

**Depiction of Postcolonial Aspect 'Compromise' In Shashi Deshpande's the Binding Vine**

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**Abstract:**

*The post-independence Indian English novelists put the crop of fresh and new themes in consistent application. They have been breathing in new fresh air and simultaneously facing tough challenges in India. They have the colourful and beautiful dream of laying the strong foundation in India on the strong bases of love, peace and brotherhood. They face the burning problems like unemployment, untouchability, partition, castism, communal violence, population and corruption. Today, the notable advancement in science and technology opens the new door to human beings and holds out multiple ways of life with new varied basic themes like - male domination, post-colonialism, man-woman relationship, conjugal adjustment, desertion, compromise, Indian Diaspora, sex, politics, freedom, expatriation, marital relationship, extra-marital relationship, exploration of the self, feminism, etc. (Chavan 12) The present research paper deals with one of these postcolonial aspects 'compromise' recurring in the novels of Shashi Deshpande with special reference to her novel The Binding Vine.*

**Keywords:** *Compromise, post-colonialism, expatriation, chauvinistic, patriarchal, etc.*

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1993), like the earlier novels, portrays her middle-class female protagonist's predicament in a male-dominated society. It also enshrines her search for love, meaning and happiness in life, a search for something to cling to in the strange world she has perforce to live. It depicts the surrender and compromise of women with the patriarchal, chauvinistic and indifferent Indian male attitude. The novel occupies a special place in all the works of Deshpande in the sense that it presents especially the women's world. Men are not entirely absent here, 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 infinite courage to compromise and cope with their surroundings 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, initially compromising finally voicing forth their displeasure and airing their views, against injustices inflicted upon them by an oppressive patriarchal system, accepting life on their own terms. According to Rama Nair,

In a largely hostile patriarchal culture, one of the ways in which women were dominated is either through a forced marriage, or through sexually perverted acts outside marriage, as in rape (Nair, 155).

The novel also reveals how poignantly, she expresses the frustration and disappointments of women, leading them to compromise with the social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. The novel unveils the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women, and how the educated earning women inculcate the spirit of solidarity among women. The innermost recesses of a woman's heart are brought to light through the perspectives of Urmila, the protagonist of the novel. Like Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya of *That Long Silence*, Urmila undertakes the retrospective journey into the past, into oneself and into the future. The hapless death of her second girl-child prompts this journey in which Urmila minutely analyses the ways through which a woman in the Indian society is subjected to compromise with all the relations.

In *The Binding Vine* Deshpande has artistically woven the stories of the lives of women of different status, ages, and generations narrated by the sharp-tongued narrator character Urmila, usually known and

recognized as 'Urmi'. The weaving of three different tales of Kalpana, Mira and Uramila into a single narrative is due to the bereavement suffered by the narrator. As Shanthi Sivaraman observes,

The female consciousness has suffered during the moments ushered in by external events such as death or rape, and such experiences suppress her into the quicksand of traditional and submissive roles, but it is the emergence of the modern woman, individualistic and confident that is finally achieved. The two central ideas that lead the protagonist into an analysis of women's issues are death and rape (Sivaraman, 133).

Urmila, sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented protagonist of the novel, is diametrically opposite to Jaya. She is aggressive, economically independent, takes her own decisions and her feminism borders on militancy, and prompts harshness in her equations with others. A lecturer in a Bombay college, lives with her mother, Yamini usually known and recognized as 'Inni' and her six years old son, Kartik. Hers is a love match with Kishore, a former neighbour now working with the Merchant Navy and away from home for long spells. Although she lives with her mother, her representation suggests the strong-willed single woman. In a way, she is like Indu, only stronger, more strident. In that respect, she is unlike any other of Deshpande's protagonists. The novelist reveals through her representation that expressing ones needs, compromising and accepting ones vulnerability are not weaknesses but liberation, and assertiveness instead of not aggressiveness is the desired ideal.

The novel opens with Urmila grieving over the death of her baby daughter Anusha usually known and recognized as 'Anu', and surrounded by the care of her mother and her childhood friend and sister-in-law, Vandana usually known and recognized as 'Vanaa'. Vanaa attempts to soothe Urmi's ruffled nerves and reminds her of the time when she was learning cycling in Ranidurg and fell off her bike and got hurt. To this Urmi's rejoinder is, "Once? I must have fallen at least a dozen times" (Deshpande, 7). Vanaa feels hurt at Urmi's deliberate attempts to belittle her but she continues the conversation. Urmi is sharp enough to know that Vanaa is trying to evoke Urmi's childhood memory of her heroic attempts to get over pain and suffering of Anu's death and to tell her indirectly that after all, she has been a brave girl and now she should live up to that 'image'. As Urmi tells us in the first few lines, "We all of us grow up with an idea of ourselves, an image rather, and spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to it. But for me . . . it's been a constant struggle against an image of myself imposed upon me by Vanaa" (7). Urmi wants to break this 'image' of being a heroic woman, she rather wish to be an ordinary woman and be able to express her feelings, than a superhuman figure forced to compromise and repress her grief.

Urmila is a strong woman but more aggressive than assertive. Her growth as a character in the novel is marked by her gradual realization that to assert is not to deny others their rights, that assertion means to stand up for oneself without hurting others. As a protagonist, therefore, she stands at the other extreme of the spectrum from the rest of the protagonists who are initially passive and whose evolution towards self-assertion records their growth. Urmila's growth is characterized by her evolution towards self-assertion from the opposite end, that is, aggressiveness.

The central theme of the novel is the binding vine of feelings and emotions between parent and child, and between husband and wife. There are moments of revolt, deep-felt anger, desire to set things right, retreat from steps which would shatter the sense of well being and fulfillment mirrored through these relationships. The final resolution is one which points at a relationship that is healthy, satisfying, something that is based on love and the wish to help, rather than drown the soul into the quagmire of the 'dark night'.

Urmila, still has her son Karthik's responsibility and, realizes that however burdensome our ties are, painful our experiences are one can and should never give up. Urmi observes it is love which is the binding vine of life,

From the moment of our birth, we struggle to find something which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor . . . The most important need is to love (137).



But love makes us venerable, so we put on unbreakable ‘armour’ round our emotions. We can not opt out; lay it down, the burden of belonging to the human race. There can be no vaulting over time, thinks Urmi, we have to walk every step of the way, however difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing. In the words of Mira,

*Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;  
but how to escape this cord  
this binding vine of love? . . . (140).*

All emotional ties emerge out of our love for each other. It is also the same love that prevents us from being cruel, which makes us to accept the life as it comes along with all its attachments and detachments. Love is the only adhesive that binds people and prevents them from falling and in turn refills and nurtures the sapling of life with all compassion and tolerance. In spite of the troubles the relationships pose us, even though, “There’s only one way out of this *Chakravyuha*. (with the condition that) Abhimanyu had to die. . .” (202) for the most of us, life is absorbed in the daily routine of living, “The main urge is always to survive. Mira realized that” (203) says Urmi. Both living as well as dying is terrific. She agrees Mira, who writes in her notes, “Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be” (203). This terror can be overcome only by the healing touch of love, the binding vine that projects itself through the urge to survive which demands terrible things. Urmi, at the end of the novel, says,

. . . I think of Vanaa, 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 need to express one’s feeling and to be heard by the society is the urge for the present day women. Urmila draws society’s attention to her protest and sees less pain in attempting to change the societal roles and attitudes. At the end of the novel, Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love soaked in understanding, adjusting and moreover compromising with each other to provide “the spring of life” (203) for human survival. We all look for some sustaining force to keep us going because life may have its futility and living may be absurd, yet we all want to cling to life.

Throughout the novel, protagonist of Deshpande, Urmila does not exhibit male hatredness. She never desires to seek a world, a life without men. Here novelist, through some of the male characters in this novel, shows the changing attitudes of men towards women. Dr. Bhaskar, for instance, is very sympathetic to the problems faced by women. He treats Urmi like an individual with an identity of her own and not just as the wife of another man. Urmila’s husband Kishore makes an exceptionally egalitarian person. He genuinely loves her and respects her wishes. Affectionate and understanding, Kishore is an androgynous character. There is also Malcolm, a journalist, Urmi’s classmate at one time. In his own way, he tries to contribute towards highlighting the prejudices in society by giving the proper exposure to Kalpana’s rape case. As Muriel Wasi rightly observes,

Dr. Jain supplies an element of hope, that there are men in India who feel as strongly as women do, on the brutal atmosphere of real and potential violence in which Indian women live. There are also journalists like Malcolm, who will make use of rape and other items of violence to keep the public conscience alive. They are not heroes, merely working journalists, but they serve a relevant purpose and stand for something positive and essentially humane. . . (Wasi, 9).

Urmila thinks a lot, about how difficult relationships are with many chasms to bridge. The relationship between her Papa and Inni, Baiajji and Aju, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai

and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion, but at the same time, they are cruel to each other, for they are ignited by clashes of egos, desires and self-centered interest. She feels, relationship can be wholesome only when people themselves are whole. When she studies the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu, Urmila regains her courage. She learns to accept freedom and advantages of her life as a gift, and decides to compromise and be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will have to remove his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could pave her a way to reach him.

This brings us to the title of the novel *The Binding Vine*. It is the vine of love, affection and fellow feelings binds us all to each other. A vine is delicate but it has the tendency to spread its tendril and hold fast to its support. Likewise, the nameless delicate moments of intimacy and understanding bind us fast. Despite pain and anguish that make our existence a struggle, there is the 'spring of life' emerging at intervals to help us overcome our sense of loss. We can look at life anew, with hope.

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