



THE CHANGING PHASE: SEARCH FOR INDIVIDUALITY IN BINDING VINE

Dr Divyabha

Asst. Professor

The NorthCap University

Gurgaon, Haryana

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the modern Indian women's search for self, society and their relationship to other social people in her novels. Her own struggle as a writer is to focus on women's issues, problems and exercises. She uses woman's voice, which comes from her inner self, to present the social reality as it is experienced by woman herself. Her manner of performance in writing goes along with skilfulness in the command of fundamentals deriving from practice and familiarity of interweaving stories from the past till date.

Her novel *The Binding Vine* touches the soul of every woman if she fails to identify herself and show a response or a reaction to the dubiety, complexes, concerns, frights, revere, inclinations, hopes, desires, agony, and woe of Urmila, the female protagonist in the novel. In her journey of life she has gone through almost all the emotional aspects of life as afflict and irritable petulant feeling, delight and psychological suffering, disarray and guilt conscious.

Shashi Deshpande's female characters assay individuality within the domain and compass of her relations. She deals also with the loneliness of women and tries to extrapolate the comparisons among different kinds of women. Deshpande presents broad family tradition in which two three generations used to live together. It is said that a woman is not complete without the larger context of the extended family and it has been very well said by the female protagonists (Jaya of *That Long Silence* and Indu of *Roots and Shadows*).

"The old tradition- bound world coexists with the modern, creating unforeseen gaps and disruptions within the family fold."¹

Women's understanding to comprehend the situation or circumstances of the old patterns of behavior becomes questionable because the modern lookout is not ready to accept it. Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* coerces women to give careful consideration for the development of a general conscious awareness for them to survive, which is necessary but lacking. This story





centers round three women characters Urmila, Mira and Kalpana. An intricately connected system of familial relationships is also present here which seems quite in accordance with or determined for the story of an Indian woman,

“Urmi’s narration of her story is interwoven with carefully selected stories of other women- some belonging to the family, some belonging to the larger society, who accidentally draw her into their own narrative structures.”²

On a first look this novel gives an illusion of just one story of an individual but when the outside comes across in the novel; which is represented by the story of Kalpana, a rape victim. The novel is consciously raising many problems in Indian society; the story of the rape victim, the class distinction, a class of Kalpana, which is totally different from

the class of Urmi. in spite of this difference there are so many indistinguishable,

“...the story of Kalpana- as a story in support of the narrator’s own movement towards some kind of self- fortification. It will be very interesting to trace these tangential figures in the narratives pattern of the novel *The Binding Vine*.”³

Urmi, the storyteller, a college lecturer, is bereaving over the death of her baby daughter Anu and trying to recover from this sudden death of an infant. And her heart felt desire not to abandon her intense sorrow caused by loss of a beloved daughter and she said:

“I must reject these memories. I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray.” (p.21)

She feels very intensely of the state of containing nothing in life and suffers from utter impuissance about it. Her psychic state of difficulty that needs to be resolved is exasperated further by her physical problem Asthma. Although everybody tries to give comfort she needs when consoled in times of disappointment, she continues to feel the void of life, obsessed with the memories of dead Anu in reality and in dreams as well. Although she has other child Kartik also, she finds it extremely difficult to forget the dead baby. The emotional vine that binds her to her daughter cannot be conduced even after the death of the baby. In fact, it becomes stronger and stronger day by day. She realizes that her son Kartik needs her love and affection for his upbringing.

Urmila indulges herself in the act of retrospection and of speaking for Mira and Kalpana because these women are the representatives of those women, who cannot speak for themselves or





rather they are not allowed to speak for themselves but this speaking of Urmi for others takes place only after the death of Anusha. This crisis in Urmi's life makes her feel lonely which sets her apart from Priti, who takes great interest in the issues regarding Indian women and the forms in which they have been suffering. As the novel progresses we see Urmi gaining more and more insight into herself. With the remembrance of the words of Priti, Urmi says:

“women's vision'... It was Priti who used the words to me. 'I want your vision, a woman's vision' she said and I laughed at her. I thought it ridiculous that two persons should have a share of same vision, only because they belong to the same sex... now I realize.” (p. 125)

When Urmi was grieving for Anu, her friend Vanna, friend from childhood and now her sister-in-law and her brother Amrut feel that she has always been a woman of utmost guts, tremendous bravery that empowers her to deal with all the situations with fearlessness and she could manage the old decaying mansion, in which she matured, and her old grandfather at the age of thirteen. Vanna tried to remind her capacity which she carried with her every time. Urmila feels that those anguishes are only a showy misrepresentation intended to conceal something unpleasant just as the house at Ranidurg was a façade of grandeur as none of the inner rooms matched the outside. Same way the pain and sorrow cannot be matched with all these suffering. Vanna also reminded her when her father died, she could bear the shock easily. She says: “Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory (p.27)

Her baffled motherhood moved her to another manifestation from which the female gender is suffering is rape, which becomes a manifest indication not of masculinity. Rape has always been an atrocious and an affront to one's dignity or self-esteem piled on woman by a cruelly rapacious person.

Shashi Deshpande herself admits that this novel *The Binding Vine* is about this animal tendency of man:

“If you ask Shashi Deshpande what her new novel is about, she is silent for a while. Then she says, in a small voice: its about rape. It now your turn to fall silent.”⁴

Shashi Deshpande often writes about the woman who is dwelling between the traditionality and modernity but now this time she has raised the voice against this sexual disorder and rape.





Having or showing excessive or compulsive concern to the remembering of her daughter, Urmila found the pictures, poems and diaries of her mother-in-law Mira. She wrote her poems in Kannada and diaries in English, her poems do not reach the public. Since the poems did not seem to be meant for public and as Deshpande drops the hint that they are autobiographical. Mira's poems are the strong force of the novel. They are presented in Urmila's English translation from Mira's Kannada. Shashi Deshpande acknowledgements credit Kannada poet Pratibha Nandkumar for crating Mira's poems. These poems have been written in an autobiographical mode and reflecting her emotions:

“What memories of her own life did this poem bring back for Akka? Did they say it of her and her husband too? ‘A couple just like Laxmi- Narayan’? Or were her tears born of pure pity for Mira, the frightened girl who feared ‘the coming of the dark- clouded, engulfing night?’ And how was she so sure the experience was Mira's own? I know, because its here, in her diary, the clay out of which she shaped her poems.” (p.66)

On first look diaries envision Mira as a loving child of her parents especially of her father, who is a proud father because the daughter is an intelligent and talented girl this is the reason her father gifted her a book of poems because Mira was primarily inclined to be a poetess. But she had reservations to come forward in this matter because:

“Mira's desire to be a poet, her fear of being laughed at if she expresses it aloud, her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty are all evident in her poems.”⁵

The diaries were not only showing her desires but it was a manifesto of sufferings, which she faced after marriage. Urmi showed curiosity about Mira and asked Akka about her. Undisputed credibility of the diaries makes an unexpected turmoil on Akka, the second wife of Mira's husband.

This novel *The Binding Vine* carries different aspect –rape in marriage. This aspect has been touched by Shashi Deshpande, second time, first in *The Dark Holds No Terror* when the physical assaults that Saru receives from her husband is the extremity of tragic life, after getting married against the will of her parents she cannot even think to go back to them. Her husband Manu has been assaulting her. Shashi Deshpande has shown same level of impuissance in her both the novels *The Dark Holds no Terror* and *The Binding Vine*. When Saru says:





“And I? Now, I knew. It was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not even relevant to my life anyways. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfilment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. But for me sex was now a dirty word.”(p. 133)

As the novel progresses we see that Urmi gradually gets connected closely and often incriminatingly in the discovery of her dead mother-in-law, Mira’s poetry written, when she was young and an unfortunate person who suffers from an adverse circumstance of conjugal rape. She made a strenuous or labored effort against the man who tried to possess her despite her extremely sharp or intense aversion. Through the poetry of Mira one can visualize. Against all patriarchal norms that Deshpande’s protagonists have to fight. Mira managed to write without a room of her own and in secret because she never expect any recognition or acceptance for her writing.

Another aspect of this novel is the relation between Urmi and her husband Kishore. She is frustrated in her married life. Kishore is an officer in Navy, he comes home not very frequently and when he visits to spend his vocations with his wife and children but Urmila longs to have him with her always. Although this marriage was a love marriage they used to play in their childhood and then had fallen in love with each other and finally got married with the consent of family. But their married life was not perfect. Just after marriage she felt that she had been trapped by him and had run away from the house. She was not able to accept this kind of relationship, “The two of us in a closed room and we can’t get out. That’s marriage.”(p.138)

Although Urmi submitted herself to Kishore in sex but she always had an intense aversion for that as she started identifying herself with Mira. Urmi never been able to disclose her this very feeling which had been situated farthest within her, to Kishore and the trap look on his face always remained with her. Primarily Kisore was neither self-generated nor extravagantly demonstrative of emotions like Urmi. But after the death of Anu:

“The death of Anu acts as a catalyst, and Urmi is compelled to re-define her relationship with Kishore.”⁶

Urmi always wanted to publish Mira’s poetry because she aims to discover the strangulated voice enunciating woman’s silent treatment, convert into intelligible form of the silent language and





liberating the imagination of woman. The poem of Mira, which is the epigraph for the concluding section of the novel, speaks of standing still and seeking the spring of life that is love.

“Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by thoughts of dying, of ceasing to be.” (p. 203)

All the characters wonder at the end of the novel whether the fugacious but memorable moments when the love between two beings reflects out which together make up this spring of life. And this binding of relations makes life sufficiently valuable to justify investment of time or interest.

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