

FEMALE BONDING IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE BINDING VINE

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ABSTRACT

“To make myself in your image was never the goal I sought”

represents the crucial and closest of relationship between mother and daughter. *Binding Vine* is a special novel which portrays the women's world. Traces of feminine consciousness is felt in her novels. She traces a woman's journey from self sacrifice to self realization, from self denial to self assertion and from self negation to self affirmation. Indian women novelists in English have been presenting woman as the centre of concern in their novels.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant novelists who depicts women's issues and problems, her deep insight into women's problems and dilemmas helps her drawing a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding. The chief protagonists in her novels are female characters who are in constant search for meaning and value of life, she presents an existential struggle of a woman who denies to flow along the current and refuses to submit her individual self. The woman emerging out of a such situation is a defeated individual undergoing much pain and suffering. Such characters exhibit a sense of insecurity due to their traumatic experiences and the absence of any enduring values. The feminine consciousness is felt in all her novels.

Shashi Deshpande offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. She is reflected as a master at expressing the anguish and frustration of women and gives a true life saga of the trauma faced by her protagonist. Feminine consciousness for 'self' is felt in the novels of Deshpande.

KEYWORDS: Shashi Deshpande, *Binding Vine*, Indian Women Novels

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande holds a prominent position as an Indian English novelist. She has highlighted the disappointments and frustrations of woman. She has portrayed her protagonists who are aware of their smothered and fettered existence in a male dominated society. The realistic delineation of woman as wife, mother and daughter and their search for identity and sexuality is revealed. Shashi Deshpande's works deal with the problems and issues of contemporary middle class women. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. She poignantly expresses the frustration and disappointments of women and describes their bitter experience in the male-dominated society.

The novel *The Binding Vine* shows how a woman of good education and earning could react to the issues against women in the male chauvinistic society, inculcating the spirit of solidarity among women and ushering in an assured secure world to all women. While depicting the agony of a wife, who is the victim of marital rape, she portrays the plight of

women raped outside marriage and those who would rather suffer in silence in the name of the family honour. She portrays male supremacist ideology and projects women as valueless who obtain value only by relation to men. She attacks the male view that women are 'natural' enemies who cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. She exhorts women to learn to live and work in solidarity, to bond with one another and to counter male supremacy. For solidarity of women, all they need is to share with one another the vast reservoir of women's experience, culture and ideas. *The Binding Vine* is a work to be read as a projection of such ideas as women solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male dominated culture. Oppression and victimization are the commonness they shared for their bonding.

The novel is an analysis of several tragedies in the lives of different women. As a female writer, she carries her authentic female experience in an effective manner and drives home the point what makes women become hysteric, escapists, sacrificial goats. She also discusses the compulsions forcing them to take extreme decisions or to become passive recipient and shows how often women become the cause of female subjugation and suffering.

The novel is a stock of women characters having different perceptions, causing difference of opinions among themselves. Their different perceptions caused misery and unhappiness to several intimately related women in their families. By the time their misunderstandings are cleared up, they eventually either overcome their own misunderstandings or move beyond them and establish a kind of solidarity among themselves.

The novel *The Binding Vine* occupies a special place in all the works of Shashi Deshpande in the sense that it presents especially the world of women. Though men are not entirely absent in the novel they could make their presence felt only by the power they exercise over women, especially their wives and daughters. Women outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them. Their infinite courage to cope with their surroundings and their ability to come to terms with their losses and to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live on in the most hostile situations are an evidence of their supremacy over the male characters. They are unique individuals in their respective domains with an affluent household or a broken family front. They express their displeasure in their views at the right time or even fight against injustices inflicted upon them by an oppressive patriarchal system when time demands.

There are five pairs of mother-daughters, namely Inni-Urmi, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana, Akka, Vanna, and Vanna-Mandira. The relationships between them are based on some sort of misapprehension or dissention. Urmi's displeasure with her mother is deep rooted in her separation from the latter at an early age. Right from her childhood days, she was sent to her paternal grandmother, she had no experience of the kind of mothering a daughter desires. But, Urmi is neither in a position nor in a mood to find out the cause of her displacement or her mother's predicament. Inni had an early marriage leading to early motherhood, and being too young herself, she was unable to take care of her child properly while trying to vindicate herself she explains to her daughter:

Urmi's father is a dominant patriarch and a domineering husband. He was the decision-maker and instrumental in her displacement. But, Inni, Urmi's mother had to bear the brunt of the anger and blame of her daughter. It is she who had to survive the rest of her life to make up for the loss of love for her daughter by being an over caring mother, bestowing too much affection over her indifferent daughter, whereas Urmi is of the wrong perception that her mother had deliberately sent her to her mother-in-law for her own convenience in her childhood. Lately, she disillusioned herself and feels frightened to think of her father's unkindness to her mother, who was carrying the child in her womb. She feels extremely sorry to her mother who was deprived of the right to decide what would be the best for her baby.

Urmi, in the end, understands her mother, but Mira holds her mother responsible for her unhappy lot of her married life. Mira's mother being dead at last, many of Mira's myriad questions remains unanswered. As a college going girl, she was forced into a marriage she was scared from the beginning because of her nurturing. Her apprehensions about womanhood were not baseless. None in the family ever bothered about her emotions or resentment and her unwillingness was taken as mere childish resistance. She had thought that her mother would support, who could have refused early marriage for her daughter or suggested delay, thereby intervening and forestalling the marriage. Her mother is more of a caretaker than the decision maker of her family with little stand on important issues. She is an unassertive woman. Her mother's silence and passivity pushed Mira to her marriage to a man whom she could not love and who hardly understood her feelings. Mira led an unhappy married life in a way, a repetition of her mother life.

Mira's mother remains a mute spectator of her daughter's drab existence and did nothing for Mira's life. As a traditional woman, Mira's mother had her own world of dreams about her daughter and, hence, she remains content with seeing Mira married and pregnant. Generally, the daughter shares her sorrow with her mother, to unburden the grief-sicken heart. Had Mira neither regrets nor feeling of sorry for her mother as she didn't want to share her feelings with her mother. She felt alienated from her. The intensity of her unhappiness is known to her mother. Mira's stand against her so-called mother and her insistence on the conventional role of daughter-in-law is implicit that she neither wants to become a victim of the trap in which women are being caught in their lives. Nor does she want to be forced by her mother into the same trap which her mother, willingly or unwillingly, had been caught. In fact, her mother has a secret hope that their daughter's fate would be better than their own in the conventional role.

Shakutai and Kalpana come from the lower order of the society and they represent the working-class women. However, their relationship as mother and daughter is as same as their counterparts from the middle class families. Shakutai is a typical, protective and affectionate mother, who had nurtured fear in her heart since her daughter grew up physically; she hates her daughter being dressed up in a fashionable manner or her using cosmetic. She feels that it would unnecessarily attract male attention.

But, Kalpana's ideas of life are different from those of her mother. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She loved to dress well and move around freely, feeling subservient to none. Her mother's fears come true when Kalpana becomes the victim of her uncle's lust, brutally beaten and raped by him. Shakutai's husband had left her for the love of another woman, at that time Shakutai had three children. When Kalpana grew up, she thinks, her father had gone away from them due to her mother's failure. To a certain extent, the mother, Shakutai, is unhappy with Kalpana because of her stubbornness and unfeeling towards her.

According to Shakutai, Kalpana is a self-willed person, she refuses to be guided by her mother's dictates and when she is struggling between life and death, she holds her mother responsible for what has happened to her. Shakutai, being a deprived and disappointed woman, fails to understand her daughter's sense of freedom, who had dreamt of living an independent life of her own, different from the oppressive and suffocating life of her mother and aunt. She even resented becoming their shadow she never wanted any of her mother's dreams.

Vanna is a medical social worker, who has to stay out of home quite often, for her duty demands her presence. Her frequent absence in the house made her daughter Mandira feel neglected. She hates being left to the care of the maid servant. Mandira often misunderstands her mother. Similarly, Vanna too finds faults with her daughter and resents her daughter's feeling of antagonism towards her. Although a child Mandira tells Urmi that she will never leave her children

when she becomes a mother. In reality, the little child, Mandira, fails to understand her mother's position to negotiate between family and profession. At the same time, Vanna too, is unable to diagnose the tantrums of her daughter, who really needs her mother's presence, affection, attention and love. One thing that should be noticed here is that Mandira, however, never complains about the absence of her father Harish at home.

Vanna thinks and believes that if her doctor husband Harish was a bit cooperative, things would have been different. There is a rapport between Vanna and Urmil, the two sisters-in-law. Vanna's attitude towards Urmil, is changed a little, amounting to coldness, when she protests against her when the latter is meddling in the Kalpana incident. As a friend, she warns her for she feels her friend's intervention would end in trouble. As a sister-in-law, she out rightly disagrees with Urmil's ambition of getting Mira's poems published, for this involves the exposure of her Vanna's father's behavior. At this point their friendship stands on the threshold of breakage. However, Vanna never thinks that her friend is unnecessarily meddling in her life.

Urmil, who has recently lost her one-year-old baby daughter, Anu, has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitiveness that leads her to be the friend of the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana, after being brutally raped, is laid in a helpless state in a hospital where Vanna is working. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmil and Shakutai, coming to terms with each other's grief, is quite remarkable. Though both of them come from different strata of the society, it is the same grief and sensitivity that makes them come together. In the same way, Urmil delves into the poems of her dead mother-in-law and understands the mind of the young Mira, who was subjected to rape daily in her married life. The efforts of Vanna, Amrut and Inni, to bring the grieving Urmil back to normal life, become futile.

Urmil gets her attention focused on Mira's poems and diaries. She establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl; who suffered and wrote poems. Mira's poems, which she had written in her diaries, become a symbol of female oppression. While reading these poems, Urmil senses them as a message being deciphered like a message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell. Mira was a favorite daughter of her father who appreciated her talent and was proud of her intelligence, and he had presented her a book of poetry. Mira too had nurtured a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet, but was scared of being laughed at. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty were all fact in her heart, and her poems were the true reflections of her latent feelings. Her writings reflected the extent of forced sexual activity she was subjected to rape in the name of marriage.

Her situation reflects the mute suffering of many unfortunate women. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women by men, merely on the strength of brutal force. Mira dies in childbirth after four years of loveless marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends, there is cry of rape and anguish. Urmil clearly understands that Mira's married life was only a 'black clouded' haunted night, which she waited with dread. Urmil, narrates a passage from the papers found in Mira's old trunk she too hates the word love for it was always uttered by her husband. She wants no love but desires to be left alone. They speak about the relationship she had with her husband and her feelings towards her husband. The house in which Mira lived is utterly lonely. Its inmates treated her as mad woman. Urmil is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion

Urmil understands that, right from her childhood days, Mira hated her mother who always surrendered herself to her husband. Hence, she opposes every inch of her mother's advice. Urmil thinks that Mira is not a common woman and wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and how she was living with a man whom she could

not love and other people with whom she had nothing in common to share. Urmila understood Mira through her poems and knew that, Mira, too, felt the burden of her femininity. Mira felt that she too was trapped like her mother with no further escape. In her case, pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined.

The pain of childbirth always results in the joy of seeing one's own child. Mira too had experienced this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child her creation, all the way. Even in the midst of terrible vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped with child forever, Mira is quite conscious of the love for her unborn child. But Mira was the most unfortunate mother as she died in childbirth due to heavy bleeding. She died within an hour after her child was born. Here, Mira's life stands as an example of the multitude of unfortunate women, who are compelled into a forceful marriage. Their lives finally end up to the lust of their husbands.

Gender is a reality and gender based discrimination is also a reality. Gender is the most important factor which decides a human being life or fate. Our experiences are always related to our gender. The term feminism is a not always means the same .It may change according to the society or different kinds of people. In common feminism means equality but in Indian society equality is a rare thing. There may be rules and regulations to protect equality but the mind set up of people can't change any law. Just like any other women writers of India, Shashi Deshpande is also a product of new education system. Higher education has given Indian women a deep insight into human psyche and a clear critical perspective to reexamine tradition in India. Not only the writer but also the central character Urmi is also an educated woman from a middle class family. Shashi Deshpande says that women are really vine and there must have some tree of love to bind. They are all human beings and no one can't live alone there must be someone or something to love. Even though there is no marriage in a life he will find some other way to make his life meaningful. But most of the characters in The Binding Vine are married and they are asked to live with their life. But the marriage becomes a meaningless act when it pushes a woman to frustration and darkness. Women's marginalization is not a new thing. But to speak out and act against that is a difficult task because that's deeply rooted. Here Shashi Deshpande discussed the double marginalization through patriarchy and imperialistic ideologies. Shashi Deshpande's characters struggle to defy traditional, patriarchal norms of society, and attempts to realize and preserve their identity not only as a woman but also as a human being. The frustrations of females are depicted in a realistic way not just to read and throw the book away but to awaken the Indian society, the Indian woman.

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