

A Critical Study of Resurrection of Self : A Feminist Perspective, Study of Shashi Deshpande's "The Binding Vine"



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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English today has acquired an admirable position and the commendation for it goes to a good number of women writers, whose pens have spilt much ink in fetching to light the agonies of women's life, left untouched by their male counterparts. The myriad expressions of their feminist works expose the bruises of women's sole and their miseries as individuals. They project the plight of women, suffering from the conventions of patriarchal society and express the quest of women to assert their selfhood in a society prejudiced in favor of men. These women writers liberate their female from the confinement of men and give them new birth to emerge out of the dominancy into the openness of assertion. Their expository and creative writers have significantly encouraged and shaped the feminist's struggle to empower women and help them transcend their deprived status. These feminist writers are audacious explorers of female psyche, make strenuous efforts to renounce and emancipate their women from the conventional patterns of patriarchal codes.

Keywords : Formidable Array, Feminist Perspective, The Binding Vine, Patriarchal Society

INTRODUCTION

From the formidable array of these Indian women writers, Shashi Deshpande is chosen for my venture to reveal her missionary zeal for exposing the disgrace heaped on women, their pathetic condition and how they evolve into a new being from various assaults of life. Shashi Deshpande, the recipient of much sought after Sahitya Akedemi Award for the novel, That Long Silence holds a prominent position in Indian English Literature. Deshpande, the living dynamic writer explores and exposes the vivid picture of women in traditional Indian society. She is the daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar sriranga. Her major novels include, The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), Roots and Shadows(1983), That Long Silence

(1988), *The Binding Vine*(1992), *A Matter of Time*(1996), *Small Remedies*(2000), *Moving On*(2004) and *In The Country of Deceit*(2008).

The themes of her novels revolve around women and their struggle, entrapped between tradition and modernity. G.S.Amur rightly observes: Woman's struggles in the context of the contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as writer (Amur 10). Deshpande has written inspiring collections of short stories which explicate the literary values. Her novels are about women trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their place in this society. Feminism is the belief that all people should be treated equally in legal, economic and sexual arenas-regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other similar pre-dominant identifying traits. The term 'Feminism' has its origin from the Latin 'Femina' meaning 'Woman' and thereby refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the ground of 'Equality of sexes'. Feminism, besides being a political crusade, attempts to question the pre-conceived assumptions about the roles that men and women are expected to perform in the patriarchal setup. In literature feminism investigates the depiction of gender roles which tend to impose social norms, customs, conventions, laws and expectation on the grounds of gender discrimination. It brazenly audaciously the age-long customs of gender-bias and explores a new social order wherein women play an emancipator role and liberate the victims of man-made society.

Shashi Deshpande dislikes being termed as feminist and voices out that her novels are not intended to be viewed as feminist works. In one of her interviews, she states: Is writing by women only for women... when I sit down to write, I am just a writer- my gender ceases to matter to me We are different, yes, but once again the factors which unite us are far more important than the gender differences which divide us I'm a novelist, I write novels, not feminist tracts. Read my novel as a novel, not as a piece of work that intends to propagate feminism. (Deshpande 2003:143). At another instance she writes: My writing has been categorized as 'writing about women' or 'Feminist' writing. In this process, much in it has been missed. I have been denied the place and dignity of a writer who is dealing with issues that are human issues, of interest to all humanity. (Jain 37)

Shakutai pleads Urmi to help her and yields to her plan for the goodness of Kalpana, Consequently Urmi seeks help from Malcolm, the press reporter, to publish the news of molestation. As it was published, many controversial issues arise and people at home censure Urmi for disgracing the girl's name. Vanaa, the friend and sister-in-law of Urmi mistakes her and there is a perturbation in their mutual understanding. Urmi

discovers the poems of her late mother-in-law treasured by Akka, finds a reservoir of female trauma that epitomizes the experience of women, globally. Urmi the protagonist spends most of her time in her feminine energy; she is the receiver of attention and helps the victims, being most compassionate she empathizes the people around her. People are drawn towards her enticing inner beauty which responds to the problems of others, comforts them and offers remedy positively. Filled profusely with feminine energy, Urmi embraces the feministic idea that woman is equal to man in socio-economical status. She heaves to the higher position of social ladder and leads other oppressive women. In the novel 'The Binding Vine', when Urmi meets Shakutai in the hospital where Kalpana lies unconscious after a ravish molestation, she immediately contemplates the death of her baby daughter. Urmi's state of bereavement makes her highly sensitive to the despondency and misery of other women who suffer a terrible fate. Bhaskar, after a careful examination informs Shakutai that her daughter is brutally raped. Shakutai is shattered from the core and disbelieves the misfortune of her daughter. Hysterically she cries to vanaa to conceal the matter claiming in the name of girl's honor.

Urmi persuades Shakutai to register a rape case in the police station and punish the culprit, but she is not convinced. Shakutai is worried about the scandal that would certainly ruin the family's reputation and impair the marriage prospects of not only Kalpana but her younger daughter, Sandhya. Shakutai decides her daughter to suffer in silence because publicizing would make the matters worse. This is an authentic picture of women in Indian patriarchal set-up. The pre-defined patterns of this society ruthlessly punish the victim to suffer in solitude, rather seeking justice. Shakutai goes to the extent of desiring premature death for her daughter instead of carrying the ignominy throughout her life. The restriction against women's liberation is being accepted by women as a social order to prove their chastity. Shakutai censures Kalpana's behavior as, "We have to keep to our places, we can never step out. There are always people weighting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all. I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me. 'I'm not afraid of anyone,' she used to say. That's why this happened to her..... women must know fear.'(148).

Deshpande presents the blind acceptance of women but never fails to question their ignorance. Urmi explains to Shakutai that it is the culprit who has to be punished but not the victim. The crux of all the prevailing problems of women is their subjugation which is always in the form of silent servitude. Violence against women, whether physical, psychological or emotional, is an issue that crosses all borders and all classes of women. Women's suppression is rooted in the very fabric of traditional Indian society. In this novel

'The Binding Vine' Deshpande has dexterously united three sub-plots, which essentially deals with the tragedy of three different women. If Kalpana's tragedy is the rape outside marriage, 'Mira', the late Mother-in-law of Urmi is the victim of marital rape. Violation of one's body is a sin to be avoided. Mira, who had a forced wedlock, does not entertain any love relationship and physical charm with her husband. Though Mira consciously avoided her husband's love play, it was a futile effort, for her inner being was torn into pieces to fulfill her husband's lust. For her being alone is more blissful than with her husband, together. Her cry of rage and anguish is explicit in the following remarks.

Deshpande subtly portrays how women are discouraged and denied of their intellectual pleasure. Like Virginia Woolf, she feels that women should be allowed to utilize their talents and simultaneously they should fulfill their household duties in their family. Woolf remarks in 'A Room of one's Own', many glorious literary texts, the property of women, were often left without signature. Mira's suffering epitomizes the universal plight of women. Violation of one's body, even if sanctified by marriage, can be as humiliating and traumatic an experience as rape. This was long back observed by Simon de Beauvoir as: marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights 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 (Beauvoir).

In 'The Binding Vine', Deshpande laboriously attempts to explore the agony of women which tears them into pieces to make their men whole. Sulu, the sister of Shakutai is the most dutiful wife of Prabhakar, was like a mother to Kalpana. She assisted very piously her husband to the fulfillment of all his needs but she was tossed desperately with the fear that Prabhakar would take another woman because Sulu is infertile.

"Assert yourself; you don't have to crawl before him, do you?"(80) Priti, the friend of Urmi embraces the feministic attitude when she unearths the pathos and sufferings of women in the name of honor. Priti, the filmmaker of the movie 'Sati' has earned a fair reputation by portraying violence against women. She is not the structurally patterned traditional woman, but brushing aside all narrow social conventions she throws light on the brutality experienced by women. The novel 'The Binding Vine' chiefly revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmi, Kalpana, Shakutai, Sulu and Mandhira. The author tactfully hints at the suffering of numerous other women. Deshpande's women characters however rebellious they are, never leap to break familial relationships and most esteemed cultural values. Being sensitive and aware of the social injustice prevailing in the society; her protagonists try to change the situation or at least fight for their basic rights. They offer solace and encourage the other victims to find remedy to the problem. The novel 'The

Binding Vine' celebrates women's coming together with other women, sharing their grief with other female companions who are sailing in the same boat offers them courage and comfort to battle against male-chauvinism. Commenting on this, Indira Nityanandam observes: the setup forward, achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the deserve of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws society's attention to the plight of the rape victim and determined to get Mira's poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist; Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting only their own battles (qtd. By Dhawan 66) Shashi Deshpande visualizes that changes would clean the society if women forge into sisterhood. In the words of Urmi.

Deshpande's novels reveal her acute sensitivity to the issues involving women and her tremendous sympathy for women. She presents both the weaknesses and strengths of women. She exhibits the power of women to withstand and withhold to survive with an identity created by individuals but not by the society. Her women finally realize, after everything- grief, shock, anger, bitterness and treachery, that life is worth living.

Thus we find the women in "The Binding Vine" undertake the journey of suppression and oppression in their lives, but they are not weak. They believe in the cruel hands of time yet they cling to hope and vicissitudes not denying the fact that they have to excavate their real strength. Her women characters despite their exploitation by the society preserve their real selves, the key to their resurrection of self. In the end they like a phoenix emerges to live life afresh.

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