



EXISTENTIAL AFFIRMATION OF URMILA IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE BINDING VINE

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Abstract:

The novels of Shashi Deshpande can be enjoyed from the perspective of Existentialistic theory also. This theory was the most influential in continental Europe from about 1930's to the mid-20th century. It interprets human existence in terms of its concreteness and its problematic character. (Britannica.com). Its multipronged approach in the first instance sees human existence as always particular and individual. Secondly, it pitches on the issue of existence or the mode of its being. Thirdly, its exploration yields scope for diverse possibilities from which the human being must opt for a choice and be responsible for the choices he makes. Fourthly, it posits that the possibilities, a human being is confronted with depend upon the individual's relationships with the things around him or with the circle of human beings he comes in contact with. Aim of this paper is to prove that human being's existence in the world is concrete and is also limited by or conditioned by the choices he makes.

Key Words: Existentialism, Fundamentals, Humanity, Individuality, Patriarchal, Alienation

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Existentialism is a theory which emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. According to this theory individuals are completely free, and they must take personal responsibility for them. It emphasizes action, freedom and decision as fundamentals and holds that the only way to rise above the essentially absurd condition of humanity is by exercising our personal freedom and choice. Personal experience and acting on the own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth of life. When the humans understand coldness and emptiness of the universe, they learn the practice of living existentially as a parallel process of defining who they really are and accept their unique place in the world. Shashi Deshpande's heroines are the embodiment of this theory who always try to attain individuality and self-worth. According to Shashi

Deshpande's heroines the search for self is a never-ending process.

Siuli exposes the importance of both existentialism and alienation of human life and how do these work and grasp the loneliness and pensive moods of human beings unknowingly. Shantanu Siuli in his article, "Existentialism and stark note of alienation in Modern Literature-a detailed analysis in terms of Post Modern Literature" states that "Man has no reality if he unthinkingly follows social law or convention suffering anguish and despair in his loneliness; he may nevertheless become what he wishes by the exercise of free will" (2). Existentialists feel that reason is inadequate to understand the enigma of the universe; they are cautious that anguish is a universal phenomenon and also believe that morality has validity only when there is positive participation.



Search for personal meaning

Each and every living being on this earth is struggling for existence. They struggle to affirm their existence through various methods. The exploration of moral and psycho dilemmas and repercussions of the women characters of Shashi Deshpande provide them success only after the hard struggle for existence. They never accept secondary position as their fate. The crisis of value adaptation and attachment with the family and society pulls them down. Shashi Deshpande seems to grapple with the identity crisis of the Indian women. She always deals with the middle class Indian woman who struggles to emerge out of the cocoon of self-pity, to spread her wings of self-confidence. For many centuries the Indian women have been the silent sufferers. Playing multi-tasking roles – as a wives, mothers, sisters and daughter, they have never been able to claim their own individuality.

The heroines of Shashi Deshpande strive to obtain autonomy through which they try to realize their immense potentialities for action and self-actualization. Traditional images of women essentially affirm the subjugated status of women, but Shashi Deshpande categorically tries to establish that woman is endowed with inherent potential to recognize her feminine and to assert her inward powers as individual. Her protagonists obviously venture to discover their self-identity Elaine Showalter calls it, “the female phase” which is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward, freed from the dependence of opposition and a search for identity” (Showalter – *A literature of their own*). She explores and reveals the long smothered wait of the fragmented psyche of her female protagonists imprisoned within the shades of domesticity, drifting between tradition and modernity. In spite of her concern

with the traditional position of women, she portrays them as living individuals, struggling and endeavoring to make spaces of their own in the existing social order. Shashi Deshpande depicts the anxiety of the educated independent middle class Indian women who search for a balance between their familial bonds and their self-identities in a predominantly patriarchal society.

Shashi Deshpande tries to establish that in the scheme of things, women are not weak and insensitive. A woman can recognize her energy to resist the forces which are hostile to herself respect and freedom. Shashi Deshpande is one of those sensitive thinkers who perceive the various dimensions of human experiences. She tries to establish serious conclusions about the plight of individuals against the unbearable conventions of the society. She desperately admits that for a woman there is no respectable criterion of moral values. Shashi Deshpande, in spite of her indignation at the humiliation of womanhood, never encourages the cult of “withdrawal” and “complain” but develops the aesthetics of self-assertiveness for self-pervasion.

The novel ‘The Binding Vine’ was published in 1993 which is basically concerned with the obsession of a young mother Urmila who is the chief narrator in the novel. She appears as an agonized mother craving for the loss of her own daughter. Urmila is a lecturer in a college by profession. The untimely death of her daughter, Anu comes as a serious shock to the maternal sensibility of Urmila. A sense of guilt grips her conscience after Anu’s death. The idea of personal happiness without Anu becomes a betrayal for her. Beneath the anguish of lost motherhood of Urmila, Shashi Deshpande reflects on the issue of undesirable and torturous sexual relationship, the apathy of society, the horrors of rape and the hollowness of the institution of marriage. Urmila articulates the voice of other



women characters who lead invisible existence in the shadows of shame and silence. Shashi Deshpande controls the narrative seeking a balance of past and present revealing the predicament of the women representing three generations and three destitute classes. Urmi is herself a victim of personal loss but she analyses her loss in the background of the life condition of two women of her own family, Mira her own mother-in-law and Kalpana an unfortunate teenage girl who becomes the victim of rape. Present is represented by Urmi but the past echoes in the silence of Mira and future is focused in the suffering of Kalpana. There is an extension of Shashi Deshpande's vision, asserting that woman is expected to register her voice of protest to shatter the bondages of patriarchal conversions. Shashi Deshpande admits that maternal instincts are invariably integrated in feminine sensibility and to impose them as societal obligation is undesirable and irrational. Urmila is endowed with excessive love for her lost daughter but she is not ready to bear the sight of humiliation of human in the name of feminine virtues. Urmi believes that women have rights over their body and that cannot be violated even in marriage. Urmi tries to find out common grounds of justification in the suffering of Mira, her mother-in-law and Kalpana the rape victim. In order to reveal her vision at a common point Shashi Deshpande brings two generations together. Mira who suffers out of bridal veil tries to affirm her existence through her poems. The imaginative perception revealed in the poetry of Mira becomes the reality of the life of Kalpana. In most of her poems, Mira exhibits her strong aversion against the sexual relationship with her husband. When physical violence occurs in the life of a young girl, it is treated as a shame but when the same thing is forced upon her in the name of marriage; it is acknowledged as the fulfillment of life. Mira's

poem clearly exhibits her hatred towards conjugal life. In one of her poems she says:

“Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something why don't you speak to me? What shall I talk about, I ask him stupidly. “What did you do today? Where did you go? What have you been thinking about all evening and so he goes on dragging my day, my whole self out of me. But I have my defenses; I give him the facts nothing more, never my feelings. And so it begins 'please' he says, 'please I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. What is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't they leave me alone? (p-66- 67).

For Shashi Deshpande, the forced sexual relationships without the emotional involvement are nothing but 'rape' though it is within or beyond marital relationship. The sexual violence against women is a method of taming woman into passivity. Urmi shares the anguish of both Mira and Kalpana.

Each and every female character in *The Binding Vine* is endowed with a never ending fighting quality irrespective of their generation and status. All of them struggle and fight for their existence and none accepts their life as it is. The protagonist Urmi struggles to overcome her sadness of her daughter's death through all means. Her motherhood sensibility doesn't allow her to lead a normal life after her daughter Anu's death. She suffers the turmoil out of grief and inability but never gives up. Even when her brother tries to console her after her hysteric behavior she asks him to give her some time to recover from sadness. She never thinks of surrendering her to the clutches of grief. The novel opens with the confident words



of Urmi which exhibits her determined mind when she says,

'That's why they want Kishore to be here – to pick up the bits and pieces. And put them together again? All the kings' horses and all the kings' men could not put Humpty – Dumpty together again. What's broken can't be mended. But I am not broken; I am not going to break....were connected to our physical selves by the fragile thread snaps that it's all over. That hasn't happened to me, not as yet. I want to live. And I won't break down; I am in full control of myself.' (19-20)

People around her expected her to cry, 'become hysterical and behave like those who

"No I must reject these memories, I have to conquest them. This is one battle I have to win if am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray. But to go on living like this is to wrong the living Karthick above all, Karthick who watches me so anxiously, so fearfully. I cannot wrong him. I must let Anu go." (21).

The novel 'The Binding Vine,' is a bold attempt of the novelist to portray the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape. Urmila is completely a different version from the earlier female protagonists. The early protagonists like Saritha, Jaya and Indu fight for themselves while Urmi tries to help other women and fight for them. As an upper middle-class career woman, she is highly sensitive to the suffering of other women. Urmila does not want to leave that person who has wronged Kalpana. In spite of the bitter fact the victim's mother wishes for the death of her daughter in order to avoid social scandal, Urmila decides to fight for her. In her attempt to find solace out of grief Urmi is drawn into the lives of three women of different character. But all have the similar never ending fighting attitude who all never accepts their life as it is and struggle for their existence.

beat at their breasts and tear their hair in their grief (96). Of course, Urmi is depressed and an emptiness is engulfing her but she knows how to control her emotions. She is in anguish, which leads to an attack of asthma, leaving her breathless. Her struggling for breath is enough for everyone to decide that she is unbearable. But Urmi is tough. She is a new woman who is emotionally and intellectually balanced. Shashi Deshpande's women are realistic and aware of the inevitability of life and death. Women who are provoked to the extent of becoming hysterical are thought to be weak. Her women are strong. Women in the middle class milieu are tough as they experience both joys and sorrows simultaneously. They also know that nothing is too prolonged as life changes quickly. Urmi's fighting quality with which she tries to compromise is revealed through her words:

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