

## SPIRIT OF CAMARADERIE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S BINDING VINE

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**Abstract:** Shashi Deshpande writing furnishes mirrors of authentic female experience and she examines lives of half a dozen women to drive home the point what drives women to become hysteric, escapist, sacrificial goats, and also discusses the compulsions which compel them to silence, suicide or death while delivering a child. Deshpande show how often women become the cause of female subjugation and suffering. All that women need, is to share with one another the vast reservoir of women's experience, culture and ideas. Her novel *The Binding Vine* is a work that should be read as a projection of such ideas as women solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male—dominated culture, the basis for their bonding, however, being shared oppression and victimization. The novel is a normal analysis of several tragedies in the life of different women. The novel is a multiple misunderstandings among women characters, particularly between mothers and daughters, causing misery and unhappiness to several intimately related women in their families. By the time, the misunderstandings are clarified; they eventually either overcome their own misunderstandings or move beyond it, and establish a kind of solidarity among themselves.

**Keywords:** Bonding, Female subjugation & suffering, Sharing oppression & victimization, Women solidarity.

**Introduction:** Shashi Deshpande studies the issues and problems of contemporary middle class woman. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and Career-Oriented. A glimpse of her novels reveals how poignantly, she expresses the frustration and disappointments of women experience social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. Her novel *The Binding Vine* shows how the educated earning woman, thereby, inculcates the spirit of solidarity among women. The novel depicts the agony of a wife, who is the victim of marital rape and would rather suffer in silence in the name of the family honour.

The novel occupies a special place in all the works of Deshpande that, it presents especially the women's world. Men are not entirely absent here, but they make their presence felt merely by the power they exercise over the women, especially over their wives and daughters. It is a world where women outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their infinite courage to cope with their surroundings and come to terms with their losses, their ability to forge an alliance among them selves' and learn to live. They are unique individuals in their respective domains, may it be an affluent and well-to-do household or a broken family front, voicing forth their displeasure and airing their views, or fighting against injustices inflicted upon them by an oppressive patriarchal system.

**Projection of characters:** In the novel, Shashi Deshpande projected five Pairs of mother-daughters namely Inni-Urmi, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai-Kalpana, Akka-Vanna, and Vanna-Mandira, and the relationship between them is based on some sort of misapprehension or dissention. Urmi's displeasure with her mother was deep-rooted in her separation from the latter at an early age. Right from her

childhood days' she was sent to her paternal grandmother and had no experience of the kind of mothering a daughter desires. But, Urmi was neither in a position nor in a mood to find out the cause of her displacement or her mother's predicament. Inni had an early marriage leading to early motherhood, and being too young herself, she was unable to take care of her child properly, while trying to vindicate herself she explains to her daughter.

"I was frightened of you, Urmi, '..... 'I was too young. I was not prepared to have a 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, he just took you away... I begged him, Urmi, I cried. Nothing could make him change his mind" (99 *The Binding Vine*).

Urmi's father was a dominant patriarch and a domineering husband, he was the decision-maker and instrumental in her displacement, but Inni, Urmi's mother had to bear the brunt and blame. She had to survive the rest of her life to make up, for the loss of love for her daughter by being the over caring mother, bestowing too much affection over her, indifferent daughter, where as Urmi had the misconstrued idea that her mother had deliberately sent her child to her mother-in-law for her own convenience. Inni's disclosure dispels the darkness of Urmi's misunderstand---"A sense of being vulnerable and naked, as if some armour I've been wearing all these years-against what?-Has been taken off "(200).

She feels frightened to think of her father's unkindness to her mother, to think of Inni who carried the child in her womb and went through the pain of childbirth, but was deprived of the right to decide what would be best for her baby. At the end, Urmi understands her mother.

But Mira's mother being dead; most of Mira's myriad questions remain unanswered. Mira holds her mother responsible for her unhappy married life. As a college going girl, she was forced into a marriage that, she was scared from the beginning because of her nurturing. As an adolescent, her apprehension about womanhood was not baseless. None in the family ever bothered about her emotions or resentment and her unwillingness was taken as mere childish resistance. She had thought that at this time, her mother would support, who could have refused early marriage for her daughter or suggested delay there by intervening and forestalling the marriage. Her mother's was more of a caretaker than the decision maker of her family with little stand or say in important issues. She was an unassertive woman and always said, "Nothing is in my hands" (126).

Her mother's silence pushed Mira to her marriage to a man that she couldn't love for and never understood her feelings. Mira lead an unhappy married life—in a way repetition of her mother life. Mira's mother remained distant on looker of her daughter's drab existence and did nothing about Mira's life. As a traditional woman Mira's mother, she had her own world of dreams about her daughter; hence she remained contended seeing Mira married. Generally, one shares one's sorrow with near and dear ones, particularly mother, to unburden the heart and overcome grief. Mira had no regrets or feeling of sorry that she didn't share her feelings with her mother since she had felt alienated from her, the intensity of her unhappiness was known to her mother. She always wanted to ask her mother an implied question for all those who expect their daughters to be bound by tradition and play the conventional roles of daughter-in-law, of wife and mother, whatever may be their situation. Willingly or unwillingly, mothers do force their daughter into traps which they had been caught in all their lives with the secret hope that their daughter's fate would be better than their own.

In the novel, Shakutai and Kalpana represent the working-class women. Shakutai's husband had left her for the love of another woman; at that time Shakutai had three children. When Kalpana grows up, she finds, her father going away from them as her mother's failure. The relationship as mother and daughter is as same as their counterparts from the middle class families. Shakutai is a typical, protective, affectionate mother who had nurtured fear in her heart since her daughter grew up physically; she hates her daughter being dressed up or her using of lipstick or for that matter any cosmetic. She feels that, it would unnecessarily attract male attention, - "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you Alone.?" (146)

To a certain extent, the mother, Shakutai is unhappy with Kalpana because of her stubbornness and unfeeling towards her. But Kalpana's ideas of life are different from those of her mother. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She loved to dress well and move around freely, feeling subservient to none. But unfortunately, her mother's fears come true and Kalpana becomes the victim of her uncle's lust, brutally beaten and raped by him. According to Shakutai, Kalpana is a "self-willed" person; she refuses to be guided by the dictates of her mother. And when she is struggling between life and death, she holds her mother responsible for what has happened to her. Shakutai, being a deprived and disappointed woman, fails to understand her daughter's sense of freedom that had dreamt of living an independent life of her own, different from the oppressive and suffocating life of her mother and aunt and resented becoming their shadow she never wanted any of her mother's dreams.

Vanna, is a medical social worker, who has to stay out of home quite often, for her duty demands her presence, due to her absence in the house, her daughter Mandira feels neglected, she hates being left to the care of the maid servant. She fails to understand her mother's compulsion, problem in negotiating between family and profession, and, at same time, Vanna too, is unable to diagnose the tantrums of her daughter, who really needs her mother's presence affection, attention and love of the world. Mandira, never complain about her father Harish absence. The relationship between Vanna and Urmi is of close friendship in spite of the two being sister's in law. There is a change in Vanna's attitude towards Urmi, amounting to coldness, when concerned as a friend and sister she protests against the latter's meddling in the Kalpana-incident and out rightly disagrees with Urmi's ambition of getting Mira's poems Published, for this involves the exposure of Vanna's father's behavior.

Urmi, has recently lost her one-year-old baby daughter, Anu, and has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitiveness that leads her to be the friend of the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lays in helpless state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and Shakutai, coming in terms with each other's grief is quite remarkable. Though both of them come from different strata of the society, it is the same grief and sensitivity that makes them come together. In the same way Urmila understands the mind of the young Mira. She gets her attention focused on Mira's poems and diaries and establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstructs the tragic tale of a sprightly girl who suffered and wrote poems.

Mira's poems which she used to write in her diaries and school note books becomes a symbol of female oppression and Urmila senses this as a message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell. Mira was a favorite daughter of her father who appreciated her talent and was proud of her intelligence, and he presented her a book of poetry. She had nurtured a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet, but was scared of being laughed at. Her writings reflect the questioning, anxiety, uncertainty, mute sufferings and latent feelings. Urmila is confident that she understands Mira's plights, sufferings, emotions and at the same time she wonders that how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and living with a man whom she could not love.

**Themes:** In the novel, the narrator reflected the themes like pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined. The pain of childbirth always results in the joy of seeing one's own child, and Mira, too had experienced, this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child. But Mira is the most unfortunate mother that she dies in childbirth. Here, Mira's life stands as an example of the multitude of unfortunate women. The partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society is seen in the outburst of Shakutai where a girl is alone victimized and she advised to remain silent and anonymous rather than demanding justice.

Urmila is Shashi Deshpande's first protagonist who decides to fight another woman's battle. Even though, she will not get any support from her family members and when the hospital authorities decides to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, she alone protests and decides to take the matter to the press, thinking that Kalpana might get justice and she succeeds in stopping the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital. She never hinders from the oppositions. She also learns from Shakutai and protests the issue of Sulu that Sulu always lived in constant terror of being thrown out of her house only because she cannot have children.

Irrespective of their social backgrounds women at different levels are treated women at different levels are treated in the same raw manner, maybe it is Sulu and Shakutai. Coming from low class illiterate women or the city bred, educated women like Urmila's mother, Inni, her friend Vanna, and her mother-in-law, Akka. Urmila is quite upset and angry to see, how, even the educated urban women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage. Vanna is an educated social—worker by profession but she is quite submissive and obedient to her husband. Her submissiveness to her husband and not being assertive irritates Urmila. She seriously observes and doesn't like the common idea of shouldering the mother to be sole responsible for taking care of the children. From the days of Inni to the days, of her

granddaughter Mandira, confining women to the subjugated roles of mothers and wives has not changed at all. There is this unfairness deep rooted in Indian society towards women.

Urmila understands that women like Shakutai, and Sulu are always haunted by the absence of security in their marriage. Sulu is affectionate and good-natured person who always tries to help her sister Shakutai. Despite resistance from Kalpana, she takes over the responsibilities of bringing her up. She has an inclination for housekeeping and decoration and this aspect in her goes unnoticed by her husband. The self-confidence of a normal girl can be shattered by the Indian institution of marriage system, which transforms Sulu into a fearful and nervous woman, can shatter the self—confidence of a normal girl. Though Urmila has married a man of her choice, is far from satisfactory, her life sees incompatibility and withdrawing nature of Kishore. Long separation from her husband, provides an opportunity to Urmila, to think of another relationship with Dr.Bhaskar. But, she rejects Dr.Bhasker's love and overtures for she longs to have the marital bliss. She never dares to over step the boundaries chalked out in the institution of marriage. Her good virtue will never be appreciated by her husband but she loves her husband very much. She answers Dr.Bhasker's question, "I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate" (164).

No other character in Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels is so rebellious like Urmila. All her character, though independent to some extent, are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. The protagonists in the earlier novels though are aware of the inequalities in the society. They do not attempt to set them right. But at every turn, Urmila emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. Her encouragement to Vanna, to be more assertive in life and not to be just a door mat, her sympathies with Shakutai, her effort to take up the work of translating the poems written by her dead mother-in-law from Kannada to English and her intention of publishing them—all are praiseworthy. She takes up the responsibilities on behalf of the rape victim Kalpana and becomes an instrumental in publicizing the case, which in normal course of Indian hypocritical societal situation, could not possible to the lower strata of the society.

Urmila is practical unlike the pseudo feminist Preeti, who is overenthusiastic to fight for equal right for women. To her, Preeti is Symbol of the Shallow female opportunist without integrity. She talks with Urmila regarding the judgment, in a case, by a husband against his wife to reinstate their conjugal rights. But, Urmila tells that a single judgment makes no difference to all the women's lives, and that it is impossible for every woman to file a case in a court of

law against their husband, she even refuses Preeti's offer to make a film of Mira's story. This is her moderation that is seen ever in her social and ethical values. She values the sanity of women hood and marriage. Throughout the novel Urmila does not exhibit male hatredness. She never desires to seek a world, a life without men. She has like-minded male friend Dr.Bhaskar, to whom Urmila is not just somebody's wife but also an individual with an identity of her own. He loves her for her passion for truth and justice. Malcolm and Dr. Jain are also essentially humane and have great respect for Urmila. She thinks a lot, about how difficult relationships are with many chasms to bridge. She feels that the relationship can be wholesome only, when people themselves are whole. When she studies the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu, Urmila regains her courage. She learns to accept freedom and advantages of her life as a gift, and decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will remove his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could pave a way to reach him.

**Conclusion:** The novel is quite notable as it introduces the concept of female bonding, the desire

of one woman for female bonding, and helps another who is less fortunate which reflects the positive development in Urmila. According to Urmila, women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indigent at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour. Love prevents one from being cruel, and this love makes one to accept its coming and its detachment. Love is the only adhesive that binds people and prevents them from falling and in turn refills and nurtures the sapling of life with all compassion and tolerance. The need to express one's feeling and to be heard by the society is the urge for the present day women. Urmila draws society's attention to her protest and sees less pain in attempting to changes the societal roles and attitudes. At the end of the novel, Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love that provide the "spring of life" (151) for human survival. She believes that the things in the system are gradually improving not at a high speed, but at a slow pace, hence Urmila is not a rebel against the existing system.

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