

**From Silence to Self-Discovery: The Journey of Women in
Shashi Deshpande’s Narratives**

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Abstract: *Women protagonists in different cultural and social narratives can be seen encountering personal and external challenges. These difficulties are critical in their quest for self-awareness and resistance to societal conventions. Authors use ‘symbolic silence’ and narrative restraint to highlight the challenges and strength of their female characters, encouraging readers to face and question the power and control mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality. These observations usually conclude with self-discovery and empowerment, in contrast to the silenced voices who claim their agency from their muted identities. The present study aims to study the famous novels *The Binding Vine*, *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to explore Shashi Deshpande’s narratives through the lens of silence to self-discovery and understand the relation between these concepts, which, whether consciously or unconsciously, shape the very essence of women's existence.*

Keywords: - *Silence and Repression, Assertion and Agency, Marginalized Identities, Power Dynamics, Patriarchy, Femininity, Conventions, Awakening, Women Empowerment*

Introduction

In such a world, can we assume that masculinist privilege can be openly challenged only through ‘voice’? Do we need to consider other forms of voice/agency/empowerment? Can silence be more than simply disempowerment and lack of agency? Can silences, partial truths, and secrets provide a basis for developing survival strategies, reassessing possibilities and limitations for action and even organising to

protect and/or challenge the status quo? (Parpart, “Introduction: Rethinking the Power” P. 1).

This critical investigation of the relationship between ‘voice’ and ‘silence’ examines the social, cultural, and psychological structures that limit women's personal space and identities as dignified individuals. It also raises critical concerns about the dualism that governs who is allowed to speak and who is silenced, who must

submit and who asserts authority, questioning the frameworks that form power dynamics and agency. Unmindful of the gravity of the situation, society, which is largely ruled by males, has comfortably ignored these issues for a long time, seeing women's subjugation as inseparable characteristics of femininity. Patriarchy, traditional expectations, and marginalised opportunities for self-expression distinguish women's journeys in an environment of reticence and repression. However, the reflection of assertion played no role in the formation of a culture in which women are deemed silent in all situations, yet submission and assertion remain two opposing

yet interwoven concepts that define the behavioural patterns that a woman might adopt in response to situational survival needs. As time progresses, this passive submission of self has resulted in an eternal desire for self-discovery making it a complex and ever-changing topic that has endured throughout history. These situational reflections, firmly embedded in India's social, cultural, and historical settings, have been superbly portrayed in literary creations. Certainly, the literary world has played an important role in graphically depicting women's journey from a mute sufferer to an expressive individual. Time and again literature has symbolically and emphatically narrated their difficulties and accomplishments in the face of great silence and constraints. This portrayal is not just a reflection of cultural constraints, but also a tool for criticism and transformation. Many literary works repress or confine women's voices, mirroring broader societal practices that seek to mute them.

Through nuanced characterizations and thematic explorations, the literature reveals the intricacies of women's experiences in these forced environments. Shashi Deshpande critically examines the situation saying:

If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy—the weight of that long silence of one-half the world. (Epigraph, *That Long Silence*)

Women establish their voices, assert their identities, and create spaces for themselves inside and outside of societal structures. Thus, literature not only provides a space for reflection but also empowers readers to imagine alternate situations in which women's voices and agency might thrive.

The Literary Portrait of Women's Awakening Voices Resisting Silence and Repression: Literature Review

Ancient Indian texts, such as the Vedas and epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, frequently placed women in patriarchal roles. However, there are some examples of strong and brave women who maintain their agency. In the Mahabharata, for example, Draupadi confronts injustice, Kunti is a wise mother, Mandodari in Ramayana counsels Ravana at the cost of his severe aggression, and Shakuntala in Kalidasa's drama *Abhijnana shakuntalam* epitomizes elegance, assertions, and perseverance. These figures reflect the struggles of commitment and fidelity, as well as the power of a woman's dedication and loyalty. Renowned female figures from ancient literature include the philosopher Gargi Vachaknavi and the poetess

Lopamudra, Rajput princess Mirabai, a devotee of Krishna, defies societal conventions by exhibiting strong spiritual devotion and individual defiance. These individuals have a strong devotion to spirituality and personal autonomy, as do legendary people.

Classical literature contains moving examples, such as Euripides' *Medea*, in which *Medea's* silence and ultimately fury underscore the limits imposed on women in ancient Greece, and Sophocles' *Antigone*, which examines the clash between personal conviction and state-mandated silence. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* are examples of modern literature that critically examine the psychological and societal limits that women faced in the twentieth century. Contemporary literature continues to explore these themes, with works such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, which depicts a dystopian world of female subjugation, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which addresses the long-term effects of slavery on women's lives, and Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, which imagines a world in which women gain and wield newfound power, challenging traditional gender dynamics. Each of these works, spanning genres and time eras, depicts the ongoing struggle against imposed silence and the search for female voice and agency. In her work, *A Room of One's Own*, acclaimed author Virginia Woolf advises that a woman requires familial support as well as economic freedom to develop her abilities. Woolf asserts categorically: "All I could do was offer you an opinion on one minor point--a woman must have money and her own

room if she is to write fiction" (*A Room of One's Own*, p.7).

As the literary genre evolved, many women novelists' focused on women's difficulties and survival. Indian English fiction can be seen as heavily influenced by writers such as Amrita Pritam, Kamla Das, Kamla Markandeya, Mahasweta Devi, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherji, Nayantara Sahgal, Shobha De, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Kiran Desai are some of the prominent authors who have helped define this genre. All of these novelists have a significant impact on how women's travels are depicted in literature. Amrita Pritam's poetry and prose, especially *Pinjar*, tell riveting stories about women's difficulties and fortitude in the face of societal and personal adversity. Kamala Das's *My Story* defies expectations with its frank exploration of female sexuality and identity, reflecting the internal and external struggles that women encounter. Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts rural women's harsh realities and fortitude, whereas Mahasweta Devi's works, such as *Bastar* and *Draupadi*, focus on marginalised women's struggles and battle for justice. Bharti Mukherjee and Nayantara Sahgal's works *Jasmine* and *Rich Like Us* examine the changing roles of women in various cultural situations. Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* explore the complexity of urban and household life. Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's works *A Married Woman* and *Ladies Coupe* provide critical insights into women's roles and identities in contemporary Indian culture. Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* delves into the junction of personal and cultural identity, whilst Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Kiran Desai's works *Heat and Dust* and *The Inheritance of Loss* investigate the impact of colonial and post-colonial contexts on women's life. These authors weave a rich tapestry of memoirs that depict women's complex journeys from quiet to self-discovery, portraying their hardships, victories, and shifting identities. The plight and challenges that women endure are a frequent element in their work. The renowned women novelist, K. Meera Bai observes: "Though women writers attempted their hand at this new genre as early as 1879, it is not till a later date that they could occupy a position of importance along with the stalwarts" (*Women's Voices*, p. 12). Certainly, women have been marginalised and silenced for many decades, and literature has served as a vital instrument for them.

Shashi Deshpande's Complex Feminine Web: Unraveling Silence and Repression in *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and *The Binding Vine*

While silence and repression are key motifs in Indian literature, breaking this silence is also an important storyline. This shift from submissiveness to empowerment represents a watershed moment in the portrayal of women, reflecting broader cultural shifts and the ongoing fight for gender equality. However, this paper particularly looks at how Shashi Deshpande depicts women breaking the silence and embarking on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment in her novels *That Long Silence*, *Dark Holds No Terrors*, and *The Binding Vine*.

Shashi Deshpande's complex feminine web provides a deep examination of women's inner lives and societal responsibilities in contemporary Indian society. These works examine the themes of female pain, resilience, and solidarity, depicting the interwoven challenges of women dealing with personal trauma and societal restraints. She confessed to Geeta Gangadharan in an interview thus:

..... I have a very strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked upon just as 'breeding animals'. They had no other role in life. I have a strong objection to treating any human being in that manner...I could see that female life had no value at all. ("Denying the Otherness", Interview)

Deshpande's novels shed light on the complexity of female identity, demonstrating how women navigate familial expectations, cultural conventions, and personal goals. Her sole emphasis lies on the conflicts between social standards and human wants by illustrating the strict bonds of tradition and the frail threads of feminine individuality. The changing dynamics of gender and identity coupled with the subtle yet significant resistances and transformations are the major depiction of Shashi Deshpande's narrative. She explores the clash between tradition and modernisation in women's lives, particularly in middle-class Indian culture. She has a profound understanding of women's psyche which helps her analysing the man-woman connection within the confines of the family and the current social structure. She concentrates mostly on the gripping issues and oppressive surroundings of her female heroes, who suffer and battle in this spiteful and

heartless male-dominated world to uncover their true identity, place, and status. This is why her works are mostly concerned with the desire for female identity, the intricacies of man-woman relationships, the pain of disordered adolescence, and the silent agony of Indian women who never assert their uniqueness. Bartleby discusses the ideas of Shashi Deshpande's works:

The authentic recreation of India, the outstanding feature of her stories, is a distinct feature of her novels also. There is nothing sensational or exotic about her India—no maharajahs or snake charmers. She does not write about the grinding poverty of the Indian masses; she describes another kind of deprivation—emotional. The woman deprived of love, understanding, and companionship is the center of her work. She shows how traditional Indian society is biased against women, but she recognizes that it is very often women who oppress their sisters....(Themes of Shashi Deshpande).

Shashi Deshpande has always had a profound understanding of the inner insights of middle-class Indian women. Her work addresses a range of issues including identity crises, conflicts, existence, absurdity, factuality, authenticity, and the plight of middle-class Indian women. She depicts these women's lives in her novels as filled with agony, compromises, forced adjustments, etc. Deshpande's female characters try to establish themselves both within and outside of their comfort zones by overcoming hurdles and challenges, and they exhibit individuality and distinct identity as human beings by making their own decisions despite

suffering. Middle-class women's situations stay unchanged over time.

Exploring woman's struggle for identity and autonomy in *Dark Holds No Terror*

Dark Holds No Terror (1980) narrates the story of Sarita (Saru), a middle-class, educated, and professional doctor whose life story alternates between past and present. Sarita had been subjected to gender bias since childhood, and she gradually learned to despise herself for being a girl. Her mother constantly ranked Sarita second to Dhurva (her brother), made comments about her dark skin, and eventually blamed her for her brother's death. Saru and her brother face extreme discrimination, which generates a sense of insecurity in her. Saru's extreme prejudice towards her brother is the source of her discomfort, her bitterness towards her parents, especially her mother, and her disobedient actions. Her father has also demonstrated little enthusiasm for her education or personal growth. Her mother desired to marry her daughter to permanently seal her identity, not to encourage her desire to pursue her study in medicine. It shows a society in which women are not allowed to make decisions for themselves. She marries a lower caste man, Manohar (Manu), after falling in love with him. Her marriage outside of her caste was rejected by her family. At that point, she had already established a profession in medicine. However, Saru's independence lowers Manohar's ego and diminishes his value. The conventional concept of the husband as the dominant figure and the wife as a mute follower has been disrupted here. Ironically, Saru is a prosperous doctor by day and a poor creature ruled by her husband at

night. She felt helpless and had nowhere to run when her spouse went beyond trying her ability to endure suffering. She chooses to speak up because she feels reinvigorated:

My life is my own somehow, If I have been a puppet, it is because I made myself one, I have been clinging unto the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right. (The Dark Holds No Terror, p. 220)

To rebuild her broken relationship, she moved out of that home and returned to her parents. Sarita portrays women's search for identity. Despite her success as a doctor, she is forced to reevaluate who she is as an individual due to her broken family life, conflict in her marriage to Manohar, and her troubled relationship with her parents. Saru opens her heart "I can't spoil my life after all because of that boy (his brother).she takes on it confidently "it is my life after all." It's enough to bring her back to awareness of her inner strength, which she had neglected for some time. At the end of the novel, Saru goes back to her husband, but this time, it's not as if she's giving in to her mother's patriarchal structure; rather, she's going back to rebuild her emotional role without breaking down her gender identity. Saru sets out to free herself from her domineering mother and the constraints of quiet that society has put on women to break free from her middle-class ties and find her own identity. Sarita has always cherished power and independence, and she values freedom; she regards her mother as a rival since she is an authoritative figure who threatens her sense of

self. Saru disapproves of her mother's rigid nature. Her mother sees her as an irrevocable burden, which causes Sarita to have a deep and abiding resentment for her mother. She is not interested in becoming a woman like her mother. Saru describes her puberty experience as: "...a kind of shame engulfed me making me want to rage, and scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother.... If you are a woman, I don't want to be one." (DHNT, p.62) Sarita is constantly constrained since she is a girl, but Dhruva is free to do whatever he likes. Saru recalls how being forbidden from playing outside affected her. She recalls their talk with her mother:

Don't go out in the sun. You will get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva

He is different. He is a boy. (DHNT, p.45)

Sarita wants to evolve from being conceited to being self-aware, from denying to asserting, and from being unsure to being certain. She gains self-assurance through this experience. She portrays a middle-class Indian woman with

accuracy. She has been very aware of the issues that face families and society as a whole. Sarita's attitude towards her brother changes as a result of her mother's prejudice, and she eventually begins to despise him. Dhruva knew that even she disliked having her brother stand next to her. There is a single picture of Dhruva and Saru. When Saru reached for Dhruva's shoulder to place her touch, he shoved her hands. She recalls why she was pushing her hand: "Perhaps she had pinched Dhruva, and squeezed his shoulder or something... but she must have done something which accounted for the hurt on his face." (DHNT, p.58) When Saru falls in love with Manu, her mother realises her feelings and speaks prophetically: "I know all these, 'love marriages'. It is love for few days, and then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then" and she returns: "God, that is the one thing I'll never do never!" (DHNT, p.69) Saru's mother's foretelling is accurate, as her relationship with Manohar changes after marriage. Despite not receiving desired love and respect, she dreams of being cherished and chosen as a superior male, influenced by his behavior and supervision: "He was the only person I saw. His effortless control over others, his anger at their mistakes, his smiles that came and went in a flesh..." (DHNT, p.53) Following their marriage, their lives begin to fall apart due to Manohar's inability to afford their costs. Sarita, with her high economic and social status, wants a specialization that is not affordable for Manu. Without money, she struggles to replace her old sari and other things: "Meanwhile, it was growing in me ... a conception of the kind of life I wanted. I would not stay in a dingy two-room flat in a far-off drab suburb all my life. I would

not bring up any child to a life of deprivation. I wanted it soon..." (DHNT, p.92) Sarita becomes a doctor to help her family financially as well as establish herself as an independent individual. However, despite receiving respect, her husband feels humiliated by her uplifted social and professional status. Sarita experiences psychological issues as a result of her inability to strike a balance between her independence and identity, which leads to her becoming reliant on her spouse and her difficulties in being respected. Her husband finds it more difficult to accept her decision to become a doctor. She is trapped between tradition and modernity: "And you know, Baba... I think he does not know it himself, what does he do to me at night. That is why he never speaks of it". (DHNT, p.203)

Finally, she realises that changing her circumstances is a better course of action than trying to run away from the problem. Her father asks her to agree to speak with him and tell him everything when he learns that Manohar is coming. She caves in when he tells her not to give up on things once more. In the end, she realises that to have a harmonious life, she must stop her self-imposed exile rather than run away from her obligations and the realities of her situation.

A Personal Odyssey of Self-Revelation and Reclamation in That Long Silence

Jaya is the main character of *That Long Silence* (1988). She portrays the dilemma faced by Indian women who are confined by patriarchal norms and their aspirations. She is a writer, her novels and short stories explore the minds of

Indian women with education. Her paintings depict traditional Indian environments as well as the problems faced by women who assume many roles. That Long Silence addresses several topics, including the trauma of problematic youth, the problem of man-woman relationships, especially in the context of marriage, and the difficulty of the search for a feminine identity. An Indian woman who has spent years assuming the roles of mother, wife, and daughter is suffering in silence. She's never had the confidence to establish her own identity. In this narrative, the protagonist Jaya, a writer who, in real life, is a submissive housewife but finds self-expression in her work, encounters a dilemma. Jaya works hard to keep her unique identity as a wife and mother. Despite having her husband Mohan, their two children, Rahul and Rati, and their material luxuries, she feels a vacuum in life. Still, she finds the routine annoying: "I had to admit the truth to myself that I had often found family life unendurable, worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony" (TLS 4).

She is forced to adopt a new identity with a name that pleases her husband after losing her real name. Mohan changes her name, Jaya, which means victory, to Suhashini, which means a composed motherly woman. Jaya finds it difficult to communicate her inner feelings. Contradictory they fabricate a fictitious couple in which the husband can only speak to her wife physically. Mohan is so image-conscious that he stops Jaya from releasing her novel because he thinks readers would confuse him with that male character, and end up misunderstanding him as

a good man. He forces her to give up writing and live a conventional life as a result. Jaya was brought up to be an intelligent woman who earned a degree in English, married businessman Mohan, and worked as a communist writer with a bright future. Although she had a gift for writing, Mohan denied her the chance to freely express her innermost feelings and longing for a happy life. She faces an identity crisis: "But what bewildered me as I looked through the pages of the diaries was that I saw in them an utter stranger, a person so alien to me that even the faintest understanding of the motives for her actions seemed impossible" (p. 69).

No one of these qualities matters, according to Mohan. He expects her to be an ordinary woman from the middle class. She discovers that her spouse shields her from everyone, including her parents, like a tree. Similar to Gandhari in the Mahabharata, she was compelled to live in Mohan's dishonest methods of generating wealth and was driven into the Dadar flat in Bombay, where she symbolically closed her eyes. However, Mohan justified his actions by saying that everything he had done was for her and their kids' sake. Jaya felt a strong, strange feeling of rage at Mohan's baseless accusation. Mohan even went so far as to accuse her of being his wife because of his elder brother Dinkar. Weary of all the accusations, she chooses to break free from the mold of her broken identity.

Shashi Deshpande has never wanted to be referred to as a feminist. She never opposed males. Her purpose was to highlight the difficulties women encounter when attempting to define and retain their identities as mothers,

wives, and, most importantly, as human beings. Men and women are never set against one another in her works. She highlighted the situation of a new Indian woman living in a traditional environment. She empathises with the woman since she is a woman. She examines women, their identities, and the challenges they encounter both within and outside of the group to which they belong. Fundamentally, feminism is the belief that women should have equal rights in society, the economy, and politics. It was created in response to Western conventions that restricted rights. Jaya is portrayed in *That Long Silence* as a middle-class woman and mother who is always forced to make decisions. She is cognisant of the societal conventions. She strives to strike a balance between old and new while remaining modern and mindful of traditional values. She too believes in way: “A first love, a first affair, a first baby, a first quarrel— I suppose they are all unforgettable landmarks” (TLS 81).

Her question “why a girl's maiden name is changed after marriage... Why is she carrying her husband's name?, challenges the age old taboo. At the same time, when she says “why can't she be completely hers?...seems to be asserting her individuality “self-concept is the most significant aspect of a person's identity. It is one of the most important aspects of one's personality.” It is not some random change; rather, it is the outcome of the steady, customary conditioning that society has imposed on women to succumb to their identities. Jaya's past experiences, present circumstances, and future goals, everything is likely to have altered with one single change. Shashi Deshpande is

attempting to identify through Jaya. She has learned to exercise self-control as a result of pressure from her society and family. She practiced self-regulation, which is the inclination to control one's behaviour, wants, and urges. According to the sociocultural perspective of psychology, Jaya seeks out her identity by associating with numerous societal subgroups or groups of individuals like Kusum and Nayana. It was Nayana's worldview, in which she saw men as domineering and unimportant. Her thoughts, emotions, and mental processes were to blame. Jaya wasn't sure if she shared the same viewpoint as Nayana, but she regularly noticed that her emotions and questions matched.

Jaya Navigating Identity as Suhasini after Marriage

Suhasini, a perceptive individual, struggles to avoid Jaya, who is influenced by the environment, social dynamics, and culture. She recalls a story her Ai told about an intelligent bird and a stupid crow, which she believes is not important for her children Rahul and Riti. Suhasini believes the story's message is pointless as she cannot connect with its fundamental ideas. Her experiences and interactions with people like Nayana, Kusum, Aji, Appa, and Vanita mami have shaped her into different parts of herself, highlighting the importance of connection and understanding in life.

It includes both ‘I’ and ‘Me’, as well as the associated thoughts, values, and emotions. Every time she compares the present to the past, she finds no connection. Maybe this is a factual

story that Ai made up, or maybe it's how Kusum and Nayana felt after having a female child traumatise them? She did not "let the third life," as the book's first paragraph suggests. How openly she shares herself with Mohan, Appa, and "the Man" before revealing her name, Suhasini, which Mohan honoured when they married. Her Appa gave her the name "Jaya for Victory" She enjoys spending time with her husband and kids. She is wordless; all that comes from her mouth is silence. She often conceals her actual personality from others. She is either Riti and Rahul's mother, or Mohan's wife. Mohan's absence makes her feel incomplete. Her father loved her and wanted the best for her in school, but unwittingly and ironically, he was the one who harmed her self-esteem, made her feel different, and broke her off from her entire childhood. He once drew her away from her friends and told her that she was different from everyone else and that she needed to do something meaningful and amazing. She was a protective child throughout her infancy and adulthood, which contributed to her life conditions.

He gave her the name Jaya, which is Arabic for "victory," but after they married, Mohan changed it to Suhasini, which means "a soft smiling, placid, and motherly woman." Following marriage, these victories and vigour unexpectedly turn into servitude. Jaya begins to comply with her husband Mohan's desires. She is only interested in her husband's preferences and dislikes. She left her job because Mohan urged her to. As a result, she loses her sense of self and is unable to recover completely. The novel focuses on the dull and ordinary parts of

her marriage. Her troubles, however, date back to her early years. Although Jaya, the novel's protagonist, is frequently reminded by her family members of a woman's helplessness and the value and importance of a husband in marital affairs, Jaya is not inferior to men in terms of biology, intellect, or emotion, and historical examples show that women are more compassionate, considerate, and emotionally strong than their male counterparts. Vanita mami informs her that a husband is "a sheltering tree." Ramu kaka goes a step further, telling her that she is solely responsible for her spouse and family's happiness. Dada instructs her to treat Mohan properly when she leaves the family after her wedding.

All of this conventional and unreasonable advice has had a big impact on her life after marriage. She strives to treat Mohan well with Dada's advice. She makes a concerted effort to be a faithful and responsible wife. However, to become a dedicated wife and mother, she must necessarily become mute and submissive. She is revealed to be little more than her husband's puppet who acts according to his will. Despite being fluent not only in her tongue but also in English—the language of empowerment—all of these events have pushed her to stay silent. Everything seems to her as an illusion now:

Things can never be as they were. It's astonishing how we comment on the change as if the change is something remarkable. On the contrary, not changing is unnatural, against nature. Biology recognizes this fact; it is stasis that is an aberration. And here, even the

façade of sameness crumbled at a touch (TLS 47).

Accepting Silence as the Ultimate Predicament

Deshpande appears to imply that, while Jaya's circumstances in a typical masculine society are powerful and responsible enough to silence and subdue her to a meek and docile housewife, her inability and reluctance to raise a voice and break the silence is more to blame for her predicament. Her willingness to assume the role of a faithful wife, in addition to being quiet, is related to her conjugal monotony. It has deeper implications. Jaya's feelings and experiences are shared by nearly all women who struggle to express their true selves in a male-dominated culture and male-centered married life. Women have been waiting their turn for millennia. Jaya, too after marriage... "had done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home", and after kids "waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school..."

To some extent, we draw a similarity between the protagonist Jaya, and the mythological legend, Sita, who suffers silently and without complaint. Both Jaya and Sita wilfully suppress their existential selves to support their respective husbands, even though they both have moments when they can easily resist - Jaya, when her husband wrongfully blames her for all of his problems, and Sita, when her husband erroneously banishes her during the difficult days of her pregnancy, misled by public rumours about her character. However, both of them are typical conservative Indian females who are willing to put their interests aside for

the benefit of their patiparmeshwar. They would have better served their lives, families, and society if they had stood up against the status quo.

The Assertion of Self-Esteem and Personal Agency in the Protagonist

Jaya is tired of being accused, so she decides to break away from the limitations of being her father's daughter, Mohan's wife, and mother to her children. She eventually decides to continue with her literary career and quits seeking Mohan for help. This novel addresses the age-old issue of whether a woman should prioritise her marriage or children. The main character speaks out against the rigorously predetermined roles of daughter, sister, wife, and mother, refusing to be subjected to social or cultural oppression imposed by the long-standing patriarchal culture. The novel concludes with her thoughts. "We do not change overnight. It's feasible that we won't change over time. But there is always hope; without it, life would be impossible." In the words of Sarala Parker "Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya ... women should accept their responsibility ... instead of blaming everybody ..." (TLS, 86).

Threads of Resilience in The Binding Vine

The Binding Vine (1992) addresses the difficulty of modern educated and illiterate middle-class Indian women seeking to achieve self-identity while also genuinely restoring familial ties. While revealing women's struggles for self-respect and identity, the author carefully exposes the various degrees of oppression, including sexual oppression that women face in

our culture. In this story, the protagonist, Urmila (Urmi), serves as the narrator, through which the author attempts to highlight the hardships of women from various areas of our society. Urmi, an intelligent, educated woman working as a lecturer in a college after losing her kid, embraces her misery while also achieving a mental condition of internalisation and lending a helping hand to the suffering women. She became caught up in the finding of her mother-in-law. Mira's poetry was written when she was a young lady subjected to rape in her married life, as well as Kalpana, a young girl dangling between life and death in a hospital, a victim of men's physical hunger.

The writer tries to show how difficult it is for a woman to give herself an autonomous identity in a male-dominated society by portraying a female protagonist like Urmi, who has to go through various layers of experiences that eventually lead to pain, suffering, anxiety, insecurity, and helplessness for women as a whole. Urmi's perspective on life differs significantly from that of other women, who assert their independence in all aspects of their lives. Despite marrying the boy she loved, her marriage was not a success. Whenever she tries to convey her mental state, her husband Kishore asserts himself physically rather than recognising that her desire is not physical and that she requires something else. Urmi is fiscally independent and well-established in her life, so she has developed a sense of self-worth that makes her unwilling to submit to her husband; also, she cannot endure the surrender of her mother Inni and Vanna, her sister-in-law, to their spouses. Urmi, combines the experiences

of five women: Mira, Kalpana, Vanna, Shakuntai, and Inni, revealing the harsh life of women of all ages. She is more than just the story's narrator; she also helped all of the women who were suffering. Despite being crushed and shattered by her turbulent marriage and witnessing the sorrows of women around her, she finally makes a firm determination to be strong and live for her son Karthik. She believes she can handle everything. Her consciousness informs her that she is strong enough to live independently.

Shashi Deshpande's female characters are unquestionably authentic, with unique features, issues and plights, failures, and disappointments of their own. But there is one common thread that connects them all: their desire for identification, freedom, and individuality as human beings. Despite numerous obstacles and pressures from all sides, they never give up and emerge successful in their journey from dependent and subjugated creatures to self-sufficient, confident, and determined human beings with their own unique identity. The *Binding Vine* marks a turning point in her artistic career. Urmila starts a new path for a woman who ends the protracted quiet that has come to define women's existence. By helping and forming a bond with other women, Urmila of *The Binding Vine* surpasses the efforts of her forebears. The novel envisions a rise to greater humanity. Urmila demonstrates how to be an advocate for the downtrodden and marginalised and assists other females in redefining who they are. She starts speaking for people whose voices are suppressed by social conventions. The novel

does a fantastic job of capturing "the urge to survive" in the face of hardship.

Although she is not a rebel, she takes up the fight against this planned "silence" and refuses to give in to this hypocrisy. She searches for a path through the stillness where the grief that is unsaid and the stories that are not spoken can find a voice. *The Binding Vine* explores women's lives and the stories they choose to share as well as the silences they occasionally break. The main characters' behaviours reveal a shift in the author's affirmation of the value of life; they appear to be stepping out from behind their shells and their concerns have grown to include the social realm. In Mira's comments and in the actions of her daughter-in-law Urmi, one can deduce a "positive attitude and resolution to move forward in a spirit of greater solidarity." The college teacher Urmila is a step ahead of the heroines of the previous novels in that she can see the futility of "the daily routine of living" and the shackles of tradition from the outset, which allows her to walk a path beyond her oppressive silence and emerge as a compassionate anchor and a "binding vine" for other suffering women: "this is how life is for most of us, most of the time; we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive" (TBV, 203) In addition to speaking, she works to eradicate the long-standing custom of viewing women as nothing more than commodities. She is presented with a narrative of women who are "silences" in and of themselves, unable to communicate with one another beyond whispers. Having experienced the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu, she can empathise with and relate to other women

who act in silence, such as Vanaa, Mira, Shakuntai, Akka, and Sulu who act in collaboration with the status quo. In the world that the novel imagines, women are more resilient than men at adjusting to their environment, accepting their losses, and forging improbable bonds with one another as they come to terms with life. Since "a new road, a new way, a new age" has begun where bonds of life and compassionate understanding, alone, can rejuvenate the "spring of life" for broader human existence and survival, Urmila calls on others—men and women alike—to join hands as she comes to realise that love is the only glue that holds suffering hearts together and compassionately nurtures the sapling of life.

Marriage as a Transformative Experience for Sarita, Jaya, and Urmila: A Discussion

Similar to Saru and Jaya, marriage plays a significant role in the life of Urmi as well. Urmi likewise chooses a love marriage. Despite her belief in the stabilising influence of love, she discovers that their marriage is not based on it. For Kishore, having sex is the answer to her issues, but emotional connection is more significant to Urmi. She eventually comes to the realisation that she cannot take off Kishore's icy exterior, saying, "Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach." (TBV141) Deshpande sheds light on the girl child's colonial upbringing in a patriarchal environment, where she is socialised from an early age to be subject to subjection. Her mother trains her in domestic activities from an early age to help her get ready for marriage. In her work *Go Home Like a Good Girl: An Interpretation of That Long Silence*, Parvati

Bhatnagar notes, "The story of middle-class ladies is distinct. As part of their training, they are sent to school and colleges and expected to assist senior ladies in the kitchen and other household tasks in their spare time." (136) In one of her poems, she presents her fear of sexual act:

But tell me, friend, did Lakshmi too
Twist brocade tassels round her fingers
And tremble, fearing the coming
Of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?
(TBV 66)

Sulu constantly worries that her husband will kick her out of the house if she doesn't have a child. She sees it as a major disadvantage and lives in continual fear: "After being married, she changed. She was terrified, always afraid. What happens if he gets mad at me, if he wants something else if he doesn't like this, and if he throws me out?" (TBV 195)

Deshpande thus reveals the truth about the Indian marriage tradition, showing how it destroyed a lively girl's self-confidence and made her into a frightened and afraid person. Five pairs of mothers and daughters can be glimpsed in *The Binding Vine*. Urmi-Inni, Shakutai-Kalpana, Vanna-Mandira, Akka-Vanna, and Mira's mother, Mira None of the aforementioned couples have a harmonious relationship that satisfies their emotional and mental needs. Deshpande skilfully depicts the world of male dominance, where women are socialised to survive by according to social conventions. As they learn to integrate with

others, conservative and traditional women view these social conventions as values that make their lives easier. To help their daughters adjust to the dictatorial structure, these women become the defenders of these ideals and do everything in their power to instill them in them. Simon de Beauvoir notes that:

Most women simultaneously demand and detest their feminine condition, they live it through in a state of resentment-vexed at having produced a woman. She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double... Sometimes, she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: what was good enough for me is good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share may lot. (Simon de Beauvoir, 533-34)

Though Urmila is a well-educated woman with a rebellious personality, this side never manifests hostility towards men. She doesn't seem to share Simon De Beauvoir's opinion that marriage nearly destroys women but degrades men. She is a supporter of the institution of marriage and recognises its significance in the lives of Shakutai and Sulu, two women for whom marriage provides "social, economic, and physical security." Being intelligent enough to handle any scenario and financially independent, she finds herself in a better position. She understands that when one chooses not to follow the crowd, a relationship can become strained. And her racing mind is calmed by this realisation. She starts to hope that one

day she and her husband Kishore will have a better connection.

She feels hopeful for a rebuilt relationship with her husband Kishore, believing that one day he will remove his "armour of withdrawal" and she will be able to "reach his soul". She understands her grief over losing Anu, but she still has Kartik, to whom she has a maternal responsibility. The author emphasises the need of perseverance in the face of adversity: "We struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in, only when we love." (137) She advocates for individuals marginalised by societal conventions. Despite knowing the importance of love and relationships, she learns the most from Shakutai, an ignorant lady, who says: "This is how life is for most of us, most of the times: We are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive." (203) It has been observed that Deshpande's heroines hibernate in their parents' house. They have a sense of liberation in the absence of their spouses. Since Kishore, Urmi's husband, is in the Merchant Navy, he stays mostly away. He is another of those "absent" husbands. Certainly, being free in the deepest psychic sense is the only way to bring about significant change from within. Shashi Deshpande's female characters rely on family and tradition for fulfilment, despite their independence. The Binding Vine depicts a female world where women share a sense of togetherness.

Research Findings

Deshpande's delicate representation of women, regardless of their positions as working

professionals or homemakers, and their inner life helps us view the image of today's women, exposing her place in "the middle of nowhere". This depicts the ordinary lives of Indian women who bear the burden of being second-class citizens in their own families while also fighting cultural constraints and psychological concerns that restrict them from expressing themselves.

Undergoing research on these female characters reveals that each has its own set of obstacles, impediments, dreams, aspirations, regrets, and plans that do not align with the rhythm of tight familial and societal boundaries as individuals. However, all these female heroes come forward to take charge of their lives and do not hesitate to give the final statement as Jaya gives "... it's my life after all..."

The author has raised through these narratives some crucial questions that require our serious attention:

- Whether males are prepared to accept professional women with successful careers as life partners.
- Why is it necessary for women to conform to societal conventions and appease their male counterparts' egos?
- How long will she be seen as just a body with feminine charm?
- Why do men's wants and demands continue to be more important than women's needs and emotions?
- Why is it important for men to solely work outside, leaving women to focus on their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers?

And finally-

- Do women still hold an equal place in society as men?

Certainly, these are not new questions; we have been discussing equal authority and status for women as dignified beings for decades. We have to give sensitive and sensible thought to the entire scenario understanding the need for a hitherto healthier society irrespective of gender biases.

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