

Feminist Pain and Struggles in Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine

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Abstract

Women have an essential and major part in making the world since the beginning. They have been struggling and suffering against societal injustice from the beginning of the post-colonial era. Deshpande's attention and sympathy are fully centred around the woman. While revealing the woman's struggle to reclaim her self-esteem and identity, the author delicately exposes the various forms of oppression that women face in our society, including sexual oppression.

The novels by Shashi Deshpande demonstrate a deep understanding of the female psychology, especially that of the educated, middle-class, metropolitan women. The novel "The Binding Vine," explores the intricacies of interpersonal relationships in great detail, with a special emphasis on the themes of love, loss and emancipation.

The aim of this paper is to explore the terrible events in the lives of several women and to portray the sufferings of women in society. The Binding Vine is based on a comprehensive pattern of gender issues and society. The novel's three sub-stories are expertly interwoven and united by a common theme of survival, love, and empathy.

In the paper, Urmi serves as a feminine voice who battles against the social norms and serves as a support system to all the repressed women in her surrounding like Meera, Kalpana and Shakutai.

Keywords: societal injustice, sexual oppression, women emancipation, gender dis-crimination

Introduction:

A thoughtful intellectual writer continually acts as a witness to the harsh truths of society and life, whose writings not only attract the reader

but also reveal the reality of artificial society. Shashi Deshpande's novel, The Binding Vine Published in 1993, beautifully depicts a wide range of topics, including socioeconomic reality,

psychological values, personalized approach, social challenges, domestic exploitation, marital rape, and human perspectives. The book poses a number of queries, such as "If the girls are safe in their family relationships at home?" What kind of social rights are offered to women? Why are the expectations of society limited only to women in a male-dominated society?

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention of the readers to the suffering endured by women. The book *The Binding Vine* explores the terrible events in the life of several women and portrays the suffering of women in society. Shashi Deshpande displays the women's strengths as well as their weaknesses. She skillfully manages the contrast of the two scenarios in the *Binding Vine* –rape that occurs inside the marriage and outside the marriage. Urmila, the protagonist and narrator, emphasizes the pain of two women: Kalpana, who was viciously raped by her uncle, outside the marriage and is currently near death, and Mira, who was raped in her marriage by her own husband. Through Urmi's perspective, Deshpande gives us insight into the lives of many other women who suffer from various forms of oppression, violence, or deprivation. (Santhi, M. 2017).

The novel, *The Binding Vine*, centers around three women Urmila, Mira and Shakutai. Urmila (Urmi) is struggling to overcome the grief of her one-year-old daughter Anu's death who has died of meningitis. Her husband is a navy officer and is away from the house. He is not with Urmi during this difficult time. All of her friends and family make an effort to assist her in overcoming her grief. However, all their efforts are in vain. S. Indira remarks:

"She believes that letting go of her anguish and sorrow would be a treachery and lead her to

lose Anu completely, so instead of battling her pain and agony, she clings to it. She holds her suffering like a masochist."

Urmi's sister-in-law and friend Vanna tries to calm her, "Anything, just talk about it; don't keep it hidden within you," Vanna advises her, "Urmi, why don't you cry? It's not natural not to cry." (120) At this, Urmi says

"I have to confront these memories and overcome them. I have to conquer this struggle if I want to be alive. But however, my triumph will be stained by betrayal because forgetting is betraying" (21).

In addition to losing her child, Urmi is grieving since her husband Kishore is not there to support her. Her life is made more frustrating and lonelier by Kishore's absence, but she skillfully over comes those issues, just like any modern-day woman. She makes the firm resolve to live for her son, Karthik, "No, I have to let go of these memories; I have to overcome. If I want to continue living, I must have to win this war." (21). Urmi's decision to embrace the fact that her daughter Anusha has died and to recommit herself to fulfill life's obligations, particularly her responsibilities to her son Kartik, is the first step towards her self-realization.

When Urmi is fully immersed in her daughter's memories, Akka, Urmi's mother-in-law, brings out an antique trunk. It has some notes, diaries, and yellowing documents. When Akka informs her that these documents belong to Mira, Urmi becomes curious about exploring them. In reality, Mira is Kishore's biological mother. She had passed away when Kishore was only a day old, and in order to provide a mother for the baby, Kishore's father had married Akka. Thus, Meera is Urmi's real mother-in-law and Akka is her step mother-in-law.

Through reading the poems in Mira's diary, Urmi gains insight into her tumultuous marriage. She comes to know from Akka that Kishore's father had pursued and married Mira when she was a college student. Through Mira's poems, Urmi is able to imagine the forced sexual activity Mira had to endure in her unsuitable marriage. Urmi considers it as a rape within marriage.

At the age of eighteen, Mira, an arts graduate, is married off against her will. There's no denying that her husband has an obsession for her. In fact, the forced, one-sided obsessed love makes the marriage a horrific experience for Mira. Her writings reveal her suffocated and deeply distressed state of mind. According to renowned lawyer Indrani Jaisingh, "It is believed that a woman who marries a man has consented to have sex with him at any time. And because her consent is presumed, he is not committing an offense (of rape) even if he forces her." (17)

She occasionally even defies her husband's forced desire for sex, although it would barely affect him. With no other option, Mira is forced to physically submit while emotionally avoiding and never established a psychological connection with her husband. Mira therefore hates the word "love" (67). Even Kishore is the product of a relationship that is entirely devoid of love, and she has no affection for her husband.

In her diary, Mira also writes of meeting Venu, a growing poet who goes on to become a great figure in Indian literature. When Mira shows him some of her poems, he asks, "Why do you want to write poetry? Giving birth to children is sufficient for a young girl like you. Your poetry lies only in producing children. Let men to create the poetry" (127). The intended roughness of this comment offends Urmi. This illustrates the suffering of a talented woman in

a male dominated society who is strictly denied the opportunity to even dream of pursuing a meaningful career or profession. (Mehta, 2024)

One day, Urmi meets Shakuntala, the mother of Kalpana, a rape victim at the hospital where her sister-in-law, Vanaa, works. Kalpana's mother thinks that she was involved in a car accident and is unconscious. But after examining Kalpana, the attending physician, Dr. Bhaskar, says that she was brutally raped. At this her mother Shakutai's reactions are like that of a typical Indian mother who is living in a society that is ruled by men. She tells Vanaa, "That is untrue; you all want to spoil my daughter's name."

She sobs in pain and terror as she learns this from Vanaa and Dr. Bhaskar's talk.

"No, no. Don't tell this to anyone. We're simple people, doctor, and who will marry my girls? I'll never be able to keep my head up again. (Chandrashekharappa ,2015)

Women are not safe in a society that is ruled by men. Sulochana (Sulu), who is the sister of Shakutai and aunt of Kalpana, fears that her husband Prabhakar would throw her away from his home and marry someone else because she is unable to bear a child. Her husband is in lust for Kalpana and is eager to marry her. But when Kalpana rejects her uncle's proposal of marriage, he rapes her.

A patriarchal system allows men to do anything. The patriarchal mindset also gives Prabhakar, Kalpana's uncle, the confidence to approach Kalpana, insist her to marry him, and then rape her. According to the story, Sulu even convinces Kalpana to marry Prabhakar. Instead of protesting, Kalpana's mother, Shakutai, who is also Sulu's sister, lets Kalpana make the choice and when Kalpana refuses to marry her uncle, he brutally raped her. (Mehta, 2024)

Shakutai is unwilling to file a complaint since it will damage the family's reputation and prevent anyone from marrying her daughters. The police also attempt to close the case by portraying it as an accident. Rape cases, in their opinion, are complicated and challenging. A police officer informs Dr. Bhaskar, "She's about to die anyhow, so what matters if she dies of a rape or an accident on paper?" (88).

The way society views a rape victim is therefore unsupportable: "What's left after a girl's dignity is lost? People would always blame the girl, even if she hasn't done anything wrong." (59).

Urmila is the only one who feels offended at the inhumane treatment of the society towards the victim Kalpana and the liberty with which the culprit can escape! "A man wronged with her, hurt her, and she didn't do anything wrong. Why are you unable to see that? Do you have blindness? No, she is not at all to blame for it." (63)

Urmila is determined not to keep quiet. She undertakes the responsibility to fight for justice for Kalpana. She asks Shakutai to report the case to the police. (Bahuguna, 2012) But out of her ignorance, she holds her own daughter responsible for bringing such disgrace and embarrassment to her family. Shakutai, however, is so upset that she tells Urmila, "But often I believe that the sole thing that can support Kalpana now, is death." (178)

Even though Urmila is not related to Kalpana or Shakutai in any sense, still she possesses "sympathy and emotional attachment" for them. Her frequent visits to their home and the hospital, demonstrate her concern for these women. She succeeds in convincing Shakutai that Prabhakhar, the actual culprit, is to blame and that Kalpana is not at fault.

The novel differs greatly from the previous novels of Shashi Deshpande because it presents

the idea of female bonding and a strong woman's determination to support a less fortunate woman. Urmila is successful in drawing social attention towards the problem, and the government orders for a new investigation in Kalpana's case. Her efforts pay off when Shakutai, after realizing her error, asks, "Should I report the police?" (194). (Bala, 2018)

There are delicate times in life, despite all its whims and problems, that make it worthwhile to live and cherish. It is the "spring of life" that we all constantly look for. She comes to realize how we all are bound together by the delicate vine of human compassion, empathy and sympathy. Despite its various ups and downs, life continues. The book closes on an optimistic note when Urmila muses over "the spring of life" that we all want.

The following statements made by Mira and followed by her daughter-in-law Urmila suggest a "positive outlook and determination is needed to move ahead in the direction of stronger unity":

Let us join our hands,
A new road, a new way
A new age begins...

- The Binding Vine

Conclusion:

The emphasis of this book is "rape"—both inside and outside of marriage. This prospect poses a threat to all of the female characters in one way or another. Through reading the poems in Mira's diary, Urmila gains insight into her stressful marriage. Her poems provide Urmila with sufficient proof to imagine the forced sexual relations Mira has endured in her unsuitable marriage.

Moreover, if a girl is raped in this male-dominated society, then also she only has to suffer, both physically as well as mentally. The

society does not bother to raise the finger on the man's dignity even if he is the culprit in the real sense. After her daughter Kalpana was raped, Shakutai is extremely concerned about her daughter's social acceptance. She asks the doctor not to disclose it to anyone. Because in that case, no one will marry her daughters.

Furthermore, a woman, who is childless, is always discriminated in the society. Unfortunately, why only women are held accountable for these situations? Moreover, if the child is not male, then also a mother is blamed, which is completely strange. Sulu's surrender to her husband's threats to send her away if she cannot give him a child is really disgusting.

Still, *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande marks a new stage in her artistic growth. Urmila, the protagonist of the book, is the hope of the novel. She starts a novel path for women by ending the prolonged silence. By giving support and building relationships with other women, Urmila distinguishes herself from her ancestors.

The book depicts a development toward greater humanity. For those women who are oppressed and disenfranchised, Urmila serves as a support system. She starts speaking for people whose voices are suppressed by social conventions. Urmila assists women in redefining themselves. Though she is not a rebel, she took up arms against this sinister "silence" because she would not give in to this hypocrisy. She looks for a path that breaks through stillness so that unspoken suffering and untold stories can be heard.

Hence, we can say that Shashi Deshpande's "*The Binding Vine*" is a gripping book that examines the intricacies of women's life in a patriarchal culture, with a special emphasis on themes of loss, violence, and the quest for

identity. It is renowned for its compassionate representation of women's problems as well as the honest depiction of Indian society. The significance of female bond and women's strength in the face of hardship are also emphasized in the book. Thus, the book skillfully depicts "the urge to survive" in the face of hardship.

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