

ISSN: 2278-9529



GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

January 2018 Vol. 7. Issue I

www.galaxyimrj.com

Editor-In-Chief- Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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An Analysis of Ecofeminism in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Article History: Submitted-20/12/2017, Revised-11/01/2018, Accepted-11/01/2018, Published-31/01/2018.

Abstract:

Ecofeminism is gradually gaining ground as a critical tool for the analysis of the text *The Binding Vine*. Especially by women writers concern of Ecofeminism is the use of nature to symbolize women or vice-versa and patriarchal paradigms. *The Binding Vine* is a story of many women who pass through the consciousness of the narrator Urmi, a self-confessed feminist from the title to the themes, symbols, language and the dead mother – in-law of the narrator. Moreover it depicts various aspects of Ecofeminism. The present paper is an analysis of the critical framework of Ecofeminism as applied to the text *The Binding Vine*. It seems to have pre-dominated the consciousness of all thinking individuals. It is a truth universally acknowledged that women, who are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, women writers, consciousness, existence, expression.

Introduction:

Ecofeminism links feminism with ecology. That propagated the split can be healed by the feminine instinct for nurture and nature's process. Ecofeminism focuses more on intersectional questions. Such as how the nature and culture enables the oppression of female and non-human bodies. Literary ecocritics began to concentrate on the relationship between literature and nature cum the physical environment. They took up the analysis of the depiction of nature in literary works. The sense of the place, the atmosphere or the local landscape which may be used as covert pointers to understanding the meaning of a literary text began to be foregrounded. A branch of ecocriticism which was gaining ground was its feminist perspective view which came to be known as Ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism is not simply a subset of feminism. But in many respects a Meta feminism offering a distinct and more broadened methodology for understanding the world. Like ecocriticism, Ecofeminism is also an interdisciplinary movement which has urged a new way of perceiving nature, culture, creativity and spirituality. Therefore Ecofeminism attempted to save the planet by creating awareness among women about environmental issues. Some concrete steps would be taken to avoid the fast-approaching to put an end to humanity. Since women bring forth new life, it was believed that would be more successful in ensuring its continuity. Linguistically and symbolically depicted as 'female', by saving the environment, women would also be establishing identity for themselves.

A branch of ecocriticism which was gaining ground was its feminist perspective which came to be known as ecofeminism. In an essay entitled "What is Ecofeminism?" the authors Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire have given a clear definition of the term: Ecofeminism is not simply a subset of feminism or ecology. It is in many respects a meta-feminism, if you will, offering a distinct and more broadened methodology for understanding the world. Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal her acute sensitivity to the issues involving women and her tremendous sympathy for women. She presents both the weakness and the strengths of the women. The author portrays in her writings "the vulnerability of women. The power of women, the deviousness of women, the helplessness of women, and the courage of women" (Dhawan 34). Domination of nature was considered to mirror the domination of women in patriarchal paradigms. Ecofeminism therefore attempted to save the planet by creating awareness among women about environmental issues so that some concrete steps would be taken to avoid the fast-approaching abyss yawning threateningly to put an end to humanity. Since women bring forth new life, it was believed that they would be more successful in ensuring its continuity and since nature is often linguistically and symbolically depicted as 'female', by saving the environment, women would also be establishing a concrete identity for themselves.

The *Binding Vine* explores important problems of our times. Deshpande's characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. Traditional Indian society follows the precepts of Manu. Manu does not grant a separate identity apart from which she has a daughter, a wife, a sister, or a mother. Mira was a woman stick to tradition. She was a traditional Indian wife. She looked after her husband. She was like a slave to him and she lived as an instrument for his sexual gratification. Rape is violence and it becomes worse when it occurs within the sanctity of wedlock. Mira wrote poems and she never published but kept in her box secretly. Her poems are her suppressed feelings and agonies. Which was expressed by Sushila Singh: Human experience has been synonymous with the masculine experience and with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete. They have not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely has an entity that concerns man either in his earlier in his real life or his fantasy life.

The feminist movement, which started in the West in the 1960s, went a long way in arresting the injustice meted out to women. There had been an abundance of feminist writing which preceded and followed this movement, but there is much still left to be done to wipe out the age-old prejudices and misconceptions regarding women. Though Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a leading woman



novelist on the Indian literary horizon, and won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her novel, *That Long Silence*, she has received the critical attention she deserves. The only book, *The Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* by Sarabjit Sandhu, that has been published so far gives only a brief account of the image of woman, the study being confined to the early novels of Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande's writing belongs to the third phase of feminism, the female phase. Urmi is really a modern Indian woman because she stretches her hand towards other women like Mira, Sakuntai, Kalpana, and Vanna. Women are considered to be the weaker sex or the fair sex. In a patriarchal society they have no role to play except the role of wife and mother. Considering the whole world, women writers are comparatively less in number. But now they are strong enough to write what they feel and experience. Many writer's male as well as female have written about race, gender and other socio cultural issues. In west, women writers started writing for women from 18th century. But feminist movements got prominence in 20th century. There is three phases of writings:

1. Feminine Phase
2. Feminist Phase
3. Female Phase

In the Feminine Phase, the first phase of Feminism, women novelists expressed themselves but they fear or reluctant to even use their real names in books. Their aim was to write but more or less they followed the male writers. But in second phase, Feminist writers got courage to print their names on the space for writers. They criticized and attacked the male and they imitate the male not in name but in other aspects. They wish to be like men and have they energy to raise voice against the oppression. But the writers of Female Phase are different. They never tried to imitate men. They identified the female in them even though they open up the problems of women and stretch their hands other women where in need of help. Feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late 1960s. Feminist writings stand for the social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality of women. Writers like Virginia Wolf discussed the problems of patriarchy. The problems related cultural economic and educational disabilities are the subjects of essays. Writers like Kate Millet point out how men depicts woman in their writings. It's really a starting for the feministic thinking. Her writings inspired the reading females to think about themselves. Shashi Deshpande depicts how women are treated in Indian society

Barring a few articles in some journals and books, there is no full-length study of Shashi Deshpande's fiction especially from the feminist perspective. Hence for a close study is needed to understand the novels of Shashi Deshpande. The close study offers a fresh perspective for critical analysis, linking literature with real life situations. The aim of this article is to evaluate the novels of Shashi Deshpande from a feminist perspective. Deshpande has gained reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. Most of Deshpande's protagonists are women who are educated and exposed to Western ideas. The emotional upheavals in the minds of these women and their reactions to

various issues related to women, caught between tradition and modernity, are susceptible to treatment from a feminist angle. The woman of today stands poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago; she does not believe that woman is an inferior being that must remain passive and submissive. This awakening of the woman's consciousness as delineated by Shashi Deshpande in her novels deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of a woman's point of view. Hence the need for a close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels as the products of feminism which offers a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking literature with real life situations.

The close study traces the origin, growth and development of feminism in the literary world, in general, and in Indian writing in English in particular Deshpande's view of feminism is studied while tracing the formative influences on her writing. The first novel *Roots and Shadows* records the suffocation experienced by Indu in a society governed by the age-old customs and traditions. It also unmasks the protagonist of her garb of a liberated woman and exposes the hypocrisy of ostensibly progressive-minded men like Jayant, Indu's husband. The second novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* describes the life of the protagonist, Saru, Deshpande highlights the trauma of a woman who is made the victim of her husband's frustrations because economically and socially she has achieved a superior status. The chapter also seeks to discuss the gender discrimination practiced by parents towards their children.

The third novel *That Long Silence* itself deals with the protagonist Jaya's passage through a maze of uncertainty and apprehension towards the assertion of herself. It reveals the trauma of an ostensibly contented housewife who is smothered under the weight of male-dominance. Deshpande's fourth novel *The Binding Vine*, in which the author makes an attempt to venture into an area-the issue of marital rape-which, perhaps, has not been dealt with by any other Indian writer in English. It focuses attention on the victims of man's lust and woman's helplessness. Deshpande's fifth novel "A Matter of Time", which is different in theme and presentation from her earlier novels. In this novel, the author makes a successful attempt to present the story from the point of view of her male protagonist, thereby fulfilling her self-confessed desire to write of human beings and not of men or women.

The overall study highlights the feminist perspective in the novels of Deshpande. Operating within the framework of a male-dominated and tradition bound society, Deshpande's heroines are conscious of their predicament as victims of inequality. It is shown that Deshpande's depiction of her protagonists is realistic to the core in as much as she does not succumb to the temptation of creating exceptionally strong women characters that revolt against conventional morality. Deshpande seems to write about the middle-class Indian women and their feelings, not as their champion but as their articular.

The Binding Vine is this attempt at redefinitions. The need of the hour for ecofeminist literary criticism seems to be to establish the proactive character of both women and nature which have till now been mistakenly considered as passive and therefore more amenable to exploration. *The Binding*



Vine is symbolic in the novel of the redemptive power of love. The vine is a creeper, a trailing plant which can have rope-like qualities of binding . But it is not a rope that spells bondage, rather it liberates. How it does this is told in the course of the novel in one of the strands of its narrative not the central story of Urmi and her loss, but of another woman, Mira a poet in whose case domination takes the form of rape in marriage .

Conclusion:

The vine is delicate and therefore vulnerable. The binding element is lacking in Mira and her husband's relationship and therefore a part of her finds emotional outlet through her writing – poems and a diary , the former generously splattered with images of nature to indicate her inner most thoughts which no human relationship can give an outlet too. The Binding Vine is this attempt at redefinitions. The need of the hour for ecofeminist literary criticism seems to be to establish the proactive character of both women and nature which have till now been mistakenly considered as passive and therefore more amenable to exploration . It seems to have predominated the consciousness of all thinking individuals. It is a truth universally acknowledged that women, who are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish.

Women's marginalization is not a new thing. But to speak out and act against that is a difficult task because that's deeply rooted. Her Shashi Deshpande discussed the double marginalization through patriarchy and imperialistic ideologies. Shashi Deshpande's characters struggle to defy traditional patriarchal norms of society, and attempts to realize and preserve their identity not only as a woman but also as a human being. The frustrations of females are depicted in a realistic way not just to read and throw the book away but to awaken the Indian society, the Indian woman.

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