



Research Paper

## Delineation of Women Anguish in Shashi Deshpande's Novel 'The Binding Vine'

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**ABSTRACT:** Women are considered to be a deity in our culture but at the same time they are subjugated by patriarchal cultural values. This paper attempts to disclose the frustrations and anguish of women who suffer silently even after the advent of education in the postmodern world. Instead of living their own dreams, they live on the image imposed on them. The predicament of women that happen within the institution of marriage is dealt upon by the careful analysis of women character in the novel. The theme of death coupled with the distorted memories of their loved ones, agonies that come out of poverty, social injustice to women done by the State apparatus like police and professionals are exhibited. Gender discrimination, child marriage and rape within marriage are also dealt upon.

**KEYWORDS:** Patriarchal culture, Child marriage, Cultural hybridity, Institutional state apparatus, Sexism, Marital rape, Identity crisis, Gender discrimination, Castesism.

Received 22 November,2018;Accepted 08 December,2018 © The Author(S)2018.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The agony of the Indian women is not heard openly because of their socialization to endure hardship. After the advent of nationalized movement which spoke about women independence, women started to express their feelings. Through the power of education, their status was transformed and now they are on par with men. Even in their present state of equality and changed perception towards women, women suffer even in this globalized era. This paper attempts to portray the anguish of women described by Shashi Deshpande in her ground breaking novel *The Binding Vine*. Indian society is immersed in traditional values in the age of modernization. In spite of the transformative power of education that uplifts women right, there are many women who don't have education and live a submissive life. The pains of Deshpande's women are manifold when compared to the traditional women because of their role inside and outside home. They are middle class educated women who want to gain a respectable position in the society. Further, they differ from their counterpart of previous generation by seeking independent life rather than a life of interdependence that prevails in joint family.

### II. THE JOURNEY OF WOMEN CHARACTERS

The protagonist of the novel Urmi is an educated women longs to live up to his own image created by her. The understanding of life according to Urmi is that she is responsible for her own life and she hates the image imposed by others. She proclaims that "it's been a constant struggle against an image of myself imposed upon me by Vanaa [1]. The trauma in the life of the protagonist is caused by nature. She is frustrated by the death of her infant daughter Anu and she is not able to come out that tragic event. She had her own expectation in life about her daughter despite occasional visits of her husband Kishore to home from ship. The death causes loneliness and she feels trapped by the natural phenomena of life. The agonies of Urmi would have been minimized if she had been associated herself in mother - in- laws home. Urmi is a woman who wants to live an independent life. Indian society has its own merits of showering care and sharing of burden especially in traditional family structure. Urmi missed the opportunity to access their emotional healing resource in her life which is the main cause of her trauma. J.R. Tripathi opines that 'the mother's agony is relieved by communal sharing and affections and rises above the European concept of existential agony which is isolationistic and individualistic and hence depressing and deadly' [2].

Women life is depended on the social image. Indian society has a biased outlook on women. The society accepts the errors of the male but always suspicious with the female. Shakutai, the mother of Kalpana, fears for the social image and fails to disclose the reality of her daughter who is raped by Prabakar. Her position and personal image in the society is more important than the pain of her daughter. She refuses when Urmi endeavors to bring justice to Kalpana by bringing the predator to the court. The predicament of women in Shashi Deshpande novels is due to the fact of suppressed feeling within themselves that result in more deceitful condition. She even insists Urmi to recommend to the physician to hide the reality and give false report about the incident. The entire attempt made by Shakutai about the incident does not mean she loves her daughter but she wants to save the image of Kalpana's sister to be married in a decent family. Burdened by the social image and responsibility to marry her daughter the anguish of Shakutai intensifies.

Honour is more important than life in the traditional society. The girls are victims in the society. Shakutai understands that neither the society nor the police will help her to bring about a resolution to her daughter's problem. The memories play a major role in human lives to break or mold their life. Urmi attempts to divert her problem by attending another person problem with a humanistic attitude but she often struck with the memories of her deceased infant Anu. The pain of death on the one hand and the guilt consciousness of not acknowledging her with others on the other hand disturb her often.

Marriage is a bond between two individuals to foster love, care and sustenance becomes a trap for women and imprisons them. The character of Mira, mother-in-law of Urmi, suffers from their imprisonment silently and dies during the child birth. The predicament of Mira is due to irresponsibility of her parents and their adherence to existing traditional norms of child marriage at that time. The word love that is synonyms with marriage is hated by Mira because she becomes a victim of rape within marriage.

One of the predicaments of Indian women is the identity crisis that occurs at the time of marriage. Similar to other heroines of Shashi Deshpande novels like Jaya in *The Long Silence*, Mira too undergoes a change in her name from Mira to Nirmala which she cannot accept. She feels that she is insecure by the new identity which results in frustration which further escalates when her husband shows interest only in her body by forsaking her real feeling through care and consideration. The novelist opines that "she refuses to give up her name and identity and proclaims 'I am Mira'" [1]. The conflicts of Mira are not only external but also internal. She hates the touch of her husband which gives her a constant trouble. In the name of 'Love', her husband indulges in rape within marriage and she is conceived. Mira has an unconscious drive that the baby to be a boy or not to be. The dilemma makes her to suffer inspite of her awareness of the forthcoming joy after the child birth. The novelist documents her desire in this way

'I feel the quickening in my womb, he moves – why do I call the child he?' [1]

Mira suffers from physical as well as from psychological conflicts coupled with her mother's lack of concern for Mira. Aspirations for human beings are endless. Female who had subjected to long years of interdependence feels elated when they become independent. Shakutai makes her daughter to be an aspiring girl who gets education and leads a duty free life which is contrary with Mira's mother. But independence in women life ended in disruption of her entire life. She has been brutally raped by Prabakar. She is so fearful that Kalpana's sister will not get married if their incident is known to the public. It is inferred that the men create problems to augment their anguish by the rape and consensual rape within marriage, but sometime like Kalpana's mother, women tend to be the problem makers by denying truth and maintain silence either for their own or family gain. Altogether, the women suffer the most.

Urmi predicament is not economical because her husband is working as a navy officer but it is psychological in nature. The occasional visits of Kishore and her parting lift Urmi in a devastated position as she equals it to death. Her interdependence on Kishore emotionally is a trap for Urmi. Kishore contributes his past to argument her suffering by his indifference attitude towards Urmi. Urmi has rights over her body but the female sexual needs in the absence of Kishore make her miserable. The author documents the bond of marriage is meaningful only the husband and wife are near and dear to each other in spite of economical and societal challenges. Urmi suffering is due to the death of her daughter Anu along with the shattered dream for her daughter. The death of Anu marks the death of her dream towards her loving daughter. The shattered dream causes much more pain to the protagonist Urmi. She says: "we dream – much more for our daughter than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves [1]."

Fluctuations of the emotions in the protagonist Urmila, despite her courage to face life with all oddities, add agony in her life. The unknown fear inside her of losing Kishore keeps her confidence at bay. Women's lack of rights over her body in the wedlock adds misery to women. Indian society unlike western societies expects women to deliver child within few years of marriage if not she is stigmatized. Further, they were socialized about the joy and benefits of motherhood. The novelist documents the Mira's pathetic status "He forced himself on her inspite of it; it is out of that Kishore was born" [1]. The predicament of women is not only psychological by societal. Society fails to give a keeping hand to document women problem and close the issue in different format.

Urmila understands the society and the social laws augment suffering and injustice of women along with Vanna, the sister in law of Urmil, fails to disclose the case of the rape victim Kalpana to the public. The conspiracy of the police man and man in the causality changes the report as an accident inspite of the clear evidence of rape.

It is not only marriage but also motherhood makes the women vulnerable to many life issues. From the experience of Urmil and her daughter Anu, It is observed that uncertainties of life will strike human being at any time despite the joy of parenthood. Socialization of girl towards parenthood and motherhood is a myth understood by Urmil which she declares to Vanna. Urmil after looking Anu is haunted by fears that she might lose her son Karthik someday. The unconscious fear of losing children is one of anguish explored by the reader which augments the misery of women in the modern age. The addiction of women to drug and ignorance of its consequences adds misery to life of women character in the novel. The author document that due to ignorance Kalpana's mother gets addicted to paan which will have terrible health related problem even to cancer. The reader observes that it was acquired from her in laws. Adding to her the family predicament of illiteracy, poverty and Kalpana's situation, she is not able to get rid of the bad habits.

Women suffer inside the ritual of marriage. But the things become worse when they lose their husband in the years of their married life. The outlook on the society about women and ways in which they become stigmatized is much more painful. The novelist documents the pain of Baijji's mother who is a victim of widowhood. Due to the total interdependence on her husband makes her vulnerable. She is engulfed with fear and ruled by fear till the end of her life and became mad. The way of life of widows this is totally difficult from family women. "She gave up wearing jewels, applying kumkum and took to all the rituals of widowhood" [1]. The reader comes across two women who commit suicide. One such is Balaji's mother and the other one is Sulu. Shakutai's sister, when she came to know that her husband Prabakar is the culprit who raped Kalpana she immolates her. In both the cases, people in the society remain mute spectator to the problem of the women. The novels disclose the social problem that women are targeted in society as well in home. Urmil, the assertive protagonist of the novel, is a victim of childhood abuse. She faced with a situation in her childhood disturbed by the adolescent boy gaze which terrifies her. Sexual harassment by men is prevalent in the society which was highly detrimental to the growth of women in the emerging developing societies like India.

Women suffer from younger age; the attitude of the society is always at odds towards the female child. Urmil never understands that why she has been sent to the grandma's house when she was a child. She often thought she was for taken by her papa. The cry of Sakutai to take her second daughter Sandhya with Urmil explains the prevalent sexist attitude in the Indian society that act as a hindrance and painful for women progress. Later Inni, the mother of Urmil, explains that she was sent to Ranidurg to save from the man. Sakutai never wants to lose Sandhya like Kalpana to some other culprit like Prabakar and she feels that she is unworthy to rear Sandhya safely any more. Education enriches a person's thinking and a man becomes a social animal and endowed with a capacity to think and protect the rights of the weaker section of the society. Dr. Bhaskar, who has an encounter with Urmil and attends the case of Kalpana perpetuate sexist violence inspite of her noble education and career. Urmil proclaims that the gaze of Dr. Bhaskar instilled fear on her and she finds it very difficult to face him anymore.

The society's attitudes towards women are at odds when she is away from her husband. Dr. Bhaskar attitude towards Urmil would have been gentle if Kishore had accompanied Urmil and Dr. Bhaskar reaction to the rape victim will be difficult if her father is near to Kalpana. The act of submission of Shakutai to her husband and her concurrence to earn a living in Bombay causes misery to the life of Shakutai, Kalpana and Sandhya. Indian society is obsessed with tradition as well as caste. The issue of caste was given more importance in marriage. It acts as a barrier to social problem and individual as well. Irrespective of class status, caste during marriage is inevitable phenomena. Despite our rationalist thinkers against casteism in the society, it still lingers even in the postmodern world. Kalpana says "she told me, there was a boy she had come to know, she said they had fixed it up I said, you can't. How could I let her? We didn't even know the boys caste, leave alone his family" [1].

Traditional social practices like child marriage, denial of education to women, denial of share in the property for women & widow remarriage augments women suffering. Advent of education and Indian Independence have made an end to the age old evil practices which caused misery to women at large.

But the evil practice of Sati is orchestrated in remote village which was informed to Vanna by women who helps in her Baba's house. Vanna, a medical social worker, is amazed at their practice even in this age and questions the role of police in preventing such practice. Vanna understands the misery of the women still continues with the support of the police and she wants to include this issue in her film. The undercurrent themes of all the Deshpande novels is women acts as a patriarchal figure and carry out patriarchal ideology which is detrimental to women progress and peace. K. M. Thakkar opines that 'Women are considered to be weaker sex or fair sex. In Patriarchal society they have no role to play except the role of wife and mother' [3]. We come across this patriarchal upbringing of Dr. Bhaskar inspite of his professional education. In conversation with

Urmil, he declares her mother's willingness for her son to get married with lots of prerequisite like fair complexion, caste and convent education. It is observed in the conversation that Dr. Bhaskar so ingrained in the ideology of 'arranged marriage' and wants to know about Urmil about her marriage procedure. The anguish of women has not changed even after the Indian Independence; women are chained towards traditional practices and patriarchal ideology.

Gender discrimination is one of main cause and marginalization of women. The protagonist of the all novel of Shashi Deshpande suffers from gender violence and discrimination in various forms. Urmil informs her friend and sister-in-law Vanna about her father's interest in Kishore and he fails to consider the pretty ordeals of Urmil. She painfully states that "I wonder, whether he knows I exist" [1]. In the novel, we can often see the cry of Shakutai that she doesn't want daughters and the burden of rearing Sandhya after the terrific incident of rape by her sister's husband Prabakar. In the occasion of marriage, the voice of the female gender about their consent for marriage is not taken into consideration in the case of Mira, the daughter in law of Urmil. It is evident that Vanna, a medical social worker, loved to have a son after the birth of her two daughters and subsequent denial of her desire by Harish. Love for the male child is obvious in the novel because women don't want their daughter to suffer like them and the burden to child rearing which culminates in marriage. From the poems of Mira, it is observed that her choice of marrying a man is not taken into consideration and her hatred for the word 'love' which happens within marriage. Nawale Arvind opines that 'the dual standards of social life strangle the voices of truth' [4].

The theme of death is often dealt by Shashi Deshpande in all her novels. In this novel, she skillfully enumerates the power of disease which surpassed the power of economy and human progressive civilization. Despite education and modernity, human beings fail to take care of human bodies which lead to terrible illness. Exceptional disease like 'bronchogenic carcinoma' [1] of papa, the elderly figure in the novel, disappoints his family members. The members of the family, especially the women folks get affected and their peace was in danger. The lack of preparation for death and the desire to live make him even more vulnerable. The death of Sulu, Shakutai sister make the readers to empathize with her because of her love and care which she showered on Shakutai, Kalpana and even to her husband Prabakar. The death of Mira during child birth is another example of how women get affected in the process of life in postmodern human societies. The agonies of women escalate and end in death. The phenomenon of death especially of women character in the novels augments the anguish of women and the people surround them. The women characters listed above wants to live by their desire for life is interrupted by the death and the process of dying.

The agonies of women are partly due to the hybridization of culture. This is a postcolonial condition where the characters adopt a culture which is characterized by a mixedness of the western and eastern cultures. It is evident in the character of Urmil who wants to lead an individualistic life, never depended on Kishore economically and at the same time longs for him. Hybridity of culture destabilizes the dominance of particular culture but at the same time creates a dilemma between the citizens of the culture especially in the postcolonial states. Kalpana who wants to lead an independent life in the postcolonial culture characterized by hybridity ends in despair. Dr. Bhaskar is also influenced by cultural hybridity unable to take decision for his marriage because of the influence of their mother's traditional outlook and Urmil's boldness in choosing their life partners. Cultural interconnectedness is observed in the women characters which disempowered them to take quality decisions in their life. The mythical illusion of uncontaminated cultural purity leaves the children of Vanna to behave in a disappointed manner. They hate her mother working which is an individualistic nature of western culture to make her self sufficient.

### III. CONCLUSION

Hence, the women characters despite their sacrifice suffer in the hands men and in patriarchal culture. Development in education and technology does not guarantee women security and it is the time for the individual to act and take decision to secure the rights of women. Basavaraj Naikar opines that 'Urmil is bound by the vine of sympathy with Shakutai and her unlucky daughter, Kalpana, in the present, she is also bound by the same vine with her own mother-in-law who lived in the past' [5]. The theme of the novel exposes the agonies of women but ends with positive note that we can survive despite their hardship with love and endurance.

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