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The Voice of Resistance in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract:

The emergence of Women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The post-Independence period has brought a number of noted Women novelists who have enriched Indian English Fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility. The patriarchy in society left woman absolutely subservient to male domination. With this change in attitude, novelist made effect to portray Women's position realistically. Most of the male writers presented female protagonist only either as idealized images of womanhood or the dumb shadows of male desires. However Women novelists were inspired to make a bold and unconventional representation of woman's position with a distinctive identity. Infact Shashi Deshpande asserts in unequivocal terms that she hopes to change the stereotyped image of women.

Keywords: Post-independence, subservient, Unconventional, Stereotyped

Introduction:

The modern day Indian women novelists in English exhibit an impressive record of success and have succeeded in putting IWE on the world literary map. Shashi Deshpande is a widely read person. Essentially a self-taught writer, has carved a niche for herself. She has created authentic female characters which are flesh-and-blood with recognisable credentials. She is subtle in delineating their trials and tribulations, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles. The defining feature of her women characters is that they have strength of their own, and inspite of challenges and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. Deshpande has been labelled a feminist for her portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated Indian women, their conflict and quest for identity, marriage and sex, and their exploitation and disillusionment.

P.Ramamoorthi points out,

“ One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the “other”: She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation”.(2).

Urmila of *THE BINDING VINE* is one who is ahead of her predecessors by her endeavours to help other women. The story revolves round the protagonist Urmi, a multifaceted middle-class woman working as a lecturer in a college . The novel portrays the plight of the protagonist in a male-dominated traditional society. It also depicts her quest to cling to in the strange world where she is forced to live. The novel also celebrates women's coming together with other women as friends and companions. Thus feminine solidarity runs as a strong undercurrent in the novel. The novel opens with Urmi's decision not to cast herself into the image of a stereotyped woman in her society.

Urmila is the voice of resistance in the novel that registers a protest against the patriarchal attitude to the issue of rape. A gradual progress of the self through darkness, revolt, and reconciliation can be observed in the course of the narrative. Shashi Deshpande presents a woman's vision of life which is expressed in the novel partly through the consciousness of Urmi and partly through the consciousness of other female characters like Vanna, Urmi's friend and sister-in-law, Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, Shakutai, and Kalpana.

Urmi is fighting within herself to distress herself. After Anu's death Urmi is caught in the maze of hopelessness and tries hard to come out of it. She is not able to cry or feel pain even by banging her head against the wall. She is fighting within herself to distress herself. She has gathered everything bottled up within herself. She is haunted by a sense of fault: 'To forget is to betray', So she wants to dote and linger in the memories of her dead daughter. Even after her conscious efforts she is haunted by the memories of her dead daughter. "No, I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them... This is one battle and has to win if I am to go on living". (21). Urmi takes first step towards self realization when she decides to accept the reality, the death of her daughter, Anusha (called Anu), and energize herself to meet the demands of life, especially her duty to her son, Kartik.

As Indira writes

instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incidents to flood her with longing and as great sense of loss". (25)

The Binding Vine is a saga of suppression of three generations of women that depicts depression and oppression in a patriarchal society. The Binding Vine of feeling and emotions connects all the three generations of women. In the first generation Mira's mother, Vanna's mother and Urmi's mother. In the second generation it is Mira, Vanna, Urmi, Shakuktai and sulu. In the third generation Mira's son Kishore, Vanna's daughter Mandira, Urmi's daughter Anu, Shakuktai's daughter Kalpana. Protagonist Urmi's is deeply connected to all the three-generations of women.

Urmi from her childhood is very strong-minded and daring, and accepts responsibility. Her grandmother and grandfather in Ranidurg bring her up. As a result of this she develops hatred towards her mother from her childhood. She rejects every gift from her mother, prefers awful clothes gifted by her grandmother. "She never minds wearing old and shabby clothes and piled Inni's dresses in the cupboard until she could say truthfully that they were too small for her." (164). Even after her grandmother's death she stayed with her grandfather. She had said confidently that she could manage the house. It was not so easy but she coped with every situation. Urmi reveals the traces of her being a very smart, competent and daring girl.

Inni was just a shadow of her husband who was very domineering and bossing over the house. She had no defence against his weapons, anger and silence. She never bothered about her own life. She loved to be dominated. After her husband she concentrated on her children and her happiness and well-being. Urmi had fallen in love with her closet friend Vanna's brother Kishore at a very young age of 15. Urmi married Kishore, the boy-next door in spite of Inni's Appa's, Vanna's disapproval. Though Urmi married a man of her choice, her imagination of a happy family was broken by the hard reality - "that he flits into her life a few months in a year and flits out again leaving nothing of him". (164)

Kishore being a typical Indian guy failed to understand his wife's tender feelings. Urmi knows sex is only a temporary answer and knew that the big problem that Kishore would never remove his armour, there is something in him she would never reach, she yearned for mental and emotional bond with her husband but she was utterly disappointed. Marriage in our Indian context is so sacred, which unites two souls but Shashi Deshpande condemns the institutions, which just binds two bodies and fails to bind the two hearts and minds.

As Simone de Beauvoir observes,

Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspects as bodies not as persons. (3)

Urmi wants to assert herself in order to be economically independent. But her friend and sister-in-law Vanna, who is a social worker, wife of Dr. Harish is very

submissive. Urmi warns her “Assert Yourself. You don't have to crawl before him, do you?”. (80). Vanna has suppressed her desires and follows her husband's order even in his absence. It is Harish's sense of order and perfection, which is the rock on which Vanna has built her life..She voluntarily takes the responsibility of the house and children while he is let free. She is crushed in by house inside and outside. Sometimes it becomes difficult for her to balance children and work simultaneously, especially with her demanding daughter Mandira. Mandira expects her mother's attention all the time and hates being left to the care of maidservant. She often misunderstands her mother and develops hate-relation and is very jealous when Vanna pets Pallavi. Although a child Mandira tells her Urmi aunty that she would never leave her children when she becomes a mother. Mandira loves her father more than her mother and never complains against his absence.

Vanna's mother Akka was very happy with Urmi who played the role of a sister to Vanna. Akka was a teacher and Vanna was never demanding her presence as her daughter Mandira did. It is Akka who tells Mira's story where even her story lay. That is Akka who a stepmother to Kishore and his mother Mira died in her childhood. Mira's husband married Akka for the concern to his son. The enormous cruelty behind this truth silenced all the three- Akka, Vanna and Urmi, then that they are pained even more by Mira's poetry. It is through Mira's poetry they learn the truth of her married life. After reading Mira's writing Akka and Vanna burst out and cried. It serves us a beacon light to Urmi who was on the ship of questions in the sea of despair.

Urmi discovers that Mira had intense dislike for sexual act with her husband, “a physical repulsion from the man she married”. (63). He was a man who tried to possess another human being against her will and Mira was subjected to marital rape. She never talks to him though he gets irritated. He pleads with her and says he loves her till he had done. He always forces himself on her and as a result of this Kishore was born. Mira is subjected to marital rape in the society where marriage is a divine bond of life.

Indira Jai Singh, an eminent lawyer for women, writes:

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence as her consent is assumed. In this respect, the woman's movement has consistently demanded that the law of rape be changed. A recent judgement of a court in England indicated that rape within marriage could be an offence. Several states in US have specially amended their original law to make it an offence (5).

Indians believe a couple should be like Lakshmi-Narayana, the best Goddess couple. But Mira who gets afraid of dark after marriage says: “But tell me friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? “. (66)

Urmi is highly fascinated towards Mira's writing. Her thoughts were in English but her creative language was Kannada. That diary was not an account of her routine life but a 'communion with herself'. The poetic language as Kristeva argues, germinates from the unconscious which itself houses desires. Feelings and obsessions banished outright from the terrain of the consciousness. While communicative language emanates from the realm of conscience after getting negotiated by ego. A promising young poet, Venu, inspired Mira when she gave him some of her poems to read. This was the response of the writer in a male chauvinist society. “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry leave the other poetry to us men” (127).

Men have never encouraged women and promoted their creative writing. Mira never showed her poetry to anyone, not even to her father who was a school teacher, who presented Palgrave's golden treasury of English Songs and Lyrics on her 13th birthday. When her father admired Venu there was a sense of loss in her, she was agonized by not revealing her creative writing. The domineering and haughty words of Venu remind us the words of Ruskin as mentioned by Kate Millet in her book sexual politics “Ruskin is solicitous to warn women away from accomplishment. They may get a smattering of information, but they are given orders to halt at the point of difficulty: Understanding the

meaning, The Inevitableness of Natural laws and follow at least one of them as far as to the threshold of the bitter valley of humiliation, into which only the wisest and bravest of men can descend “.(10).

Mira symbolizes female oppression. Through her poems she attempts to create an imaginative space for herself in the patriarchal tradition and to make herself a model of female survival in her created world. Like a modern woman she rebels against the norms in a tradition-bound society and struggles to establish her own individuality and social status. She is placid, plain and just a shadowy figure who fails to recognize her own self. She writes, “Whose face is this I see in the mirror, unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear? The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow” .(120)

Mira died at the age of 22, lead a lonely, choiceless, life without any freedom in her in-laws' house. They called her mad and were indifferent to her. “She cloistered in a home, living with a man she could not love, surrounded by people she had nothing in common with”.(127). Mira knew that love makes a person vulnerable and one is always afraid to lose it. Urmi saw this fear in the eyes of Shakutai when she met her in a hospital where Vanna works. Urmi is moved by Shakutai's overwhelming anxiety towards her daughter Kalpana. Earlier Shakutai assumes that her daughter who is now unconscious has been injured in a car accident. Shakutai is sacred of the society, which would be very cruel to them henceforth. She thinks death is the only thing, which can help Kalpana. In the eyes of society regardless of her fault she would remain guilty and invalid for marriage as she had lost her virginity and she had to bear the burden of impurity all her life. Shakutai is more worried about her daughter's marriage. She is agonized in the fear of society and cries not to publicize the issue. “I will ever be able to hold up my head again, who will marry the girl, we are decent people”.(58)

Rape is a very personal and intimate traumatic experience for a woman. Whether it is rape inside marriage or outside marriage society is very rude and unsympathetic towards women. More than rapist the victim of rape becomes the centre of crime. She is both mentally and physically harassed by the society. Society even synthesises gentlemen like Dr. Bhaskar who has real desires to help her and rejects the police officer's advice to write a false report.

Urmi who is caught in the web of grief is ready to give her time and consoles Shakutai. Kalpana's case connects Urmi and Dr. Bhaskar. They got along well. Vanna and Inni don't like her going out with Bhaskar. Urmi argues that she can't live like a cloistered nun just because she is married and goes out with Bhaskar to have dinner together. They have better understanding. He talks open-heartedly to her and listens intently giving response each time. Urmi after revealing about her childhood fantasies is stuck on the thought how she has spoken of those things, which she never shared with anyone outside the family. His mother warns Urmi that he is a flatterer. While leaving Urmi back home Bhaskar reveals his desire for her and asks if she loves her husband. She flushes immediately and Bhaskar understands he is nowhere in the frame of her family. Urmi loves her husband and therefore she is an inviolate, chaste Sita. Her love for him is deeprooted and she had every chance to flirt with Bhaskar but she abstained from it. Urmi confesses that she was tempted by Bhaskar and her responding is the only way of releasing the mushy adolescence with her dream of living happily ever after with Kishore, who is trapped inside her.

Urmi, cognizant of the rape case and the insecure position of a girl, resolves to fight for justice in Kalpana's favour. A girl is not safe even in her own family. Urmi is pained to learn that Kalpana is raped by her own maternal uncle, Prabhakar, who is like her father. Womanhood makes a woman vulnerable and a victim of outrage. She is too inhibited to spell out her misery and misfortune. Shakutai too, insisted of fighting for justice, blames her daughter for her misfortune, Even though she has all praise for her, She also has some reservations about her. On another occasion Shakutai admires her daughter's beauty. At the same time she criticizes her daughter's behaviour that Kalpana did not choose to live like her mother, but lived her life independently. Having her own life and the terrible life of these women under forced circumstances.

Urmi after hearing the truth from her mother was able to forgive her mother. It was a new morning for her life, as she had become a new person after reading Mira's poem, sharing Shakutai's agony and getting justice for Kalpana. Now she decides to publish Mira's poem who didn't have the chance to express her poetic talent. It would be a tribute to her mother-in-law who died in pain and sorrow. Urmila got a chance to recover from her agony only through the redemptive power of love.

Each and every character in the novel is craving for love, caring, and emotional support which is the spring of life. Urmi loved her daughter very much and thinks to forget her is to betray and she can't wrong her living son Karthik in the thoughts of her dead daughter. Urmi loves her husband very much and hopes she would shed his armour one day and be close to her.

Urmi is bound with the binding vine of love with her dead daughter Anu, Karthik and Kishore. Mira was bound with the binding vine of love with the unborn baby in her womb. She craved for the love and affection from her mother and husband but unfortunately she was deprived of it. Urmi is emotionally bound with Mira, Vanna, Inni, Balajji, Arjun and she is humanely bound to Shakutai and Kalpana. Mira was sad, she had become like her mother-'marrying and bearing children'. She was good in education, a poetess that's why she never forgives her mother till the end and never shared her feelings with her.

It is significant to note that the protagonists in Deshpande's fictional world realize the responsibility of their own community and resolve to fight tooth and nail for justice as "a culture in which such feminist dreams have been replaced by fundamental patriarchy that divides women into rigid categories based on function" (11).

The narrator being a woman, the reader gets a clear perspective of the plight of women from Shakutai's life also. During the course of her conversation with Urmi, she narrates her loveless marriage and the way she suffered in the hands of her husband in Bombay. To add to her suffering, she gave birth to three children and had to work rigorously to sustain her children and improve her life style. She tells Urmi that it is her long cherished dream to have a gas-stove in her kitchen as it makes cooking easy and a mangalsutra made of gold. But the very next moment she says, "The man himself is so worthless, Why should that 's been the greatest misfortune of my life' Urmi, marrying that man" (110).

Marriage without love, understanding, sharing and caring, and respect for the other is no marriage at all as is reflected in the life of Shakutai. Shakutai suffers most when her sister, Sulu, commits suicide by burning herself. Shakutai's problems get aggravated by illiteracy, emotional insecurity, crushing poverty, and traditional responsibilities of a housewife. The suffering and fate of Shakutai's sister, Sulu, is no better. She is also helpless and has a libidinous husband who has an eye on Kalpana since the beginning. She is sweet natured, affectionate, and caring woman who keeps smiling and tries to be cheerful.

In all the three generations women in marriage is same very submissive, helplessness. The binding vine also questions the concept of marriage and man-woman relationship outside the marriage. Shashi Deshpande condemns certain facts of marriage like changing the name of the bride and even the selection process. Deshpande's attack on arranged marriages is direct when she describes how the opinion and feelings of prospective bride are ignored completely and as a consequence she suffers and remains vanquished throughout her life. Unable to assert herself, she keeps on slaving away for her husband and family. She even suppresses her emotions before her husband.

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Virginia Woolf feels:

As women received education they feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of incompatibility, with their tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male-dominated ideas of morality and behavior, Problems at home and the place of work or in society-all come up in a welter for projection (24).

Shakutai and Sulu are also good sisters who helped each other and loved each other. Whenever Shakutai talks about Sulu to Urmi the words are dipped in love and affection. Sulu was a good Maushi to Shakutai's daughter. But she changed after marriage and lacked courage to face the reality and lead her life. As Sulu was childless and suffered with white patches on her body she was frightened that her husband would leave her, send her out of the house and have another woman in her place. Finally Sulu commits suicide by just increasing the pain of Shakutai after Kalpana's plight.

Bell Hooks writes in her essay "Sisterhood",

"...Sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures, by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress, and by the victims themselves, who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (22). She calls woman to bond with one another to counter male dominance.

Urmi is a good sister to her brother Amrut. Both share a good relationship. He is worried about his sister's hysteric behaviour. Amrut feels that she is dominating and needs to be gentle with their mother. He feels her teaching profession gives chance to be bossy over others. Amrut is soft in nature and his love for Radha is quite dominating. Urmi makes him understand that their father was not brutal towards their mother but she was weaker between the two, that's why she got dominated.

The idea that a mother should devote much of her time to her family and children is emphasized in the novel. In view of the bitterness between the daughter and the mother, Vanna feels that things would have been better had Harish, her husband, been a bit co-operative. A woman's domestic happiness, joy, and contentment in life are directly linked to her children's well being and progress. However,

... courage and not escapism is what woman of today requires. She should have the courage to uphold what is right for her and adhere to it with firm determination and tenacity. A headlong plunge into the social milieu with pertinacity can bring harmony and fulfillment in her life (14).

On the whole *The Binding Vine* is different from the earlier novels of Deshpande. The desire and inclination of one woman to help another less fortunate woman is a bold and positive step taken by the protagonist in the novel. Urmi is presented as a bold lady, who is considered, by virtue of her social status, very assertive, "a complex female and a bossy female" (25). In her relationship with all the women, Urmi is able to nourish the binding vine of womanhood with love and sympathy which functions as a strategy of empowerment.

The desire and inclination of one woman to help another less fortunate is a bold and positive step taken by the protagonist in the novel. Urmi is presented as a bold lady, who is considered, by virtue of her social status, very assertive, "a complex female and a bossy female" (25). In her relationship with all the woman, Urmi is able to nourish the binding vine of womanhood with love and sympathy which functions as a strategy of empowerment.

CONCLUSION:

Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class married women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Revealing a remarkable insight into the nature of a woman's mind, she depicts woman in myriad roles-wife, mother, daughter and an individual in her own right. She always concerns herself with a woman's search for her identity. She endeavours to establish woman as an individual who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and refines her identity in

tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times. Urmila of the Binding Vine is a head of them by her endeavours to help other women-the poor and the downtrodden. She strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. Accordingly, she exhibits interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils

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