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Stylistic Devices in Hemingway's Novels: A Study on the *Old Man and The Sea*

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Abstract

Usage of literary figures and techniques is a symbol of writer's skill over writing. General writing is quite different from literary writing. Writers use certain literary techniques to convey information exactly and accurately. Such methods of writing add literary value to the text. In this paper I would like to examine in this article "Stylistic Devices in Hemingway's Novels – A Study on the *Old Man and The Sea*". My main focus is on symbolism used by the writer to convey their ability of using them and identify the interpretations they stand for. As the topic is so wide I would like to limit myself to symbols related to stylistic devices.

Keywords: *literary figures, techniques, symbol*

Full Text

Literature is not only nectar of thought but also the reflection of human life. The characters, incidents, situations, themes reflect various angles of human life while giving pleasure to mind. It reflects the human lives in many folds and the society in many directions with its characteristics while gives the pleasure for the people. To tackle with different themes and subjects, writers use vivid styles, literary devices

and language aspects. American literature has derived these genres as their major genres i.e. Realism, Naturalism, Rationalism, and Romanticism. Some of the writers from East tend to use symbols to give an artistic beauty and a depth for their literary creations. For other purposes such as evaluating, interpreting explaining, society in different lines they used these genres behind those symbols to avoid troubles and problems that may fall upon.

In this point of view, I took Earnest Hemingway for my observation who is signified by many critics for his mastery of using various stylistic devices. Among the masterpieces of Hemingway including *In Our Time, The Torrents Of Spring, The Sun Also Rises, Men Without Women, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom The Bell Tolls and The Old Man and The Sea*, it was only *The Old Man and The Sea* was an immediate success by selling 50, 000 copies from the first edition only. *The Old Man and the Sea* is undoubtedly Hemingway's masterpiece. It is a simple story about a fisherman Santiago and his battle with a great marlin. For 84 days Santiago does not catch a single fish but he does not feel discouraged. He goes far out into the sea and hooks a giant marlin. A desperate struggle ensues in which Santiago manages to kill the fish and tie it to his bout, only to find that on the way home he has to fight a more desperate struggle with some dangerous giant sharks, which eat up the marlin, leaving only a skeleton. The old man brings it home and goes to bed to dream, almost dead with exhaustion. But his struggle wins him much respect.

His language is simple yet he creates an artfully designed plot. Within the story of an old man who goes out to sea to capture a large fish, Hemingway expresses the plot through the usage of narrative voice, symbolism, and personification. These literary devices are woven into the novella to complete a story which could not have been titled a classic unless these writing styles were used accordingly. Alone in his boat, the old man Santiago gently rowed out towards the immense ocean. The omniscient narrative draws close to Santiago's thoughts. Hemingway enters his lines with increasing regularity. "Perhaps I should not have been a fisherman, he thought. But that was the thing that I was born for (50)." The blending of narratives is usually indicated customarily, with such as "he thought" or with "he said" and the quotation marks around what Santiago actually speaks aloud. At other times, the narrative drifts almost unnoticeably into Santiago's thoughts where the quotation marks around whatever Santiago speaks aloud to himself eventually disappear. When Santiago comes home from a rugged day of fishing, he would expire on his rickety, newspaper-covered bed and dream of beautiful dreams. The aged fisherman slept of "Africa when he was a boy and the long golden beaches… (24)." Santiago never dreamed of people or tremendous occurrences, he "only dreamed of places now and the lions on the beac… Played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy (25)." The young cubs symbolize

Santiago's remarkable traits of courage, strength, and dignity. These are the attributes in which he holds dear and close to his heart. These same qualities he wishes to bequeath to his beloved Manolin, the only person left who keeps a place in his dying heart.

Because of his directness, clarity and freshness in his language, he is identified as a unique stylistic writer in American Literature. Hemingway always manages to choose words concrete, specific, more commonly found, more Anglo-Saxon, casual and conversational. He seldom uses adjectives and abstract nouns, and avoids complicated syntax. Hemingway's strength lies in his short sentences and very specific details. His short sentences are powerfully loaded with the tension, which he sees in life. Where he does not use a simple and short sentence, he connects the various parts of the sentence in a straightforward and sequential way, often linked by "and". In his task of creating real people, Hemingway uses dialogue as an effective stylistic device. Here is an example chosen from *The Old Man and the Sea:*

> "What do you have to eat?" the boy asked.
>
> "No, I will eat at home; do you want me to make the fire?"
>
> "No, I will make it later on, or I may eat the rice cold."

Here we can see that such interpolations as "he said" have frequently been omitted and the words are very colloquial. Thus the speech comes to the reader as if he were listening. Hemingway has captured the intensity of dialogue skillfully and has made connotative economical speech.

The dialogue, too, is combined with the realistic and the artificial. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, The language style is very peculiar from Hemingway's other writings. This is because the novel is an English version of the Spanish that Santiago and Mandolin would speak in real life. Since we are meant to realize that Santiago and Mandolin could not possibly speak like this, since English is not his tongue anyway, we are more likely to accept other artificialities of the dialogue. The speakers are distanced from readers to a certain degree. And while their language taking on a king of epic dignity; it does not lose its convincingness. Even slightly strange exchanges like the following become fairly acceptable. For example:

> "You're my alarm clock." the boy said.
>
> "Age is my alarm clock," the old man said. "Why does old man wake so early? Is it to have one longer day?"
>
> "I don't know," the boy said. "All I know is that young boys sleep late and hard."
>
> "I can remember it," the old man said. "I'll waken you in time."

The simple sentences and the repeated rhythms flash at the profundities that the language tries to ignore. Its simplicity is highly suggestive and connotative, and often reflects the strong undercurrent of emotion. Indeed, the more closely the reader watches the less rough and simple the characters appear. In Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway uses an effective metaphor to describe his writing style. If a writer of the prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only 1/8 of it being above water. The author seldom expresses his own feelings directly, nor does he make any comments or explanations. On the contrary, he tries to narrate and describe things objectively and blend his own feelings harmoniously to the natural narration and description. This gives readers a picture of compression, from which they can learn the implied meaning and feelings of the author. When Hemingway said of this story, "I tried to make a real old man, a real sea and real sharks," he then went on to say, "But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things." So this novel has a great conveyed by a compressed action. The core of the novel's action is fishing. To the hero, fishing is not simply of contest in life. It contains profound philosophic meaning. In addition, two details, the baseball match and the hand wresting with the Negro, like fishing, symbolize the contest in life. They compensate and enrich the inner meaning of the main plot of fishing. So the simplicity of the novel is highly suggestive. So Hemingway has formed narrative and dialogue, which though natural and simple on the surface, is actually deliberated and artificial. It combines elements that are realistic with elements that are stylized and heightened.

Not only from the point of view of language style, *The Old Man and The Sea* is but also famous for the writing techniques. The main events of the story seem to be based on a real incident, which are described by Hemingway in an article about fishing in the Gulf Stream in Esquire for April 1936. So the novel is full of facts, such as the habit of fish, the technique of the novel lies in the way to use these facts. Like any realist, he relies on selection. When the giant marlin finally surfaces, his tail "was higher than a big scythe blade and very pale lavender above the dark blue water." Sargasso weed is bleached and yellow by day; Tuna are silver when they jump out of the water, but blue-backed and fold-sides when swimming. Hemingway never describes them excessively, but chooses some effective ones. He uses them with a sense of how colors shift and change in their relationship. Without selection, there can be no intensity, and compression.

An efficient writer uses the facts as a device to make the fictional word accepted. The novel is not simple a manual for us to study the technique to catch a fish or how to survive in a boat. The author tries to implicate people's imagination in what

is happening by appealing to our love practical knowledge. The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As he looked down into it he saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now." These facts show readers the process of fishing, which mostly comes from the author's own experience. From these facts, which are vivid, precise and terse, readers can learn a lot about how to catch a fish and can also feel as if they themselves were catching a fish. Then they will have the sense that what the author describes is real and believable. Thus Hemingway's stylistic devices used in his writings took the attention of the readers and mark as a symbol of his writing style.

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The Problem of Leadership in the Novel 'Animal Farm' and in the Dalit Community in India: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The key lesson of the novel is that the organisation's bosses often manipulate the organization for their own benefit and end up being as bad, if not worse, that the real or imaginary evils from which they are protecting their followers. The novel is satire of the Russian revolution and therefore full of symbolism. These symbols are also applicable to show the political and social position of Dalits in India after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Mahaparinirvan. He dreamed about political power for Dalit and he established the political front for Dalits. He thought that the entire destiny of the society depends upon the intellectual class of the society. But the followers of the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar could not maintain the same spring. Today in India or especially in Maharashtra, they are indirectly ruled by the lass against which they made revolution. The same tragedy of the animal takes place at the end of the novel when the leaders of the animals and the men comes together.

Orwell associates certain real characters of the book. He is the list of the characters and things and meaning in both contexts i.e. Russian revolution and the Ambedkarism in India.

Keywords: *Leadership, Dalit, Russian Revolution, Caste*

Full Text

Although George Orwell (1903-1950) had been a writer for many years, he only achieved worldwide fame with the publication of 'Animal Farm' in 1945. This extraordinary political satire, which Orwell called 'a fairy story', aroused considerable interest which still remains today.

The story takes place on a farm somewhere in England. The story told by all knowing narrator in the third person. The action of this novel starts when the oldest pig on the farm, Old Major, calls all animal to a secret meeting. He tells about his dream of a revolution against cruel Mr. Jones. Three days later Major dies, but the speech gives the more intelligent animals a new outlook life. The pigs, who are consider the most intelligent animals, instruct the other ones. During the period preparation two pig distinguish themselves, Napoleon, snowball, Napoleon is big, and although he isn't good speaker, he can assert himself. Snowball is a better speak well, he has lot of ideas and he is very vivid. Together with another pig called Squalor, who is a very good speaker, they work out the theory of "Animalism". The rebellion starts some months later, when Mr. Jones comes home drunk one night and forgets to feed the animals. They bread the barns and run to the house, where the food is stores. When Mr. Jones see this he takes out his shotgun, but it is too late for him, all the animals fall over him, and drive him of a farm. The animals destroy all whips, nose, rings, reign and all other instruments that have been used to suppress them. The same day the animals celebrate their victory with an extra ration of food. The pigs makes up the seven commandments and they write them above the door of big barn. They run thus:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

The animals also agree that no animal shall ever enter the farm house, and that no animal shall have contact with humans. This commandments are summarized in the simple phrase. "Four legs good, two legs bad". After some time Jones comes back with some other men form the village to recapture the farm. The animals fight bravely. And they manage to defend the farm. Snowball and Boxer receive medals of honour for defending the farm so bravely. Also Napoleon who had not fought

at all, takes a medal. This is reason why the two pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, often argue. When Snowball presents his idea to build a wind mill to produce electricity, for the other animals, Napoleon calls nine strong dogs. The dogs drive Snowball from the farm and Napoleon explains that Snowball was in fact co-operating with Mr. Jones. He also explains that Snowball in reality never had a medal of honour that Snowball was always trying to cover up that he was fighting on the side of Mr. Jones. The animals then starts building the wind mill, and as time passes the working time goes up, whereas the food ration decline. Although the "Common" animals have not enough food, the pigs grow fatter and fatter. They tell the other animals that need more food, for they are managing the whole farm. Sometime later, the pigs explain to the other animals that they have to trade with neighboring farms. The commons are very upset, because since the revolution there has been a resolution that no animals shall trade with human. But the pigs ensure them that there never has been such a resolution, and that this was an evil lie of Snowball.

Shortly after this decision the pigs move to the farm house. The other animal remembers that there commandment that forbids sleeping in beds, and so they go to the big barn to look at the commandments. When they arrive there they can't believe their eyes, the fourth commandments has been change to "No animals shall sleep in bed with sheets". And the other commandments have also been changed "No animals shall kill another animal without reason" and "No animal shall drink alcohol in excess". Some month later a heavy storm destroys the wind mill, which is nearly finished. Napoleon accuses Snowball of destroying the mill, and he promises a reward to the animal that gets Snowball. The rebuilding of the mill takes two years. Against Jones attack the farm and although the animal defend it, the wind mill is once again destroyed. The pigs decide to rebuild the mill again, they cut down food rations to a minimum. One day Boxer breaks. He is sold to the butcher, but Napoleon tells the pigs that Boxer has been brought to a hospital where he has died. Three years later, the mill is finally completed. During this time Napoleon deepens the relation with the neighboring farm, and one day Napoleon even invites the owners of this farm for an inspection. They sit inside the farm house and celebrate the efficiency of his farm, where the animals work very hard with a minimum of food. During this celebration, all the animals meet at window of the farm, and when they look inside they can't distinguish between man and animal.

Critical Analysis of the novel

> *"No question now what had happened to the faces of the pig of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig. And*

from pig to man again, but already it was impossible to say which was which"

-George Orwell, the conclusion of 'Animal Farm'

The key lesson of the novel is that the organisation's bosses often manipulate the organization for their own benefit and end up being as bad, if not worse, that the real or imaginary evils from which they are protecting their followers. The novel is satire of the Russian revolution and therefore full of symbolism. These symbols are also applicable to show the political and social position of Dalits in India after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Mahaparinirvan. He dreamed about political power for Dalit and he established the political front for Dalits. He thought that the entire destiny of the society depends upon the intellectual class of the society. But the followers of the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar could not maintain the same spring. Today in India or especially in Maharashtra, they are indirectly ruled by the lass against which they made revolution. The same tragedy of the animal takes place at the end of the novel when the leaders of the animals and the men comes together.

Orwell associates certain real characters of the book. He is the list of the characters and things and meaning in both contexts i.e. Russian revolution and the Ambedkarism in India.

Mr. Jones –Mr. Jones is one of Orwell's major villain in 'Animal farm' Orwell's says that one time Mr. Jones was actually a decent master of his animals. At this time the farm was thriving. But in recent years the farm had fallen a harder times and the opportunity was seen to revolt. Mr. Jones symbolizes the evils of capitalism and Czar Nicholas II, the leader before Stalin (Napoleon). Jones represents the old Government – the last of Czars. In Indian context, Mr. Jones symbolizes the traditional people who treated Dalit badly and consider them inferior.

Old Major-Old Major is first major character described by Orwell in 'Animal Farm'. This "Pure-bred" of pigs is the kind grandfatherly philosopher of change-an obvious metaphor for Karl Marx. Old Major proposes a solution to the animals' desperate plight under the Jones "administration" when he inspires a rebellion sorts among the animals.

Animal Farm and the Dalit movement

Old major symbolizes Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who fought for Dalit improvement.

Napoleon and Snowball -, two pigs symbolizes Stalin and Napoleon respectively. After the revolution in the farm both pigs wanted a leadership position in the "new" economic & political system which is actually contradictory to the whole supposed

system of equality. But as time passes both eventually realize that one of them will have to step down.

After Mahaparinirvan of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Dalit society is wondering without any prominent leader. Internal conflicts among the successors of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is mainly responsible for low political role in the state politics. In the Lok Sabha election of 1996, all the leaders came together and faced election under one head. The result was that all the four leaders were elected for the parliament.

Squealer- Squealer is an intriguing Character in Orwell's 'Animal Farm' Many critics correlates Squealer with the Russian News Papers of 1930s. The media is the major source in the modern time for making propaganda. The media gives less attention on issues related to Dalits in India.

Boxer & Clover are used by Orwell to represent the proletariat, or unskilled labour class in Russia. This lower class is naturally drawn to Stalin (Napoleon) because it since as though they will benefit most from his new system. Among Dalits many common people wish for better future but they are lacking a good leader.

Farm buildings- The farms stands for the Kremlin. In the early days of the USSR there were sightseeing tours through Kremlin. Later it became the residence of Stalin. On India farms stand for such places where castism or oppression of Dalits took place.

Windmill- The windmill stand for Russian Industry that has been built by the working class. The wind mill is a symbol of concrete achievement. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar put foundation of the Republican Party of India (RPI) and tried to collect all Dalits under one political front.

Destruction of Wind mill- This destruction is symbol of the failure of the Five year Plan in Russia. Through RPI is not completed destructed but it divided in four groups. This is intellectual destruction of the party. All the symbols in the novel one not applicable. Dalits especially the Mahars who converted to Buddhism and are known as Ambedkarites formed a different place in every field.

Conclusion

> *"Oh God, We have been the victims of atrocities, you have watched impotently while these were committed,*
>
> *Now, we, the god makers, serve you with a notice,*
>
> *We tell you that your services are no longer required."*

The above poem was written in 1970 at the high point of Dalit political activism, when militant Dalit panthers brought in a new dimension of the fight against social

and official apathy." The era is long past. The Zenith of Dalit, politics, literature and intellectual debate has faded. What remains is political opportunism in the guise of leadership, a floundering culture and growing number of misdirected youth. The RPI has a potential vote bank of over 30 lacs votes in Maharashtra. Yet, the representation of its various factions in government is dismal. While the Congress, and more recently NCP have mastered the art of using RPI leaders, the Shiv sena & the BJP have not lagged behind.

Political & social consciousness among Dalits is high. A strong community bod exist for obvious reasons, but the leadership has never tried, maximized this. Buddhist values combine with determination to pursue education, have stained the community. It is early political leaders kept alive these value sadly, this is no longer the case.

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Scuffle for Freedom and Existence: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*

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Abstract

Roots and Shadows Shashi Deshpande's first full length novel is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who is a representative of the educated middle-class. It describes her assertion of her individuality to achieve freedom leading to her confrontation with her family and the male-dominated society. Feeling smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society, she attempts to explore her inner self to assert her individuality. It tells about Indu's painful self-analysis. The main theme which elevates in the novel is the sorry state of women.

At the beginning of the novel we have seen Indu, the protagonist got vexed with her family life and planned to separate from her husband in order to attain freedom. But later Indu's experiences teach her that one should listen to the voice of one's conscience and be faithful to it. Freedom within marriage is possible if one dares to do what one believes is right and tenaciously follow it. This alone can bring harmony and fulfillment in life. So this paper aims at presenting various problems that a common middle class women faces and how she has struggled to attain freedom and individuality.

Keywords: *freedom, struggle, existence,*

Full Text

Roots and Shadows, Shashi Deshpande's first full length novel, is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who is a representative of the educated middle-class. It describes her assertion of her individuality to achieve freedom leading to her confrontation with her family and the male-dominated society. Feeling smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society, she attempts to explore her inner self to assert her individuality. It tells about Indu's painful self-analysis. The main theme which elevates in the novel is the sorry state of women.

Indu, protagonist of the novel is in her quest to be dependent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu is a journalist and a writer, the novelist, seems to believe that, it is the educated and creative woman, who will liberate herself first and contribute to women's liberation, both, actively as well as through her exemplary behavior. Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in general in contemporary Indian society, passing through from the old cultural modes to the new socio-economic forces impinging effectively on the patterns of human lives. Indu is presented as a woman torn between age-old traditions individual views. Her awareness of the sanctity of the familial bonds, she restraints herself from the precipitous action of feeling from the domestic scene. Though these bonds appear to be unreasonable in the beginning gradually she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian woman. She knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties.

Indu, in *Roots and Shadows*, a middle class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka (the mother-image in the novel), discovers what her roots are—as an independent woman and a writer, and what her shadows are—as a daughter, a mother and commercial writer. She rebels against Akka, her conventional world, and her rigid value and marries Jayanth. To attain freedom, she seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage inevitable in the paternal family. She thinks by fitting herself in a new role of a wife to attain her freedom.

While looking into the novel we can understand that the disappointment of Indu towards her family life. Even after her marriage she won't attain freedom what she was expecting since her childhood. Coming to the story Indu returns to her ancestral home after a gap of eleven years, which is occasioned by her cousin Mini's marriage. She leaves home at the age of eighteen to marry the man she loves, She returns on being summoned by Akka, the domineering matriarch, as Akka is on her deathbed. Akka has made her sole heiress to her property which the others resent. Deshpande presents with vivid details a large Maharashtrian Brahmin household, and the myriad women characters, their greed, jealously, hopes, fears, disappointments, and their anguish. Among the myriad women characters is the

old tyrannical matriarch Akka. She is rich and childless, and decides to stay in her brother's house after her husband's death where she wields absolute control with her venomous tongue. It reduces Indu's grandfather Kaka into a tongue-tied, submissive character.

Akka, representative of the old order, is so obsessed with untouchability that she refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes. She is also very particular about how a girl should conduct herself in society. However Indu cannot break herself free from the clutches of tradition and realizes that despite her education and exposure, she was no different from the women that circumambulated the tulsi plant to increase their husbands' life span. Even her husband who is apparently an educated modern man is a typical Indian husband for whom she has to remain passive and submissive. All along Indu has been playing the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. From this we came to know that even after her marriage she was not happy. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. She compromises against her conscience with the values of a hypocrite society where success is counted sweetest. Had Akka not called her, she wouldn't have had time enough to think about her identity and selfhood, which she had effaced just to prove that her marriage was a success. Thus this novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and to realize her freedom. At this point it is important to determine the nature and context of the questions and issues Deshpande rises in the novel, primarily by means of the introspective analysis through which the main protagonist, Indu, passes. The relationship, family structure and the social background of the novel provide an appropriate and very credible stage upon which the action unfolds.

Thus Indu, the protagonist, is caught up in a conflict between her family and the professional roles, between individual aspiration and social demands and as a journalist she is also torn between self-expression and social stigma. The majority of characters in the novel have restricted notions of cultural identity with which their vision of political changes is burdened. In this novel we come to learn how Indu is able to free herself from the stultifying traditional constraints and achieve her individuality. For Indu it is difficult to move towards emotional growth, peace and fulfillment; she must necessarily seek within and without herself not only to look for answers but also as a first step to identify the source of her disappointment and mental turmoil. Only then can she hope to be at peace with herself and with her world. She states: *'Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself'* (6).And similarly her belief that even if the house is demolished, the feelings, the emotions, the passions which the house has sheltered would not cease to exist. These aspects of the family would keep on holding her in

spite of all assaults coming from different directions. We do get from this novel a strong sense of the ambivalence that Indu feels towards both her family and the house which has sheltered her. This brings us to the other main issues confronting her. Where does her home lie? When she was young, she left the house full of resentment and rebellion, determined to prove for her and the family that this was not her home. It is a rejection of the family in the most emphatic terms possible. This particular phase of her life gives her enough experience to know the world which exists outside the four walls. However, in the course of introspection and self- analysis she comes to realize that there is indeed a comfort in living as part of the family, whatever its level or quality, and that the house she ran away from is still the one she thinks of everyday for the first few moments. It takes her no efforts to fall into the rhythm of life at her family's house despite the number of years she has been away from it. She does also realize that her efforts at making a family, a home consisting of just Jayant and herself, are not really succeeding. Her endeavor to draw a magic circle around the two of them is meaningless because she can neither keep the world away nor can she find the happiness and contentment in just this one relationship. She discovers that a nuclear family misses out on a number of different relationships which a large family such as the one she grew up in provides. She thinks, that, maybe, her home has always been with her family. Indu's search for a home is symbolic of a deeper dissatisfaction with her marriage. She loves Jayant and to her this love means surrendering herself body and soul to him. However, she feels that Jayant is not committed to this relationship to the same degree as she is, and, understandably enough, she finds Jayant's indifference the main source of her anxiety and distress. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. So she started compromising against her conscience as she doesn't like to work for the magazine why because she felt that as a woman she doesn't have freedom and her own identity and so not capable of working for magazine.

However, Jayant does not understand the delicacy of her situation and, to the contrary, advices her to continue with her job. Besides, there is also the crucial issue of nurturing a family with children. Jayant, it is obvious, is not interested in having children, and in the course of every discussion on this topic postpones it by saying that they do not have enough resources to look after a child properly. It is true that Indu herself is ambivalent about this particular issue, for she often feels scared of the responsibility that would devolve upon her in that contingency; and still she, even if vaguely, resents this attitude of not having any child at all. Nevertheless, the very strain of maintaining a façade before Jayant on this problem in the course of their life together is emotionally exhausting. It is not at all palatable for her honest, forthright nature to continue with this pretense or any other kind of pretense for a

certain measure of time. This naturally leads to another layer of resentment and anger in her.

Yet another theme that frequently recurs in this novel is that of freedom, independence and detachment. Since her childhood Indu has rebelled against the rigid dictates of the family matriarch, Akka. She gets a taste of what society expects from a woman through the way the various people in the family try to mold her to the well- established cast of traditional household. She is made to feel like a criminal for being inquisitive and intelligent, for being willful, passionate about things and a non - conformist. Her only support is her old uncle, kaka and her aunt, Atya. However, she is too young to value their advice at that time, and so yearns for freedom. She herself says: …..But twice in my life I had thought I was free. Once when I left home as a young girl, and the second time, when, once again I left the family and returned to Jayant. Both times I found out how wrong I was. New bonds replace the old: that is all (36). In an effort to counter the pain of disillusionment, she tries to take the path of independence and detachment. However, these paths do not provide her with happiness either. She eventually realizes that what Old uncle has been trying to tell her all these years is the only solution. To find happiness in little things, finding a measure of freedom within the obligations of duty, and finding that there is no shame in being dependent on people, these are the only possible solutions to this eternal cycle. In the words of Old uncle, 'The whole world is made up of interdependent parts.

The other important consideration is the role Naren plays in her inner journey. Naren has been Indu's childhood friend, and she shares a very high level of comfort with him. Naren's is a probing personality but one which does not overtly judge Indu. Talking with him is a kind of catharsis which is indeed very important for Indu. Had she not had to face herself and her actions under Naren's influence, she would, most likely, have taken even longer to reach a stage where there is a hope for her future life. Naren does also epitomize the role of an outsider in the family. Though old uncle's grandson and thus technically a part of the family, he has been made to feel an outsider since his childhood. And by virtue of being much different from others Indu too has never felt easy belonging to the family. The relationship they share is one of allies against the family and specially Akka. As an adult Naren makes Indu realize her own desires as far as her marriage and Jayant are concerned. With Naren to compare with, she finds herself in a better position to be able to see Jayant's strengths as well as his weaknesses. She comes to realize that the fault does not lie with Jayant alone. She does also bear a responsibility towards their marriage. Her desire for detachment is also put into perspective since she sees that if she does become detached, she is likely to end up being like Naren, and she does also realize that this is not what she wants. Naren is also the person who brings to Indu's attention the fact that she has been resenting being born a woman, and not a man.

This is so because she's been trying to move out in ways that are contrary to her inner nature. Since she does not realize it earlier, the whole thing has resulted in emotional conflict and alienation.

Though she does succumb to an extra --marital affair with Naren, she feels that what the two of them have done is not love. It might be termed an infatuation, besides camaraderie and understanding, but in the final analysis that still comes up short of the love she and Jayant have. In the end, Indu does come to a piece of sorts. She realizes that her home, her destination, her point of final arrival is Jayant and Jayant alone. She needs to shed off her complexes and not let her love for him become a restrictive bond. She also needs to do away with a large part of the façade she has built up around Jayant and to inject honesty and authenticity into their relationship. She comes away with a better understanding of her family and of what is really important for a meaningful domestic life. She is on way to forgiving or at least understanding what has actually driven Akka to be the kind of woman she has been. Indu understands herself better during this period of introspection and self-analysis. She has recognized that her morals would not suffer on the altar of her profession and that she would devote herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of doing. Looking from a broader perspective, in the end the realization comes that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it, which alone can bring harmony in life.

Shashi Deshpande is not a feminist in an aggressive and militant sense, for she does not make any assault on the male or masculine world. She has been maintaining and developing a very balanced kind of vision, a vision that is positive and creative and sustaining in nature. She does not believe in any kind of visible or invisible war between the sexes, and her whole attitude rests upon the fact that home is where one starts from, and that the happiest kind of home is one which rests upon liberal or liberalized domesticity. It is this kind of domesticity that holds the key to Shashi Deshpande's image of a perfect household, and it is essentially for this very reason that Indu has been made to realize this truth after so many turns and twists in her life.

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Anita Nair's View on Feminism

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Abstract

This paper presents a view, about feminism in general and specifically rises Anita Nair's views on feminism in her writings with reference to her novel 'Ladies Coupe''. The word 'Feminism' seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. Feminism in Indian fiction has not developed suddenly but it has developed slowly and steadily. A major preoccupation in recent Indian Woman's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity, which is imposed as a patriarchal society. The theme is from childhood to womanhood, developed a society respecting women in general. Cultural clash suffered by the women swinging between two cultures has also been a prominent theme in the writings of the Indian women writers.

Anita Nair was born in Kerala. She is a famous poet, short story writer and journalist. In her writings, Anita Nair focuses on men and women relationship, marriage and divorce, social and cultural, and psychological issues. She has taken up for treatment the theme of estrangement in, marriages, issues of pre-marital and extra-marital affairs. The landmark of Nair's fiction is to focus on the inner experience of life.

Keywords: *Feminism, Feminity, feminine psyche, masculinity, protagonist,*

Full Text

Feminism and Feminity

Feminism is, indeed, a serious attempt to analyze, comprehend and clarify how and why feminity is or the feminine sensibility is different from masculinity or the masculine experience. Feminism brings into perspective the points of difference that characterize the 'feminine identity' or 'feminine psyche' or `feminity' of woman. It can be studied by taking into account the psychosomatic, social and cultural construction of feminity vis-a-vis masculinity.'

Female- 'Self'

Gayatri Spivak's words; "looking into the looking glass" has given thrust to the subject for a definition of the female 'self'. The female 'self' cannot be found in a culture where an ideal of womanhood is imposed on woman. It has to be discovered by looking inwards and speaking from within the depths of the female psyche, an endeavor that sparked off the very movement of "her story" versus "his-story," a movement that aimed at locating fissures in patriarchy and converting them into massive cracks, so that the monolith called 'patriarchy', collapses and a new consciousness emerges, nullifying irrational power structures in society. In this new order women would have a far greater role to play because then they would speak from the "unity and resonance of their physicality", "the corporeal ground of their intelligence".'

This, in essence, is the definition of the female 'self'. It is a state of being which is arrived at when the chord of existence is touched and awakened so that the 'female psyche' is receptive to all sights, sounds, smells from the world outside and the woman lives and sustains herself by the richness of the experience gained thereof. It is a historical moment and the ability to sustain this moment marks the power of a woman centered novel, a feminist novel.

The dialectics of the definition of the female 'self' in literary traditions in the western world presents a movement through three stages - "feminine, feminist, and female". These three stages sum up woman's attempt at producing texts of great artistic and aesthetic value.

Feminism in the Indian Context

Modem feminist trends in the west have moved beyond the trivial politics of equal rights and opportunities. We see that 'Feminism' or Women's liberation is a term that escapes clear definition, as it depends on the individual's, one's culture, the place one belongs to, and how far one is able to practice one's feminist ideals. In my view, Indian feminism seems to follow a middle path that stands between the

extreme radical feminist stance and the liberal, individual, socialist and cultural feminist stances.

To understand and sympathizes the sensibility of feminism it is important to observe that Indian feminist present altogether different picture sequence. The long and painful suffering of women, the bitter struggle for the exception of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's right to abortion and to practice of birth control are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality that has persisted and that woman had to fight for inspire of the commitments they were made under circumstances. Feminist situation in India possess a dissimilar dispensation. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. the several hierarchy within the family concreting age, sex and ordinal position ,congenial and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power have been maintained very strictly.

It was mainly after the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s that the contemporary feminist ideology evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern. The focus of the literary studies was shifted to women's writing with a view to re-reading, re-visioning and re-interpreting it in the light of long-existing gender bias and sexual politics in history, culture, society, family, language and literature .

Women's writing and feminist critical theory go hand in hand for the precise reason that women's writing has produced literature of aesthetic value; literature that can fulfill the twin purposes of education and pleasure. Women's writing talk, for the conservative dominions of the family, marriage, society and through an intrinsic mix of the real and the imaginative, has created an image of the 'self'. The image of the 'self' opposes the 'other' and moments of just positioning of the 'self' and the 'other', overpowering the 'other' and finally the 'self' ruling the 'other' marks the tremendous emotional development of women authored texts as well as of the gripping powerful effect these texts have on readers. Therefore, early feminist critical theory in favour of women being able to mother texts which can stand tests of time, hold much ground.

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity, which is imposed as a patriarchal society. The theme is from childhood to womanhood. Majority of the contemporary Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Kamla Das, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Anita Nair have focused on the psychological sufferings, oppressions of the frustrated unmarried woman protagonist, housewife, whose only option was to suppress the storm within, the inevitable existential dilemma of women in a male

dictated society. The neglected women as characters in their novel attempt for better way of life mentally and physically.

Cultural clash suffered by the women swinging between two cultures has also been a prominent theme in the writings of the Indian women writers - a state of 'in-betweenness' which was explored by these writers with utmost care and accuracy. They have described the apathy towards women with simple and stunning frankness. Their writings act as windows to view the unexplored 'female psyche' which is unfortunately beyond the reach of most of the male understanding.

Anita Desai, a concerned social Visionary and a keen observer of the contemporary society has tried to explore the psychological aspect of her protagonists in context to the prevailing day to day conflicts in man and women relationship.

Kamala Das is a confessional poet whose treatment of female sexuality is free from any sense of guilt happens to be the basic ingredient of her writing style. Her main theme revolved around love, its betrayal and the subsequent anger. Her frankness in relation to sexual matters expressed with dignity is remarkable. She focused on the marriage, motherhood, women's concerns to their bodies and sexual explorations in the backdrop of traditional Indian society. Das considered male as beast full of lust and ego which is instrumental in crushing the identity of women ruthlessly.

A glimpse of Das's special edge of sensuous and passionate love, total involvement and unconditional honesty for the lover is discussed in her poem "The Looking Glass"

Das's poetry provides an excellent opportunity for study of the psyche of the loveless and deprived lives of married woman who are not only deprived of freedom of expression but are also restricted to the extent of being chained within the ambit of the husband's household which is depicted in "The Old Play House".

Sex, is implied more explicitly in "Socialites Evening" by Shobha De which describes the erotic sex lives of the high society in Mumbai. De, expresses the innermost desire of wishes of modern women, the women who were brought up in conservative environments turns up as enlightened women with strong determination and freedom along with their responsibilities, where the middle class always wants to have the lifestyle of the elites.

Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel 'Roots and Shadows'. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition bound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel.

Anita Nair, the perceptive explorer of women's world especially that of Indian women, has tried to explore the psychological aspect of her protagonists in context to the prevailing day to day conflicts in man and women relationship. Nair's novels represent the contemporary modern women's struggle to define and attain an autonomous 'selfhood'. Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying, traditional constraints. The landmark of Nair's fiction is to focus on the inner experience of life.

Anita Nair's views on Feminism

Anita Nair was born in Kerala. She is a famous poet, short story writer and a novelist. In her writings, Anita Nair focuses on men and women relationship, marriage and divorce, social and cultural, and psychological issues. She has taken up for treatment the theme of estrangement in, marriages, issues of pre-marital, and extra-marital affairs, men- the sheltering- tree, curbed women's growth, and nullified her identity. She was forced to deny - 'her'- 'Self'. Patriarchy Colonized her into being the, "other". Her subaltern position deprived her of any chances of liberation. She portraits the, female- defiance, woman's- self, women-empowerment, and last but not the least what, woman does to woman, through her women characters.

As to study, Anita Nair's women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author, she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the today's world. She deals with such issues by asking fundamental questions that not only shake the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in a traditional society, but also imply the existence of an alternative reality. Put differently, her novels questions whether the role of Indian woman, as a representative of other women living under oppressive patriarchal systems, in relation to culture resistance, should be restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers. In such a world, woman's role is limited to reproduction regardless of her own desires and needs. Anita Nair has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist.

A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Anita Nair has exposed the gross gender discrimination in a male dominated society in her novels. In "Ladies Coupé' she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist, Akhila and other women characters in a male-dominated and tradition bound society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel. Anita Nair discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their

daughters and their desire to have a male child. Anita Nair enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy.

Basically, it is about protagonist Akhila and five other women she meets them during the train journey and tells how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. In the intimate atmosphere of the 'Ladies' Coupé , she meets five other women, each one of whom has a story to tell": Janaki, pampered wife and confused mother; Margaret shanti, a chemistry teacher married to the poetry of elements and an insensitive tyrant too, self-absorbed to recognize her needs and succeeds in "disciplining" her narcissistic husband; Prabha Devi, the perfect daughter and the rich submissive wife, transformed for life by a glimpse of a swimming pool, metaphorically, gives her a sense of achievement ; fourteen –year- old Sheela, whose understanding of her dying grandmother paves the way for her own future liberation with her ability to perceive what others cannot ; and Marikolanthu, whose innocence was destroyed by one night of lust - coupled with extreme poverty and class-exploitation - is, literally and metaphorically, the culmination of all other stories. "As she listens to their stories, the most private moments of their lives, she begins to wonder: "Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?" (Nair, *LC,* 2001), Seeking in them a solution to the question that has been with her all her life.

By narrating the stories of these six women, Nair moves them from a state of passivity and absence into a state of active presence, from the kitchen and the bedroom to the street and the world at large. These are the stories, which together make a single story, of women rediscovering their bodies. The *Coupé* becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from all expressions ever since the dawn of civilization, one that is not characterized by false binaries.

Anita Nair has delineated feminine sensibility, despite the fact that this delineation is chiefly expressed through the projection of the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom. Sunita Sinha says, "Nair's India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality"

Influence Dynamics: Male Repressive Force

With Anita Nair, we move into a much more middle-class ethos and the forms of male repression within the family that takes on an uglier, more obvious form. In novel after novel, marriage is shown to be an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male dominations. Anita Nair's exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension than the inner psychological world. In her novels she creates, in fact, an assortment of marriage;

women come and go, aunts, cousins, mothers, mothers-in-law, friends, acquaintances, each providing a different slant on marriage, a dozen sub-texts to the main text of a protagonist who is in search of her own life or whose marriage is collapsing. Anita Nair is a writer who can focus intensely and elaborately on a network of male repression and is concerned with making statements regarding the politics of male power and its effect on women.

Anita Nair projects Colonialism, Patriarchy, and various model of feminism in her novel 'Ladies Coupé'. The view embodied in her novels is that the same code of morality be applied to both men and women.

Since Narsi was a man he did not ask for anybody's permission to get married but decided to get married. (77). Akhila waited for Amma or her brother's to say something about her marriage but they never asked, "What about you? (77). Amma expected her to get permission from her brothers, being men to go on an office tour, "Perhaps you should ask your brothers for permission first" (150). When Akhila argued that she was their elder sister and why she should ask their permission Amma simply says, "You might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family." (150)

When Akhila boldly told Padma about her decision to live alone, she without reluctance says, "Do you think the brothers will consent to this? Do you think they'll let you live alone?"(204). When Akhila says for her defiance, "For heaven's sake, I don't need anyone's consent" (204), Padma mocked at her telling, "They are the men of the family" (204). Everyone including Padma, Narsi and Narayan were strongly rooted in the Patriarchal structure and hence were unable to bear the thought of a woman living alone.

As we read the story of Margaret Shanthi, it is obvious how women are dominated by man-power. She married Ebenezer Paulraj at her own choice. Initially, Margaret did not understand the deep rooted male 'Egoism' in Ebenezer Paulraj, as her extreme love for him had made her blind. She chose flattery as the weapon to bring down Elbe's self-esteem. She convinced herself saying, "He was Ebe, my Ebe". (109). "Ebe is simply a male chauvinist when he takes the power to ask Margaret to abort the baby off, the first baby off. Not only that, but he continued to thrust upon his supremacy over her, deciding her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing for he says, "What's the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn't suit you. Cut it off. You'll look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob" (105). Ebe was becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypo critic, when he said to the Coterie "When I think of Chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs" (130).

Oppression of Women

In Nair's novels, discords or disappointments in marital relationship drive introspection in the protagonists. They do not disregard the importance of marriage as a social institution and seek solutions to their marital problems with marriage. They seek a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They have the courage born of their being honest to themselves after an objective appraisal of their situation. They do not blame the others or their husbands for their troubles, but blame also themselves. Their desire to seek solutions to their problems leads to their temporary withdrawal from their families, followed by an objective appraisal of the whole problem. They are traditional at times in their approach as they strive to seek identity and self-realization upholding social conventions and institution. They are women who are individuals with awareness of their rights and duties; they have legitimate passions and expect an independent, autonomous existence. Their circumstances lead to their becoming mentally mature and they finally consider marital relationship as worthy of preservation.

Akhila, a forty- five –years- old spinster, who takes various roles of a daughter, sister, aunt and the provider of the family after her father's death. Though Akhila had done her duties, all that of a head of a family to her brothers and sister, she was not recognized as the real head, just because she was a woman. When Narsi her brother after graduation found jobs "Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen: Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?" (77)

Margaret Shanthi thought, "all that was good and noble about my life that he had destroyed, the baby that died even before it had a soul….there was nothing left for me to dream of and the words rose to the surface again: I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM. What am I going to do?" (131).

Marikolanthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry women on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. Even as a girl she is denied to be sent to the town school as her mother says, "It's not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself . . . . There is too much at risk" (215). To ensure her mother's fear, her childhood innocence is destroyed when Murugesan attempts physical brutality on her. When she is found 'pregnant', her mother and Sujata, regret it as they just feel it is too late to insist Murugesan to marry her. Her mother is least bothered about her feelings but worries that no one will marry her. Even when the matter is taken to the Chettiar's son Sridhar, he with little reluctance says, "The girl must have led him on and now that she is pregnant she's making up a story about rape" (245). For her mother and Sujatha, a woman's life and protection lies in her husband, as Sujata says, "But if she has a job, that will replace a husband's protection" (246).

But Marikolanthu is able to raise the question within her about the so called "Husband's protection". She is sure that neither her mother nor Sujata had their husbands look out for them, but for them, "a fulfilled woman was one who was married" (246). She defines her as an independent woman.

Anita Nair appears to believe that by not protesting and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. She, therefore, suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them from a state of captivity for several centuries. They have to free themselves from the socially constructed stereotypical images.

Anita Nair uses certain characters like Akhila's mother, to express how women are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Akhila's mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife with her own theory for she believes.

Woman's distinctiveness

Anita Nair expresses the position of woman in a patriarchal society- someone without a clear sense of purpose and without a firm sense- of her own identity. Her women characters do not place themselves in the centre of a universe of their own making, but rather are always painfully aware of the demands and needs of others. Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behavior. In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Anita Nair waves no feminist banners, launches into no militant discourses. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy.

Besides, Nair has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women's needs of the head, heart and the anatomy. Nair has ventured out of the cordon she had confined herself to and articulates the agony, pain, doubts and fears of her protagonists — male and female alike. She does not fight for justice of women at men's cost, but presents their respective limitations as spouse. The heroines of Anita Nair fight the prevalent gender stereotypes and assert their individuality.

In 'Ladies Coupé' Akhila is who happens to be the most subdued, rather crushed member of the family. Akhila is like a catalyst whose presence is never noticed, never appreciated and yet whose absence may make all the difference. Akhila is a woman lost in the jungle of her duties; sometimes for to her mother, at other times for to her brothers and still at other times for to her sister. She is expected to be an obedient daughter, affectionate and motherly sister, and everything, but an individual. As a woman, Akhila has her dreams, her desires, but when her dreams come in conflict with the comforts of her family, it is she who has to sacrifice. She lives a life designated by the society or family. On few occasions she listens to the

voice of her innermost being and then she appears a rebel. In fact, her character appears to be a continuum of nothingness and being. On this continuum, nothingness shades into her being very slowly and occasionally.

Even Virginia Woolf, was aware of the complexity of a character and therefore, she saw character as a flux and wanted to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind". Like Akhila's the other characters are also questioning the system and are "groping for their identities and their status both in the family set-up and the larger social structure"

It is pleasing to note that Anita Nair observes the uneducated, poor and rural women, like Marikolanthu, who boldly reject traditions that define their lives in dependent relationship with men more strongly than the educated and urban women reject those traditions. Through this depiction, she asserts that education can empower and liberate women only when it is aimed at changing social attitudes. In fact, in Nair's writing, the restructuring of male-female relationships that brings changes in social and interpersonal attitudes, becomes the most important basis of feminist emancipation.

Anita Nair has used the character of Karpagam to bring awareness to the society of women's demands and their need for "self – expression". Karpagam is portrayed as a strong woman striving for "self – definition" in a patriarchal social organization. She is a widow but unlike other widows she wears the kumkum and colourful clothes. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy when she says, "I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose.

Listening to the lives of various women in the Coupé' Akhila gets down at Kanyakumari as an 'Empowered woman' to rediscover her "self". The more she wants to get rid of her life she had lived for others, she desires more of her life that is more of Hari and executes her decision to get reunited, connected to him over phone. Finally she succeeds in her defiance against patriarchy. She subverts the repressive forces of patriarchal ideas that have chained her not letting to discover her "self".

Conclusion

Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. But in human civilization, they are often allocated a secondary role. However, they possess the power of endurance, affinity, love and foresight, which contributes to the happiness of others.

In conclusion, the study shows feminism is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexiest aggression. This study

reveals the growth of Indian Feminism and its development. Indian women writers have placed the problems of Indian women in general and they have proved their place in the International literature.

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Wounded Voices, Healing Words: Feminist Resistance and Recovery in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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Abstract

This article assesses Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1992) concerning its achievement of an indigenous Indian feminist discourse through the representation of sexual violence and the psychosocial processes of trauma recovery. The narrative unfolds in contemporary urban India and follows the protagonist, Urmi, as she gradually unearths and reclaims the submerged histories of female suffering. Through the testimonies of women such as Mira and Kalpana—whose injuries are both intimate and institutionally ignored—Deshpande constructs a narrative zone in which women's utterances, no matter how constellated or disjointed, are recovered, archived, and legitimised. This reading proceeds from a postcolonial feminist orientation to contend that the text not only unpacks the patriarchal formations that sustain both the infliction of violence and the enforced mutism surrounding it, but also elevates female solidarity, narrative practice, and intergenerational memory as both modes of subversion and vehicles of psychosocial rehabilitation. Integrating tenets from feminist trauma theory, subaltern studies, and Indian feminist criticism, the article situates *The Binding Vine* as a decisive contribution to a suffused feminist ethics that, while firmly anchored in the Indian milieu, privileges relational subjectivity, somatic recollection, and the restorative

retaking of vocal agency. This study argues that Deshpande's intricate portrayal of trauma subverts prevailing constructions of victimhood, reorienting the discourse toward a feminist praxis of empathy, agency, and collective healing that is firmly situated within the Indian sociocultural milieu.

Keywords: *Shashi Deshpande, Indian feminism, trauma narrative, sexual violence, postcolonial feminism, healing, resistance*

Full Text

Introduction

In postcolonial Indian literature, the convergence of gender, trauma, and modes of resistance constitutes a critical domain of feminist inquiry. Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1992) constitutes a foundational intervention that exposes the conversational void around sexual violence and the concert of sociocultural forces that sustain it. The narrative centres on Urmi, a bereaved mother and university lecturer, who, while mourning her recently departed child, becomes progressively enmeshed with the muted sorrows of other women, most prominently, Mira, a deceased poet and victim of marital rape, and Kalpana, an adolescent girl confined to a hospital ward after a ferocious sexual assault. Deshpande thereby renders trauma a generational and communal inheritance, refracted through the whisper of memory and the fracture of voice. Trauma circulates not as a discrete episode but as an ill-defined, interdependent pressure that contours the identities of the living. *The Binding Vine* thereby reframes the act of bearing witness as a collective and cumulative undertaking, binding women's fates through the double necessity of reconstruction and refusal.

The novel participates in a larger corpus of postcolonial feminist writing. However, its distinctive contribution resides in the intertwining of intimate loss and communal wound, thereby crafting a feminist ethics anchored in mutual attention, oral testimony, and narrative remembrance. Rather than replicate Western paradigms that prioritise individual purgation and the closure of the therapeutic, Deshpande embeds any discourse of healing within webs of interpersonal obligation, inherited remembrance, and collective idiom. The present essay interrogates the text's deployment of trauma and sexual violation in the service of an indigenous Indian feminist lexicon—one that forwardly contests colonial sedimentations and persistent patriarchy yet remains resolutely committed to the concrete experiences of Indian women. Leveraging a wide-ranging corpus of feminist criticism—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranjana Khanna, Meenakshi

Malhotra, and their interlocutors—the study explores how *The Binding Vine* cultivates an oppositional narrative anchored in the reclamation of register, the poetic recreation of memory, and the interlacing of solidarities. The central contention is that Deshpande's text does not merely depict trauma; it transmutes that depiction into an apparatus for feminist redress and the imaginative remaking of culture.

Literature Review

The academic conversation concerning sexual violence and trauma within Indian English literature has matured, primarily through feminist efforts to recover and make legible previously silenced voices. Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* has become a focal point for critics because of its unflinching, yet nuanced, depiction of women's corporeal and emotional suffering alongside the socio-cultural forces that enforce its concealment. Usha Bande, among others, has noted that Deshpande "situates domestic violence within the continuum of women's quotidian lives, politicising domesticity itself" (Bande 97). This strategic framing reinforces the feminist demand to examine how private injuries are inscribed with historical and ideological meaning, thereby inviting a second-order critique of marriage and family structures.

Deshpande's novel has incited reading within trauma studies, yet existing criticism typically affords the category only marginal attention. Ritu Tyagi, for example, observes that the text reveals "the inadequacy of patriarchal languages to articulate women's trauma," and that the narrative compensates through "poetic expression and fragments of memory" (Tyagi 83). The figure of Mira, whose poetry becomes the latticework on which buried wounds surface, carries this aesthetic. Concurrently, scholars such as A. Suneetha and Kalpana Kannabiran have insisted upon women's autobiographical and testimonial writing as a cornerstone of Indian feminist thought, positing that such discourses rupture hegemonic silence and facilitate a communal consciousness (Suneetha and Kannabiran 145). Deshpande's deployment of fictional testimonio, then, extends the praxis of literary counter-memory within a colonial archive that has long denied the subject of trauma a singular voice.

The text has further animated conversation within postcolonial feminist criticism. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's indictment of Western universalism insists upon an attention to the particularities of women's historical inscription (Mohanty 336). Deshpande signals an attunement to this imperative by anchoring trauma within an Indian socio-cultural substratum, thereby contesting both colonial and patriarchal reductions that efface the multiplicities of female agency. Meenakshi Malhotra contends that the novel "resists simplistic binaries of victim and perpetrator" and instead "foregrounds the ambiguities inherent in familial and

gendered relationships" (Malhotra 112). This formulation proves incisive in the reading of Urmi, who never occupies the role of the heroic rescuer, yet assumes the vital function of attentive witness and bearer of others' sorrow. Equally, Ranjana Khanna's analysis of "disposability and melancholia" in postcolonial settings illuminates Kalpana's almost spectral existence as a comatose rape survivor, whose body is rendered abject by the Military state and by the family that has already mourned the daughter she never was (Khanna 414).

Although scholars consistently affirm the text's feminist commitment, few interrogate how it participates in the slow work of articulating an indigenous feminist discourse, one anchored in resistance, in healing, and in the tenuous yet fiercely maintained ties of relational solidarity. This study intends to fill the lacuna by tracing the novel's treatment of trauma: it is presented neither as a private psychic rupture nor as an effect of the sovereign name of the state, but as a social wound that can be neither acknowledged nor sutured apart from the community's ritualized witnessing and the literary imagination that gives it shape.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis proceeds within a postcolonial feminist framework, drawing upon feminist trauma studies, subaltern theory, and the corpus of Indian feminist criticism. This configuration permits the analysis to move beyond representation of female suffering, positing the text instead as a cultural formation that deliberately cultivates a discourse of resistance and recovery anchored in Indian histories and the contingencies that those histories continue to produce.

Postcolonial feminism, developed by thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Mohanty, contests the presumption that Western feminist frameworks are universally relevant and foregrounds the historical, cultural, and colonial forces that condition women's experiences. Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" and her proposition that the subaltern woman cannot neatly "speak" within the terms of colonial discourse (Spivak 294) gains resonance in the novel's portraits of Mira and Kalpana, who are conscripted into silence by patrilineal and community imperatives. However, the text intimates that the subaltern's discursive absence does not entail her erasure; traces of her dissent—poems, private journals, or silent, charged gestures—remain latent, awaiting recovery.

Feminist trauma theory, as elaborated by Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal, affirms the constitutive role of narrative in the process of working through catastrophe. Caruth observes that trauma can never be fully assimilated at the moment of its infliction and thus returns belatedly in fragmented, disruptive surges (Caruth 5). In *The Binding Vine*, the temporal fabric is deliberately non-linear, marked by recurrent loops of memory that echo trauma's return. The events that have marked Mira, Kalpana, and Urmi can no longer be straightforwardly recalled;

instead, they circulate via mediators: Urmi listens to testimony, decodes letters, and traces the afterlife of erased voices, thus enacting a form of collective memory that honours the original displacements while reconstituting them into a tentative, incomplete narrative.

Indian feminist scholars such as Susie Tharu, K. Lalitha, and Uma Chakravarti have insisted on rescuing women's mundane, daily selves from the debris of hierarchical social systems. Their work presses Indian feminism to grapple with caste, class, language, and regional customs, and to counter both the epistemic violence of the West and the hierarchical double bind of Hindu upper-caste male power. In this context, Deshpande's depiction of Kalpana, the lower-middle-class daughter whose rape is met by maternal denial and maternal secrecy, renders visible the simultaneous workings of gender, economic status, and carefully cultivated silence.

The indigenous understanding of healing further strengthens the analytic frame as an emergent, communal, and narratively-inflected practice. In Deshpande's oeuvre, recovery is not delivered through the bounded, diagnosis-driven sessions of clinical psychology, but through the gifting of attentive listening, of "resurrecting" the past through fragments that can never promise full recovery, and of grieving that is, simultaneously, mutual. In this way, the text performs what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a "reparative reading"—a process that excavates promise and coherence from voices that have seemed to dissolve. By weaving these registers together, this study interprets *The Binding Vine* as an act of feminist counter-memory. The novel, thereby, does not merely criticise existing oppressions; it insists that literary practice itself can nourish critical reflection and cultural revitalisation.

Portrayal of Sexual Violence in *The Binding Vine*

Deshpande portrays sexual violence not as episodic spectacle but as an omnipresent strand in India's public and private textures. By alternating between Mira and Kalpana, she dislodges the discrete, courtroom-centred logic that generally governs representations of rape, revealing instead an overlapping, cumulative field of oppression in which individual acts of violation cannot be meaningfully extracted from the architectures that condense and reproduce them. Kalpana, the young and officially stigmatised survivor of gang rape, is, by social definition, the scandal, yet her singular instance of violation emerges as one of a continuum that includes Mira's muted and unqualified surrender of consent to a husband whose patriarchal right was custom itself. Decays of consent, in Deshpande's formulation, operate across and within lifetimes. Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, is thus domesticated by an idiom the society refuses to name. Marital rape is never ceremoniously tabulated as a discrete crime. However, it is

instead reactivated—authorised, rationalised, explained away—within the same domestic space that the induction of her daughter-in-law would later validate. Mira's trauma is never uttered in the first person. It arrives, instead, through hushed circulation of her notebooks and stray verses, texts the otherwise unvoiced Urmi deciphers as the geological strata beneath the face she has known. One line crystallises the stone-like compression of her violation: "I am the woman who lost herself in the circle of a man's arms…" (*The Binding Vine*). The poetic figure of the lost "I" underscores both the exterior hand that encircles and the centring loss that discredits the distinction between legally sanctioned and legally actionable consent.

The failure to explicitly name marital rape in Indian law highlights its wide cultural erasure: within marriage, a woman's consent is automatically inferred, transforming her body into a legally and ritually owned space, devoid of her agency. Rukmini Sen argues that "the refusal to legally acknowledge marital rape is a systematic repudiation of a woman's bodily autonomy within the marriage contract" (Sen 202). Against this backdrop, Deshpande's Mira, through her poems, interrogates the surrounding silence and insists that the depths of a woman's internal landscape, however solitary and unrecognised, form indispensable registers of lived trauma. Kalpana's rape, inflicted by a stranger in a moment of flagrant violence, stands as a more visible episode of sexual violation, yet it, too, is encased in denial and repression. When the mother, Shakutai, prevents the police from formally recording the crime, her concern centres on the fallout of public shame and the jeopardy it poses to marriage alliances for her younger daughter. Such a choice discloses the stubborn belief that a woman's value is indelibly tethered to the index of her sexual purity—a belief intricately interwoven with caste and patriarchal doctrines. As Urmi sardonically inquires, "Why must the shame rest solely on the woman, when it is the man who commits the crime?" (*The Binding Vine*). The question posed invites readers to consider the mechanics of rape culture in which survivors are met with reproach, erasure, and reversal of fault. The dramatic irony of Shakutai's purportedly protective maternalism—her effort to shield familial honour by burying her daughter's agony—reveals the profound absorption of misogynist imperatives by women themselves. Uma Chakravarti, in her study of the familial nexus, observes that "the family serves as both the site of women's subordination and the primary means of its reproduction" (Chakravarti 86); interpreted in this light, Shakutai's passivity cannot be judged as aberration of nurturing instinct, but rather analysed as the banal reproduction of collective subjugation. Kalpana's unconscious, speechless body incarnates the erasure inflicted by sexual violence. The hospital's antiseptic space, thick with murmurs of stigma, transforms her form into a symbol of the collective immigrant's subjugation and the social mandate that survivors' pain remain unarticulated. Ranjana

Khanna's conception of "wasted lives" and the melancholic body in the postcolonial register finds its embodiment in Kalpana, who, forfeit of both voice and redress, marks the limit of recognition in a polity that quantifies human worth in consent. (Khanna 412)

Deshpande compels us to recognise sexual violence not as sporadic outrage but as an unbroken chain that transcends both class and the generations of Indian women it binds. Mira's marriage to a husband who conceives of her as chastisement, and Kalpana's premeditated humiliation by strangers, are not variant scenes but interchangeable testimonies to the brutal uniformity with which the male-dominated order denies women both voice and claim to their bodies. Equally disturbing, the text exposes how each institution of social authority colludes, bafflement and silence substituting for condemnation. Police, medical personnel, and kin, each in their polite evasions, convert the site of outrage into a site of reproach against the victim. Such muted collusion finds its analytical correlative in the work of Menon and Bhasin, for whom the refusal to speak a woman's ordeal aloud, and the refusal to allow her to speak it, is the regime's first line of defence. *The Binding Vine* defies that silence by exposing the sacrilege of confinement to the marginal and the domestic, thus forcing a sheltered readership to acknowledge that private pain is always, already, public abjection. Deshpande's depiction of sexual violence adamantly refuses the conventional convergence of fascination and victimisation. Mira and Kalpana are not consolidated into passive icons of suffering; the text reinscribes the legitimacy of their hurt and insists that that legitimacy must be acknowledged through the labours of language, rememory, and open witness. The following section investigates the mechanics of trauma's migration through the generations, questioning how it lodges in the unsaid and how it returns, re-articulated, through unexpected and oblique modes of telling that are as often lyrical as they are narratively governed.

Narrativising Trauma and the Ethics of Testimony

In *The Binding Vine*, trauma is not enfolded within some dramatic crescendo of suffering; rather, it is never altogether over, constantly re-sutured and re-exposed as it filters through multiple membranes of memory. Deshpande's choice to withhold, rather than censor, the verbatim speech of Mira and Kalpana is neither absence nor grievance but an ethical insistence on mediation. Trauma, in this aesthetics, becomes subject to the interpretive labour of memory, quotation, and literary condensation; testimony is not the hologram of the body but the hesitant attempt to carry it. The novel thereby entails an ethics of listening, of reading, and writing: it summons those who encounter the account to approach it with an attention that is not consumption, an acknowledgement that acknowledges its distance, and a humility that refuses final restitution.

Urmi functions as a reluctant yet responsive listener who holds open the space between silence and speech. She reads Mira's poetry and attends to Shakutai's contradictory accounts with a sharpened awareness of the limits of language. She remarks: "There are no words, no language for this pain. Only silence. Or poetry" (*The Binding Vine*). This assertion compresses the novel's central contention that trauma eludes standard discourse yet may be uttered, albeit imperfectly, through poetry, memory, and the disjointed cadences of personal histories. Trauma, in Cathy Caruth's formulation, does not fully register at the instant of its infliction; instead, it returns in deferred, often opaque forms, requiring a narrative that proceeds in circular, interpretative gestures (Caruth 4). Deshpande's recourse to Mira's verse as a form of traumatic testimony embodies this poststructural account, permitting the traumatic event to be stage-managed rather than suture the wound. Mira's diary and poems, published only after her death, exemplify what Marianne Hirsch designates as "postmemory": the transmission of trauma through those who, though not present at the original event, nonetheless carry its affective burden (Hirsch 10). Urmi, in the process of deciphering these texts, occupies the position of the postmemorial witness, perpetually treading the tenuous boundary separating the recovery of memory from its violation. This mediating role draws into focus the ethics of testimony itself: in what manner can one pay homage to trauma that fundamentally eludes direct re-presentation? Deshpande deftly circumvents the danger of appropriating the victim's voice. As Gayatri Spivak cautioned in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", efforts to recover subaltern speech can inadvertently replicate the very silences they seek to contest, unless the mediating subject adopts a reflexive and ethically attuned posture (Spivak 295). Urmi, throughout the narrative, is neither hero nor all-knowing chronicler; instead, she repeatedly interrogates the validity of her readings and maintains a critical awareness of the epistemic gap that separates her from those whose histories she retrieves. Her insistence on questioning, therefore, converts into a deliberate ethical gesture, attuned to what Veena Das identifies as the "impossibility of complete translation of pain" (Das 75).

Kalpana's silence, stark and physiological, inscribes her body within a fray of competing significations. Confined to a vegetative state, she becomes a site upon which relatives, clinicians, and the media inscribe stories that proceed with little or no regard for her once-intact subjectivity. Urmi's refusal to exploit Kalpana's fate for sensational headlines or to instrumentalise her injury for partisan ends demonstrates a feminist insistence that the survivor's agency, however attenuated, be acknowledged and respected. In this light, Meenakshi Malhotra observes that "Kalpana's silence acts as a powerful counter-narrative to the hyper-visible rhetoric of victimhood" (Malhotra 118). Deshpande's analysis expands the critique to the public sphere, condemning not only the acts of corporeal violence but the

mechanisms of cultural consumption that translate female suffering into spectacle, eclipsing structural inequities by preferring the more palatable economies of pity and moral outrage.

The novel remains open to the possibility of recentering the subject toward healing. Mira's poetry, emergent from the fissures of her suffering, acts as a bridge that traverses both generational and caste boundaries. Urmi's encounter with Mira's lines prompts a reconfiguration of her emotional landscape, enabling her to reinhabit her grief for her daughter's death and to renegotiate the distance from her husband. Here, trauma shifts from a solitary wound to a communal geography, and the act of storytelling activates a slow, relational mode of repair. In consonance with trauma theorist Dori Laub, who writes, "bearing witness is not a solitary act; it is performed about an other" (Laub 70), the narrative shows that mending occurs when voices braid across dissociation. Deshpande's schema critiques and displaces dominant Western therapeutic paradigms that identify confession as the telos of recovery. In *The Binding Vine*, reparation is neither spectacle nor catharsis; it unfolds gradually, is soaked in the sediment of Baburao's village, and is energised by memory, acknowledgement, and civic solidarity. The text insists that to narrativise trauma is to engage in a dual act of poetry and politics, requiring reverent attention to that which abides beyond the reach of language, no less than to that which it can encompass.

Feminist Solidarity and Intergenerational Healing

Deshpande's exploration of trauma foregrounds the stratified, mediated, and relational constitution of both memory and recovery. By prioritising the ethics of listening and postponing the pressure to articulate injury, *The Binding Vine* advances a unique feminist model of witnessing that both deflects appropriation and compels sustained, empathetic attunement. While *The Binding Vine* indeed confronts trauma, its more profound contribution lies in its portrayal of healing and resistance as communal practices rather than as individual triumphs. The narrative advances feminist solidarity, invites empathetic listening, and foregrounds intergenerational memory. The novel deliberately sidesteps the redemptive arc of the solitary survivor; instead, it depicts recovery as a collective achievement wherein women hold, bear witness, and archive one another's stories, thereby fracturing entrenched circuits of silencing. At the narrative's core, the bond between Urmi and Mira, though mediated by time and mortality, reinforces this collective feminist arc. Urmi's engagement with Mira's poetry and private writings enables her to reconstitute a subjectivity that the performance of daughter-in-law and wife had long concealed. Gazing into that archival interior, Urmi encounters a voice that had been hushed by patriarchal script and that, once inscribed, materialises the "horizontal sisterhood of women" that Adrienne Rich

identifies as transcending chronological gaps. Mira's inability to speak her truth in life, paradoxically, fortifies Urmi in the present; her preserved utterances reorient Urmi's interior landscape and spur her emotional and political maturation.

This relational dynamic illuminates what feminist philosopher Nel Noddings terms an "ethic of care," wherein comprehension and empathy serve as the bedrock of moral obligation (Noddings 34). Urmi refrains from the impulse to "rescue" Mira or Kalpana; she listens, documents, and retains—acts that, against the background of patriarchal erasure, acquire a radical charge. In Deshpande's conception, feminist solidarity does not reside in grand abstract doctrines but in contiguous, frequently anguished, practices of attention and preservation. A further pivotal relation is that between Urmi and Shakutai, Kalpana's mother. Their exchanges frequently bristle, with Urmi embodying a liberal, educated, and middle-class sensibility, while Shakutai articulates the apprehensions of lower-middle-class respectability. However, Deshpande steadfastly resists the reduction of their conflict to a simple oppositional frame. Instead, she dissects how their divergences index wider systemic pressures. Shakutai's refusal to report the rape is informed by a palpable, actionable dread—dread of social ostracism, of the erosion of Kalpana's marriage prospects, of the family's precarious economic stability. As Uma Chakravarti and Susie Tharu contend, Indian women frequently "participate in the reproduction of patriarchal structures not out of ignorance but because of the absence of viable alternatives" (Chakravarti and Tharu 199).

Urmi and Shakutai's relationship is marked by both fracture and affinity; womanhood and loss are the narrow threads binding them. In their joint watch over Kalpana, a project marked by suspicion and necessity, they illustrate the delicate architecture of cross-class feminist solidarity in contemporary India. Deshpande refuses the temptation to depict this bond as either pure or effortless; it is, instead, marked by unresolved hierarchies and divergent interests. However, the text persuasively argues that only through such fractious entanglements can anything resembling effective resistance to patriarchal violence acquire traction. The story, further, poses healing as a relay handed from one generation to the next. Silence encircling Mira's trauma finds reluctant articulation through Urmi's reluctant empathy; Kalpana's mutilated body, voiceless in every conventional sense, becomes the occasion for exchanges that otherwise languish unuttered. Gayatri Spivak insists that the subaltern never completely disappears from the text of power; instead, the subdued body "interrupts the narratives of modernity" (Spivak 308). Deshpande's novel refuses to gloss over that rupture; it apprehends the interruption not as a vacuity to be filled, but as a wound to be borne and, in bearing, transmitted. Urmi's journey—from mourning parent and silent onlooker to advocate for the concealed suffering of other women—maps the contours of a feminist becoming open to the world. Her shifting inward landscape traces a

deliberate departure from isolated grief toward a web of relational empathy and shared moral obligation. Here, Deshpande's narrative takes the postcolonial feminist insight of Ania Loomba to heart, for it constructs a resistance that flourishes in the tender topology of affective communities rather than the solitary glow of the heroic subject (Loomba 154). The narrative closes not on tidy closure but on the bare yet eloquent promise of presence: to stand alongside, to hear even when the social order conspires to hush. This practice of sustained witness—of keeping open the space for the other's story without eclipsing it—marks what Deshpande contributes to a feminist discourse tracing its roots for India. In a public world that persistently renders women spectral, the act of being listened to, without being rewritten, mistranslated, or conscripted to silence, becomes irrefutably political. Deshpande, therefore, conceives of healing not as a reddening absence of hurt but as the patient crafting of places where hurt can circulate, endure, and be altered. Through the interstices of kinship, the cadences of verse, and the slow chores of collective memory, *The Binding Vine* articulates a feminist polity of solidarity grounded in the specific cultural and historical fabric of India.

Developing an Indigenous Indian Feminist Discourse on Healing and Resistance

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* transcends the representation of trauma and sexual violence, emerging as an active site for the articulation of an indigenous Indian feminist discourse. Rooted in culturally specific narratives, communal ethics, and modes of resistance that diverge from dominant Western paradigms, the text interrogates the gendered violence woven into Indian social fabrics. Deshpande juxtaposes oppression with strategies of narrative retrieval, mnemonic revival, and intersubjective solidarity, thereby recasting memory not as passive recall but as an ethical and resistance-laden practice. Such an intervention operates in conversation with ongoing Indian feminist debates concerning the dialectics of voice, the fracture and reconstitution of agency, and the politics that surround whose story is rendered visible on the page and in the broader socio-political arena.

The term "indigenous feminist discourse" in India emerges from an intersectional matrix that refuses any move toward universalisation. It emerges from the lived realities of caste, class, religion, language, and regional difference, and thus refuses the category "woman" as any kind of analytic, let alone a unitary subject of study. Drawing on the critique of Western feminist scholarship articulated by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, I insist that the reductive category of the "Third World woman" collapses difference and enacts a colonial gaze that appropriates rather than amplifies subaltern subjectivity. Mohanty's argument exposes the failure of Western feminisms that elide the complexity of local power

relations and thus erase the very contextual specificity from which any practical feminist politics must emerge. Deshpande's novel responds to this failure by placing its characters within fully articulated, locally situated environments: the cramped interiors of urban middle-class households, the antiseptic corridors of government hospitals, and the lightly regimented spaces of women's colleges. The text shuns grand abstraction in favour of a detailed cartography of everyday practice, situating feminist opposition in the fabric of daily life: in the quiet event of listening, the geopolitical act of remembering, the problematic practice of mourning, and the labour of writing. In doing so, the novel refuses to privilege large movements over the microphysics of power inscribed on the surface of the ordinary, and thus model the politics of resistance on forms of life rather than on grandiose anticipations of liberation.

Urmi's account emerges as a chronicle of intimate loss and encroaching political consciousness, yet it is also a deliberate reflection on the differing forces of speech and mutedness. The deaths of Mira and the long-stilled Kalpana render a dual obstacle to any explicit feminist narrative, since both women, the intended subjects of feminist testimony, are already imprisoned beyond the bounds of utterance. Nevertheless, Deshpande declines the temptation to take on a surrogate voice for either figure; instead, she privileges the act of attentive listening as the decisive feminist intervention. This stance echoes the long-held Indian feminist conviction, articulated by K. Lalitha and Susie Tharu, that testimony grounded in lived experience constitutes a legitimate and necessary form of knowledge (Tharu and Lalitha xviii).

Through this refusal to appropriate, Deshpande participates in the "politics of representation without appropriation" that Rajeswari Sunder Rajan sets forth: a polity acknowledging the spaces of silence, hesitation, and the fundamentally unknowable (Rajan 333). The ethics of a witness in *The Binding Vine* is not a project of wresting lost voices back to the surface. However, instead of clearing a situated arena for the traces those voices leave: the scattered remnants of memory, the rawness of pain, the half-formed texts of the yet inexpressible. Such a procedure undermines patriarchy's demand for mutedness. Also, it contests the tendencies within some varieties of liberal feminism that insist on clearly delineated, coherent trauma as a prerequisite for validity.

Deshpande dismisses legalistic, state-centred responses to sexual violence. Kalpana's ordeal is never recorded in an official complaint; Mira's marital violation remains unrecognised. The bodies—police, hospitals, courts—that ostensibly dispense justice appear indifferent, if not openly antagonistic. The narration, therefore, redirects attention to practices of justice enacted in everyday relations, to emotional reparation, and a collective, memorialised past. *The Binding Vine* thus

dialogues with postcolonial feminist critiques of state feminism, which show how legal interventions against sexual violence continue to serve nationalist, class, and patriarchal agendas (Menon 79).

The decision to foreground poetry as a mode of resistance is culturally loaded. Indian feminism has long recruited oral histories, autobiographies, and folk forms of verse to voice dissent. Mira's poems operate as a feminist counter-archive, safeguarding her words in a register that slips past patriarchal censors. The form's layered syntax and concentrated emotional weight enable her to articulate what remains unspeakable in legal or confessional discourses. In Alexander's formulation, "in postcolonial women's writing, poetry becomes a site of resistance to imposed identities and an act of memory against forgetting" (Alexander 23). Urmi's subsequent reading and interpretation of these poems thus becomes an act of feminist recovery, a refusal of erasure, and a rite of collective remembrance. Deshpande's compositional technique activates a decolonised feminist practice. The narrative renounces the classical trajectory of beginning, middle, and end, instead advancing through an episodic, recursively intertwining form. Trauma, rather than culminating in a neat resolution, is persistently revisited, reframed, and palimpsested across other memories of loss and affection. This non-teleological configuration realises, in Leela Gandhi's terms, an "ethics of fragility" characteristic of postcolonial literature: an ethics that emphasises the porousness of human encounter, the politics of the undecidable, and the refusal of triumphant closure (Gandhi 108).

The Binding Vine yields no redemptive blueprint. It acknowledges that recovery from violence is, by necessity, incremental, jagged, and painstaking. However, the text argues that the very act of recognition retains political force. In a society that routinely sanitises or mythologises the suffering of women, Deshpande affirms the corporeality, the socio-historical embeddedness, and the urgent right of that suffering to enter collective memory. This affirmation constitutes a decolonial feminist praxis that is not strung across mandates of outside agents but that grows—with quiet insistence—from the regimented, yet continuously renewing, labours of care, of lament, and of narrative persistence.

Conclusion

In *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande makes an enduring contribution to Indian English fiction by confronting sexual violence and trauma while simultaneously nurturing an indigenous feminist discourse oriented toward healing, resistant practice, and relational ethics. The interwoven narratives of Mira, Kalpana, and Urmi reveal the manifold faces of trauma—its muteness, its exposure, its corporeal and cultural inheritances—through a storytelling that neither sensationalises nor suppresses suffering, but rather dignifies its presence by

sustaining a formally constructed receptive space. Deshpande articulates a feminist ethics of trauma that is intimately local and quotidian. Healing is envisioned not as redemptive closure or as reform through external institutions, but as a community-based practice anchored in attentive remembering, bearing witness, and safeguarding the voices of women, even when those voices falter. Within this frame, *The Binding Vine* dissolves the oppositional categories of victim and survivor, positing a mode of feminist resistance in which fractured utterance, poetic recollection, and emotive solidarities animate collective reclamation.

Deshpande's unwavering commitment to ethical narrative practice, her deliberate refusal to privilege dominant discourses over subaltern voices, and her finely calibrated representation of gendered violence coalesce to render her fiction an indispensable locus of feminist theorisation. Grounded in postcolonial and Indian feminist critical discourses, this analysis has demonstrated that *The Binding Vine* refrains from merely cataloguing trauma; instead, it transmutes that trauma into a shared, collective language of solidarity, thereby advancing a homegrown feminist discourse that contests the double inheritance of colonial subjugation and patriarchal domination. *The Binding Vine* vindicates narrative's capacity not merely to mirror suffering but to intervene in the world by orienting that suffering toward emergent forms of collective resilience. In so doing, it presents contemporary Indian feminism with a literary practice of resistance—one that acts, listens, and persistently remembers.

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