

Voice of the Voiceless: Self Regard through Self-Expression in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract

Indian novelists writing in English are conscious about the need to enlighten women and to endow them with survival skills in a predominantly patriarchal society which is on the verge of transition in socio-economic terms. Shashi Deshpande, one of the leading women writers in the contemporary Indian literary scenario, particularly focuses on the feminine consciousness of women belonging to the Indian middle class. Her works explore the inner psyche of women who are brought up in a conventional atmosphere but whose education causes them to question the biased societal norms which seek to control their self-perception. The protagonist of Shashi Deshpande is able to overcome estrangement and alienation through a pragmatic approach. Instead of revolting and disturbing the familial relationship, the protagonist reaches beyond in a pragmatic manner to become useful member of society. The protagonist acquires strength from external defeats and her internal victories escalate her to the level of self-actualisation. The protagonist recognizes that it is vital for her self-growth to overcome the desire for isolation and reach out to the less fortunate.

Keywords:

Indian English Fiction, Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine*, Compromising attitude, Voice of the voiceless, self-actualisation.

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Indian writers have created a new dimension for Indian English fiction. They have also conceived a new path to reconstruct the 'new woman' who would be liberated and free from ignorance and social restrictions. New woman is in quest for individuality by struggling with patriarchal norms. In order to keep pace with her new dimensions of responsibilities and expectations woman has started reconstructing her own 'self'. Indian writers have portrayed their women characters in different ways. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayam, Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhuri, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantra Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Anita Nair, Manju Kapur, Githa Hariharan

and Jai Nimbkar, Uma Vasudev, Anjana Appachana have dealt with the theme of identifying the 'self' and have given a new direction to Indian English literature.

Indian writers in English have imprinted that alienation is a struggle for self identity. Alienation is one of the post-modern trends and in the post-modern time everyone has the right to express their individuality. Each one of the authors has chosen different aspects of alienation in their fiction. Women novelists have special way of catching the theme of alienation and self identity in their novels as they live in restrained spheres. Among the women writers Shashi Deshpande has obtained a special room for her scrupulous consideration towards psychological insight and existential concerns. Human relationships are the main theme of Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Shashi Deshpande creates the framework of her novel with a well-made spatial and sequential milieu so her vision has not been misrepresented and made inferior. The analysis of Shashi Deshpande's themes in her novels should be considered by her concerns and perspective. Shashi Deshpande attempts to deliver deep into the dark recess of human mind and also exposes insensitive social realities and analyses the characters psychologically. She portrays the society minutely with its suffering, anxiety, and misery. She presents her protagonists in an emotional crisis struggling in search of self-identity in the frenzied society. Through the portrayal of her characters, it is made clear that she concerns for individual 'self'.

Shashi Deshpande tries to highlight another important attitude in the protagonist of the *The Binding Vine*. The protagonist shows interest in involving the issues concerning the outer world. This novel covers the loneliness of gendered female and her isolation which encourages her to settle in the outer world rather than in the familial relationship. It observes the firm decision of woman character to live without discarding the bonds of human relationships and responsibilities. It also projects the protagonist's affirmation of the self through the participation in the lives of others and describes how she thinks beyond own anxieties to reaffirm her humanity by helping people in despair. It examines the acceptance by society of the protagonist's dissent and her achievement of changing the norms and attitudes in an understated but firm manner. The protagonist recognizes that it is vital for her self-growth to overcome her desire for isolation and reach out to the less fortunate. It is seen that the novel emphasizes the values of human relationships which helps to strengthen the independent woman's association with society.

Shashi Deshpande's recent novel, *The Binding Vine* is a feminine novel which represents woman as a spineless, wooden creature subjected to male domination. The protagonist experiences loss and solitude in the opening of the novel. The death of her daughter Anu results in the isolation of Urmi. J.P.Tripathi says: "The central theme of the novel is the 'binding vine' of feeling and emotion between parent and child, and between husband and wife" (153). In order to get rid of the loneliness, Urmi pays attention and concentrates in the outer world. The preoccupied memory of her dead daughter is replaced by the poems and diaries of Mira.

Urmi's mission into Mira's life establishes her to the traditionally guarded life of woman in Indian society. Urmi also understands the agonies of Mira through her writings.

Through the revelations of Mira's untold experiences in her poems, Urmil identifies the rape victim Kalpana. In the process of helping Kalpana and her mother she becomes involved in their problem. Urmil becomes aware of the suppression and ill treatment of woman belonged to lower strata of the society. The shame engulfed Shakutai is not ready to note the logic behind Urmil's argument and begins to expect for death of Kalpana. Even Urmil's crusade for the rape victim is not approved by her family members. Vanna and Inni never try to understand her involvement in the girl's problem. Ironically, Shakutai is manipulated by Urmil into telling Kalpana's story to journalist in order to prevent transferring Kalpana to another hospital. Urmil succeeds in the mission finally. Urmil associates the story of Mira and Kalpana to explain the sexual wrongs done to women in patriarchal Indian society. Kalpana is not a victim of rape the same way as Mira. Basavraj Naikar observes:

In *The Binding Vine* is shown the perennial truth of how all the human beings in life-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. (122)

It is the fear of expectations of the society dominates the woman of Shakutai's class which makes their life impossible and gives them the status of subaltern. The effective narration exposes the fear of a woman belonging to Shakutai's class. The new self-realization and the strength makes Urmil's desire to help a less fortunate woman Kalpana, a rape victim and get Mira's poems published. The trust that the protagonists have on the outer world is not failed and eventually strengthens her at the end. J P Tripathi states in his article "The Binding Vine and Indian Ethos" that *The Binding Vine* gives a serious depiction of human relationship:

A serious study of *The Binding Vine* reveals that it concentrates on human relationships, affection and love. This type of concentration of human relationships is found in pure novels as those by Jane Austen. So technically speaking the novel *The Binding Vine* can be called a pure novel. (152)

The change in the attitude of woman's thinking is the positive segment of development. Some of the positive phases in the development of human kind includes think globally and understand one's pain and agony. The story of Kalpana acts as another support to the narrator's own movement towards a kind of self-fortification. Urmil acknowledges her life with new understanding after visualizing the miseries and agonies of married woman, a victim of marital rape and an unmarried girl, a victim of rape.

Shashi Deshpande's writing style gears up the readers a ride to discover the significance of relationship and explore the feelings of loss and solitude in *The Binding Vine*. She depicts the loneliness of the gendered female in *The Binding Vine*. This novel strongly emphasizes the value of human relationships. The positive vision of life and human competence to survive with dignity reaches a new dimension in *The Binding Vine*. The single woman is notoriously unsafe, and the enormous emptiness inside her is filled with the close relationship with society. The positive development in the protagonist is, Urmil draws society's attention to the agony of the raped victim and is determined to get Mira's poems published. The protagonist of this novel is a perfect example for re-structuring her own self. The protagonist reframes the shell of familial relationship and engages herself as an active participant in societal relationships. Shashi Deshpande has explored the problems of every woman in the patriarchal society and in family. Shashi Deshpande portrays her protagonist's psychic havoc in this dual frame, the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself,

struggle between her own knowledge and the power on her by the surrounding. The step achieved in this novel is the presenting the preamble of female bonding, compromising attitude in the inconsistent married life and the desire of woman to help the less fortunate.

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