

Female Trauma and Silence in Shashi Deshpande's 'The Binding Vine'

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Abstract—Shashi Deshpande focuses her attention on middle-class women's problems and experiences they face in their families and society. There may be three reasons for Shashi Deshpande to portray the middle-class educated woman. Firstly, she has come from a middle-class family. Secondly, the middle-class women form a larger part of contemporary Indian society. Thirdly, the middle-class woman seems to be the fit subject to explain the conflict between tradition and modernity. She presents the psychological problems of the individual mind in her novels. Her women struggle for their rights in a conventional society. They try to transcend it but fail. They however work hard to prove their individuality. They fight against the norms and conventions of society. But, ultimately they compromise with the traditional and societal codes. She describes such a woman's inner world in her novels. The *Binding Vine* focuses on the disturbed minds of the women characters. Urmila fights the despair caused by her daughter's loss in her gloomy domestic atmosphere, without having a supporting husband. The novel describes the mental trauma of her character who is affected by forced marriage and also clearly explores multiple forms of female trauma such as psychological, sexual, marital emotional and generational trauma.

Index Terms—Conventional Society, Compromise, predicament, submissiveness, oppression, economic independent

I. INTRODUCTION

Human life in a society is the resource of literature. It mirrors society and plays a vital role in development and registers the same in the form of books. The purpose of literature is to reflect society, the reality of life.

Indian society stands as the value laden structure with required resources not a value ridden society. It has been a formation with its base on patriarchy and its related intertwining branches extending towards the family units. The Writer presents a purview of society in which men hold the prime and responsible positions to define discriminate and decide the regulations of everyday life and find solutions for the ensuing problems. Women live under an oppressive mechanism of the patriarchal society. The inter-personal power relationship of women and men is highly sensitive and serious. The educated women of Deshpande's novels crave for identity.

Shashi Deshpande pictures an educated woman who revolts against the conventional society but towards the end compromises with the existing reality, as her bondage with the family suffers. The novelist also reveals the fact that modern women are economically independent but emotionally dependent on their husbands. She presents the two characters Kalpana and Mira, two victims of man's lust and shows how the two suffer helplessly the agony caused by it.

Urmila is a clever, educated woman working as a lecturer in a college. She has married a man of her own selection. Kishore, her husband works in Merchant Navy and therefore gets only one month to visit his home. But Urmila is capable of leading a socially secure life and economically even without help her husband. This condition makes her egoist and she does not like to submit herself to her husband.

Experiencing death through the loss of her one year old daughter, Urmi becomes too sensitive to feel the despair of other women of the society even though they may not be close to her in time or relationship. In her mind the female experiences motherhood and lives for it. She understands the poor conditions of the life of women living in a male dominated society and their inability to speak for their rights. She begins to pay attention on the life of such women whose urge for freedom and creativity has been destroyed through forced physical relationship by men. In the end, she comes out as a self-assertive and entirely different woman because of her education which enables Urmila to reassess her life and find ways to cope with it.

II. ANALYSIS

On reading Mira's poems, Urmila tries to visualize her as a girl. She visualizes Mira as the favourite daughter of her father, who might have been proud of the child's intelligence and talent. It is evident when he has presented a book to her daughter. Urmila wonders whether Mira has talked to her father about the marriage with the man or showed her father her poems. Urmila finds in Mira's diary which has revealed about the day on which a young poet, Venu

has been invited to her college to address the students. In the crowd, a student has asked Venu why he has chosen the name Venu for himself. To his question, Venu has replied that he is a flute. He has also added that

'the creator of the music is someone else', he is 'only an instrument.' And how strange, he didn't sound humble when he said that, he sounded almost arrogant. How proudly he declared, I am only an instrument!' He read out two of his poems. I've written them down so I won't forget. Each time I read them, I am filled with awe. Will I ever be able to write like this? Today, after hearing him, I know this is what I want – to be able to write like this. But I can't believe I ever can. And, thank God, I never say this aloud. They will laugh at me, I can imagine how they will, I can hear them laughing. (65)

Mira has felt that his words have sounded arrogant. Venu has recited many of his poems. Mira has been deeply inspired by these poems. After hearing Venu's poems, Mira's desire to become a poet has surfaced. She has also started writing poems but never showed them to anyone. She has felt that someone would laugh at her, if she has expressed it aloud. These are all evident in her poems. In one such poem, Mira has written:

Huddled in my Cocoon, a somnolent silkworm will I emerge a beautiful being? Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist. (65)

Mira has got married to the man when she is eighteen. She is only twenty-two when she died. Urmila relates her freedom and the choice of her own life in comparison to women of olden days who have lived a terrible life. From Mira's diary, Urmila comes to know Mira's meeting with Venu. Mira has showed him her poems. After reading them, he has never encouraged her. He has told her that a woman's duty is child bearing and nurturing the child. He has added that men have to write poetry. Urmila knows that Venu has become a great poet of the century, who died just a year later. He is a grand old man of Indian literature who has won all the awards and honours. His poems are sung on the radio, TV and even in films. Urmila says that

Venu ... even I knew his name. Papa was an admirer of his. 'He's that rare thing, a born poet,' Papa used to say. I remember Papa uncharacteristically tongue-tied when he met him once at a function, and, like a schoolboy, held out a copy of his book for Venu to autograph. I was there too at that function, in the last year of Venu's life, when he was

honoured. I can remember the frail, bewildered figure and his wife, anxious and watchful by him, the admirers who surrounded him. (128)

The creativity of a woman is not properly recognized. The society wants to keep a woman always inside the four walls of the house. It is not a kind of physical enclosure but of knowledge – arrest and the society never has a least thought that woman also has a physical brain and engendering creative skills. They are afraid of the impending danger of women overpowering men in the race and so suppression through indoctrination seems to be the ready reckoner.

Urmila finds that Mira's name has been changed to Nirmala during her wedding. But Mira has never liked when a new name and a new identity as wife have been forced on her. She has refused to give up her name even though she has been bound in marriage against her choice. She has proclaimed herself that "I am Mira" (101). At this juncture of her pathetic life, Mira has become pregnant; Urmila learns that Mira has never wanted to beget a female child for she has never wished her daughter to suffer like her. She desired to have a son. Urmila finds that Mira has written that "I feel the quickening in my womb, he moves – why do I call the child he?" (149).

From Mira's poems, Urmila understands the inability of Mira's mother who has never supported her daughter as she dare not defy the society. She has kept silent all through her life. She has played a role of a typical Indian wife who has never wanted anything of her own in her life. She has written in her diary that when her mother died, people have talked that she died happily. They have stated that Mira's mother has seen her daughter married and also her pregnancy. But Mira is not ready to accept it. Her mother has not uttered even a word in her life except "nothing". Her mother said, "Nothing is in my hands" (126). She has always taught Mira not to utter 'no' to her husband under any condition. Mira has wanted to ask her mother: "why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?" (126). But, her mother has died who has never got the answer for her question.

III. DISCUSSION

The Binding Vine portrays the middle-class female protagonist's predicament in a patriarchal society. It also presents her search for love, meaning and happiness in life. It is the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmila. She faces two victims – Kalpana and Mira who are victims of man's lust and woman's helplessness. Shashi Deshpande boldly portrays the distress of a wife who is raped under the auspices of marriage. Many of the Indian writers in English do not

touch upon the theme of marital rape but she has the courage to deal with that. This novel tells how women are emotionally dependent on her husband even though they are economically independent. The protagonist initiates the silent revolt against the conventional society but ultimately compromises with the existing reality because of her bondage with family relationship.

Akka narrates the story of Mira to Urmila and Vanaa. Both of them ask Akka to read out the poems of Mira as though the script has become unfamiliar through the years. While reading these poems, Akka starts crying. Urmila is surprised to see Akka crying for Mira. Akka has never cried even when her husband had died. When Vanaa has gone to Bombay to study, she has never wept. Akka has never cried even during Vanaa's marriage. Urmila is excited to see Akka who is broken down while reading Mira's poems. Urmila finds that the marriage of Akka describes the fate of Indian women in the institution of marriage. Urmila learns that Akka has been compelled to marry the father of a child. The husband has married her only for his son so that the motherless child could have a mother.

Urmila used to read the poems of Mira, "the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty-two" (98). From her poems and diary, Urmila learns that Mira has suffered in her conjugal life. Mira has been subjected to rape in marriage. She has intensely disliked the sexual act with her husband. She has utterly hated the very word "love" she has written in her diary as follows:

And so it begins, 'Please,' he says, please, I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why can't he leave me alone? (67)

One day Shakutai visits Urmila's home on her request. She tells Urmila her desire to have "mangalsutra made in gold" (P.110). Later she changed the idea because her husband himself has become worthless. She tells Urmila about her conjugal life. After her marriage with the man, Shakutai has expected that he could soon take her away to Bombay from their village. But he has never done it, she has never wanted to burden her father anymore. So she has gone to Bombay. There she has learnt that her husband has had no permanent job but only temporary jobs. Shakutai and her husband have lived together with his cousin, who is in the police. The family of his cousin has treated her as a free servant and made her do all

the household works. But she never minds it. They have made Shakutai and her husband sleep in the common passage outside their room. She has never liked to sleep "in public, with strange men walking up and down" (110-11). However, she has endured it. She has got three children – Kalpana, Sandhya and Prakash. Her husband starts working to earn money for her children.

Sulu is submissive before her husband Prabhakar. Sulu has no children. Once she has taken Kalpana to her house as she has wished to bring her up. But Kalpana has run away from her. As she has no children, Sulu has feared that Prabhakar could desert her one day. She is very obedient and submissive to her husband. A few years back, Sulu has started getting white patches on her face and all over her body. So, her husband has stopped touching her. He has wished to marry Kalpana. When Sulu has taken Kalpana to her house, he has misbehaved her. It is the reason for Kalpana to run away from Sulu's home. Prabhakar has told Sulu about his desire of marrying Kalpana. When Sulu has asked to marry Prabhakar, she has refused. She has told Sulu: "Don't you know. . . ., you can't have a second wife now? He can go to jail for it" (193). When Prabhakar has come to know the love affair of Kalpana, he has never uttered a word. But he has seduced her.

Another female character, Vanaa is also submissive to her husband Harish, she always depend on her husband. She hesitates to take decisions of her own. She never tries to assert herself. She keeps slaving for her husband and his family. Even Urmila abuses Vanaa for her submissiveness. She tells Vanaa that she can never like to act like that to her husband Kishore. Urmila says if she submits once she can never be redeemed. So, she advises Vanaa: "Assert yourself. You don't have to crawl before him". Though Vanaa is a career woman, she always crawls before her husband.

The societal purview presented by the novelist narrates the predicament of Indian women inside the society. The age long conditions never allow a woman beyond the threshold of the house. The pressure of the oppression would definitely find a way to come out. The process of releasing the pressure should not affect anyone around her. She has to be careful enough in her mission to breathe free air among pollutants alive around her. She should not be so radical in her behavior because it may cause some disturbances in her family. Marriage is very serious and vital issue in the patriarchal set up. It is sanctimonized to be Godly and the womenfolk should not dare to pose questions regarding any single process of promotion.

As far as the novelist's presentation displays, the women should find subtler ways to sustain their marital status and along with that they have to make their initial steps towards a better living conditions. Deshpande as a progressive writer shows how the so called ideals of the society curtail the natural freedom and cripple the movement of the women. She has presented a purview for the liberation of new ideals to be sanctioned by the society on par with the trend of the world.

IV. CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* vividly brings to light the multi-layered trauma experienced by women in patriarchal Indian society. Through the interwoven narratives of Urmila, Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai, Sulu and Vanaa, the novel maps the contours of psychological, sexual, marital, emotional and generational trauma that silence and subjugate women. Deshpande's nuanced portrayal challenges readers to question deeply ingrained social norms while celebrating the quiet resilience of women who dare to assert their identities even within oppressive structures.

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