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Revolt and Reconciliation in Binding Vine by Shashi Deshpande

Abstract

The Tradition-oriented Indian society has experienced various changes in the last seven decades. One of the most fundamental and far-reaching social changes brought about after India's independence has been the emancipation of women from their tradition –ridden ethos, which has resulted in the entering of women of the middle and upper classes into remunerative vocations that were largely the preserves of men. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital relationship between man and woman .Woman, is now gaining strength to rebel against the cultural social oppressions. But at the same time she fails to reject totally her social and cultural background. She stands therefore at crossroads, caught between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande in all her novels has dealt with the problems of new women. Especially she has concentrated on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by women in tradition –oriented institutions. The reality of modern Indian woman is that even to the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex, she is in a state of utter confusion. Her novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspects of women's experience and attempt to give voice to "muted" ideologies, registering resistance. Her female protagonists are truly in search of inner strength and her attempt to given an honest portrayal of their frustration, hopes and disappointments makes her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle. Deshpande

not only shows the path but the right path which is necessary to live a happy life, for modern, emancipated, educated and intelligent middle-class working women.

Key words: Tradition oriented, emancipation, remunerative, ideologies, resistance, susceptible.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal her acute sensitivity to the issues involving women and her tremendous sympathy for women. She presents both the weakness and the strengths of the women. In the *Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande deftly handles the juxtaposition of the two situations-rape committed within and outside marriage. The narrator – protagonist Urmila highlights the despair of two women-Mira, who is a victim of marital rape and Kalpana, who is brutally raped outside the marriage and is now on her death-bed. Through the voice of Urmila, Deshpande offers us a glimpse into the lives of numerous other women who are victims of one or the other form of violence, oppression or deprivation. *The Binding Vine* is one of the few contemporary Indian novels to discuss its heroine's sexuality, her passion with a measure of unrepentant concern.

Her Sahitya Akademy award winner novel, *The Binding Vine* (1993) is significant, for the novel not only projects complex human relationship but through three characters Urmila, Mira and Kalpana she focuses on the modern woman's emotional crisis. The male characters are outsiders; The novel explores the underlying tensions between women's aspirations and their cultural identity. Urmila, the central character is not only a wife but also a mother. She is not radical but she tries to live her own. Through her eyes one can see different types of Indian woman around her. Urmila is married to a naval officer, Kishore. She is capable of looking after her family with her job in the absence of her husband. Recently she lost her girl Anusha. She was in grief. Vanna, friend and sister-in-law of Urmila pacify her. Vanna says: "Anything, just speak, don't keep it bottled up within you. Why don't you cry, Urmila? It's unnatural not to cry."(120)

It's a pain at the loss of her child and her dreams also shattered when Anu died. Urmila 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."(124). Urmila is full of grief not only because she lost her child but also her husband Kishore was not with her to share her feelings. Not only a women but also

men desires for the presence of their loving ones at the time of agony or happiness. She decides to make changes in her life to get relief from the pain. The absence of Kishore contributed frustration and loneliness to her life but she intelligently overcome those problems like any modern women do. She took stern decision to stand strong and live for her boy child, Karthik. She believes she can manage everything. Her inner mind assures her that she is smart and she holds strong that inner courage to live her own.

The novel starts with darkness, revolt and at the end reconciliation. The story of Sakuntai is heart breaking for Urmila. Sakuntai is a poor woman work hard for her family. Fate was cruel towards her. Her husband avoids her with three children and married another woman. Sakuntai's daughter was raped by someone and now her daughter is admitted in ICU. Rape is not only the rape of body but also rape of mind as well. Urmila, the protagonist comes to the shocking revelation that society wish to close rape case files and the rapist is able to free from acquisition. The general attitude towards the rape case is:

“Okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn't going to do anyone good. It's going to mean trouble for everyone the girl, her family.” (88-89)

On a visit to Vanna, working in a hospital, Urmi encounters the hysterical, distraught mother of the rape victim. Sakuntai's insistent cry in the hospital contains the paranoid fear of social stigma and of aspersions on her daughter's reputation: “my daughter is not that kinds of girl . . . you people are trying to blacken my daughter's name . . . I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people” (58).

The fear of public opprobrium is more terrifying to Kalpana's mother than the desire to find the culprit and punish him. The truth must be hidden, to protect the victim and her family, especially the younger sister of marriageable age. The police are complicit with Shakutai insistence to repress the truth because rape cases are “messy and troublesome, never straightforward” (88). Moreover, the police believe that the girl may have invited this kind of attention:”for all you know she may be a professional . . . she must have been out with a boyfriend”(88). For the mother, Kalpana's guardian, and the police, the official guardians of law, the verdict is the same – Kalpana's rape is not to be recorded. Moreover, Kalpana had displayed an independence and willfulness which transgressed the boundaries of that society. “Cover yourself decently; I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should

have seen her walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It's all her fault . . . all her fault” (147). The fear that women must have and the constraints they must live within are points driven home repeatedly by Shakutai: “we have to keep to our places, we can never step out” (148).

From the memories of physical touch – 'I can feel the softness of her body . . . the heaviness of her head' – to every sensory perception – 'I hear the soft snuffling sounds of her breathing . . . I can smell her sweet baby's flesh' (BV 21) – Urmi is obsessed with her love for her daughter. She is able to relate to Shakutai and her grief: they are both mothers, one having lost her daughter, the other on the verge of losing hers. The connectedness, however, is in the dreams and aspirations that mothers have for their daughters.

Mrinal pande, in ‘Recollecting Motherhood', says,

A close reading of women's writings from the Therigatha (The songs of Buddhist Nuns), to Mahasweta Devi's and Ambai's fiction reveals that motherhood as women truly experienced it and distinct from each other, as Gandhili is from Gandhism. As an institution, Motherhood comes to young women, as an already perfected idea, a system built by a patriarchal society. And when the family elders bless them and say “may you be the mother of many sons” it has all the heaped force of custom and tradition, behind it. (11)

Sakuntai is an uneducated woman is a reality but she is a mother also. Urmi realizes that even the mother doesn't want a case to be registered. Sakuntai says:

“You people are trying to blacken my daughter's name... don't tell anyone. I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girls, we're decent people... even if it's true, keep it to yourself, doctor, don't let anyone know of it. I have another daughter, what will become of her?”(58-59)

Sakuntai is the embodiment of helplessness and gendered subaltern. The illiteracy, insecurity and crushing poverty are problems of the woman Sakuntala. When Urmi tells her that Kalpana was hurt, she was injured and wronged by men and she is not responsible for anything happened to her, Sakuntai failed to understand the logic behind her words. As a depressed woman she tells, “But sometimes, I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death.” (62).

Deshpande's novels usually start at a point of crisis, which initiates a process of self-discovery for the protagonists. Urmila starts to contend with her loss, with unanswered questions of the past, and an analysis of herself and her marriage to Kishore, after two significant events-

the discovery of her mother-in-law Mira's poems, and her involvement with Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana had been brutally raped. Deshpande's technique of counterpointing the past with the present becomes an axis for Urmila's journey to self-discovery.

Tradition is belief transmitted from generation to generation. In India, patriarchy is the prevalent system. Male dominates in society. Woman is not allowed to fit for independence according to the unwritten laws of tradition. Women have no role, she is just a wife and mother."The Binding vine" explores important problems of our times. Deshpande's characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. Mira, urmi's mother-in-law and Kishore's mother had died in childbirth. She was a traditional Indian wife who obeys her husband and was like a slave. But, Mira never received any understanding or empathy from her husband. She is considered as an emotionless person.

Mira wrote poems about her life. Her suppressed anger and agony expressed through her poems. Her writing's are not encouraged but she wrote for her own sake. Urmila realizes that what has happened to Kalpana happened to her mother-in-law Mira. Urmila is determined to publish the poem of her mother-in law, Mira instead of thinking about what Vanna, her skeptical friend and her mother the solicitous Inni feel if she published those poems. She is initially reluctant to probe into Mira's private papers, "to trespass, to violate her privacy, to lay bare her tragic story" (51). The reader Urmila is like a voyeur looking into private documents and papers, diaries and poems – forums for self-expression that Jaya, Sumi and Madhu realized were so important for self-definition. "I have been imagining myself the hunter and Mira my prey; I have been filled with the excitement of the hunter each time I approached her" (135).

Urmi arranges the papers with the same meticulousness with which Mira had arranged hers: "I've smoothed the scraps of paper, put the notebooks in chronological order, piled the other books together and dusted the ancient file', in a manner similar to Mira's 'workmanlike orderliness about her file of poems" (50). Moreover, since "the past is always clearer because it is more comprehended . . . we can grasp it as a whole" (121). Urmila finds it easier to reconstruct it than to cope with the present, "maddeningly chaotic and unclear" and elusive.

Through Mira's letters and poems, Urmi discovered an unhappy woman who questioned silently the relevance of her traditional role of wife and mother..The interpersonal context

revealed through the interpolation of Mira's personal history in the main narrative structure indicates how Urmi's life shapes and evolves through this relationship.

Deshpande hopes for women writers to be able to reinterpret myths and write from the women's point of view. "What women writers are doing today is not a rejection of the myths but a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them." (150). Like Urmi, Mira is a woman writer who writes her life and reworks in her writings myths aimed at conditioning women.

The novel is a work about love and recovery. "Today, when i call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive and to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has" (200). Urmi survives the grief of her daughter's death, Kalpana has the resilience of youth, and Mira's voice, recovered by Urmi, will find a place in the literary history of Indian writing.

Shashi Deshpande's fiction opens up hitherto unknown perspectives on the Indian Woman who even today is seen as an appendage to man or family. She seeks to explore the myth of man's superiority and the myth of woman being always being always dependent and thus ushers in the winds of change at least in sensitive readers.

Mira's poem from which the title of the novel is taken seems to hold the key Deshpande tentatively proffers as the anchor that can hold oi the chaos of this transitional phase of Indian society.

Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
 But how escape this cord
 This binding-vine of love? Fear lies coiled within
 This womb-piercing joy (137).

Love is the inescapable force which may be the cause of intense grief as well as ecstatic joy. As long as human beings themselves remain imperfect, it is unrealistic for them to expect perfect love from anyone. Another poem of Mira's, which is the epigraph for the concluding section of the novel, speaks of standing still and seeking the spring of life. Urmi wonders at the end of the novel whether the transient but memorable moments when the love of one human being for another shines out in the midst of the mundane bustle of everyday existence, together make up this spring of life. The title highlights the multiple connotations of love which is 'binding' in the sense of being "restricting"; can bind, that is, 'hold people together' and is

enduring. It is this spring of life which, despite all the trials and sorrows of existence, makes life worthwhile.

Conclusion

The Binding vine is not only about sexual temptation and sexual repression; it is also about relationship between refusal and acquiescence, between desire and lack and also the relationship between language and culture. Deshpande demonstrates how among other points of view, desire and fulfillment in woman are located in biological processes. Seemingly desire for recognition, a poet's identity, an imaginative instinct, a passionate for writing are all subversive strains in woman.

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