

ISSN : 2454-3365

THE LITERARY HERALD

AN INTERNATIONAL REFEREED ENGLISH E-JOURNAL

A Quarterly Indexed Open-access Online JOURNAL

Vol.1, No.1 (June 2015)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Siddhartha Sharma

Managing Editor: Dr. Sadhana Sharma

www.TLHjournal.com

sharmasiddhartha67@gmail.com

**The Old Vessel Filled with New Wine: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande's
The Binding Vine through the Revisionist Lens.**

Neelam Sanwal Bhardwaj

Research Scholar
SGRR P.G. College, Dehradun
H.N.B.Garhwal University
(A Central University)
Srinagar, Garhwal
Uttarakhand

Abstract

The present paper attempts a revisionist reading of Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine*. While the writer does not refer to myth directly, rich overtones of myth and legend are implicit in the plot and subplots of the novel. Mother-daughter relation forms the core of the novel and thus invites a close parallel with the Demeter-Persephone myth. The novel examines motherhood as an institution with its critical focus on the rape of the daughter and the mother's inability to play a nurturing role. The protagonist, Urmila, chooses to speak up for the wronged daughter. Urmila's story itself may be interpreted as a contemporised version of the legend of Urmila from the Ramayana. *The Binding Vine* presents a woman's world in all its complexities. Deshpande, thus, successfully deploys cultural narratives in order to bring women's stories from the margins to the centre.

Keywords: phallogocentric, mythmaking, gynocentric, reference-point,

**The Old Vessel Filled with New Wine: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande's
The Binding Vine through the Revisionist Lens.**

Neelam Sanwal Bhardwaj

Research Scholar
SGRR P.G. College, Dehradun
H.N.B.Garhwal University
(A Central University)
Srinagar, Garhwal
Uttarakhand

The Interrogation and rewriting of myths and cultural narratives has been high on the agenda of feminist writers and critics inasmuch as these narratives tend to uphold a phallogocentric worldview in which the female has been relegated to the margin. One of the major objections of

the feminist critics is that myths reduce women to angel/demoness binary and dilute their complexities to the simple formula of desirable vs undesirable with reference to the needs of a patriarchal society. The desirable women eulogized by patriarchal texts turn out to be stereotype, obedient and passive. In his book, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* Ken Dowden observes “. . . mythology is by and large a man’s mythology, describing a world from a man’s point of view. Women are seldom considered in isolation from men and seldom have scope for action on their own initiative” (161).

Again, the mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering and sin is the foundation of sexual attitudes, since it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition. The patriarchal culture suppresses women and confines them to domesticity. Carolyn Larrington in her work entitled *The Feminist Companion to Mythology* writes: “Myths about women are not necessarily women’s myths” (xii). On a similar note, N. Geetha in her essay “Feminist Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Male Myths and Fairy Tales via Intertextuality” opines that the myths created by man represented “fictional women” (247) and women were persuaded to accept them as the norm through a process of strict indoctrination. These fictional assumptions regarding women have, “concretized into a cluster of values and bundles of taboos putting women in a disadvantaged position” (248).

A major interest of feminist critics has been to reconstitute the ways writers and readers deal with mythology in order to do justice to female points of view, concerns and values. One of the techniques of reworking mythology is feminist revisionist mythmaking which attempts to rediscover the stereotyped women in the old stories and narrate the story of the ‘other’ or the ‘other side’ of a culturally accepted story. Feminist revisionist mythmaking is a strategy employed by feminist writers in order to subvert the conventionally accepted gender imagery inherent in mythology.

In her paper “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking” Alicia Ostriker notes that the revision of myths is aimed to rewrite them from a female point of view to discover new possibilities for meaning (71). Emphasising the need of the inclusion of autobiographical elements by the feminist writers while reworking misogynist myths, Ostriker notes, “The poet simultaneously deconstructs a prior “myth” or “story” and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself” (72). According to Ostriker, in feminist revision of myth a culturally accepted tale is appropriated for altered ends like “the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible”(7).

Shashi Deshpande is a leading Indian-English writer whose fiction has given voice to women’s silences and gendered existence in a patriarchal society. The influence of the Hindu myths and legends is clearly visible in her works. In most of her novels, the protagonists seek answers to their problems in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata or the Upanishads. Deshpande explores Hindu myths and legends and juxtaposes them with modern situations. In an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom she talks about the significance of myths and legends:

Writers in India in search of some truths about themselves and their condition invariably go to the Epics and the Puranas. So do women. And when they began, they were, in effect, rediscovering themselves finding things relevant to their lives today. What we are doing is retelling our own tales. . . I think a number of us do that in India all the time; we relate a great deal of our personal lives, our daily life to the myths. (*Wasafiri* 26)

Deshpande uses cultural myths in her fiction as allusions and reference points to draw parallels or set contrasts with the situation of the modern Indian woman. She has contemporised myths and legends. The mythical and the modern mingle perfectly in Deshpande's fiction. By embedding cultural narratives in her fiction, she presents both the contemporary and the timeless. Shalmalee Palekar observes: "She (Deshpande) maps out the cultural determinants overt or covert, that structure the 'desirable role perception' of an Indian wife and mother" (69).

The Binding Vine is Deshpande's sensitive novel about women caught in the web of patriarchy. The novel narrates the story of Urmila, or Urmi, who has lost her baby daughter, Anu. Her family closes in to take care of her after the bereavement. At a hospital Urmi meets Shakuntala, or Shakutai, whose daughter, Kalpana, has been brutally raped and is in coma. Shakutai, however, favours the theory that Kalpana has met with a road accident. She believes that Kalpana is herself responsible for what had happened to her.

At this time Urmi discovers the diary and poems of her dead mother-in-law Mira. Mira had died shortly after giving birth to a son, Kishore. Urmi discovers that Mira was a sensitive woman and budding poet whose talent was neglected by her family members. She wrote poems in Kannada. Mira's married life had been a hell. She had been married to a coarse and insensitive man. She dreaded the coming of night at the prospect of her husband forcing her into sex. She became a victim of marital rape. Her poetry reveals how unhappy she was in her marriage. Urmi translates Mira's poems into English.

Urmi crusades to get justice for Kalpana. As Kalpana's case comes into limelight, it causes a furore in the State Legislative Assembly and the government orders an investigation into the matter. It is soon found out that Kalpana was raped by her own uncle. Urmi decides to get Mira's poetry published despite strong objection by her sister-in-law and friend, Vanaa. Urmi learns to let go of her grief and seeks strength from women like Shakutai. She can look back with satisfaction at the role played by her in empowering Kalpana and Mira. The novel ends with the hope that justice will be done to Kalpana.

The Binding Vine is a novel that has many layers of meanings. This paper attempts to do a revisionist reading of the novel. The name of the protagonist, Urmila, evokes the legend of Urmila who finds only a marginal place in the Ramayana. In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande reinvents the legend of Urmila who was Sita's younger sister and Lakshman's wife. Urmi, the protagonist, seems to be a revised version of the legendary Urmila. Deshpande also engages with the Sita myth obliquely by referring to Sita's blade of grass.

In *The Binding Vine* Deshpande seeks to narrate the unwritten story of the mythic figure Urmila who has been relegated to the margins of erasure by the patriarchal version. Deshpande recovers a female story and simultaneously modernizes what is ancient by using the old story in newly found feminist contexts. *The Binding Vine* interrogates the legend of Urmila in order to discover what she was as a wife and whether she pined for her husband, Lakshman, during his absence for fourteen years. Deshpande uses Urmila's legend to ask certain pertinent questions: Can love exist between two lovers even when they separate for months or years together? What do the lovers do about the sexual demands their bodies make during the absence of the beloved? Can the modern Indian wife wait patiently for her husband as the legendary Urmila had? Are chastity and purity prime virtues to be cherished by women at all times and in all circumstances?

The two source texts, the Ramayana and the Ramcharitmanas, fail to answer these questions. Neither throws any light on Urmila's character. All we know about her is that unlike Sita, she stayed at Ayodhya while her husband, Lakshman, left for the forest along with Ram and Sita. However, in an article titled "A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in

Telugu”, Velchuru Narayana Rao refers to the women’s tradition in which the legend of Urmila has been discussed. A Telugu poem entitled “Urmila Devi’s Nidra” gives a beautiful explanation of how Urmila survives the fourteen years when her husband, Lakshman, is away. Urmila and Lakshman devise a pact between them. Urmila exchanges all her waking hours with all of Lakshman’s sleeping hours during the fourteen years of separation. This means that Urmila went to a slumber for fourteen long years. It can be said that Urmila becomes inanimate or controls her sexual urges by putting them to *sleep* (124-25).

In *The Binding Vine* Urmi’s husband, Kishore is conspicuous by his absence throughout the novel. Urmi and Kishore have to separate for a few months every year as Kishore’s merchant-navy job demands that. Urmi struggles with her sexual urges during Kishore’s long absences. Their teenage love had culminated into marriage. Urmi loves Kishore deeply, yet his absence for months leaves her empty and lonely. Before the death of her baby daughter, Anu Urmila would find it extremely difficult to control her sexual urges during Kishore’s absences:

Then he goes away and I’m left with that passion. There was a time when I was frightened by the intensity of my bodily hungers for Kishore. It seemed to do nothing but complicate my life enormously. I often wished I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned. (*The Binding Vine* 164-65)

It is during one such absence that Urmi forges a platonic friendship with Dr. Bhaskar Jain. Lonely and bereaved, she considers this friendship as having a positive influence in her life. Urmi’s mother, Inni and Vanaa, however, do not approve of this friendship:

‘Urmi, you should realise he’s serious about you. Have you heard him say your name?’

‘Don’t worry, Vanaa,’ I reassured her, seeing she was truly concerned. ‘I’m quite safe. I have my blade of grass.’

‘Blade of grass?’ She was puzzled.

‘Like Sita,’ I added.

‘Oh!’ she said then, as if she understood. But I wonder if she really did. I know what she thinks I meant. I love Kishore and therefore. . . (*BV* 162)

The incident of the blade of grass occurs in the Sundarkand of Valmiki’s Ramayana. In the Sundarkand, Sita is mentioned as keeping a blade of grass between her person and Ravana as a fragile boundary in order to defend her purity and modesty. Though there is only a blade of grass between Sita and Ravana, yet symbolically it is a big barrier. In a paper titled “Guarded by Grass: A Ramayana Motif and Some Western Parallels”, J. L. Brokington compares Sita’s use of the blade of grass with the European custom of keeping a sword (weapon) between one’s person and that of an enemy or a suitor (24-25).

Urmi trusts Bhaskar and expects that he will respect the sanctity of her marriage. But she is deeply upset and disturbed when Bhaskar declares his love for her. Bhaskar hopes that love between Urmi and Kishore has died because of Kishore’s absence. For Urmi, however, Kishore’s love is her *blade of grass* powerful enough to keep at bay amorous advances of other men. She feels cheated by Bhaskar. Pondering over her love for Kishore, Urmi wonders: “Is that my blade of grass? Bhaskar obviously thinks so too. ‘You love him?’ he asked, and how anxiously he looked into my face as if the relationship between us hinged on my reply to his question” (162).

Urmi remembers how Sita used the blade of grass to protect her modesty and purity against the amorous advances of Ravana. She realises that chastity and purity are not just virtues but also convenient options for Indian women. She regards her friendship with Bhaskar

ambivalently: “It’s not Bhaskar, It’s really myself I’m angry with. (BV 162) . . . And yet for a moment I was tempted, I was perilously close to responding to Bhaskar, to giving him what he wants. . .” (BV 165).

Though Urmila is a modern woman, yet she would not transgress the boundary to have an affair with Bhaskar not because she is a chaste woman, but because the affair will complicate her life. She will find it difficult to manage her marriage and an extra-marital affair. Instead, she turns to her relations with the other women for support and understanding. Urmi comes to understand that virtue and chastity are of value because they help make life simple and manageable. She thinks: “And what about Bhaskar then? Oh, I don’t know. It’s so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity of being a good wife, I see the point of it now” (BV 166).

In the novel, Sita emerges as a reference-point for the Indian women, facing situation such as Urmila’s. Through the protagonist Urmi, Deshpande depicts how women control the sexual demands of their bodies during their husbands’ absences, and yet use their love as a barrier to the unwelcome attentions of the other men. Deshpande enshrines Sita as a relevant role-model for the modern Indian woman. Siddhartha Sharma finds in *The Binding Vine* a close parallel between the real and the mythical:

In *The Binding Vine*, a mythological parlance can be seen in the stories of Urmila, Mira and Shakuntala and the tales of the mythological characters . . . The mythological Urmila, Lakshmana’s wife, is left in a broken and aggrieved state when Lakshmana leaves for the forest with Lord Rama. In this novel Urmila is greatly aggrieved by the loss of her child. Urmila’s mother-in-law Mira, like the mythological Mira remains detached to her husband and both desire relations based on love and not sexual pleasure. (81-82)

The novel presents a world of sisterhood that binds all women. The binding vine of women’s support, love and sisterhood is therefore, preferred by Urmi during her husband’s absence. With a little regret, Urmi feels relieved when her friendship with Bhaskar cools down. A.G. Khan, in his essay “*The Binding Vine: Multi-Storied Misunderstandings*” sums up the novel aptly: “Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* is a work that can be read as a projection of such ideas as women’s solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male-dominated culture, the basis for their bonding, however being shared oppression and victimization” (162).

The Binding Vine focuses on the mother-daughter relationship and woman’s identity as mother. The novel analyses the psyche of the Indian woman from two angles: woman as mother and woman as daughter. The novel depicts a number of mother-daughter pairs, a few of them being Urmi-Anu, Inni-Urmi, Shakutai-Kalpna, Akka-Vanaa, Vanaa-Mandira and Mira’s mother and Mira. There is a palpable tension between almost each of the mother-daughter duo. As mother, each of the women is filled with some degree of guilt: Urmi holds herself guilty for Anu’s death. Inni regrets not caring enough for Urmi as a child. Shakutai blames herself for Kalpna’s rape. Vanaa is contrite for not being able to please Mandira. As daughter, each nurses a degree of discontent towards her mother: Urmi refuses to wear smart clothes sent by Inni. Kalpna would defy all the directions given by Shakutai. Vanaa is upset with an aging Akka who refuses to move in with her. Mira would pour all her complaints towards her mother in her poetry.

In the novel, Deshpande sets her critical focus on the two narrative frames: of Mira and of Kalpna, with Urmi’s story binding the two frames. Both the frames have mother-daughter

relationship, with the rape of the daughter forming the backdrop. The motif of mother-daughter relationship, and the rape of the daughter as a backdrop invites a close parallel with the mother-daughter archetype—Demeter and Persephone who enjoy a perfect relationship of warmth and closeness together. When the god of the underworld, Hades abducts the beautiful and tender Persephone, Demeter, the goddess of harvest, rises in righteous anger and curses the earth with autumn and winter. Persephone resists Hades by desiring to be with her mother. Demeter eventually vindicates her daughter's honour by forcing Hades to return her daughter to her. While in the underworld, Persephone eats six of the twelve seeds given to her by Hades. Because of this, she is forced to spend half the year in the underworld, this half year represents autumn and winter. The other half of the year, which she spends with her mother, represents spring and summer or the rebirth myth.

The first narrative frame of the novel narrates the story of Mira, Urmi's dead mother-in-law. As a young girl, Mira was married to a coarse and insensitive man who was obsessed with her. He would force Mira into sexual act. Mira became a silent victim of marital rape. Mira's mother was a weak-willed woman. She failed to give her daughter any support. She would say to Mira: "Don't ask me . . . Nothing is in my hands" (BV 126). Although she sensed Mira's agony, yet she let her suffer silently. To Mira's mother, women's fate lay in the hands of men. She died happily after seeing Mira married and pregnant. Mira, too, like a good daughter, never revealed her pain and masqueraded as a happy wife. She could not raise her voice against her husband who raped her every night. Mira followed her mother's advice: "Obey, never utter a 'no'; / Submit and your life will be / a paradise, she said and blessed me" (BV 83).

Mira aspired to become a poet. Her aspirations, however, could not come true as she was married at a young age to a man she did not love. Mira's pain, carefully hidden, found release in her poems. She hated the new name given to her after her marriage. Mira found marriage oppressing and confining. In one of her poems, she wrote:

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. (BV 101)

Mira's husband would force himself on her every night. This forced union led to the birth of Kishore, Urmi's husband. Mira's existence and identity were gendered. She got no support from her family to take up an unusual career of a poet. She had to stifle the poet in her. Neither could Mira become a famous poet, nor could she play the role assigned to her by the society for being born a woman.

Mira's life and aspirations draw a striking parallel with those of Mirabai, the historical personality, devotional poet and saint who rejected marriage and left home to seek a spiritual union with her beloved, Lord Krishna. Like the legendary Mirabai, Mira, too, wrote poetry to express her spiritual longings. She, too, could not accept her husband and suffered in a marriage that was to her not a spiritual bond, but bondage. Unlike the saint Mirabai, however, Mira could never muster the moral courage to deviate from the gender norm expected of her.

The story of Kalpana is the second narrative frame of the novel. The narrative of Kalpana was inspired from a real-life incident of a sexual assault on a nurse named Aruna Shanbag by a

hospital worker at the famous K G M hospital, Mumbai. Kalpana too, becomes a victim of rape. As had happened in Shanbag's case, Kalpana's mother Shakutai pleads the Doctor to suppress the fact of rape from her medical report: "I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people" (BV 58). Urmi is astonished at Shakutai's attitude towards her own daughter. Failing to see Kalpana as a victim, Shakutai blames her for being raped. She says, "It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault" (BV 147). Instead of demanding the arrest of the culprit, Shakutai herself wants to suppress the fact of the rape, saying, "If a girl's honour is lost, what's left?" (BV 59).

Urmi realises, "What has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too" (BV 63). Mira, like Kalpana, was a victim of rape. The only difference was that Mira was raped by her husband. While the legal system can help Kalpana, there was no such help for Mira as her oppressor was her own husband. Society would never understand Mira's woe. Urmi feels equally sad for Mira as for Kalpana. She is despaired that Mira's mother did not encourage her writing. While Mira's mother was very happy to see Mira married and pregnant, Mira wanted to be different. In one of her poems, Mira writes: "To make myself in your image / was never the goal I sought." (BV 124). Later, however, Mira finds herself turning into her mother's shadow: "Whose face is this I see in the mirror, / unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear? / The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow" (BV 126).

Shakutai, too, is a typical Indian mother. She is proud of her daughter's achievements and tells Urmi, "She is very smart, that's how she got that job in the shop. Kalpana even learnt how to speak English. People in our *chawl* used to laugh at her, but she didn't care. When she wants something, she goes after it, nothing can stop her" (BV 92). At the same time, she is extremely critical of Kalpana and blames her for the rape: "She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. . . . What could I do? She was so self-willed. 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. . ." (BV 147).

Urmi feels angry with the mothers who cannot dream different dreams for their daughters. Shakutai worries about Kalpana and Sandhya's marriages. Mira's mother, too, had wanted Mira to get married. Having lost her daughter, Anu, the mother inside Urmi becomes highly sensitive to the plight of Mira and Kalpana. She takes interest in Kalpana's case as though she was her spiritual godmother. In vindicating Kalpana, Urmi identifies closely with the archetypal Demeter, the goddess of fertility. By playing the role of a strong benign mother, she reclaims the lost mother-daughter bond that has been celebrated in the West by a number of feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray, Adrienne Rich and Helen Cixous. In her work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Rich observes:

Each daughter. . . must have longed for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death. And every mother must have longed for the power of Demeter, the efficacy of her anger, the reconciliation with her lost self. (240)

Urmi finds women's apathy towards their daughters appalling. She finds herself rising in a righteous anger towards a society where crimes are committed upon women's bodies and psyches. She is equally angry with the mothers who shut their eyes upon the crimes done against their daughters and cover up their own cowardice under the name of respectability. While there are mothers like Inni, Vanaa and Shakutai, who fail to stand up for their daughters, Urmi stands apart as a sensitive woman and nurturing mother.

At the same time, Urmi may be compared with the archetypal daughter, Persephone. She, too, had been separated from her mother when her father sent her to Ranidurg to be looked after by her grandmother, Baiajji. It is towards the end of the novel that Urmi comes to know that the breach between Inni and her had been brought about by her own father. This revelation brings “the spring of life” (BV 203) back into Inni-Urmi relationship. Like Persephone, again, Urmi spends half the year with her husband, Kishore; and when he leaves for his job, she stays with Inni.

In *The Binding Vine*, writing as revision and as an instrument of woman empowerment can be seen in Urmi’s engaging with Mira’s poetry. Urmi reads Mira’s diaries and poems and finds that instead of settling down into matrimony like other girls, Mira aspired to be a poet. One of Mira’s poems reads: “Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm / will I emerge a beauteous being? / Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?” (BV 65). In another poem, Mira writes:

Shall I surrender to this Maya-world
dancing peacock, displaying its feathers?
Or shall I, defying the market world
Retreat into my shell tortoise-like? (BV 98)

Mira admired a young poet named Venu who claimed to be the instrument, not the creator of poems. Mira aspired to write like him. In her diary Mira mentioned meeting Venu. She had shown some of her poems to him, eager to know what he thought of them. Venu, however, had said to her “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (BV 127). Urmi remembers having seen the poet Venu, an old man, a cult figure laden with awards and honours. Urmi contrasts Venu, the cult poet, with Mira who died at the age of twenty-two, her poetry languishing in her old trunk. One may wonder whether the poet inside Mira died young because of Venu’s piercing remark that her destiny as a woman lay in matrimony and childbearing. Venu represents patriarchy that confines women to the threshold. Mira, thus, became a victim to patriarchy that put an end to her ambition of becoming a poet. Mira did not have the courage to break free from the norm, and appropriate language in order to use it for subversive ends.

One of the aims of Feminist revisionist writers is to discover the lesser-known or unknown women poets and study them from a feminist perspective. By doing so the revisionist writers make an effort to trace these unknown poets’ struggle to express themselves in the patriarchal world. In this regard Cathy N. Davidson, and E.M. Broner have observed:

But over the year there has been a new trend, with many scholars finding other paths to our mothers. By searching in unusual literature—in the private or hidden literatures of diary, tale, myth, song and autobiography—women have been restoring the blurred image of our mothers. There has been an embracing of the maternal past. (xii)

Urmi undertakes to empower dead Mira by taking an initiative towards getting Mira’s poetry published. Urmi’s attempt is a positive action towards giving worth to Mira’s poetry and making public this facet of her personality. What Urmi is trying to do is to reclaim the lost poet that Mira had been. Urmi’s efforts have the resonance of the feminist efforts to discover the lost maternal past of the womankind. Urmi’s decision to publish Mira’s poetry, however, is opposed by her sister-in-law, Vanaa, who fears that publishing Mira’s poetry will cause embarrassment to her mother and bring a bad name to her dead father:

How could you ask Akka to help you with the poems? Didn’t you imagine what she would feel? You saw her that day when she read them, you saw how she

cried. And to talk of publishing them—how can you, Urmi, how can you! It's all right for you and me, we don't live there. But Akka does. Once people read those poems, how can she hold her head up again?' (BV 172)

On the other hand, there is the film-producer Priti, who wants to produce a film based on Mira's life and would like Urmi to write the script for her. For Priti, Mira's life and death is just a wonderful script to make a women-oriented film and win awards. Urmi knows that for Priti, Mira's story is only a film, but for her own self it is far too personal. Urmi regards Mira's writings as a heritage to be cherished and respected. Urmi realises that women like Vanaa, Priti and she had been very lucky that they have managed to live happy lives. All the same, it was their duty to help less-fortunate women like Mira and Kalpana. It is this thought that strengthens her resolve to fight for Kalpana's sake.

Urmi dares to look beyond the restricted ideas of propriety, disgrace, stigma and public opinion—constructs, of which women such as Vanaa, Shakutai and Inni can never break free. She empowers dead Mira by letting her pain be read by women. Despite losing her daughter Anu, Urmi gets the courage to go on like the legendary Abhimanyu who went ahead fearlessly, though he knew not the way out of the *Chakravyuha*. Urmi muses, "You can never opt out, you can never lay it down, the burden of belonging to the human race. There's only one way out of this *Chakravyuha*. Abhimanyu had to die, there was no other way he could have got out" (BV 202).

The Binding Vine presents a female-centered worldview in which the complexities of female-bonding are explored, and man-woman relationship is relegated to a secondary place. In the novel Deshpande has used old myths in totally new female contexts thereby offering new possibilities for meanings. She has appropriated and creatively reinvented the story of legendary Urmila from a gynocentric perspective. By recovering an untold feminist legend and presenting it in the modern Indian context, she has succeeded in developing what David Birch has termed "Feminist Poetics" (19). By bringing the mother-daughter relationship from the margin to the centre, she has rejuvenated the female life-stories that have been either sidelined or misrepresented in the male myths.

Works Cited

- Birch, David. *Language, Literature and Critical Practice: Ways of Analysing Text*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Davidson, Cathy N., and E.M. Broner, eds. *The Lost Tradition. Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Ungar, 1980. Print.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *The Binding Vine*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- . "Shashi Deshpande Talks to Lakshmi Holmstrom" *Wasafiri: Journal of Caribbean, African, Asian and Associated Literatures and Film* 17 (1993): 22-27. Print
- Dowden, Ken. *The Uses of Greek Mythology*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Geetha, N. "Feminist Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Male Myths and Fairy Tales via Intertextuality". *Modern Criticism*. Ed. Christopher Rollason and Rajeshwar Mittapalli. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2002. 244-61. Print.

- Khan, A. G. "The Binding Vine: Multi-Storied Misunderstanding." *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. Ed. Naik . New Delhi: Pencraft, 2005. 161-68. Print.
- Larrington, Carolyne, ed. *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. London: Pandora, 1992. Print.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *Signs* 8.1 (1982): 68-90. Print.
- Palekar, Shalmalee. "Gender, Feminism and Postcoloniality: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande's Novels." *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. Ed. Naik . New Delhi: Pencraft, 2005. 46-71. Print.
- Rao, Velchuru Narayana. "A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu." *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Ed. Paula Richman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 114-34. Web. 11 Aug. 2013. <<http://ark.cdib.org/ark:/13030/ft3j49n8h7>>.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago, 1984. Print.
- Sharma, Siddhartha. *Shashi Deshpande's Novels: A Feminist Study*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2005. Print.
-