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EXPLORING HUMAN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND POSITION OF WOMAN IN INDIA IN THE BINDING VINE

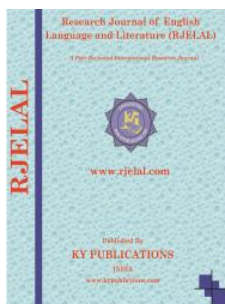
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ABSTRACT

The socio-economic emancipation of women in India has brought changes in their status and outlook. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital interpersonal relationship between man and woman. Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* is a work that can be studied as a projection of such ideas as women's solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male-dominated culture. Shashi Deshpande reveals the man made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being part of them. This paper attempts to explore the various aspects of interpersonal relationships depicted in *The Binding Vine* and also how with the help of these relationships the position of woman in Indian society keeps on changing. The novelist has also explored the status of women within the family and her role in social works in giving a special shape to her relationships.

Keywords: Interpersonal, domination, exploitation, oppression, discrimination

Explaining the concept of human interpersonal relationships and the place of woman in Indian society, Shashi Deshpande has said:

"It means better human relationships and I think this is what has been denied to women so far because you have to live as a subordinate, you have to live as a subject you have to live as a slave, you have to live as a tool- as a tool to bear children. And none of these are conducive towards good human relationships - not even with other women, because, you know, slaves are not always united by their slavery; on the contrary there is a lot of bad feeling among slaves. So for me better human relationship is what feminism is all about,

which definitely includes relationship with men. You can only have better relationship with an equal. For this reason men should also be feminists, because they also have to understand that feminism will give them a better quality of relationship with a woman. A man may imagine that it is nice to have a woman whom he can order about, but he is bound to lose out on companionship. So my idea of feminism is a better quality of all human relationship." (Pallavi 236)

The Binding Vine clearly shows the domination of males over females. The experience is that which minutely analyses all the relationships a woman in the Indian society is subjected to. There are moment of revolts, deep felt anger, desire to set

things right, retreat from steps which would shatter the sense of well being and fulfilment mirrored through these relationships. Simon De Beauvoir in her classic work *The Second Sex* has written about the domination by male over women:

"...humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as autonomous being...For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less...He is the Subject, He is the Absolute-She is the other. (33)

The novelist underlines the fact that sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination, which leads to woman's subjugation, discrimination, exploitation and oppressions. In her opinion 'Male supremacist ideology' projects women as valueless who obtain value only by relation to men and she attacks the male view that women are 'natural enemies' who 'cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another' and counter male supremacy. In the context of women's solidarity, Bell Hooks writes:

"When woman actively struggle in a truly supportive way, to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity. Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite to build sisterhood." (Feminist Theory 67)

She makes it clear that it is not necessary for women 'to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression' nor do they require "anti-male sentiments to bond them together". Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* is a work that can be studied 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, is shared oppression and victimization.

The Binding Vine presents predominantly the women's world. It is not that men are entirely absent, but they make their presence felt merely by

the power they exercise over the women, especially over their wives and daughters. It is a world where women outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their courage to cope with their surrounding and come to terms with their losses, their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live. They are unique individuals in their respective domains, may it be an affluent and well-to-do household or a broken family front, voicing forth their displeasure and airing their views or fighting against injustices inflicted upon them by an oppressive patriarchal system.

There are five pairs of mother-daughters namely Inni Urmila, Mira's mother- Mira, Shakutai - Kalpana, Akka -Vanna and Vanna - Mandira and the relationship between them is based on some sort of dissension. Urmila's unhappiness with her mother was rooted in her separation from the latter at an early age. The dominant patriarch father and a domineering husband, Urmila's father was the lone decision-maker and instrumental in her displacement, but Inni had to bear the burden and blame. She has to live the rest of her life to make up for the loss of love for her daughter of being the over caring mother, bestowing too much affection over her indifferent daughter where as Urmila had the ill-idea that her mother had deliberately sent her child to her mother-in-law for her own sake. 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. She constructs contexts, representing different facts -of the trapped female psychology and tries to transcend its boundaries.

The Binding Vine projects dominance of male. For this two central issues are - female bonding and resistance to patriarchal ideology. The pain of the death of her baby daughter, Anusha, seems to motivate Urmila, the main character, to reach out to other women around her, who have their own tabs of suffering to tell. In suffering a unique sense of fellowship is forged, not only with the living but also with the mute and the dead. Urmila is drawn, in sympathy to Shakutai and her

young daughter Kalpana, who is brutally raped and is lying unconscious, and Mira, her own dead mother-in-law who suffered rape in marriage. Female bonding runs as a strong undercurrent in the novel. The novel shows women coming together with women as friends and companions, and sharers of life rather than as rivals for approval by men. It is the story of mother and daughters where Urmila grieves for her baby--daughter who is dead and Shakutai sorrows for Kalpana who is dying. There are other pairs of mothers and daughters like Urmila and her mother Inni, Vanna and her mother Akka, Vanna and her young daughters, in spite of its differences, reinforces the idea of the binding vine. In the feeling of sorrow and sympathy, a sense of identity is struck. Urmila remembers Mira's cry of despair and says:

"How clear it comes to me across the years, her cry of rage and anguish, 'Why does this have to happen to me?' Why did it have to happen to my daughter? Shakutai asked me. Why? My own question comes back to me -- Why?" (The Binding 67)

Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* presents that women were not discerning enough in their assessment of men. Sulu, Shakutai's sister and Shakutai herself are convinced that Kalpana should marry her Mousaji. But when Kalpana takes her decision not to marry him, she is not only oppressed by the two women but is also raped by the man, who was rejected. Whatever happens, in the end it is the woman who suffers. Sulu, who is an embodiment of love and submissiveness, goes home, finishes her cooking, gives her husband breakfast and puts a match to her body drenched in kerosene. It is an outrage against this extreme vulnerability and submissiveness which prompts women to seek and insist on their independence. This is why Urmila, even if it is for a moment, wonders whether she should get in touch with Bhaskar (who has proposed to her) knowing full well that she is a married woman. In a society where male is chauvinistic it does not help to be good. Mira's attempt through her poems to clear an imaginative space for herself in the patriarchal tradition makes her a model of female survival that creates herself and recreates the world through her

poetic power, through the power of language. Thus Mira becomes a symbol for other women in society who have nothing to offer but a legacy of violence and her effort shows the way to millions of oppressed and victimised women in the words of Shakutai

" 'And my other dream was to have this,' her head goes to her neck, where her string of black beads has sunk into the creases in her throat, 'mangalsutra made in gold. Then one day I thought - the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this made in precious gold? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life, Urmila, marrying that man.' " (110)

Shakutai is the most unfortunate. Deserted by her husband and living in poverty, she is the totally oppressed woman. With the help of female characters in the name *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande gets to the root of existence itself. There is a division within ourselves that leads us to love and hate, to be gentle and good and at the same time become an agent of cruelty. Human nature itself is the "hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with." The terror can be overcome only by the healing touch of love, the binding vine that projects itself through the scene depicted by Shashi Deshpande such as:

"And yet I think of Vanna, heavily pregnant, sitting by me, holding my hand during the pains before Kartik was born, I remember Kishore's face when he first saw Anu; I think of Akka crying for Mira, of Inni's grief when Papa told her about his illness of Papa's anguished face watching her, of the touch of grace there was in Shakutai's hand when she covered me gently at night while I slept, of the love with which she speaks of her sister, of Sandhya " (203)

The woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal India, is now gaining strength to rebel against the cultural-social oppressions. But at the same time she fails to reject totally her social and cultural

background. The novelist, in *The Binding Vine* has shown the problem of woman. Specially she has concentrated on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by women in tradition oriented institutions. Coming out of home woman comes in real world where she feels different type of attitudes towards this aspect of life. These attitudes sometimes reject the tradition and same times rebel against them. That is why she feels a kind of imbalance between the traditional expectations and her new sexual demands.

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