

## Predicament of Women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

S. Kavitha<sup>1</sup> and Dr. K.M. Sumathi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Scholar (Full time), PG & Research Department of English,  
M.V. Muthiah Government Arts College for Women, Dindigul.

Email: [kavitha6369265272@gmail.com](mailto:kavitha6369265272@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Associate Professor  
PG and Research Department of English, M.V. Muthiah Government Arts College for  
Women, Dindigul

Email: [sumaangel@yahoo.com](mailto:sumaangel@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

This paper aims to examine the predicament of women in a patriarchal Indian society and its biased limitations for women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*. Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique position among the contemporary Indian women novelists especially for her vivid portrayal of women characters. Her protagonists are represented the overwhelming majority of Indian women who are struggling to adjust the traditional set up rather than get freedom from such restrictions. Writings of Shashi Deshpande has clearly exposed a complex relationship, predicament, pathetic circumstances of women, clashes and chaos in a biased Indian society. As a woman writer, Deshpande has concerned with the subject matters of women through her powerful writings.

**Keywords:** Female subjugation, Predicament, Struggle, Chaos, Restriction, Male Chauvinism Tradition and Oppression.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the widely acclaimed writers of Indian Writing in English. She has represented a true picture of the social world of many complex relationships in her works. The author has stimulated her characters to undergo a keen self-examination by using such tools like anxiety, doubt and a feeling of void of values. Particularly the women characters are caught in the process of rediscovering and redefining their own position and roles within their personal spaces. Her novels are focused on modern Indian women's quest for selfdiscovery and self actualization. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in middle class society. Her novels also deal with the theme of the quest for female identity and the complexities of man-woman relationship especially

in the context of marriage and the trauma of a disturbed adolescence.

Shashi Deshpande is one among the reputed novelists of Indian English Writing. She was born in Dharward in Karnataka, India in 1938. She is a daughter of the renowned Sanskrit Scholar and Kannada Writer Sriranga also known as Adya Rangachar. Shashi Deshpande's eminent works include: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *If I Die Today*, *Roots and Shadows*, *Come Up and Be Dead*, *The Binding Vine*, *That Long Silence* and *A Matter of Time*. She has also written four books for children.

The author has stood unique from other writers by inculcating real life experiences in her writings. Likewise, her remarkable novel *The Binding Vine* (1992) she has scripted the story of Kalpana by referring a real life incident of a physical assault faced by a woman in her husband's hospital. She has captured the poor attitude of men against women by insisting physical assaults even within the marital relationship. The novel is divided into four parts. It gives a vivid portrayal of predicament of Indian middle class women, their struggles, agonies and issues. The title, *The Binding Vine* itself suggests that the women characters of this novel spread the vine of love and bind themselves in the society to attain liberation and freedom from their mental traumas.

The story of the novel mainly revolves around the female protagonist Urmila and her family. The author has built the narration of the story more interesting by using various subplots. The novel begins with the painful experience of a mother Urmila (also known as Urmi), who has lost her one year old daughter Anu in an accident. The loss of a little child makes her extremely sensitive and speechless. It makes her to realise how every woman has an intense relationship and pure love with their children. Such an unexpected loss of the protagonist has created awareness within herself to relate and accompany with other women, who may not be very close to her. Child bearing and nurturing is regarded as the first and foremost duties of Indian women, which made Urmi to keep a strong emotional attachment with her children and other women. After the loss of Anu, Urmi starts observing the voiceless sufferings of other women around her. Deshpande has intellectually intervened the story of Kalpana and Mira with the main plot which makes the novel more reliable one.

Kalpana is a teenaged girl actually a rape victim looks after by her mother Shakuntala (also known as Shakutai) in a hospital. Mira is Urmi's dead Mother-in-law, who was shattered by a forced physical relationship by her own husband. The pathetic condition of

man – women relationship and marriage as an institution to exploit women are exposed through these instances and the author probes into various forms of suppressions, destruction through male domination and social injustice of women.

Shakunthala had suffered a lot in her married life. After her marriage, she came to know that her husband had no job, he didn't want to work at all. He was living with his cousin- brother, who is in the police. They had a room in the chawl voluntarily joined Shakutai with them and treated her as a free servant to take care of them. She says: "I didn't mind working, I'm never frightened of work, I'm used to it. I did all the work without complaining. But..." (Deshpande 110). She can't control her anger when they made the couple sleep in the common place outside their room. A woman is forced to sleep in public, with strange people walking up and down.

Shakunthala admits that how men are very particular about their physical needs and cruel towards women in the name of relationship. Her husband never tries to take care of his family, instead abused her mentally and physically. He is not at all worry about their living in a public place. Shakutai painfully remarks that:

And my husband...' the voice drops low 'you know what men are, he wanted to... We're not animals, I told him. As if he cared. And I got Pregnant. It was the worst thing that could happen to us then. (Deshpande 111)

Shakutai started earning money by working in a grocery shop. She didn't want that child 'Kalpana' and wish to abort the baby. It was her sister Sulu, who comforted her and take care of the baby and mother. Sulu, a childless woman living with her husband Prabhakar, who look after Shakutai's three children Kalpana, Prakash and Sandhya.

Sulu and her husband offered that they would look after Kalpana, her schooling and everything else. After their proposal, Shakutai felt so relieved and said God sent them for her. But Kalpana ran away from there even she can't stay with them more than three days and went to her father. She refused to go back to Sulu's house. Shakutai scolded even beat Kalpana for that but no use, who firmly refused to go. Shakutai argues that: "Die then," I said, "What do I care? What can I give you but dry chapatties and one set of clothes?" Whereas Sulu – what would she not have done for her?" (Deshpande 111). Shakutai reveals the truth to Urmila that sometimes she was cruel towards Kalpana, but it was for the welfare

of the child. She wanted Kalpana to have all that which she never had such as a good life, a good marriage, education and respect from others. When Kalpana was in her dead bed, Shakutai cried and admitted that “I didn’t her to be born, is that why she’s dying now? Is this my punishment?” (Deshpande 112).

In an Indian biased society, if a man walks straightly head erect and never mind anyone which is considered as a male pride, whereas a woman does such thing in her life is regarded as a sin. In the case of Kalpana, it is proved by her mother, as a woman she never allows her daughter to be free and independent. She has instructed the do’s and don’ts for Kalpana even her way of dressing and everything is restricted by Shakutai. As a modern woman, Kalpana never listens her mother’s opinions, instead keep doing whatever is right up to her. Shakutai remarks that:

Kalpana was dressed up, lipstick and all, when I came home that day. When I asked her where she was going, she wouldn’t tell me. It was Madhuri who said “We’re going to the studio to have our photograph taken.” “Wipe off that lipstick,” I told Kalpana, but she didn’t even reply. Just Walked off. (Deshpande145)

When Kalpana is brutally raped by a man, no one questions the culprit, instead finding fault with Kalpana’s behaviour and activities. Her mother laments that I kept telling her that men are like animals so cover yourself decently, but she went her own way. “I’m not afraid of anyone” (Deshpande 148), Kalpana used to say to her mother. Shakutai thinks that that’s why this cruel one happened to her. Though she is the mother of Kalpana she never scolds the rapist keep finding fault with her daughter’s attitude. Shakutai says that:

It’s her fault, she says. She was stubborn, she was self-willed, she dressed up, she painted her lips and nails and do so this happened to her. ‘You should have seen her walking out, head erect, caring for nobody. (Deshpande 148)

The police officer who investigates the case of Kalpana admits that why do make it a case of rape she’s going to die anyway instead make it as an accident case. He says, “We don’t like rape cases, the man said. They’re messy and troublesome, never straightforward”(Deshpande 88). She is an unmarried woman, if it is registered as a case of rape, people are bound to talk about her and spoiled the name of her family and its pride

and prestige. Bhaskar, who is a doctor and a friend of Urmila questions about the injuries in her body. He says angrily: You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down.

And there were huge contusions on her thighs – he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips – bitten and chewed. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks? The man laughed at that, he had the sense to give in. Ok, he said, she was raped. (Deshpande 88)

At the end of the novel, Shakutai is caught between the dilemma that the unexpected death of her younger sister Sulu, who commits suicide and her daughter Kalpana who is almost a dead person. They found the truth that Kalpana was brutally raped by Sulu's husband Prabhakar, after knowing the truth Sulu committed suicide. She was also threatened by her husband Prabhakar that if the police asked about him, she should tell them that her husband was at home with her that whole evening and night. Sulu's neighbour admitted the cruel death of Sulu that "She was like a torch when she ran out, burning from head to toe, they said. My God, oh my God" (Deshpande 189).

Even at this point also Shakutai blames Kalpana for everything. If she agrees to marry Prabhakar (Sulu's husband) everything will be fine. She scolds Kalpana for turning down the proposal of Prabhakar. Sulu pleased Kalpana to marry her husband begged her and fell at her feet but she refused. Shakutai flashes out in anger against Kalpana that: "How could she treat Sulu that way? Sulu loved her than I was. And what was wrong? He would have treated her like a queen, and my Sulu would have been there" (Deshpande 193).

Mira is the dead mother-in-law of Urmila, her life story is entirely different from Kalpana, who is raped by her own husband Balkaka in the name of marital relationship. Urmila came to know everything by reading her diaries, papers and poems. Urmila likes to expose the wonderful poems of Mira by publishing it. She works hard to translate the manuscripts of Mira into English. When Urmila reveals her plan to publish Mira's poems to Vanna, she strongly refuses and says that: "Once people read those poems, how can she hold her head up again? You heard her, you heard what she said about Balkaka" (Deshpande 172). At the end of the novel, Urmila takes initiative to publish Mira's poems titled *The Binding Vine* to show

the hidden calibre, potential and competence of Mira to the world.

Urmi's opinions of women's role as parents changes gradually, as she herself goes through various experiences. The struggles of Mira, Kalpana and Shakutai makes Urmi to understand the importance of mutual support and women's bonding. Urmi accepts that the pathetic condition of women like these made her to realise that "they never had a chance". She accepts that all such cases and incidents must be open to the public and more awareness should be created among women. Urmi's realisation of increase of awareness among women reflects the view of Deshpande that it is the duty of women writers and thinkers to write about women and their predicaments.

### **Works Cited**

Deshpande, Shashi. *The Binding Vine*, Virago, UK, 1993.