

Suppression and Oppression of Women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract

Suppression refers to putting an end to something by force. Suppression can be denoted as preventing something from being known by the people, or simply the necessity to keep something secret. This can even be a publication. As the communist ideals begun to spread around the world, in most countries, the governments suppressed the publication and distribution of material which encouraged communism. Oppression can be defined as harsh and unfair treatment. Feminists fight against the oppression of women. Women have been unjustly held back from achieving full equality for much of human history in many societies around the world.

Key words

Chauvinistic, Solidarity, Enormity, Anguish, Dictates

The Binding Vine is a special novel for it presents predominantly the women's world, the presence of men is felt merely by the power they over the wives and daughters. It is the women's world where they out shine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their clear perception of things around them their surrounding and their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live.

Actually, they are unique individuals in their respective domains, may be a well to do family or a broken family front, voicing their displeasure and airing their views, so fighting against injustices inflicted upon them by and oppressive patriarchal system. They are assertive in their own way. They are aware of their limitations, and do have some misunderstanding about their limitations and do have some misunderstanding about other women, especially the mothers about their daughters.

The novel provides several instances. The title is significant because, mother and child are bound by the Binding vine of love, now relationship rebuilt, vine is also relevant for it grows in all directions and has intricate network and that would not disengage from its tentacles.

In this novel, the stories of Mira, Akka, Vanna, Inni, Shakutai, Sulumavashi and Kalpana touch Urmi as ripple waves and disturb her poise, but beyond their angrily pain and suffering in their nameless movements of intimacy and bonding, she discovers the bountiful binding vine of love, springs of life, crescent hope, all add to overcome her own sense of loss and despair and to come out of all shades of misunderstanding.

In fact it is through Vanaa's reminiscencing about Misra that Urmi's healing process begins. Urmi gets Misra's poem out of the trunk, which had sat for decades in the attic, gathering dust, and starts reading them. It is while reading these poems written by a college going teenager Misra, who was married off to a man whom she could not love, that Urmi realizes the various facts off pain that many a women has to bear, very often silently and mostly without having any option.

The healing process which begins by reading Misra's poem continues when Urmi accidentally meets Shakutai in the hospital where Vanaa works as a medical social worker. Shakutai's eldest daughter Kalpana has been brought to the hospital after she was brutally beaten and raped. Urmi feels compelled to help Shakutai to listen to her, to keep her company. During the long wit in which Kalpana lies in coma, Urmi makes a bold, modern, and a very humanistic statement in that she tries to convince Shakutai that it was not Kalpana who did anything wrong, it is not that she invited trouble upon herself by dressing up by painting her lips and nails, but it is Kalpana who is terribly wronged. For a long time Urmi herself does not understand her need to come sit with Shakutai, whose world is so very different from her own.

As much as The Binding Vine is the story of Urmi it is also the story of Mira, and of Shakutai. Mira is the binding vine between Urmi and Vanaa. Vanaa's father first wife, she died giving birth to Kishore, Urmi's husband. Writing poetry was for not only way of finding solace in her life but also a way of protesting against the way society works. When during the marriage her name is changed to Nirmala, the protest that arises in Mira at the loss of her identity finds its outlets in the poem:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice carefully traced a name Nirmala. Who is this? None but I, my name hence, bestowed upon me. Nirmala, they call, I stand statue-still. Do you build the new without razing the old? A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

And they again Mira is the symbol of the relationship between daughters and mothers, all over the world. She has one question she desperately wanted to ask her mother, a question she never asked mother, why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own.

Shakutai, an attendant at a school is raising her children all alone. Her elder daughter Kalpana has been raped, brutally beaten up and is lying in coma in the hospital. Shakutai is torn by her motherly feeling for Kalpana, and at the same time is afraid of the dishonor this incidence would bring to the family. Once she says, "she was a good girl, I swear to you, my Kalpana was a good girl". (92)

It is the only in which the author has used poems beautiful ones to tell a story of marital discordance, to paint a picture of traditions in India and to raise a voice of protest against the way off the society. Urmi goes through the poems in Mira's diary and get a glimpse of her troubled marriage. She comes to know from Akka how Kishore's father had pursued Mira, a college mate. The poems and entries in the diary are proof enough for Urmi to conceive the forced sexual activity Mira had to undergo an incompatible marriage.

Through her photographs and poems, Urmi gets an image of her mother-in-law as a very lively an intelligent girl snuffed of in forced marriage. Mira's inhibitions about her voicing a desire to become a poet are clear in following lines: "Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent Silkworm. Will I emerge a beauteous being? Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist" (65)

Thus, Shashi Deshpande suggests her that forced violation of a woman's body even in marriage can be as traumatic as rape even though it is not placed in same. In her short story *Intrusion* this very concern has been voiced again as the wife find herself in a situation where in the husband forces her into the sexual act.

She does not share his loneliness with others. She has walled herself in after marriage to this man, she was rechristened *Nirmala*. Though overtly she does not react but puts down her reaction in these lines "Nirmala, they call, I stand salute still, Do you build without erasing the old? A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me *Nirmala*? I am *Mira*" (101).

With the loss off such selfhood and identity, women have to undergo yet another kind of brutalization. *Mira's* diary reveals how *Venu*, poet who later rises to become a great figure in Indian literature, subtly snubs her for attempting to write poetry. When *Mira* gives him some of her poems to read he says, "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young women like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men". (127)

It is reflective of the handicaps that women writers often face in a male dominated society. Thus, *Mira* symbolizes the miserable and hopeless lot of innumerable Indian women who suffer silently and their voice remains smothered. The messages Shashi Deshpande gives is that the invasion of a women's body even in marriage can sometimes be as traumatic rape.

She has dealt with particularly every issue raised by the women's movement raised in India regarding the subordination of women: rape, child abuse, single motherhood, son-preference, denial of self-expression, deep inequality and deep-seated prejudice, violence, resourcelessness, low self-esteem, and the bind of domesticity. In a way this exploration has corresponded to her own development as a writer and, in her own words, helped her to find her true voice.

By simple device of describing the reality of many middle-class women in india, Deshpande lays bare the social discrimination and hypocrisy that underlie society's treatments of them by the same token, she is also

able to acknowledge status, especially within the family. Manorama in *A Matter of Time* is the shining example of this.

Yet Deshpande cannot in any way be said to have a propagandist or sexist perspective to present her readers with “bad bad men and good good women”. (25) Nor does she acknowledge or with feminist writers. Speaking about her use of male voice in most of her short stories, she asks:

Why did I have the male I? Did I do it to distance myself from the subject? Because I, too, felt there was something trivial about women’s concerns, sometime very limited about their interests and experiences? Had I, without my knowledge, been so brain washed that I had begun regarding women’s experience as second rate? Did having male narrator help me to pare down the emotions, intellectualize, but the fact was that both the intellect and emotions were mine. Yet the fact remains that I was trying to use an equivalent of the male pseudonym which so many women employed to conceal their identities. In other words, the winter in me was rejecting her femininity. Perhaps I felt that to be taken seriously as a writer I had to get out of my woman’s skin. (Deshpande 230)

In an interview, she told Holmstorm “My feminism has come to me very gradually, and for me it isn’t a matter of theory. For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive a real strength”. (26)

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