

The Reproduction of Mothering: Female Bonding in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract:

In this research paper, the researcher examines Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine to demonstrate in the context of the bond of mother-daughter relationships, and of their struggle for selfhood and self-definition in a man's world and of their search for strength in their woman to woman relationships, their common victimization and their shared identities.

Key words: Shashi Deshpande, The Binding Vine, selfhood, self-definition, woman identity, victimization

In this research paper, the researcher attempts to examine Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* the context of the female bonding relationships. It aims to analysis and to demonstrate how the protagonist of this novel Urmi and her mother search for strength in their woman to woman relationships, and struggle for selfhood and self-definition in a man's world.

In this research paper, the researcher also proposes to focus on female bonding in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* with special emphasis on the mother and daughter relationship and woman to woman bonding. The researcher would like to conjure up the meaning of term 'female bonding' as defined by Joyti Singh who aptly defines female bonding as,

An important expansion of nurturing and care-giving is the

woman-woman dyad, also called female bonding, which helps in female identity formation. It challenges the male-centered interpretation of female psychological development and offers new paradigms to contextualize female friendship.¹

There are considerable divergences in personal experiences, cultural background and the realistic problems faced by women in the developing country and those in developed countries. These differences, in many cases restrain woman's life and position. The relationship of women to each other is a theme found commonly in women's fiction. The mother daughter relationship is of particular interest in this regard. Shashi Deshpande brings out the strained mother daughter relationship in her fiction. The mother daughter relationship has always occupied an important place in Deshpande's fiction. She has not valorised the image of mother; instead she has rendered more human qualities to her. Deshpande in the essay *Telling Our Own Stories* writes about womanhood:

Even today, our ideas about motherhood are so set in images of loving and cooing mothers, that I am often asked, Why are the mothers in your novels so unloving? Unloving? No, it's because we have this stereotypical image of what a loving mother is like, that we find any variation to be lacking in 'motherly' feelings. It seems to me that we need to get rid of these images to release ourselves from guilt.²

Our society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here, a female is considered to be a peripheral member of the family, both in her parent's house as well as husbands. Throughout her lifetime she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity. As the daughter is closest to the mother, this insecurity is rubbed on to her also. Shashi Deshpande has delved into the problems of every woman in this hypocritical society where she is rendered a second grade position but is expected to carry the burden of the family. The double edgedness plays mayhem on her psyche.

She is confused about her own role in the society and family. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman, fighting within herself, and her surroundings. The psychic imbalance stems from the unresolved love hate relationship between mother and daughter. While tracing the conflicts of her female characters, Deshpande has also explored that sometimes women themselves create conflicts in the lives of other women.

The Afro-American mother had to depend on her children for emotional support, especially daughter/s as mother/s found it easier to relate with the female child. It became an act of self-affirmation for many to recognize and appreciate the mother's creativity. Alice Walker calls the mother the 'walking history of our community and Gloria Naylor records:

I used to believe that self – affirmation meant you had to be totally a conventional. But to keep a house, especially the way my mother kept her house- against all odds-is really a creative statement.³

The concept of female friendship as seen by western scholars cannot be fully applied to the Indian socio-cultural matrix. As Vrinda Nabar points out, there is a significance differences between the western and Indian bonding, though the basic nature of female bonding is similar around the world she contends:

The concept of female bonding, which western feminists emphasized, has operated in societies like ours for a very long time, but its special nature is conditioned by differences between the individualistic version of the west and our perception of community- membership as a basic duty. Such membership may mean an intolerable loss of individual freedom in the western world's view, which the Indian may perceive as spiritually fulfilling.⁴

She feels that in India the dependence of one generation of women upon the earlier one is far from salutary because women

pass on to younger generation the laws of *stridharma*, which are backed up by patriarchy and become an instrument of oppression. The concept of female friendship, especially the mother-daughter relationship, is the central concern of recent feminist psychological studies. It is concerned that these relationships aid the development of the female personality.

The Girls, being of the same gender as the mother, do not completely separate from their mothers. Moreover, the mothers also tend to experience their daughters as more like and continuous with themselves. Thus the formation of identity blends with attachment felt for their mothers. On the other hand, boys identify with their fathers or other male members and, in the process, become masculine and separate their mothers from themselves, curtailing their primary love and sense of empathic tie. The girls,

emerge from this period with basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way the boys do not...Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs and feelings'.⁵

Lynn Z. Bloom, questioning the attachment and empathic ties between mothers and daughters, Observe:

The most significant dimensions of maternal heritages that offer some answers to these questions are the nurturing and conveyance a sense of self; the transmission of human value through mothers who serve directly or indirectly, as positive or negative role models; and the fostering of a group identity – national racial or cultural.⁶

Hence, the mother and daughter and woman to woman bonding becomes a growth fostering medium with empathy as an important nutrient.

The Binding Vine is a work which deals with ideas of women solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male - dominated culture, the basis for their bonding. All that women need, is to share with one another the vast reservoir of

women's experience, culture and ideas are represented through this work. It shows the persistent truth of how all the human beings in life-like parents and children, relatives and strangers, men and women are bound by vine of emotional regard and how the tender vine of human understanding, empathy and sympathy binds all of us.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* in terms of its intricate mesh of mother daughter relationships that constitute the female bonding in novel. What does being a mother's daughter and a daughter's mother imply in a hegemonic man's world is the question that Deshpande attempts to articulate through the various daughter-mothers in the novel. The heritage that these women pass on generation after generation is that of dependence and yet the tenacity with which the dependent vine clings and survives is the triumph of womanhood.

All our mothers teach us is what they have learned in the crucible of sexism. They cannot give us a sense of self-esteem which they do not possess. We must learn to interpret anew the experience our mothers have passed on to us, to see these lives in terms of struggle, often unconscious, to find and maintain some peace, beauty and respect for themselves as women. The psychic imbalance stems from the unresolved love-hate relationship between mother and daughter. While tracing the conflicts of her female characters, Deshpande has also explored that sometimes women themselves create conflicts in the lives of other women. To understand the mother daughter relationship in Deshpande's, works it would be appropriate to appreciate the psyche of a mother. Simone de Beauvoir in the chapter on mother writes that,

Some women feel their femininity as an absolute curse; such a woman wishes for or accepts a daughter with a bitter pleasure of self recognition in another victim, and at the same time she feels guilty for having brought her into the world... Vexed at having produced woman, the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: 'You shall be a woman.' She hopes to

compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double; and she also tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered. ⁷

The mother at times imposes on the girl child exactly her own fate. Sometimes the mother, on the contrary, forbids the child to resemble her. Beauvoir says that the real conflict arises when the girl grows older, and when she wishes to establish her independence from her mother. This seems to the mother a mark of hateful ingratitude; she tries obstinately to checkmate the girl's will to escape; she cannot bear to have her double become another. The pleasure of feeling absolutely superior which men feel in regard to women can be enjoyed by woman only in regard to her children, especially her daughters; she feels frustrated if she has to renounce her privilege, her authority.

In Deshpande's fiction, unharmonious mother-daughter relationship is found to be the cause of conflicts in the lives of some of the female characters, for example, Saru's mother plays a vital role in perpetuating her neurosis. Her mother strongly prefers her son Dhruva over Saru. When Dhruva drowns while playing, Saru is held responsible for his death. Her mother remarks "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" has a devastating effect on Saru's psyche.

She becomes rebellious, adopts the strategy of moving against people, joins a medical college and marries against the wishes of her mother. Both of them enjoy hurting each other. The rift increases disproportionately and the reconciliation does not take place even after the death of the mother. Similarly the unharmonious relationship between Manorma and Kalyani in *A Matter of Time* results in Kalyani's tragic life. Manorma not only stops the schooling of her daughter on the basis of doubts about her daughter going astray but also forcibly arranges the marriage between her daughter and Shripati, her maternal uncle, just to keep property safe in family hands. In the novel

Moving On too, adamant attitude of Vasu makes her daughter Manjari rebel and marry Shyam against the wishes of her mother.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* tells a story of mothers and daughters of their struggle for selfhood and self definition in a man's world and of their search for strength in their woman to woman relationships, their common victimization and their shared identities. They are mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters and friends and in their female relatedness and diffuse bonding, there is a strength, a tenacity, that of the binding vine which, with all its fragility, clings on, and flourishes. The novel presents a range of women characters: Baijaji, Inni, Urmi, Vanaa, Akka, Mira, Priti, Kalpana and Shakutai, all bonded together by their experiences of womanhood of daughterhood and motherhood. The novel is structured largely through mother daughter relationships. Urmi's vague relationship with her mother Inni, Urmi's bereaved motherhood caused by the sudden death of her baby daughter Anu. Urmi's relationship with Mira as a surrogate daughter through the reading of her poems, and Urmi's close understanding of the mother-daughter bond between Kalpana and Shakutai. Interspersed between them are the mini mother-daughter narratives of several characters like Priti, Vanaa and Akka. There are five Pairs of mother daughters namely Inni-Urmi, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana, Akka, Vanna and Vanna-Mandira and their relationship between them is based on some sort of misconception.

Urmi's displeasure with her mother was deep rooted in her separation from the latter at an early age. Right from her childhood days she was sent to her paternal grandmother, she had no experience of the kind of mothering a daughter desires. But Urmi was neither in a position nor in a mood to find out the cause of her displacement or her mother's predicament. Inni had an early marriage leading to early motherhood, and being too young herself, she was unable to take care of her child

properly, while trying to vindicate herself she explains to her daughter.

I was frightened of you Urmi. I was too young. I was not prepared to have a child. And you were not easy, you used to cry all the time, I didn't know how to soothe you.... Then he (Papu) decided he would take you to his mother. He didn't say anything to me, he just took you away...I begged him, Urmi, I cried. Nothing could make him change his mind.⁸

Urmi's father was a foremost patriarch and a domineering husband, he was the decision-maker and instrumental in her displacement but Inni, Urmi's mother had to bear the burnt and blame. She had to survive the rest of her life to make up, for the loss of love for her daughter by being the over caring mother, bestow too much affection over her, indifferent daughter, whereas Urmi had the misconstrued idea that her mother had deliberately sent her child to her mother-in-law for her own convenience. Inni's disclosure dispels the darkness of Urmi's misunderstanding - "A sense of being vulnerable and naked, as if some armour I've been wearing all these years-against what?"⁹

She feels frightened to think of her father's unkindness to her mother, to think of Inni who carried the child in her womb and went through the pain of childbirth, but was deprived of the right to decide what would be best for her baby. Urmi, at last in the end understands her mother. The central figure in the novel is that of its narrator Urmi or Urmila. Having been sent away in childhood to live with her grandparents in Ranidurg, Urmi has developed an ambivalence in her relationship with her mother, Inni whom, although she does not reject, she fails to identify with. It is her grandmother Baiajji who grants a sense of fixity to her life along with her childhood friend Vanaa. Psychologists define attachment as a process of interaction between a child and his/her primary caregiver usually the mother, a process which fostered at birth contributes to the child's intellectual, emotional and social growth. In Urmi's case, attachment has been split between the

parent figure Baiajji and the confidante figure Vanaa, both of whom fail to complement within themselves the role of the mother which subsumes both functions.

When the novel opens, Urmi is grieving over the loss of her eighteen month old daughter Anu, a grief and an emptiness that cannot be filled till she experiences a connectedness with her mother and the other women in the novel whose lot it is to silently suffer. Nancy Chodorow writes:

the experience of mothering for a woman involves a double identification. A woman identifies with her own mother and, through identification with her child, she (re)experiences herself as a cared-for child....Given that she was a female child, and that identification with her mother and mothering are so bound up with her being a woman, we might expect that a woman's identification with a girl child might be stronger.¹⁰

Seen in psychoanalytic terms therefore, Urmi's grief over her lost daughter is also her childhood grief for the loss of her mother with whom a psychological association had been renewed through her mothering a daughter. Urmi harbours a deep-seated though unexpressed grudge against Inni for having separated her from motherly love.

she never was the solicitous mother, was she?" she says to her brother Amrut, brushing away his words about Inni's concern for her.¹¹

She is grieved with the memories of her mothering of Anu which are also psychoanalytically, the memories of her preoedipal relationship with her mother:

I can smell her sweet baby flesh...my breasts feel heavy and painful, as if they are gorged with milk....I can feel her toes scrabbling at my midriff.¹²

The loss of her daughter leaves her with an absolute emptiness "As if the core of me has been scooped out, leaving a hollow".¹³ The dead can never return to the world of the living and Urmi

can only fill this emptiness with the realization of and by empathizing with the mutual and cyclical nature of suffering in the lives of both mothers and daughters.

Married to Vanaa's step brother Kishore whose own mother Mira had died in childbirth, Urmi is introduced to Mira through Vanaa's mother, Akka, who hands Mira's trunk of papers to Urmi as her daughter-in-law's legacy. Through her papers, her photographs and especially her poems, Mira provides to Urmi a companionship that she had failed to receive from Inni: "...Mira in some strange way stays with me, I know she will never go...It is Mira who is now taking me by the hand and leading me." ¹⁴

She can construct Mira through her writings and know her as closely as she can know herself her love for books, passion for poetry, aspiration to poetic excellence, her unhappy marriage and the forced physical associations, her only marital joy being felt at impending motherhood. And yet, it is only after Urmi gets involved in the stranger, Kalpana's tragedy that she can fully apprehend the depth of Mira's pain. Seeing Kalpana's battered, violated body, Urmi instinctively realizes that what had happened to Kalpana had been Mira's fate also. Mira and Kalpana, generations apart, had both been bent against their wills to the wills of men who wanted them. How does it matter that one suffered within the institution of marriage and the other outside it. There is something common in their fate which manifests itself before Urmi again and again. Now begins her proper initiation into womanhood as she, through the stories of Mira and Kalpana's distraught mother, Shakutai enters the world of women where the semiotic mysteries of the hitherto broken pre-oedipal mother daughter bond begin to disclose themselves to her and help her towards a greater understanding of mothering, suffering and life.

The tradition of *The Binding Vine* as Mira, the daughter of the bulky woman who, in the family photograph, seems as if "she's unused to being centre-stage, and would be more

comfortable being in the background”¹⁵ wished to defy her mother’s victimization through her high poetic aspirations: “To make myself in your image/ was never the goal I sought”¹⁶.

Shakutai’s daughter, Kalpana was no different. She refused to be tied down to her mother’s hopes for her and filled with the vitality of reassuring youth, she sought to define herself through independence, fearlessness, beauty and love. Through Kalpana in the novel the novelist has portrayed the agony, trauma and social situation of rape victims. Instead of sympathizing with them, society raises fingers at them. A rape victim is ashamed, even scared, that she will be accused of having proved the incident. This is what exactly happens in the novel. Kalpana’s own mother Shakuntala holds her own daughter responsible for the incident. On catching a hint of the conversation between Vanna and the doctor in charge, Shakuntala recoils in fear against the word report. She cries:

No, no, no. tell him, tai, its not true, don’t tell anyone. I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people, doctor,” she turns to him, “don’t tell the police.”¹⁷

The mother daughter relationship is mostly strained due to the double standards of the society. This shows from the very paradoxes in Shakuntala’s exchange with Urmi regarding her daughter. On one hand she says that she is very smart, that’s how she got the job in the shop. Kalpana even learnt how to speak English. People in our Chowk used to laugh at her but she didn’t care. When she wants something, she goes for it, nothing can stop her. She stubborn, you can’t imagine how stubborn she is. A little later, she continues showing her resentment, condemning her for the very things for which she praises her earlier:

And I have to listen to such words because of this girl. She shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me-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, Urmila, all her fault.¹⁸

The mother's reaction, no doubt, is a reflection of the society we live in, governed by age old patriarchal norms. In this case the mother daughter relationship suffers due to the community pressures. Both daughters and mothers remained unfulfilled in the only way that was possible in a patriarchal world and Mira, despairingly asks: "Mother...why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?"¹⁹

Mira and Kalpana too wished to resist these binding rags but so did their mothers. The feelings of these women, separated by time, class and cultures home into Urmis' understanding like the different stanzas of a song, each successive stanza building upon the last. Mira writes of her mother's lifelong advice to her: "Don't tread paths barred to you obey, never utter a 'no submit and your life will be a paradise, she said and blessed me."²⁰ Shakutai, blaming Kalpana for her misfortune says: "We have to keep our places....I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me....That's why this happened to her...women must know fear."²¹

It is Urmis' destiny to be the receptor of all voices and to experience the agony of both the mother's daughter and the daughter's mother. We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them a world we dreamt of for ourselves. Do we always turn our backs upon our mother's hopes?

In the world of *The Binding Vine* the daughters fight back against their mother's shadow, only to conform to it later. Urmi rejects her mother's ideals of beauty and fashion and shatters Inni's dreams of an upper class marriage of her daughter by marrying the boy next door. Vanaa shocks her school teacher mother with her decision to get married and settle down to family life. Vanaa's still young daughter Mandira

rebels against her mother's ways and promises to be not like her when she grows up and Kalpana and Mira pay bitter prices for daring to surpass their lot. The circle must come round and where the mother stands today in confrontation with an unequal world the daughter must stand tomorrow whose face is this I see in the mirror, Unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear? The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow. Urmi says: "The past is always clearer because it is more comprehended; we can grasp it as a whole. The present, maddeningly chaotic and unclear, keeps eluding us."²²

The progress of the novel is, among other things, Urmi's progress in her journey towards self exploration. Through the stories of Mira, Kalpana, Sulu and Shakutai, Urmi comes closer to understanding her role as a mother and a daughter. She who had been separated from her mother in childhood and managed to achieve a psychological detachment from her learns the impossibility of shaking off that bond.

As Inni breaks down to recall her own personal tragedy to Urmi that is her unpreparedness for motherhood, hasty childbirth and agonized separation from her daughter following her father's fury at seeing his daughter entrusted to a male servant. Urmi has the final revelation. The room seems full of the echoes of an old conflict. She can see on her mother's face the terror she had felt then, as if she has carried it within her all these years. And with Inni's supplication for forgiveness "I wanted you with us...I wanted you with me...." Urmi finally absolves that "girl-mother of long ago"²³ Arcana writes.

The oppression of women has created a breach among us, especially between mothers and daughters. Women cannot respect their mothers in a society which degrades them; women cannot respect themselves.²⁴

All blame that she had psychologically cast on her. The bond is restored, the importance of the child to the mother has been brought home to her. Urmi realizes with anguish that Mira, Kalpana, herself and all women were undergoing their mother's

inherited suffering. That was why perhaps Mira had aspired for a son so that she would not have to bear this constant burden of fear for a daughter. But bearing a son does not seal off Mira's pain in her past. It breaks loose of its temporality and replicates itself in the pain of Inni, in the fate of Kalpana, in the hurt of Urmi. Deshpande's feminism in the novel, however, exudes forth only in muted colours. The man woman relationship can never be disowned, both emotionally and culturally and where love is a common human emotion, so is cruelty, and the presence of one, as Urmi herself remarks, does not necessarily rule out the other. Deshpande's men are patriarchal but they are weakened and prompted to cruelty by love. Mira and Akka both become the victims of their husband's obsessive love. One for too much of it and the other for too little, just as Kalpana falls a victim to her uncle Prabhakar's lust and infatuation, and Inni to her husband's concern for his daughter's safety. Urmi is frequently hurt by Kishore's insecurity in his love for her while Bhaskar's presumptuous love is unacceptable.

Since the beginning of her married life Urmi finds that the bond between her and her husband is not that of love, though she believes that the anchor to attach oneself to in this strange world is love. From the very first night of their wedding she feels distanced from Kishore. She realised that he looked trapped. Marriage, which was a spiritual bond in the olden times, has become only a sexual, legal bond in modern days. Each time she tries to reveal her emotional insecurity, Kishore asserts himself sexually. Kishore, the archetypal Indian husband, never understands the depth of her feeling. She openly reveals her emotional insecurity. She says that each time you leave me the parting is like death. She tries to tell him twice, and both the times, he finds the solution only in the physical relationship. But to her, sex is only a temporary answer I came out of it to find that the light shad come back.

I was afraid of what I would see; I turned round and fell

asleep. This incompatibility ends in alienation. She thinks that each relationship, always imperfect, survives on hope. Am I to give up this hope? Thus, a marriage that suppresses Urmi's human demand, Marriage that denies her the fullness of experience forces her to take refuge in Dr. Bhaskar Jain's friendship. She tries to find herself in the relationship with Bhaskar because he is a patient listener to her talk and gives her the talk and gives her the right response. He cares for her emotions and makes her feel complete. Extra marital love, though not a true solution to the problems incompatibility, finds a prominent place in Deshpande's novels. It shows the urge of the woman to assert herself whether it is inside marriage or outside it. The married life of these women, whether working or non working, ends in discontent. Shakutai talks about her sister Sulu's life. She says after marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out? What kind of life it is?"

The second angle of sex can be seen in the case of her mother-in-law, Mira. Mira's story raises the question of rape within marriage. Mira was married at the age of eighteen to a man who loved her passionately but did not find solace in sexual relationship .Urmila finds in the writings of her mother-in-law a clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband. She writes that I have learnt to say no at last, but it makes no difference. No difference at all. What is it he wants from me?

I look at myself in the mirror and wonder and wonder what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone? This age old cry of woman against an enforced act is taken up here. In India, however, the woman is still haunted by this enforced act of man upon her. Even Shakutai, a woman from the lower strata of society, did not find her painful experiences acceptable. She says to Urmi: I, a woman, had to sleep there in public with strange men walking up and down.

And my husband...We are not animals I told him. As if he cared. And I got pregnant. It was the worst thing that could happen to us then. While reading Mira's life-history, Urmi compares her to Kalpana, a victim of rape hanging between life and death in a hospital ward, and concludes what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too. Shashi Deshpande gives a realistic picture of Hindu marriages. A counter point to Mira's loveless short life is presented in Priti's shallow modernistic preoccupations. Priti makes a film on 'sati' based on Mira. Urmila is invited to the celebration. The film is about a woman who is raped by her own husband. Urmila realises that is Mira's story, exaggerated, coloured, over-dramatised. A serious study of the novel reveals that it concentrates on human relationships and love and feelings and emotions between husband and wife. Urmila's desire to keep Kishore by her side also relates to the binding vine theme and symbol. It is love which is the binding vine of life. She writes the most important need is to love.

In a world where heterosexual relationships are unequal, unsatisfying, and often fatal, it is a woman to woman bonding that makes survival and hope possible for these mothers and daughters. The heritage of these women is that of weakness, subservience and failed attempts. It is the vine of dependence and loss that binds them all but this, as Urmi, finally realizes, is also the vine of love, of emotions and of a shared hope. With her daughter's death, Urmi had lost hope entirely. That's what haunts me now, the smell of hopelessness. I have lost hope entirely. But hope is a fragile support anyway on which to rest the whole of your life. I can do without it. I will have to do without it.

But her painful memories find an ally in the memories of Mira, Shakutai, Akka and Inni, the mother daughters who, in the face of their gravest losses had the courage to transform their hope into their strength. They loved and lost but life continued with their hope of a better tomorrow. The binding

vine of love, for all its vulnerability, weakness and pain cannot be escaped. It manifests itself in all our closest relationships and flourishes with hope.

Shakutai and Kalpana come from the lower order of the society, and they represent the working class women. But even then, the relationship as mother and daughter is as same as their counterparts from the middle class families. Shakutai is a typical, defensive, affectionate mother who had nurtured fear in her heart since her daughter grew up physically. She hates her daughter being dressed up or her using of lipstick or for that matter any cosmetic. She feels that, it would unnecessarily attract male attention, "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll "leave you Alone.?"²⁵

But Kalpana's ideas of life are different from those of her mother. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She loved to dress well and move around freely, feeling subservient to none. Her mother's fears come true and Kalpana becomes the prey of her uncle's lust, brutally beaten and raped by him.

Shakutai's husband had left her for the love of another woman at that time. Shakutai had three children. When Kalpana grows up, she finds, her father going away from them as her mother's failure. Shakutai recalls her daughter's accusation, "...She was furious with me! "You drove him away," she said," you're always angry, always quarrelling, that's why he's gone'.²⁶ To a certain extent, the mother, Shakutai is unhappy with Kalpana because of her stubbornness and unfeeling towards her,

she never tells any thing. Didn't even tell me how much her pay was, can you imagine that? Me, her own mother, as is I was going to take her money away from her! I don't want any thing ...can you believe it, she gives her father money more easily, than she gives me. She doesn't grumble at that, even though she knows he will use it for gambling.²⁷

According to Shakutai, Kalpana is a self-willed person; she

refuses to be guided by the dictates of her mother. And when she is struggling between life and death, she holds her mother responsible for what has happened to her Shakutai, being a deprived and disappointed woman, fails to understand her daughter's sense of freedom who had dreamt of living an independent life of her own, different from the oppressive and suffocating life of her mother and aunt and resented becoming their shadow she never wanted any of her mother's dreams to make myself in your image/was never the goal I sought.

Vanna, is a medical social worker, who has to stay out of home quite often, for her duty demands her presence, due to her absence in the house, her daughter Mandira feels neglected, She hates being left to the care of the maid servant: "I don't want Hirabai, I want my mother".²⁸ Mandira often misunderstands her mother and she keeps on saying that you are always making fun of me. You are cruel. I'll never talk to you again.... Similarly, Vanna too finds faults with her daughter Mandira, and resents her daughter's feeling of antagonism towards her": "Mandira hates me ... that little chit, she does it deliberately, and she knows she can hurt me".²⁹

Although a child Mandira tells Urmi that she would never leave her children when she becomes a mother. In reality, the little child, Mandira, fails to understand her mother's compulsion, problem in negotiating between family and profession, and, at same time, Vanna too, is unable to diagnose the tantrums of her daughter, who really needs her mother's presence affection, attention and love of the world. The relationship between Vanna and Urmi is of close friendship. Urmi, has recently lost her one year old baby daughter, Anu, and has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitiveness that leads her to be the friend of the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lies in helpless state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and Shakutai, coming in terms with each other's grief is quite remarkable. Though

both of them come from different strata of the society, it is the same grief and sensitivity that elves into the poems of her dead mother-in-law and understands the mind of the young Mira, Who was subjected to rape daily in her married life.

Mira's poems become a symbol of female oppression, she had written them in her diaries. Urmila senses while reading these poems as a message. Mira too had nurtured a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer. Her writings reflected the extent of forced sexual activity, she was subjected to rape in her marriage. Her situation reflects the mute suffering of many unfortunate women. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women by men, merely on the strength of brute force. In the words of Adrienne Rich "it is not only rape of the body alone, but, rape of the mind as well".³⁰

Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion. She confesses that I have worked hard at knowing Mira. I've read her diaries Gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, and painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself. I know Mira. Mira hated her mother who always surrounded to her husband. Hence she opposes every inch of her mother's advice, who says, *never* utter a no, submit and your life will be a paradise.

Mira's life proves to be an array of unfortunate incident who are forced into a forceful marriage and finally end up to the lust of their husbands. Urmila's involvement with Shakutai develops a concern for her and her daughter Kalpana, because of the binding vine of humanitarianism. Shakutai's daughter Kalpana is raped and brutally beaten up. But the mother, Shakutai assumes that her daughter has been injured in a car accident. The doctor, after thorough examination, and confirms and informs Shakutai that Kalpana has been brutally raped and in the process, she is physically and mentally injured, even after seeing her Daughter, who appears to be lying like a vegetable, Shakutai is shocked and hysterically refuses to

accept that she was raped, and hence tells Vanaa, it's not true, people are trying to blacken my daughter name. Shakutai is very worried about social acceptance of her daughter after the rape of her daughter Kalpana and she requests the doctor not to tell anyone as she will never be able to hold up her head again, who will marry the girl, we are decent people, doctor.

Despite lot of suffering she is very anxious to get her daughter, Kalpana married off. Some how the unfortunate silent suffering mothers like Mira and Shakutai stand by their unfortunate daughters, as they dare not defy the norms of the society. Mira's mother remains helpless during the misery of her daughter, and Kalpana's mother is worried about the family's name and its dignity. Shakutai is proud of her daughter's beauty but on the other hand she thinks her daughter is responsible for her tragedy.

She shamed us; we can never wipe off this bolt. And Prakash blames me. What could I do? She was so self-willed cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, and men are like animals. But she went her way you should have seen her working out, head in the air caking for nobody, opts all her fault Urmila all her fault .³¹

The patriarchal society structure prevails in the subjugated mindset of women as Shakutai arrives at this point in spite of all her motherly love and sympathy for her daughter, that Kalpana's bold independence as the real reason for this tragedy. The victim is always advised to remain silent and unidentified rather to demand justice. Even after her ruined married life, she still plans for subsequent marriage prospects of Kalpana. The doctor observes that women are astonishing. I think it takes a hell of lot of courage for a woman like that even to think of marriage.

Urmila does not want to remain silent; she wants Shakutai to file report to the police. She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do any thing wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It is not her fault, No, not her

fault at all. Instead of pointing to the heinous crime by the rapist, most of people like Shakutai find it easier to blame the girl as we have noted earlier, and if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they will leave you alone. Shakutai is so much disturbed that she says to Urmila that sometimes I think the only thing, that can help Kalpana now is death.

Urmila is really not displaying any radical attitude towards the institution of marriage. Urmila shows her ideas on the system of marriage when she talks to Dr. Bhasker. Marriage is a necessity for women like Shakutai, because it means security, it provides safety from other men. Urmila has married a man of her choice but there is little compatibility between her and her husband Kishore.

At times Urmila thinks of another relationship as there are a number of moments when she overcomes a longing for physical gratification. She is attracted towards Dr. Bhasker and she has opportunity to satisfy her urge. She comes close to respond to Dr. Bhasker but just holds back. Urmila withdraws from the attraction towards Dr. Bhasker as she wants to retain her marital bliss. Urmila never dares to over step the boundaries of institution of marriage. She loves her husband very much. "I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate and Yes I was honest when I told Vanna I am safe"³²

Urmila, is more self reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband. She is self respecting and does not want to depend on Kishore's money. She is the most rebellious character in Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels. Many of Shashi Deshpande's earlier characters and protagonists have some shackles of tradition. They attempt less to set the social norms right. But Urmila comes out a saviour against the unequal treatments imposed on women. As Pier Pablo Picuenco observes, "Women learn to live for others and through others and in the process erase themselves."³³

She encourages Vanna and she has sympathies with Shakutai. She takes up the work of translating the poems of

her dead mother-in-law. She wants to publish them. She takes up the responsibilities to fight for justice in case of Kalapana. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that, though there are Mira's and Kalpana's and Shakutai's, we also have our Urmila's. There is special thing about Urmila that she does not exhibit male hatredness anywhere. She never desires to seek a world, a life without men. Urmila does not lose her individuality and identity of her own. She is attracted towards doctor but she is clear on her ideas. Her doctor friend appreciates Urmila for her passion for truth and justice. Urmila, analyses a lot, about all the relationship around her and between her Papa and Inni, Baiaji's and Aju, Vanna and Harish, Vanna and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana. These all have love and compassion, but at the same time, there are cruelties to each other due to clashes of egos, desires and self-centered interest. Urmila, tries to settle her relationship with her son Karthik.

Hence, The Binding Vine is remarkable where it deals with the notion of female bonding and it proves it. Here a woman tries to help another woman who has less fate. A woman to woman bonding. Urmi provides an excellent example of this trait. She is deeply troubled by the tragic story of Mira and the rape of Kalpana by her uncle. She wants to help them in one way or another. She decides to publish Kalpana's story in a paper to generate public opinion. Due to her efforts women morchas are organized, the issue is discussed in the assembly, an inquiry is held and the real culprit is exposed. Urmi wants to publish Mira's story too, so that people may know about her life's sorrowful tale. By publishing Mira's poems and helping Shakutai, Kalpana's mother, Urmi wants to be their ally in their struggle for justice because these acts of love, affection and bonding are the "springs of life".

She tells that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is needy at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family

honour. She is restricted to be heard by society. Urmila wants to draw society's attention to her protest. She takes less pain in attempting to change the roles and attitudes of society. She thinks that this system is gradually improving though not at a high speed, but at a slow pace, hence Urmila is not a rebel against the existing system.

As *The Binding Vine* is the story of Urmi, it is also the talks about of Mira, and of Shakutai. Mira is 'The Binding Vine' between Urmi and Vanaa. And then again Mira is the representation of the relationship between daughters and mothers. It explodes here mostly a women's world. But we can't say that men are totally absent, but they come to impose their power over their wives and their daughters. It is a world in where women suffer numerous kinds of losses, and have to learn to cope with these losses. It is the typical setting of Deshpande's characters that whatever happens in their lives, her protagonists do not lose hope and they learn to survive finally against all odds. Suffering and pain seem to be necessary for one has to undertake, so as to be able to develop one's self and one's individuality. *The Binding Vine* is the only novel in which the author has used poems beautifully to tell a story of marital discordance, to paint a picture of traditions in India, and to raise a voice of protest against the ways of the society.

The Binding Vine is founded on but as the various stories of the mother daughters weave themselves with Urmi's memories. S. Indra has aptly observes, "She clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of love"³⁴ And her stream of consciousness, the weakness of the binding vine becomes a strength, the strength to love despite loss and to find in the shared victimization a new companionship and hope. Urmi can now understand how Inni, Akka, Mira and Shakutai had survived it all and how perhaps, she, Vanaa and Kalpana were going to live through it. It was in their shared heritage of

womanhood, of love, silent hope and beautiful memories of the bond of sympathy and understanding.

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