentment at the display of passion on her part. He expects his wife to
be coy, and not shed her inhibitions even in the privacy of their bedroom. But Indu cannot totally become indifferent to her husband, her homecoming after a long absence makes her feel very happy but this happiness is incomplete without Jayant by her side. She thinks, “This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself.”

(34) She questions herself, whether she is actually independent, as she realizes that under the guise of independence, it is rearing and circumstances which have conditioned her to become as acquiescent as any other Indian wife. And she realizes that Jayant’s needs have always mattered to her. The thought of becoming an ideal woman frightens her. But unknowingly or knowingly Indu emulates the ideal woman because of her traditional upbringing. From their early childhood, girls are taught to remain happy in their married life under any circumstances, and thus incorporate these ideals in their psyche.

This desperate need to assert herself, combined with the attraction she feels for her cousin Naren, and the compatibility they share makes Indu take a bold step in yielding herself to him. She refuses to be consumed by remorse and in fact deliberately savours the memory of it, refusing to wipe it out of her mind. She feels that her sexual encounter has nothing to do with her husband Jayant, so she resolves not to tell him anything about it. This act in itself is reflective of the conflicting tendencies in Indu’s nature. Her expression of her sexuality is an act of feminist assertion a confrontation of the double standards in patriarchal societies.

This bold step towards self assertion has sparked off contradictory remarks from the reviewers commenting on her decision not to reveal this to her husband, P Ramamorthy says,
This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is not a dependent on Jayant. This novel gains its feminist stance in Indu’s exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of the human existence. (Ramamoorthy 124)

This is also an assertion of her individuality which she wants to maintain despite her marital status.

This incident is seen in a totally different light by P. Bhatnagar who laments the fact that she had to commit infidelity to come to terms with her married life. She feels that,

Indu’s casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of the modern Indian woman? (Bhatnagar 121)

Shashi Deshpande in her essay “Masks and Disguises” (Writing from the Margin) mentions her first reading of Erika Jong’s Fear of Flying and says that reading it was joyously liberating for her. And on writing the short story Intrusion about a woman’s first experience with a man who happened to be her husband. With this story, she said she liberated herself, ‘both as a woman and writer’. She describes the double standards which are practiced by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties. (Deshpande, 191)

Shashi Deshpande also highlights the frustration in women due to the domestic chores. The drudgery and the disgust that women face in the countless
household errands, is described by Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. Indu throughout the novel is seen very conscious towards the unfairness prevailing in society with regard to women. One such scene is graphically described by Indu:

> I went to the house avoiding the hall, ugly now with all the aftermath of an eaten meal. It disgusted me to see the strewn plates, the scattered remnants. And yet, for the whole a lifetime, women patiently cleared up the mess with their bare hands after each meal. And women like kaki even ate off the same dirty plate their husband’s had eaten in earlier. (73)

Domestic chores as Indu describes, can be terribly tiresome and frustrating. Simone de Beauvoir regarding the domestic work states that:

> Few tasks are more like torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present. She never senses conquest of a positive Good, but rather indefinite struggle against negative Evil. (470).

There are other examples too which tell us how well aware Indu is of the prevailing injustice in society. And if one is unaware of the injustice it is mainly because he/she has been nurtured since childhood to accept things in such a way. It is indoctrinated in the girl-child to play the role of a restricted daughter, a meek and compliant wife and daughter-in law, and a sacrificing mother. And any girl who tries to rebel against such rules is severely reprimanded. She tries to explain the same to Naren in one of her conversations:
How will you understand, Naren, you have never had to fight, to turn aggressive, to assert yourself? How easily it comes to you, just because you are a man, for me – 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 said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive.

(174)

Right from the childhood, Indu also observes the secondary position occupied by women in the family. The reference to the shaven head of a woman, a domestic help, reminds Indu of the plight of all widows – those who shaved their heads to avoid censure and to be treated like out castes. Looking at the widow’s shaven head, Indu says:

The bare skull, with its short hairs, looked somehow not only indecent, but obscene when bared. And I understood why Kaka had, when Atya was widowed, so stoutly resisted the idea of her becoming a shaven widow. He had won but at the cost of Atya’s status. She was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her. (130)

Though Kaka had shown his sympathy for Atya and widows in general by forbidding her from shaving her hair he had inadvertently caused her humiliation in what Deshpande calls ‘the kingdom of widows’. Critics have pointed out that even though the reforms of women’s position seem to be a major concern within nationalist discourses, ironically women themselves are not involved in any real sense in these
discussions about them. Kaka’s stand over Atya on not having shaved head is not, because he has Atya’s interest or rights of women in mind. Instead she becomes the site upon which various tradition and laws are elaborated and contested. Why is it that remarriage is not even once suggested for her? In fact on the other hand she is treated as a second grade citizen. Lata Mani rightly points out that:

Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of woman was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which the tradition was debated and reformulated. What was at stake was not women but tradition. (181)

Another issue which is highlighted by Shashi Deshpande in this text is the difficulty faced by middle class people in finding suitable grooms for their daughters. This is pertinently illustrated in the case of Padmini in *Roots and Shadows*. Subsequent to a continual search when a boy finally agrees to marry her, the marriage is settled without any further wavering. This is in spite of the fact that the boy had “heavy, coarse features and crude mannerisms.” (3) Padmini’s acceptance of this marriage makes Indu speculate,

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 no choice either, had to accept the reality, the finality, with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength. (6)
Mini agrees to her marriage because she knows and accepts that there is nothing else she can do except look after a home. She also realizes how dreary and harrowing an experience it is for the parents of most Indian girls to find a suitable match for their daughters. Her dilemma is revealed when she pours her heart out to Indu:

You don’t know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav Kaka running around after eligible men. And then sending the horoscope and having it come back with a message, it doesn’t match. And if the horoscope matched there was the meeting to be arranged. And mother and Atya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming and staring and asking all kinds of questions. And if we heard they were old fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, ‘She is not modern enough.’ And if I dress up well, they would say, “She’s too fashionable for us. Or too short. Or too tall or too something.” And Kaka trying to laugh and talk to those people, while his eyes looked so… anxious. And I, feeling like as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl. So we would have to go through with it all over again. And finally if everything was fine, there was the dowry. (135)

The traditional concept of marriage in patriarchal society makes a woman a helpless creature, a deprived soul, unaware of her own existence, her own desires. It does greater damage to the emotional life of a married woman who as a victim of a wrong marriage continues to be subject to persistent male tyranny and ego. Due to the onslaught of loneliness and the continual haunting reminders of this unpleasant situation make her position more vulnerable.
Through her article “Uncertain Objects of Desire” we see that Divakaruni also has dealt in detail and described the arranging of a marriage in the Indian set up. Mostly parents take the initiative and the whole process is complicated. The horoscopes have to be matched and the so-called ‘modern families’ also ask for them even though they state ‘caste no bar.’ Then the career, financial and social status are common features which are taken into consideration while making a match. The age education and the foremost criteria being the complexion of girls. Divakaruni points out in her online article “White Complexion and Pink Cheeks” how people insist in the Matrimonial ads in the newspapers for “wheat complexioned” girls which is still the basis while making the choice of a bride. She further reveals important changes in attitude towards the Indian diaspora. Originally the Indian immigrants who came to the U.S. ‘declared that the bride should be willing to go abroad’ “Uncertain Objects of Desire” which implied that going abroad was not something the bride and the parents wished for, but over the course of twenty years, the tide has turned and the grooms/brides who live abroad have a distinct advantage. Someone thus, situated can unabashedly demand more. The marriage of Anju one of the main protagonists in The Vine of Desire is also arranged in similar circumstances. And her match is supposed to be carefully and thoughtfully chosen.

Anju travels to California after her marriage, a place totally foreign to her nature, culture and traditions. But with her husband’s support she adjusts well in the U.S until she gets the news of Sudha her cousin’s unhappy married life. Sudha flees away from her husband’s house because she is being urged to abort her unborn daughter and returns to her paternal home. When Anju learns of this development in Sudha’s life she invites her to America where she feels it will be easier for Sudha to live as a single parent and look after her child.
After marriage Anju and Sudha who have been brought up in the same household, now find themselves on different platforms altogether. Anju, who shifts to America after marriage leads a more independent life, independent to the extent of believing that one should not attach to any relationship which lacks love and compatibility. But Sudha who is married in India and living in a joint family selflessly accepts her husband’s dominating mother and two young brothers. She occupies herself with the daily responsibilities of life. She forgets her passion for stitching and designing clothes. She also tries to divest herself, of the memories of her past love, Ashok of whom she is always reminded because she is dissatisfied with her married life. But she continues to live in her husband’s house with forbearance till she is made to undergo an ultrasound test during pregnancy to find out the sex of her child. The insistence by her mother-in-law to abort the female foetus is the last straw and she decides to depart from her husband’s home.

This attitude to the loveless marriage was shared to a large extent by feminists. They too believed that marriage should be based on love and not on property, and they deplored the pressures, economic and social, that not only forced women into such marriages but kept them in a husband’s power after marriage. (Banks 54)

Sudha takes the rebellious step of running away to her mother’s house and then to her cousin Anju in the U.S., mainly because she is opposed to the idea of female foeticide and hates the thought of enduring life-long submission to the old fashioned views of her mother-in-law and an ineffective husband. She thinks she will be able to bring up her daughter Dayita in a better manner in a liberal society like America, as a single parent. Under these circumstances Sudha defies traditional
Indian culture and leaves her husband to raise her child independently, which she thinks is much easier in the U.S.

Once bound in marriage, woman has little room for escape and running away is a disgrace not only to her family but also to the whole of society and its tradition. That’s why women never dare to come out of from her marriage. Therefore in spite of suffering she remains in marriage, and never tries to give up her relationship with her husband. (Sharma)

Sudha knowingly or unknowingly emulates the ideal woman because of her traditional upbringing. From their early childhood, girls are taught to remain happy in their married lives under any circumstances, and thus incorporate these ideals in their psyche. Sudha comes with big dreams to America, but she ends up doing odd jobs there and is dissatisfied with her life in the U.S. She had come to America after defying the traditions of an arranged marriage, and does it at the cost of ostracism isolation and intense loneliness. Her stay in her cousin Anju’s house is terminated by the emotional involvement that grows between Sudha and Anju’s husband. However, she does not want to cheat her cousin so she decides to leave and the life-long candid relationship of the two sisters. She looks after Trideep and Myra’s incapacitated father, a position she obtains with the help of Lalit, who is a surgeon. He proposes marriage to Sudha and Ashok her first lover also pursues her to America in the hope of marrying her. But Sudha wants to return to India and tells the old man she is nursing that

America isn’t the same country for everyone, you know. Things here didn’t work out the way I’d hoped. Going back with you would be a
way for me to start over in a culture I understand the way I’ll never understand America. In a new part of India, where no one knows me. Without the weight of old memories, the whispers that say, *we knew she’d fail, or Serves her right.* (320)

The old man is extremely surprised at her choice of leaving America because in his experience “Young people who come to this country never want to leave.” (320)

Sudha, emigrates to the United States to follow her dream of bringing up her daughter in an environment where her daughter unlike her could fulfil her dreams without anyone’s intervention. But for Sudha to have that kind of setup for her daughter has to go through several rites of passage before she can act as a “real liberated American immigrant.” However, all these steps towards her own and her daughter’s liberation are marked by men who relocate Sudha into new domestic realms, until she moves forward and chooses a new abode, from her mother’s domain in Calcutta to her husband’s then Sunil and Anju’s and finally Trideep and Myra’s residence in America. Sudha keeps switching her place and keeps moving forward to find a new relocation of the self. All these shifts slowly proceed from vivacious childhood with her cousin Anju to dutiful daughter in-law to assertive mother, unencumbered by the weight of ancestral traditions.

Sudha enters the threshold of marriage with the husband chosen by her elders which she later repents. She longs for freedom and love in marriage, but it breeds grief, unhappiness and anger. She develops an aversion to all the things around her, even to herself. There are additional disappointments when she reaches her cousin Anju in the U.S., she realizes that the idealized images of life in the west clash with
rather mundane details of reality, a sense of irony escapes her, and as a result, she sees nothing but her failed quest for the exotic.

Sudha’s beauty has been highlighted by Divakaruni in *Vine of Desire* and this is what attracts male attention. Her first love is Ashok, her college mate, then Anju’s husband Sunil and the surgeon she meets in the U.S. - Lalit. She tries to forget Ashok once she is married but needs him when she decides to leave her home to save her unborn daughter. Love is never the ruling passion in her life because when Ashok refuses to accept her with the child she leaves him too.

Anju realizes the ‘new hardness’ in her cousin and the opaqueness, and she could tell that Sudha was trying to hide something from her. But Anju cannot tell what has changed her relationship with her cousin who was once her soul mate. It even occurs to Anju that “In order to survive, Sudha had had to learn many things. Could selfishness be one of them?” Both Sudha and Anju feel the inability to communicate with those who are closest to them. Though Sudha travels miles to be with her cousin Anju, is unable to disclose the trauma she has been through. Sudha is constantly consoled by Anju by her protective gestures and persistently told that she has taken the right decision and also the right step to give up everything. In spite of this continual cajoling Sudha can not get herself to tell Anju that she had not seen

one hundred and one faces of my cowardice. My resentment. Someday I will tell her, I did care. All the things I had to leave behind, not only clothes and jewellery but my good name. The legitimacy of wifehood that I had worked so hard to earn. (43)

So self assertion proves to be extremely difficult and is earned at a very heavy price.
With this channel of communication we do notice the similarity in the psyche of the heroines of both Chitra Banerjee and Shashi Deshpande. They believe in the authenticity of marriage and their resentment on the flouting of the same but Divakaruni’s heroines take a stronger stance regarding the atrocities done to them in the male subjugated society. Like Sudha is determined never to go back to her husband, even Anju who loves her husband is not ready to forgive him for his infidelity. They emerge as more psychologically strong women and are not carried away by their emotions.

It is the lack of communication which becomes the reason for misunderstandings and emotional isolation in the lives of Sudha and Anju. Anju gives vent to her feelings through the letters and essays, the feelings which she earlier shared with her closest confidante and cousin Sudha. Sudha on the other hand finds it easy to communicate with other Indians like Sara, Lalit, Myra than her childhood friend, Anju and Sunil. The rift becomes so wide between them with the passage of time that it becomes almost impossible to grapple with the inner pain. The two friends, who are also sisters, can not connect with each other like they did earlier. The further deterioration of their relationship occurs with the revelation of Anju’s husband’s passionate obsession with Sudha. The latter is already aware and has been guilty of this knowledge ever since her early meetings with Sunil suffers even more, because of his incestuous feelings for her and this is the only reason she is hesitant about going to her cousin Anju in the U.S. Anju is unaware of this truth, insists on her coming and staying with them. It is in fact ironical that the friend, on whom she could depend upon for everything otherwise, can not even share her deepest secret with her.

Sunil evinces sympathy though his feelings for Sudha cannot be justified. He ultimately has to pay for his actions, Anju applies for a divorce between them
nevertheless he tries to communicate his thoughts to her through a movie plot to have Anju back in his life. “Underneath the measured rise and fall of his storytelling voice are hidden phrases like small explosions. Anju feels their reverberation.” Anju makes attempts to interrupt the story but all her efforts are futile, it is the story she knows that will disrupt her life.

Sunil tells himself that he must learn not to compare his life to the movies. He is in a pathetic state, he purposely leaves his dirty clothes on the floor, lets the toothpaste drip on the dirty counter something for which he earlier found fault with Anju. “My futile, animal attempt to mark my territory. This is what I have come to, kid!” (306) He finds himself taking on her ways, of talking like her in images, which he earlier thought was fanciful. He becomes a loner to an extent that he uses his work like “cough syrup” to suppress the symptoms of his disease. These circumstances also remind him of his father who hated him and was now on his death bed. “What did I do-and my mother-to arouse so much hatred? Maybe I should go to Calcutta before he dies, kid, just to make him tell me.” (309) Sunil is totally shattered and asks to be forgiven but he knows that “If I have no forgiveness in me, can I asked to be forgiven?” He can never forgive his father even after his death.

Another unique feature of Divakaruni’s treatment of marriage and human relationships is that she links the pivotal moments in each of the characters’ lives with references to significant current events. When Anju anxiously anticipates Sudha’s arrival, Divakaruni writes: “It is the year of dangerous movements. Two weeks back a major earthquake hit Los Angeles, causing seven billion dollars damage and leaving more than ten thousand people homeless.” (317)
This probably is an indication of the coming catastrophe in the lives of Anju, Sudha, Sunil and the family which Divakaruni is hinting at, which Anju right now is oblivious of. Similar clues and incidents are marked by Divakaruni from time to time. Regarding the invitation by the Chopra’s and Sudha’s attending the party with Anju and Sunil, Divakaruni writes:

It is year of taking risks, of facing consequences. In Bangladesh a woman writer criticizes the Quran and must go underground to escape the fatwa. In Abidjan a twenty-year old ban against big-game lifted in the hope of attracting tourist money. And here in a home not hers, Sudha, servant girl turned apsara for a night, a loveliness for the gods to squabble over, trails her fingers over the spot in the mirror where Anju’s reflection had been. (127)

“Send me away, Anju,” she says. “Send me away before it’s too late.”

Global events that are the representative of times, have both positive and negative influence on the individual psyche which further affects human relations. Sudha who is drowned in the turmoil of her personal relationships cannot keep herself from thinking about the death toll in Rwanda which crossed half-million mark. After twenty-seven years in jail, Mandela becomes the first black president. “Is this the law of the world, that to go forward you must first step back?” Sudha while in the midst of all this, forgets her own pain which to her at this point in time seems less significant. Her misery and dilemma is masked under the global events like she says “Her voice is drowned in the dizzying roar of SUVs and Harleys, BMWs and Benzes, as they vie with each other for mastery of the road.”(97)
Similar statements are made by Divakaruni when Sunil is being transferred to Houston by his company. He and Anju meet again and Sunil makes all efforts to pacify Anju but she does not forgive and reconcile with her traitor husband. She says that after the loss of her baby nothing could hurt her this much and that his betrayal has made her tough. But when she meets him she has a moment of weakness and undergoes a sensation in her “like the ribs being swayed away” she tries to think of other things to keep at bay this moment but she realized everything is connected to him. “Even poetry—the only line that will come to her—betrays her. My life closed twice before it is close.” (242) Anju makes sure that he doesn’t see how much it hurts and doesn’t cry until he has left the room. Just prior to this Divakaruni makes this statement, “It is the year of temporary compromises. On the continent halfway across the world, Russia signs on accord titled “partnership for peace.” On an island at the edge of the Atlantic, the IRA agrees to cease hostilities.” (241)

The process of assimilation into American culture for both Anju and Sudha is different. Sudha’s stands for deep-rooted view points, background, one’s initial stages, the personality one is born with, the pull of the native land, the buried past and, the security etc.. Whereas Anju stands for liberty, escape, exploration, discovery, revelation and removal of the imagination, for balancing new heights, for thoughts and aspirations and achievement and for facing the test of the indefinite. Sudha chooses to return to India, even after her mother’s condemnedatory letter where she accuses her of destroying her marriage with Ramesh and throwing two households into turmoil. She writes “Once a woman leaves her husband, she doesn’t hesitate at anything. Even the most immoral acts come to her with ease. I shudder to think of the effect your behavior will have on your daughter’s character. (272)
In Anita Desai’s vision the Indian woman is always working towards an adjustment and compromise. Few Indian feminists really contemplate total change. Working towards and adjustment through the traditional role is much less drastic much more Indian. I think Indian feminism is more practical than theoretical. It is expedient rather than ideological. (Desai 168)

In the light of this statement the analysis of *Roots and Shadows* by Shashi Deshpande and *The Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni present different outlooks. By the end of the novel *Roots and Shadows* Indu is an emancipated woman and she lives up to her own expectations but she does not abandon her marriage. Her dilemma is representative of the larger predicament faced by women in modern India where a slow transition threatens to shake the age-old setup to its very roots. Y.S.Sunita remarks that Shashi Deshpande suggests through the character of Indu that there is a greater chance of happiness for women if they learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. As P.Bhatnagar comments,

Thus Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude. (128)

Indu does achieve her freedom towards the end, refusing to let herself be influenced by Atya or even her husband Jayant, in doing what she believes is the right thing. She who is earlier cowed down by Jayant’s disapproval of her giving up her job now gathers enough courage to stand by her decision. Jayant also finally
acknowledges her right to make her own decisions and recognizes her strength which she has never displayed earlier. He even comforts Indu who despairs when she cannot find a publisher for her book by telling her, that he will publish it for her. This reassurance by her husband is the ultimate happiness for her. The novel ends on a note of hope with the protagonist Indu, asserting herself as an individual and putting an end to her doubts about herself. Regarding her heroines Deshpande has been asked questions like “Why do your heroines stay within their marriages? Why do they not walk out? Why do they compromise?” And was even once questioned by an academic, “Why is it that your women, who are so troubled by patriarchy, don’t rebel?” To this she very aptly responds in her essay *Writing from the Margin*

The problem is that rebelling is generally understood to mean walking out on marriage, the problem lies in thinking that walking out is a liberating process. Whereas, to me, it is always clear that an understanding of oneself is what really liberates, it is this that opens out a number of possibilities. To walk out, or away, is to carry the old self with oneself. (158-159)

Unlike Shashi Deshpande’s heroines who make a place for themselves within the family by defying the status quo with rationale and accountability, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s protagonists experience a lot of transformation as she realizes the freedom that comes with the help of a culture which is so different from their own. The problems with her heroines arise when the characters try to create a new identity-the choices they make and the interaction they have with the immigrant community in America. Their contact with the family forces them to question their existence and morality and look for answers to the questions raised in their minds..
Through Anju, the reader is made to feel as though what ever happens to her is a result of centuries of traditions- the arranged marriage process; the need to have a child but feeling guilty because she really didn’t feel she wanted one; her aim of studying and achieving independence through a sound career in creative writing. Her self condemnation on having lost her baby. If she had come from a different society, more progressive and forward thinking she would not have gone through the emotions and the reactions that she experiences. She would not accept the responsibility for her actions nor for the consequences that resulted; choosing instead to blame others.

Shashi Deshpande’s and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s protagonists nowhere suggest split in the relationships, even if they have parted ways with their spouse. There is no where a mention of a divorce. Shashi Deshpande defines liberation in context of Indian feminism. She says,

Liberation does not mean leaving your marriage. We are human beings. Human beings are social animals and we need all these ties…My only thing about liberation is that you don’t give into oppression and cruelty. Liberation means you refuse to be oppressed, you refuse to give up your individuality, you refuse to do things which go against your conscience. You realize the potential you have within you, you don’t let other people tell you what to do. You know what you are worth. You know what you are worth. You take that into account, and this is liberation. This does not mean doing away with all ties. (Prasad 90-91)

And this is exactly how the protagonists of the two writers react and are in true sense liberated.
Although Deshpande gives due importance to familial relations and never suggests walking out, at the same time she feels that family should not flourish at the sacrifice of some for the benefits of the others, rather on mutual understanding and co-operation. In all her novels she makes her female protagonists choose security through reconciliation. “The ethos in the novels is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposite ideas and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude” (Bhatnagar 128). She strongly feels that liberation and emancipation of women will be beneficial not only for women but for all. It will result in improvement and betterment of family at large. She further states “A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in. after all, ‘No man is an Island’ (Times of India)

Divakaruni’s characters in Vine of Desire emerge as women of substance. They learn to make peace with events life seems to have thrust on them, they try to correct their mistakes and they grow with the hope for some kind of happy ending despite all the odds. As J. Bhavani observes: “This is not a negative but a realistic end to the novels. Deshpande upholds marriage as a backbone of society, what is stifling is the persona of the wife and not the institution of marriage.” (Qtd. Y.S. Reddy 157)

So while marriage is still sacrosanct in the novels of Shashi Deshpande whereas Divakaruni’s protagonists wish to look for options outside it too. They do not think that marriage is destiny for them and that they always need to compromise due to patriarchal pressures. Sudha realizes that life back in India is not going to be easy but she thinks that going to a new place and getting a convent education for her daughter will be beneficial. Anju on the other hand chooses to separate from her husband and maintain her dignity rather than live with a man who has betrayed her. Unlike Deshpande, Divakaruni does not think that ‘we need all these ties’ as women.
Both writers express the opinion that married women are like birds whose wings have been cut-off but they are not prepared to suffer the fate of such birds. So, they break free of the cages and return in Shashi Deshpande’s case, rejuvenated to face all kinds of crisis. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels however, the protagonists have the courage of their conviction and separate from their partners.

Along with marriage both writers also deal with the issue of widowhood and reflect how traditional Indian norms make life hell for widows. While they do not endorse separation and divorce as the best choices, they do condemn those practices that hamper women’s lives. As the widowed protagonist in the short story “Clothes” thinks: “Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white saris are bowing their veiled heads, serving tea to their in-laws. Doves with cut-off wings (Arranged Marriage 33) Marriage thus becomes difficult for both wives and widows but they somehow resolve their problems. Both Deshpande and Divakaruni have discussed the various aspects and their responses to them.
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