

Suppression of Women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to present the sorrows and sufferings, self sacrificing, suppression and oppression and helplessness of Indian women. This is the tradition of society that women should be timid and submissive. They have to face various harsh realities of life in order to adjust themselves in male dominated society. Women were not supposed to raise voices for their rights and protest against injustice. They have to exist only according to the wishes of patriarchal society.

Shashi Deshpande, a well known Indian English fiction writer started her literary career by writing a short story in 1970. In all her writings, Deshpande reflects upon the issues related to women and sympathy for the women characters. The novel *The Binding vine* portrays the suppression of women at the hands of male members of the society. Her novel presents the disappointments and frustrations of women which they experience in patriarchal society. She has established her greatness by dealing with issues of Indian women. Moreover, she studies the problems and concerns of contemporary middle class women. Her women characters are frustrated and disappointed at the hands of cultural oppression in the society.

Women are subjugated by male-oriented cultural values although somewhere from ages they are considered as to be a goddess. Indian women tries to face all hardships because of their socialization. Nationalized movement spoke about independence of women so after its advent, women started to express their feelings. If they are on par with men and transformed their level this was only possible through the power of education. But in this day to day state of equality and changed thinking towards women, even they faced many obstacles and suffering. A few women novelists like Manju Kapur, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande goes deep into the psyche of their women characters that are binding in the obstacles created in front of them by the dissonance between the individual and the surroundings.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* presents the gloomier picture of the middle class women. In India, women has been represented as a spineless wooden creature, who has no feeling or wishes of her own and all her feelings depend upon the wishes of the male. The heroins of Shashi Deshpande's novel do not rebel but they learn to generate in themselves the power to cope with the male orientation by facing the harsh realities of life.

The title of Shashi Deshpande's novel can be the starting point of analysis. *The Binding Vine* is symbolic in the novel of the redemptive power of love. The vine is a creeper, a trailing plant which can have rope like qualities of binding. As the vine needs support to move forward such is woman who wants support of patriarchal society to move forward in life. *The Binding Vine* suggests several things in many directions as following: The protagonist's bond of familial ties of parents, husband and children, her bond of pregnancy that is the connection of umbilical cord. She also feels love for her lost daughter and have love in Mira's poems. Moreover, she also feels sympathy for the wrongs done to Kalpana.

Shashi Deshpande has presented Urmila as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by the death of her daughter. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who, tries to make the best of her life by facing the realities of life. Besides Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women's needs of the head heart and the anatomy. Urmi, the protagonist of the novel also grieves over her dead infant daughter Anu. Although she tries to fight the loss, she feels that forgetting this loss would be equivalent to betrayal. She had spent her childhood with her grandparents and had no intimacy with her mother nor with her husband who was far away. In this way, she says, "I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle. I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray" (21). It is her heartily attachment with her daughter that become her cause of suffering. She realizes her responsibilities for Kartik, her only son who need her love. When her father died she was greatly shocked. She says that "Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory"(16) but Anu is different when Inni wants Anu's framed photograph to be on wall she reacts bitterly by saying that she does not need a picture to remember her. But when her friend Lalita asks her how many kids she has, she replies, Only one son(106) And soon she realizes that she has done injustice to Anu.

Only one son ...the words keep hammering in my mind
How could I? That was betrayal, treachery
How could I deny my Anu? Only one son....How could I? (106)

There is this inequity deep rooted in Indian society towards women. This idea is very well illustrated with the marriage of Akka in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* who willingly agree to marry a widower, as she thought that marriage is a single goal for girl. Women are groomed for dependence of wifehood and motherhood. Akka was brought as a bride only to be a mother to the one day infant Kishore. It was a loveless married life.

Fixed with the memories of her daughter she comes across a photograph of her mother-in-law Mira who is introduced as "Kishore's mother. Kartik's grandmother". Urmi is shocked to notice the difference in handing over Mira's property to her. When Akka hands over Mira's jewellery to Urmi, she says "They are kishore's mother's....." but while giving books and diaries to her she says, "Take this, it's Mira's"(48) this difference made by Akka symbolizes that the poems and diaries are her own achievements whose identities does not depend on husbands.

Urmi forgets her own suffering after reading the poems of Mira who exists only in notebooks, discovered by chance in the dusty trunk, which depicts her suffering and sacrifices. Urmi tries to go deep into Mira's poetry to visualize the troubled life she lived. Her diary and poems connote molestation in marriage. When Mira came to her In-law's house she was labeled as Nirmala the first alienation from her identity from herself. One of her poem was written in reaction to this incident:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice
Carefully traced a name 'Nirmala'
Who is this? None but I,
Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

According to Urmi, Mira is not an ordinary woman. She wonders how she lived with a husband with whom she had nothing common to share and how could she survive a life denied of choices and freedom. She thinks that "Perhaps it was her writing that kept her going that kept her alive"(127). Mira's writing reflect the pain of a vibrant young women trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage and of a gifted writer whose work because she is a women, must remain shrouded in secrecy and silence. Mira's problem is her obsessive love for her husband, he loves her not for her sake but for his own lust. Perhaps her situation reflects the situation of many such unfortunate women. Deshpande suggests here that forced violation of woman's body even in marriage can be as traumatic as rape even though it is not placed in the same bracket. In case of Harish and Vanna also, Vanna's submission is just to keep her marriage intact. It makes woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male domination. In the words of Adrienne Rich, "it is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind as well"(Rich 61). Mira dies after four years of her loveless marriage during childbirth. To her, sex became a stinging arachnid borne by women in silence. In one of her poem, Mira cries and 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)

Mira's mother to whom she refers in the diary is another example of a self sacrificing and suffering woman. Mira hated her mother right from her childhood days who always succumb herself to her husband. Hence, she opposes every inch of her mother's advice who says, "Never utter no, submit and your life will be a paradise"(83). Totally absorbed in her role of an ideal wife and mother, she never thought of her individual self, and always became ready to sacrifice herself for others.

Shashi Deshpande publically shows respect to women who suffers domination by male and death silently. In Mira's last and the only complete poem, Urmi finds the phase that lends the title of the book.

Desire, says Buddha, is the cause of grief
But how escape this cord

This binding vine of love? Fear lies coiled within
This womb-piercing joy.(136-137)

The Vine needs the support of a stem or branch to survive, its identity is often defined by the tree around which it twines itself. This is also the condition of women of Mira's generation. Mira is also forced to kill her poetic ambitions with the intensive generalization. A very well-known poet discouraged her after reading her poems as:

Why do you need to write poetry?
It's enough for young women like you
To give birth to children .that is your
Poetry, leave the other poetry to us men.(127)

This type of thinking of Venu reflects the thinking of the society of that period. It reflects the agony of creative woman in an andocentric world of that period where the men of the society can't expect a woman to write the poetry and they think that this is the work which should be done by the men only. Here one can put the ideas of Elaine Showalter, American literary critic, feminist and writer on cultural and social issues, who gave two kinds of feminist theories and consider women as the producer of textual meaning by presenting their experience as writers. She is always compared with the spineless wooden creature that has no feeling of her own and all her wishes depend on male which become the cause of her suppressed condition.

Kamala Das expresses the same grievousness in her poem "An Introduction".

Dress in saris, be girl `
Be wife, they said. Be embroider, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in on.
Belong, cried the Categorizes.(pg)

This attitude which our society follows is quiet symbolic of how women are deprived of imagination and the power of communication. The poem of Mira haunts Urmi so much that she decides to bring her thoughts back to life by getting her poems published. But when Vanaa,(significant name vandana) Urmi's sister in-law who is an archetypal Indian pativrata comes to know about all this she is infuriated. She feels that this stride of Urmi will destroy and demolish the honor of her family. In fact, in our society, the women are brought up in such a way that they start looking at the world and interpreting it from the male point of view. Their own individuality, perception and thought process is marred by their own conventional female counterparts.

Urmila the narrator of the novel *The Binding Vine* befriends Shakuntla, the mother of a rape victim, Kalpana and takes up the young girls' case. Shakuntla has two daughters Kalpana and Sandhya and a son. Shakutai is the bread winner of the family because her husband doesn't stay with them. Kalpana was lying unconscious and her mother thought she met with a car accident but however she was raped. Her mother's reaction was the same as a

typical Indian mother. She says, “It’s not true; you people are trying to blackmail my daughter name; my daughter is not of that kind” (58). Most Indian mothers react same as they are concerned about their marriage. Talking about rape. Deshpande says, “everybody wants to hush it up..... I would say yes, make it public, but when it comes to my own daughter, my own self, would I? The mother blames her daughter for crossing the limits of a woman’s life and attracting attention “If you paint and flaunt yourself do you think they’ll leave you alone?” (146). The mother does not want the case to be reported to the police as it would spoil her name and would become an obstacle in front of her marriage. This incident was narrated in the poetic way like this:

No, no, no. Tell him that it’s not
True, don’t tell anyone I’ll
Never be able to hold up my
head again, who I’ll marry
the girl, we’re decent people.(31)

Shakutai is also afraid of the boys of her colony because they used to behave like dogs chasing girls, taking them as bitches. To cast aside from this problem, she thought to marry kalpana to Prabhaker who was Sulu’s husband, knowing that Sulu was also not comfortable in her marriage. As the case got reported by Urmi, the rapist is revealed who is none other than Prabhaker, Sulu’s husband. Sulu is a childless and is afraid that her husband would shunt her out of the house. So she approves her husband’s wish to marry Kalpana, by accepting Kalpana as co-wife. Kalpana rejects the proposal and the result of this was rape. Knowing that her own husband molested Kalpana, she could not lie just to save her husband from charges of molesting, so she committed suicide after serving breakfast to her husband. Sakutai might be thinking that by marrying her daughter soon, “she will be safe from other men”. Urmi analyses the condition of a neglected women for whom marriage acts as a defence from the outer worlds as it provides a symbolic shelter for them for whole of the life. But if marriage is the only means of security then why Mira, Shakuntla and Sulu are the women who are physically vulnerable even in the safe structure of marriage.

Urmila is always puzzled as to why her parents kept her away from them and why not her brother. She bore a kind of grudge against her mother Inni for leaving her with her grandparents in her childhood. This is the example of Indian women who are subjected to domination by their husband. Inni tries to explain Urmi that it was not she who send her away but her father who had no trust in his wife in matter of childcare. “I was frightened of you Urmi, I was too young, I was not prepared to have child and you were not easy, you used to cry all the time. I didn’t know how to soothe you.... then he (Papu) decided he would take you to his mother, he didn’t say anything to me, I cried, nothing could make him change his mind” (200). Now Urmi come to know how Inni must have suffered the pain of separation and how bravely she bore it over the years without complaining. She feels very sorry for her mother.

Urmila become conscious that women in different levels regardless of their social background are given a harsh treatment. She is enraged at the educated women like Vanna who submit themselves to secure their marriage. Vanna's constant repetition of "Harish says" irritates Urmila, she rebukes Vanna, "Assert yourself; you don't have to crawl before him. Do you"? (80).

The women characters in the novel look for their identity from the male dominated society. They wish love from them nor mere lust. They want themselves to be heard and express their feelings in the society. The women's harassment in the society overcomes even the mother's grief on the death of her daughter.

The susceptibility of the girl child in our society towards such heinous acts is clearly brought out by their conversation. It is very clear that relationship within the family is no protection against the sexual vulnerability. Here Deshpande brings the point that it is not the victim who is responsible but it is the society at large which is to be made accountable for such brutal act against women. But upon all the agonies and frustrations, women is surviving and struggling to make her identity in the society.

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