



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 12 | ISSUE - 5 | FEBRUARY - 2023

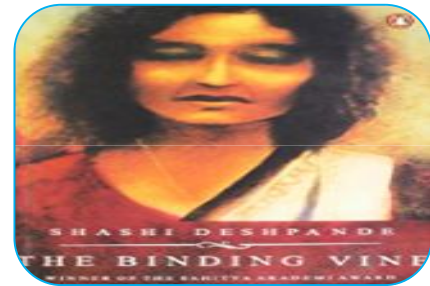


SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE BINDING VINE AN INSIGHT INTO FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr. Prashantkumar Bhupal Kamble
I/c Principal, Department of English,
Rajarshi Shahu Arts and Commerce College, Rukadi, District:Kolhapur.

ABSTRACT:

Feminism is by no means a monolithic term. If we seek a common strand in a number of its varieties, it is the critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking which aims at the domination of the male and subordination of the female. This patriarchal ideology teaches women to internalize this concept in the process of their socialization. It brings to fore the concepts of gender which are man-made. Simon de Beauvoir is of the view that the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She states: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine".¹ Very often what has been termed great literature is preoccupied with the andocentric ideology which focuses on the male protagonists providing the female secondary roles.



KEYWORDS: Literature, Drama, Feminism, women, philosophy, movement etc.

INTRODUCTION:

Feminism refutes these masculinity approaches to women. It aims at things from "a woman's point of view an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries" Theories of female creativity generally make use of four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psycho-analytic and cultural. Feminism in Indian English literature is a by-product of the western feminist movement but it got sustenance from various native sources such as Indian freedom movement, independence, and spread of education, employment opportunities, and laws for women's right. The indiscriminate application of western theories may be misleading because cultural contexts should not be overlooked and the "application of western critical models and paradigms for a literature having its root in a different native tradition is neither judicious nor desirable." This is necessary because our history, our ethos, our cultural and social milieu have been different. "The vastly different scenario in India encompasses contradictions of a kind undreamed of in the main stream (western) feminist philosophy". Factors such as caste, class, and economic deprivation, sectarian dragmentedness, over population, fundamentalism, superstition and Hinduism are necessary for the appreciation of the Indian society. The western individualism may prove impractical in the Indian context because the collective unconsciousness still operates on the principle of faith and dogma. John Oliver Perry recognizes the unsuitability of an arbitrary application of the essential values of a European based culture in Indian context which is entirely different and composed of various and mixed cultural value systems. R.K.

Gupta is also of the same opinion. He says: Not having graduated to the militancy of the west, literary feminism in India has also largely escaped the excesses of the western model its reductionism and at times simplistic view of reality which it into what one might call 'vulgar' Marxism, and 'vulgar' feminism.

Shashi Deshpande has been a very serious Indian English women novelist who has depicted different aspects of woman's life particularly the middle class woman's life- in her novels and short stories. She is strongly against labelling her a feminist writer. Instead of taking an extreme stand as a feminist against the patriarchal society and male domination, she takes a balanced view of life from a woman's standpoint by bringing in all the perceptiveness of a sensitive writer that she is. Her serious philosophy of life is expressed in many of her writings. In *The Binding Vine* is shown the everlasting truth of how all the human beings in life -like parents and children, relatives and strangers, men and women- are bound by the vine of emotional attachment and struggle to enjoy the beauty of life and overcome the ugliness in various ways. One may describe the emotional bondage among the human beings as part of Maya of mortal life. But the characters in this novel, far from running away from the anxieties of life, indulge in life with a lot of gusto and face it boldly. Written in the third person singular mode, the novel is centered around the life of Urmila, a sharp tongued and self-willed woman. The author's femininity, obviously, has helped her to depict the mind and heart of the protagonist microscopically and with an insider's authenticity of experience. Urmila, though not very poor, has been leading a contented married life. She is educated and teaches in a college. But, the happiness of her domestic life is spoiled by the unexpected death of her female baby, Anu. She is unable to forget her because her memories haunt Urmila. She fights with the memories but also realizes that forgetting is betrayal: "I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living. Ar yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray". She remembers the child time and again and sorrows over it. In her despair she bangs her head against the wall. The experience of frustrated motherhood keeps on gnawing at her soul. She feels the emptiness of life very intensely and suffer from utter helplessness about it. Her psychic problem is aggravated further by her physical problem i.e. asthma. Though her relatives try to console her, she continues to feel the blankness of life haunted as she is by the memory of her dead daughter both in reality and in dream. Although she has other child like Kartik, she finds it extremely difficult to forget her dead baby. The emotional vine that binds her to her daughter cannot be severed even after the death of the baby. In fact, it becomes stronger and stronger as days go by.

Frustrated motherhood of a different kind is depicted through the character of another woman, Shakutai. Although Urmila is neither a friend nor a relative of Shakutai, she develops a concern for her and her daughter Kalpana, again because of the binding vine of humanitarianism. Shakutai is shocked to learn that her daughter has been a victim of rape by somebody. She has been spending her days in the hospital attending upon Kalpana. When Urmila happens to meet Shakutai and understand her plight, she' tries to give her moral support. Dr. Jain examines the patient Kalpana and gives the report. He certifies that Kalpana has been raped and wounded badly and he is duty bound to report it to the police. Shakutai's helplessness and sorrow are limitless. Uneducated, poor and abandoned by her husband, she has to suffer from the disgrace and dishonour brought about by her daughter's freedom, recklessness and lack of practical wisdom. Shakutai is frustrated in her life both as a wife and as a mother. She requests the doctor through Urmila not to report the rape case to the police. Although Urmila is not related to Shakutai, she is bound to her by the bond of sympathy and understanding. She escorts Shakutai to her humble house. She visits the hospital repeatedly to offer moral support to Shakutai who is deeply worried about the gossip in her chawl generated by her daughter's case. She tells Urmila how she has married a worthless man who was jobless and who forced pregnancy on her and how Kalpana was born as an unwanted child for her. Since Kalpana's stay in the hospital has been almost interminable, the authorities of the hospital are planning to discharge her from there. But Shakutai does not know what to do next and where to go, especially when she has no money to support her. Urmila wants to help her in own way. She introduces Shakutai to her classmates, Malcolm who is a journalist and explains the whole history of the case and the decision of the hospital authorities to discharge the

patient i.e. Kalpana. Accordingly Malcolm interviews Shakutai and gets the news published in the local news paper much to the chagrin of the poor mother. In spite of the fact that the journalistic publicity causes terrible embarrassment to Shakutai, it helps her at least in one practical way. As a result of the wide publicity in the newspapers, the authorities of the hospital decide not to shift Kalpana from there. Like Shakutai, Sulu also is helpless and has a libidinous husband who had an eye on Kalpana from the beginning. Sulu is shocked to know that it is her husband Prabhakar who has raped Kalpana and been trying to escape the police. Shocked by the terrific news for her husband's heinous act, Sulu commits suicide by burning herself. Sulu who was the only person who offered some kind of emotional security and moral support to Shakutai is now no more. Shakutai, thus, becomes an embodiment of suffering in the patriarchal society of India. Whereas, her sorrow is aggravated by the factors like illiteracy, emotional insecurity, crushing poverty and orthodox duties of housewifery, Kalpana's tragedy is caused by adamancy, self-will, recklessness, exhibitionism and limitless freedom. Shakutai tries to find meaning her life by giving her daughter all the facilities, which were denied to herself-like good education, a good job and a respectable marriage. But all of her dreams are frustrated by her daughter's reckless and brainless behaviour like painting her lips, dressing herself up and moving about with stranger without knowing her own biologically determined limitation. Thus, the mother and the daughter exemplify two contrastive patterns of behaviour, but ironically enough both of them suffer in their own ways. The solution to their problems is not easy to achieve. Both of them are identical in the quality of their frustration, though different in their sorrow purely on humanitarian grounds.

Whereas Urmila 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. When she accidentally discovers the Kannada writings of Mira safely kept in a trunk on the loft, she reads them avidly and discovers the sad story of Mira. She is sad to learn that Mira being a sensitive girl, did not love her husband who could not understand her heart or mind. Mira's husband possessed her physically, but could not comprehend her psychic and artistic dimension. Mira was thus subjected to rap in marriage and being a lady of supersensitive temperament had a great repulsion for the so called 'love' or sexual act. There was only physical marriage and never marriage of minds or hearts. Thus, frustrated with the physicality of marital life, Mira tried to achieve her true identity by writing lyrical poetry. That was only way to escape from the sense of isolation and emptiness of her humdrum life. Urmila, who reads through the pages of Mira's poem, is deeply touched by the tenderness of feelings expressed in them and can easily guess her suffering through her own feminine imagination. She sheds tears of sympathy for Mira's miserable condition in the past. She wants to translate and publish Mira's poems in order to immortalize her in the world of art. That is the way of paying her homage to her dead mother-in-law.

Urmila is also frustrated in her own married life like Shakutai and Mira, but in a slightly different way. Although she is educated and employed as a lecturer in a college (unlike Shakutai) and has married a man of her choice after falling in love at first sight on the day of a grand father's death by suicide, she is not totally happy. She wants to be a good housewife and finds pleasure in her home, husband and children. But the contingencies of her husband's job have taken him away from her. An officer in the Indian navy, he comes home once in a while to spend his time with his wife and children. But Urmila long to have him permanently with her at home and fears that she may lose him forever. Kishore wants to alleviate her anxiety by having sex with her. Although Urmila submits herself to him in sex, she has repulsion for that- a quality that she shares with her own mother-in-law Mira. Urmila longs to reach his spiritual centre, but does not unfortunately succeed in it. Contrary to her habit, Kishore never tries to understand her spiritual aspect of life. To that extent, she is frustrated, though materially she lacks nothing. In spite of her husband's long absences from home; she never tries to look at another man for amours. Unlike a modern emancipated woman, she wants to be a chaste wife and loves her husband deeply. That is the reason why she does not show any positive response to Dr. Bhaskar Jain when he proposes to her in spite of his knowledge of her marital status. Urmila, thus, happens to be a sensitive woman rather than a radical feminist and can be taken to be the mouthpiece of the novelist. She derives consolation for herself from extending sympathy to similar woman like Shakutai and mira

whose frustration is perhaps greater than her own. In spite of the difficulties and obstacles caused by the patriarchal society, these three women endeavour to channelize their emotions in different ways because of their strong urge to survive. Having entered a chakravyuha from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their given life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life. Shashi Deshpande has, thus, offered an affirmative vision thereby upholding the ultimate goodness, beauty and truth of life quite in line with the Hindu philosophy.

The foregoing analysis foregrounds the notion that Shashi Deshpande is an Indian feminist writer who does not go to the extremes because she knows that the "wails of anguish or thunder of curses or growls of anger do not by themselves turn into great literature". It is significant that in the creative world of Deshpande all men are not villains. The husband of the protagonist Urmila is good to her and she is fully satisfied with him. But she realizes the responsibility to her own caste- the Stri Jati - and struggles to bring its truth before the society. This embodies the depth of the dimensions of personality of Deshpande's heroine.

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