

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

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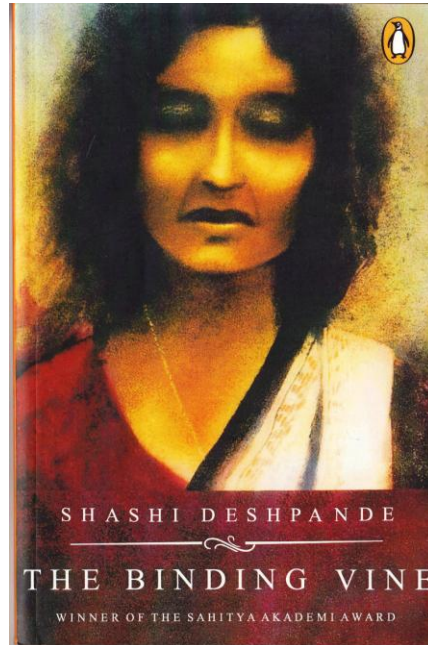
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## The Plight of Women in Shashi Deshpande's Novel *The Binding Vine*

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## ***The Binding Vine: Three Running Strands***

Shashi Deshpande studies the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. Through her novels, she expresses the frustrations and disappointments of women who experience social and cultural oppression in the society.

The novel *The Binding Vine* has three strands running parallel. These are the stories of three suffering women; they are different in age and time. They are Kalpana, who is unconscious; Mira, who is dead, and Urmi who discovers the meaning of life through the stories of Kalpana and Mira.

The journey starts with Urmi and many characters join with her. The main plot is about Urmi and her grief at her daughter Anu's death. The stories of Kalpana and Mira are the sub-plots. They join with the main plot.

### **Individual Dreams**

In this novel both Mira and Kalpana have their own dreams, aspirations and demands. But the society does not honour these. Mira has secret dreams to be a poet. She aspires to write and she does write. But she cannot make them public. Her poems are hidden in a trunk. Her voice is muted by the social norms. Her demands to get her individuality are not recognized.

In the case of Kalpana, she aspires to her individual freedom to dress well, to earn and to marry a person of her choice. This freedom is crushed before it takes shape.

### **Feminist Ideas in Sub-plots**

These two sub-plots have strong feminist ideas. Mira tries to speak through her poetry, Kalpana openly rebels. They have choices they couldn't exercise. That is however, not the end Urmi, Vanna, and others have many choices open to them.

Here the plot shows social progress. Urmi has a verbal attack on Inni and Vanna. She is angry and imitated; the reason is her inability to bear her grief of the death of her daughter. During this period she engages herself in reading Mira's unpublished poems. She finds them interesting because they reveal the innermost secrets of a woman life. Then she meets Kalpana, the young rape victim, she discovers similarities in the two cases Kalpana is raped by her own relative whereas Mira is by her own husband.

### **Meeting Other Sufferers**

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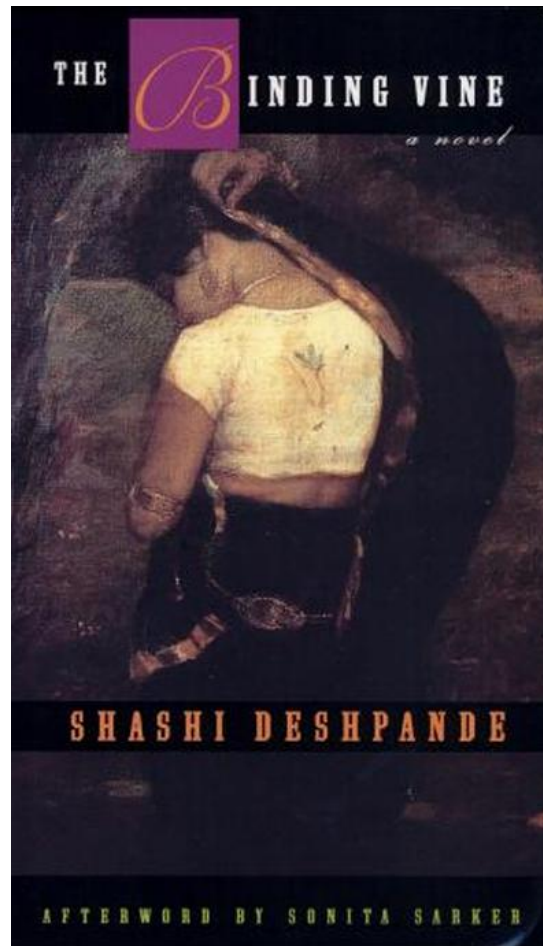
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During this period of her visits to the hospital Urmi meets Kalpana, Shakutai, and other sufferers whose grief is as real as her own. She decides to help the people those who are in sufferings. In the end she learns the secrets life and gets over her grief. She understands that life has small happy moments of affection, sympathy and understandings these memories make it worth living.

### **Different Perceptions and Different Opinions**



The novel is a stock of women characters, having different perceptions causing difference of opinions among themselves. It caused misery and unhappiness to them in their families. There are five pairs of mother-daughters, Inni-Urmi, Mira's mother-Mira, Shakutai-Kalpana, Akka-Vanna and Vanna-Mandira. Their relationship between them is based on some sort of misapprehension.

Urmi's displeasure with her mother is deep-rooted in her separation latter at an early age, right from her childhood days. She is always puzzled as to why her parents had sent her away while her brother stayed with them. She bore a kind of grudge against her mother

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Inni. While trying to vindicate herself, Inni explains 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, I cried, nothing could make him change his mind” (p. 200).

It is only in the end of the novel that Inni reveals the incident. Long back, Urmi was a child; Inni had gone out leaving Urmi in the care of a trusted male servant. Urmi’s father knew that the girl was left with a male servant and had angry. After that he sent Urmi to his mother. He made this decision without even consulting his wife Inni. At this point Urmi understands the sinister power of male dominance that rendered her mother a helpless victim. Now Urmi realizes how Inni must have suffered the pain of separation and how bravely she bore it over the years without complaining. She feels extremely sorry for her mother.

### **Looking Back**

When Urmi is in the grief of the death of her child daughter, Vanna talks of a small incident of their girlhood days. When Urmi was learning cycling in Ranidurg , one day she had fallen of the bicycle and hurt her knees. At this Urmi angrily asked her “What are you trying to say Vanna? Why don’t you say it straight off” ( p.8). Actually, Vanna is trying to shift her mind from her grief, but Urmi is not in the mood to be soothed by such remarks. She refuses to let go of her pain. She replies to Vanna, that the fell off from the cycle was a small hurt compared to the agony of losing her daughter. ”This pain is all that’s left to me of Anu. Without it, there will be nothing left to me of her; I will lose her entirely (p.9).

### **Revealing Records**

One day Akka, Urmi’s mother in-law brings out an old trunk. It contains some yellowing papers, diaries and notes and tells her that these papers belong to Mira. Urmi gets interested in reading them to find what they contain. Intact Mira is Kishore’s real mother, i.e., Urmi’s mother-in-law. She had died when Kishore was just one day old and Kishore’s father was married to Akka so that the infant Kishore could get a mother. So Akka is Urmi’s step mother-in-law. Thus Urmi realizes that Akka was brought as a bride only to be a mother to Kishore. Urmi now can understand the loveless married life of Akka and feels extremely sorry for her.

By reading the diaries and notes, Urmi understands the pain of one more woman-Mira. From the letters and poems Urmi re-creates Mira’s life, her aspirations, failures, fears and desires. Mira’s problem is the obsessive love for her husband he loves her not for her sake but for his own lust. Mira frankly records her intimate feelings in her diaries. Her poems are also confessional to her sex becomes “Sting of scorpion to be borne by women” (p.19).

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## **Wants Love, Not Lust**

She wants love, not lust. Love means mutual understanding and caring for his or her needs. Lust means selfish and it looks for personal satisfaction. Mira is afraid of her husband's lustful love. Mira's mother remains a mute spectator of her daughter's drab existence and did nothing for Mira's life. As a traditional mother, she had her own world of dreams about her daughter and hence, she remains content with seeing Mira married and pregnant. Generally the daughter shares her sorrows with her near and dear one, particularly mother, to unburden the grief-sicken heart. But she did not want to share her feelings with her mother. She felt alienated from her. The house in which Mira lived was utterly lonely. Its inmates treated her as a mad woman. The anguish in Mira burst out thus "they called me mad, they who cocooned themselves in bristly blankets and though themselves warm when I spoke my soul that boiled and seethed (P.99). Despite her despair, Mira feels happy when she is with child. As an expectant mother, she starts loving life. Unfortunately, she dies in childbirth. Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion she confesses.

Urmila understands that right from the childhood days Mira hated her mother who always surrendered herself 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" (p.83).

According to Urmi, Mira is not a common woman. She wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and how she was living with a man whom she had nothing in common to share. She thinks that" perhaps it was her writings that kept her going that kept her alive" (p.127).

Through Mira's poems, Urmila learns a lot of things about her and Urmi felt the burden of her feminism.

## **Story within Story**

Here Despande gives us one more story. Kalpana is a young girl from a lower class background. She is Shakutai's daughter. Shakutai has one more daughter Sandhya and a son. Shakutai is the breadwinner for her family because her husband doesn't stay with them. She has a sister, Sulu. Sulu is childless and is afraid that her husband, Prabhakar, may marry another woman and shunt her out of his house. So her husband wishes to marry Kalpana. Both Shakutai and Sulu approve the proposal. Sulu likes it because if Kalpana comes as the co-wife, Sulu will not be driven out. But, Kalpana however, has her own aspirations. She likes to marry a young man of her own choice and rejects Prabhakar's offer.

One day, Urmi goes to the hospital to meet Vanna (her sister's in-law and friend) who is a medical social worker. Here Urmi learns of the rape-case of Kalpana. While Kalpana

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admits in the hospital, the outside world moves around her. Shakutai does not want the case to be reported to the police. She is afraid that it will spoil their name and it will affect the marriage of her second daughter. The police officer wants to project it as an accident case because rape cases are complicated. It is clear that nobody wants to make it as a rape case. Priti, Inni, Vanna, all offer only lip-sympathy on Kalpana. But Urmi would like to help Kalpana and she decided to fight for the justice of Kalpana.

Shakutai blames her daughter for crossing the limits of a woman's life and attracting attention by the modern ways of dressing up. She feels that it would unnecessarily attract male attention "If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone?"(p.67).But Kalpana's ideas of life are different from those of her mother's. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She loved to dress well and move around freely. Her mother's fears came true now, because Kalpana becomes the victim of Lust and she is brutally beaten and raped.

Urmi is shocked to find everyone wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot-free. Shakutai doesn't like the case to be registered and given publicity. "Even if it is true, keep it to yourself, doctor, don't let anyone of it" (p.59). At last Urmi gives out Kalpana's story to her journalist friend and it is published. Shakutai gets social attention. Questions are raised in the Assembly and the hospital authorities are instructed to let Kalpana remain in the hospital.

Urmila is unable to do anything for Kalpana, though she is filled with all sympathies. She is forced to remain as a mute spectator. Shakutai is also much hurt and troubled. Even she wishes for her daughter's death. She says to Urmila, "But sometimes I think the only thing, that can help Kalpana now is death." (p.178)

### **Tender Vine of Empathy and Sympathy Binds Us All**

Thus, Urmi breaks the silence and manages to get justice for the suffering family. The police have to investigate the case, and when Sulu realizes that her husband Prabhakar is the culprit, she commits suicide. In the course of the events Urmi understands how the tender vine of human understanding, empathy and sympathy binds us all. Life goes on with ups and downs. The novel ends on a note of optimism.

### **Longing for Recognition**

The women characters in the novel long for their recognition from the male dominated society. They need their freedom and fight for their individualities. They wish mutual love from their men but not their mere lust. 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.

The novel has an implied expression that the women's harassment in the society overcomes even the mother's grief on the death of the daughter. At the end of the novel, Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love that provide "the spring of life" for human survival.

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