

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*: A Brief Thematic Study

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Abstract

The chief purpose of liberal feminism has been to expose the prevalent false notions of the society that women are less competent than men. Rather it focuses on gender equality and individual freedom. Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women, J. S. Mill's The Subjugation of Women and Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique are famous works of great feminists, which have paved the way for further reforms of society and women's conditions. Literature is an area, covering broad aspects of issues of society, nation and worldwide. This paper aims to analyze the important latent aspects of society, which have become instrumental in consciousness among women and improving their critical conditions.

Keywords: liberal feminism, prevalent false notions, women's conditions, issues of society, nation and worldwide

A sensitive creative writer is always an eyewitness to grim realities of life and society in general, who not only grips the mind of the reader but captures the truth behind society's artificiality. The novel, *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande beautifully presents a comprehensive portrait of socio-economic realism, emotional values, individual approach, human-endavours, child abuse within domestic areas, rape within marriage and human perceptions. The novel raises several questions like "are the girls safe among relationship in their homes?" What sort of rights are provided to women in society? In male-oriented society, why society's expectations are from females only?

The Binding Vine published in 1993 is based on an integrated pattern of society and gender-issues. The three sub-stories in the novel have been mixed so well in a way tied in one thread of love, sympathy and survival. The stories are based on the real experience of women's life and its bitter truth. The epigraph of the novel "Where were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here" (*The Binding Vine*) has been taken from Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and describes the universe's creation and creativity.

Deshpande has presented the real picture of stereotypes, cultural aspects, and the dark truth of life. This paper is an interesting study of human-predicament and human relationship, including particularly mother-child relation. The novel's title *The Binding Vine* refers to the umbilical cord between mother and her child, which joins each other profoundly and connecting. Here, the protagonist, Urmilla is a lecturer in Bombay College and married to Kishor, a merchant navy. Presently she is away from Kishor, living with her mother Yamini (also called Inni) and her son Kartik. Urmilla is the narrator of the novel, taking care of her mother, Inni and communicating with her earlier friend and sister-in-law Vanna. The astonishing qualities we observe in Deshpande's novel's protagonists are seeing and observing the people and society according to their situations and understandings. The minor characters are always marriage-centred; marriage only matters for them at any cost, where self-respect or individuality within society is not so essential for them. Even women characters, especially protagonists, are individualistic or self-centred. They always try to see the dark

or silent area of society and human beings. Urmi is in deep grief because she has lost her child Anu. Somehow she tries to overcome her grief. She becomes familiar with Mira's life (her mother-in-law) through her diary, given to her by Akka that she (Mira) was raped within marriage. In the flow of the story, it has witnessed how Kalpana is also being raped and hospitalized. Her condition is very pitiable. Despite supporting for justice to her daughter, Shakuntai tries to conceal the facts in this regard that there will be problem in the marriage of her second daughter named Sandhya, if this fact of rape is opened and put before the society.

The novelist has put forward all the aspects of society regarding gender and justice. She had noticed even those areas of life, which human beings of our society do not want to display and remain silent throughout life.

The Binding Vine is a combined saga about the relationship, mainly how the relationship between parents and their children has existed in society. Urmi is the central character, having a son named Kartik and around whom all the other characters have been moving around. Urmi had a daughter named Anusha, who is no more, but her memories have existed in her mind so that she feels her as a living-creature. The observing facts are a cordial bond between mother and children, which joins a mother to her children tightly. The bond between Urmi and her daughter is of blood and attachment. The feeling of being a mother is very typical for woman. To forget her little child Anusha's memories are not comfortable for Urmi, she always realizes : "To forget is to betray". (21)

Another important female character Vanna is the sister of Kishor and friend of Urmi and now Urmi's relation to Vanna is of sister-in-law. Vanna also has two daughters named Mandira and Pallavi. Mandira comes before us very frank and argumentative, while Pallavi is simple. Kishor, Urmi's husband, is a merchant navy officer, living away from Urmi. Presently Urmi is living with her mother Inni, who is also an emotional and dependent lady. Other characters of the novel are Shakuntala (also called Sakutai), Kalpana, Prakash and Sandhaya. Sakutai is a poor woman, belongs to lower caste and status, having three children named Kalpana, Prakash and Sandhaya. It is very sadistic turn in the novel that Kalpana is raped. The rapist of Kalpana is not any outer being, but her uncle named Prabhakar, husband of her mother's sister Sulochana (also called Sulu by her nickname). Karre Svalastoga defines 'rape'

"is a successful or unsuccessful attempt at securing coitus by the method of more or less violence, which in a society creates sufficient disturbance to be reported to the police and brought before a law court". (Svalastoga 51)

In the novel, Deshpande presents the cruel picture of the degrading and hateful situation of the male's attitude. We come to know about the events of Mira's life, mother-in-law of Urmi and Kishor's mother. The mystery of Mira's rape within marriage creates a sensation among the readers. Throughout the novel, rape and marital rape emerge as the significant themes. Such as description of rape raises a question mark on patriarchal social-system, where every decision depends on the male figure. Males are considered to safe-guard the family, more potent than female, but when they come before the society as a rapist, that male-dominated society seems to be ashamed of themselves for this cruel face of man. In the article "*Investigating the Causes and Consequences of Marital Rape*", I. H. Frieze says :

"Sexual relations in rape couples were more negative for the wife in many ways, and these women were more likely to report having sex more often than they wished. Their husband pressurized them into sex more and more likely to want to have sex after beating them". (544)

However, Urmi is presented as a woman of strong willpower. Her strong character can be seen in many ways. Even she decides to live with her grandfather's dead body only at the age of fifteen. In life, she had to suffer because of domestic activities, but her daughter, Annu's death, becomes the

primary reason for her distress, pain, despair, intense, grief, and repentance. Indeed the novel is a portrait of Urmilla's self-understanding and evaluation regarding identity and human relationship. She aims to gain equal status with her husband, even believes in her earnings and wealth, that is why it is revealed that the relationship between Urmi and her husband Kishor is of egalitarian.

While Vanna, her sister-in-law, being a social-worker, represented the glimpse of submissive and dependent wife having a very tender relationship with Harish (who is a doctor), the nature of Urmilla is just the opposite, feeling not secure in her relationship with Kishor. She always feels a kind of separation and lack of physical need, when Kishor leaves her but conceals this fact to Kishor. She thinks how Kishor has become her need : "Each time you leave me, the parting is like a death." (138)

undoubtedly, Kishore is a good husband, yet there is a lack of harmony in their relationship, causes are less-communication and adamant nature of Urmi. As a merchant navy, Kishor can do his transfer and can spend his enough life with Urmi. It is suggested there must be a requirement of time and communication in all relationship. Sometimes, Urmi does not expose her feeling to Kishor by thinking that her female ego may hurt. Throughout the novel, two prominent places have been described : Ranidurg and Bombay city. The Novel's beginning shows how Vanna tries to divert Urmi's mind by recalling her past childhood incidents. While learning the bike, Urmi fell from the bike, injured, her knees yet when she came before Baiajji, informed not to stop riding. Urmi differentiates between the hurt of childhood and now by questioning: "I know what you are trying to tell me. But that was just a hurt, a small hurt, and this is my child, Vanna, it's my child". (8)

The notion of motherhood tortures her mind mentally and emotionally so that she gets hurt herself by banging her head on the wall. D. S. Gahlawat has analyzed Urmi's state of mind :

"Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds, on to it as she believes that to let it become a thing of 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 incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss" (*Turmoil and Turn Woman in Shashi Deshpande's Novels*, 128).

Urmi spent a significant part of her life in Ranidurg from childhood here. So memories of Ranidurg are very dark in her mind. Though Ajja was not very rich, it does not mean that he was poverty-stricken, but his source of livelihood was his pension only. The house was a gift from Raja, while his son completed graduation because Ajju tutored his son. The house was not more than a splendid facade only. Urmi's preference regarding the choice of clothes was individual, not artificial; always accepted the stitched clothes made by Baiajji and ignored the expensive clothes given by her mother Inni, whether looked different from other children in school : "I didn't mind that. It was better than being distinctive in Inni's expensive clothes." (9)

Through the conversation between Amrut and Urmi, it has been seen that Amrut is in love with Radha. Urmi says to him to tell Inni about his feeling for Radha in a funny mood. Nevertheless, Amrut says in any airy way that he will tell to Inni on a coming time, and realize to Urmi that he helped her when she needed his support. Urmi remembers the words of her father. The meaning of it was that every living cell desires to multiply. Remembering the last poem of Mira, Urmi realizes that Mira lost in silence after writing this poem. Mira intended to recreate the poem later, but she died just after one month. While she gave the birth of his child, could not survive more than one hour.

Having gone through the entire plot of the novel it clearly appears that theoretically, Feminism aims at rising long-way existing gender issues prevalent in this patriarchal society. Major themes of the novel are women's emancipation, mother-daughter bonding, human bonding, parenthood issues, loneliness with marriage, the problem of earning women, polygamy, individual preference, caste and class.

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