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THE BINDING VINE BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

SANJANA SHAMSHERY

Email:sanjanashamshery@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

The Binding Vine by Shashi Deshpande is stylized on the various experiences of the heroine -Urmila, who lost her child accidentally. She comes across a diary of her mother -in-law, who seemed to have undergone the trauma of rape. But her husband is skeptical about the outcome of publishing this diary. Simultaneously, Urmila comes across the trauma of a young girl Kalpana, who is brutally raped by her own relative. She resultantly slips in to coma. The trauma of these two women, placed in different time zones, makes Urmila review her personal loss in a different light and she is able to cope up with the tragedy. She restores her inner harmony to a considerable extent. Mira and Kalpana had no chance to retrieve their lost selves but Urmila is lucky enough to repair her fractured self by the end of the novel.

Key words: Mental journey, rape, love, Redemptive power, tranquil, sheet anchor

We all of us grow up with an idea of ourselves, an image rather, and spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to it.¹

The novel *The Binding Vine* (1993) by Shashi Deshpande opens up highlighting the idea that our 'self' in childhood adumbrates the pattern of our future lives. The novel is stylized on the sequence of events that figured in the life of the woman protagonist Urmila, and her reactions to it. In this novel, the distance traversed in external time or space is severely limited, roughly some four months, but the distance covered emotionally denotes the 'loss' and 'gain' of the 'self' of the protagonist. The mental journey leaves the reader exhausted and distraught. The narrator-heroine, Urmila, who over the years, has lived with an image of herself as a 'smart' and 'competent' person, finds it shattered one day when her baby girl, Anu, expires suddenly:

Between the girl who lives in that room and the woman who has lost her child, there is a chasm so deep it seems to me it can never be bridged. Yet that was me and this is me too -- I cannot get away from that (p.97)

The dawning on her of the harsh awareness of her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, having been a victim of rape (through her poems) and the sufferings of a young girl, Kalpana (also a rape-victim), make her realize in retrospect that her own lot has been better than theirs. Analysing the theme of rape discussed so decorously in this novel, Laeeq Futehally, comments as follows:

there are no dreadful, explicit scenes. The subject is written about with delicacy, sophistication, strength and percipience. Ms. Deshpande has the ability to be direct and decorous at the same time.²

Urmila's initial grief, which has undermined her adroitness and vivacity, attenuates seeing the sufferings of Mira and Kalpana, and she again respects herself as a woman having guts. Simultaneously, she discovers the redemptive powers of love, which is the panacea of all the ills in human relations. The coverage page noting of *The Binding Vine* runs thus :

--- in this web of loss and despair area the glimmerings of hope. Shashi Deshpande explores with acuity and compassion the redemptive powers of love.³

The emotions of love and cruelty are balanced in this novel, but towards the end the scales tilt in favour of love :

The most important need is to love. From the movement of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor, (p.137).

Though there are many points of commonality between Arun Joshi and Shashi Deshpande, their characters are based on real life rather than on Utopian wishful thinking. They grow up with the story. Like Joshi's characters, Deshpande's characters (such as Urmila in *The Binding Vine*) undoubtedly are plagued with a deep sense of frustration and depression, but they eventually emerge victorious. Adele King thinks that Deshpande's characters are quite ironic and pose "questions for which there is no clearcut answer"⁴

The lucidity and transparency of the language, in the beginning of the novel never allows the reader to peep into the deep philosophy of 'self' underlying it. The events recur in the narrator's memory, in a spiraling time sequence. The reader finds himself enmeshed unaware in the cobweb of philosophical logistics . The novel starts simply with an argument between the two friends, Urmila, the female protagonist, and her friend Vanna. The latter is trying to console Urmila, who is stricken with immense grief over the untimely death of her just one year-old child Anusha. She often remembers her :

I wanted so much for Anu now it's all gone, there's nothing left of all my hopes for her. We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons we want to give them the world we dreamt for ourselves (p.124).

Urmila is inconsolable, since for her "to forget is to betray"

There can be no vaulting over time. We have to walk every step of the way, however difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing. And I have no desire to leap into the future, either to project myself into a time when all this pain will be a thing of the past, healed and forgotten. This pain is all that's left to me of Anu. Without it there will be nothing left to me of her: I will lose her entirely. (p.9).

In her attempt to divert Urmila, Vanna reminds her of her childhood days in Ranidurg, where she lived with her grand-parents. Memories of her days as a child cascaded down with a rush on Urmila and her memories enable her to face the future with will-power and courage. In this connection, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan opines: "The human self is able to save the past, bind it with the present, and face the future".⁵

Here Urmila presents a contrast to the thought-process of the female protagonist Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry. The Peacock* (1963). While for Urmila, old memories are a soothing diversion from the complexities of real life; for Maya the memories of herself in her father's house work as an insulator cutting her off from the mainstream of life. She is "twisted away from tomorrow". Maya is not able to face the facts of her harsh life; therefore, she is always steeped in the past. But for Urmila, her memories of the past impart her strength to fight the intricacies of hard real life.

In spite of the fact that she has lost hope entirely, Urmila tries to put a bold face in front of the difficult situation that has cropped up due to Anu's death :

---That is what haunts me now, the smell of hopelessness. I've lost hope entirely; I used it all up in that one day and night of frenzied hoping and there's nothing left. But hope is a fragile support anyway on which to rest the whole of your life. I can do without it. I'll have to do without it. I have to

live with the knowledge that it is real, that Anu's gone, that she will never return. It's cruel to leave the dead behind and go on but we have no choice we have to let them go. (p. 21).

Urmi even bangs her head on the wall in an attempt to realize whether she still has the capacity to 'feel' or whether it is lost with the departure of Anu. Her mother Akka, her brother Amrut and her friend Vanna: all try to create a facade of normality for Urmi, but as John Kennedy comments "... let us remember that our environment is not our immediate surroundings . It is more mental than physical."⁶ Their routine life seems to be limping back to the normal. All of them see a movie on the Video. But Urmila's deep sense of frustration and depression lingers on. To Urmi, "happiness, after a time of sorrow, seems like another country, distant and unreal", (p.41). When she is trying to put together the disjointed bits of her broken 'self' after the tragedy that has befallen her, she comes across the poetry of her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, who was also trying to restore her 'self' as reflected therein. S. Indira writes that Urmila gets attracted towards Mira's poetry because she "senses a message being deciphered like a message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell".⁷

At her first encounter with Mira's poetry, Urmila reacts thus: "As if in opening the book, we had released a genie; she came alive, she was suddenly all about us", (p. 43). Mira's diaries were not a daily account of the routine life but like her poems, they were the source of 'communion with herself (p.51). While Urmila's grief is eating like a canker into the vitals of her being Mira's 'self' was slipping away from her due to the continuous cruelty committed upon her by her own husband as Urmila realized through Mira's poetry and diaries. She was subjected to rape in marriage. Indira Nityanandam comments in this context thus:

The Binding Vine deals simultaneously with another aspect of rape which is generally not discussed or even accepted as being a problem-- rape in marriage.⁸

Mira poetically articulated her feelings when she wrote in the following manner :

But tell me, Friend, did Luxmi too,
Twist brocade tassels round her fingers.
And tremble, fearing the coming
Of the dark-clouded, engulfing night ? (p.56).

Mira was just eighteen when she tied in a nuptial knot with a man she had always abhorred. The first thing she had to sacrifice at the altar of her marriage was her name :

Nirmala, they call, I stand statue still.
Do you build the new without razing the old ?
A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold
Can they make me Nirmala ? I am Mira. (p.101).

Lakshmi Holmstrom regards Meera's poetry as the *tour de force* of the novel, and writes applaudingly in this context :

...they (Mira's poems) suggest a development starting from the exuberant 'set pieces' which as a teenager Mira sent in to college magazine, they chart her loneliness and despair through the much more intense and personal poems of her married years.⁹

Though Mrs. Deshpande feels embarrassed at being labelled as a 'feminist', her novels candidly highlight the feminist tendencies because "one of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not appendage of man. A woman is not the 'other', she is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation"¹⁰ Mira's husband is cruel in trying to possess a human being against her will. Thus, Mrs. Deshpande elaborates the idea of cruelty through her protagonist : "Do you think you have to use physical violence to be brutal ? Even to force your will on another is to be brutal", (p. 133). Besides this mental violence, Mira's husband uses physical force

to possess her every night. Mira always tries to resist him, but each night he drags her 'self out of her. His verbal refrains of 'I Love You' soon turn into physical act of sex. This has made 'love' a 'terrible thing' to Mira. On the other hand, 'love' is a source of 'immense strength' to Urmila. Conveying the western reader's sense of awe at the submissive tendency of an average Indian woman, Adele King comments :

The non-Indian reader is perhaps surprised both by the submissiveness of many of the women... and by the strength of the modern generation who refuse to be treated as victims.¹¹

Gradually and painfully Urmila comes to the concluding parts of Mira's poetry. Urmila guesses that in the last months of her life, Mira was happy and 'tranquil' and so she had not to put in writing her misery. She was feeling happy at the thought of a life growing inside her womb. She was expecting a child:

Tiny fish swimming in the ocean of my womb

My body thrills to you:

Churning the ocean, shaking distant shores.

You will emerge one day.

Desire, says Buddha, is cause of grief ;

but how escape this cord,

this binding vine of love? Fear lies coiled within

this womb-piercing joy. (pp. 136-137).

These last lines of Mira's poetry (because after some months she died in childbirth) play a vital role in the novel; since they've gone into the making of the title of this novel-- *The Binding Vine*. These lines help Urmila to complete the incomplete 'crossword' of Mira's life. As Urmila reads her last lines, she reacts thus :

I know the feeling when I read this poem, I feel I have found the word which will help me to solve the rest of the crossword. ...Now, with this poem, Mira has cleared my emotional life, swept away the confusing tangle of cobwebs, (p. 137).

Urmila concludes that Mira who hated 'love' initially had eventually affirmed the power of love. She has realized by now that in this 'strange world', love is the sheet anchor of our lives and existence. But there is a tinge of fear underlying it since love makes you vulnerable. This corresponds to the following view : "If we learn to take Life as an adventure- as a game-- as a risky but enjoyable sport, we can largely eliminate *Fear*"¹² . Thus, Mira's poetry has infused a ray of hope and cheer in the murky recesses of Urmila's mind.

While Urmila is reading through Mira's agony, she comes across another case of rape. Somewhere a poor girl named Kalpana has also become a victim of this abuse. There is a marked similarity between the condition of Kalpana and that of Mira because both have been the victims of rape and physical abuse at the hands of menfolk. The identity of their common agony binds them together. Discussing rape as a social problem Laeeq Futehally remarks as follows :

Mrs. Deshpande weaves a skillful story exposing to us most of the major disabilities which are the lot of Indian Women of all classes.¹³

And again :

We find that in the space of a short novel, she has managed to say everything that could be said about the position of women in India.¹⁴

While Mira was raped by her own husband, Kalpana's modesty is outraged by one of her close relatives, as we come to know towards the end of the novel. The hidden entity of Kalpana's rapist imparts a touch of mystery to the novel till the very end. Another difference between Mira's and Kalpana's rape is that Mira was

not as badly mauled by the rapist as Kalpana is for Kalpana goes into coma after the brutal mishap. Dr. Bhasker, who has examined her, explains her pitiable physical condition thus :

You could see the marks of fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs-- he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips-bitten and chewed. (p. 88)

After the barbaric incident, Kalpana's 'self' vanishes into nullity, as she loses her consciousness forever. While the members of Mira's family remained isolated from her trauma (since Mira never told anyone about it), Kalpana's rape besides affecting her own 'self' draws others around her into the vortex of her misery and travail. Kalpana's mother, who has done all kinds of chores for a better upbringing for Kalpana are dashed to the ground. Sulu (the real sister of Kalpana's mother) is another person whose life stands wrecked and ruined due to this mishap. Sulu, who has acted as a submissive and docile wife all these years for her ever-commanding husband, one day comes to know that her own husband is the rapist of her dearest niece, Kalpana. She can't bear the trauma of the fact and commits suicide by immolating herself. Thus, Kalpana's rape has disturbed the 'inner rhythms' of three women altogether- Sakutai (Kalpana's mother), Sulu and Kalpana herself.

The hapless lives of Mira and Kalpana prove that Urmila has a better lot in her life. Her pangs of separation from her departed daughter, which are eating into her 'self' lessen considerably on knowing the agony of these women folk. Urmila realises that She cannot sit lamenting over her baby's death and that she must act according to the circumstances, and thus Urmila is able to restore her 'self' at long last. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarks: "It is the essence of self-conscious intelligence to look before and after and vary action according to circumstances".¹⁵ Urmila tells her friend Vanna :

...There's been a voice inside me saying, "Urmila's so smart, so competent".

After Anu died, the voice stopped. Then I saw Kalpana, I met Shakutai, I read Mira's diary, her poems, And I've begun to think yes, I've managed, but I've been lucky, that's all. (p.174).

Urmila has better luck and opportunities to restore the broken harmony of her 'inner being' than many other women like Kalpana and Mira who never have a chance to retrieve their lost 'selves'. While Mira was tied in a conjugal knot with a stranger, Urmila is lucky enough to marry the man of her liking. Comparing herself with Mira, Urmila discovers :

It seems appalling to me when I think of the choices of my own life, of its freedom. Cloistered in a home, living with a man she [Mira] could not love, surrounded by people she had nothing in common with how did she go on ? (p.127).

Ever since her childhood, she has been familiar with the family of Kishore her husband, and it is very much like her own family. Kishore's sister, Vanna, is her most intimate friend and Kishore's step-mother, Akka, is very sympathetic towards her. So, she never feels a stranger in her in-law's house as Mira did. Unlike Mira, Urmila is never buckled under her husband's wishes. Even on her very 'first night' with Kishore, she walks out of her room without saying a word to her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, just to show her husband that she is not a slave to his wishes and social bonds. Taking an overall view of the marital relations of the heroines of Mrs. Deshpande, P. Ramamoorthi writes thus :

---When husbands began to kill the very roots of their existence, they defied their husbands and found a way of their own, rejecting all over-riding influences.¹⁶

Though sometimes Urmila also want to submit like Vanna (who never says 'No' to her husband), she resists herself because she knows that if she "walks the way of submission" she will "walk that way forever" (p.82). Unlike Mira, Urmila is not dependent financially on her husband; she is a teacher and hopes to start her Ph.D. very soon.

Analysing the theme of marriage in Deshpande's novel, Indra Nityanandam writes :

Deshpande shows a more positive attitude towards marriage in this novel than she did in the first three.¹⁷

Urmila is very happy and well-satisfied with her marriage. She has got an understanding husband. Her strong marital bond enables her to turn down Bhaskar's overtures-- a decision which cannot be taken so firmly by Deshpande's earlier protagonists like Jaya and Indu. Kishore's love is her 'blade of grass' which she uses against Bhaskar, as Sita used it against Ravana to keep him at bay. Deshpande's previous heroines succumbed to their extra marital affairs (Saru with Boozie in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Indu with Jayant in *Roots and Shadows*) to fill up the void created by their own unsatisfied sexual relationship with their husbands. In fact, their extra-marital sex is an act to ascertain their individuality in this world. Since Urmila is a woman with 'self' she need not take recourse to any such act of sexual infidelity (which Urmila could have done with Bhaskar if she had been 'vulnerable' like Saru, Indu, Jaya). She has realized that the only way 'to come to terms' with sexuality is to "recognize it" (p. 165).

Urmila is a woman of some mettle. Her brother praises her in the following manner :

People seeing us together always think I'm the tough guy and you're my delicate sister; they little know it's the other way round, (p.22).

Sometimes he refers to Urmila as a 'complex female' and a 'bossy female'. She never shies away from the hardships of life. She often thinks, "I'll cross the bridge when I come to it" (p.175). Urmila dares to think of publishing her own posthumous mother-in-law's poetry, knowing well that it will tarnish the social image of her husband's family. Her adventurous spirit helps her to take the case of Kalpana's rape to the media, despite the knowledge that it will affect the social reputation of Shakutai's poor family. But her daring efforts are fruitful because the publicity given to Kalpana by media results in the investigation into the case without shifting Kalpana to a suburban hospital. And a hectic search for the culprit is made by the administration. When Vanna feels irked with Urmi for raking up Mira's pathetic past; Urmila, acting like a messiah for the female species, answers in the following manner :

They (women like Mira and Kalpana) never had a chance. It is not fair, it's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it- what happened to them-under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace, (p.174).

The same Urmila, who is so pragmatic, outspoken and matter- of- fact throughout, feels run down by the untimely demise of her one-year- old daughter, Anu. Urmila suffers from bouts of asthma off and on while struggling with her grief, but she tries hard to keep a strong hold on her zest for life :

We're connected to our physical selves by the fragile thread of our wills. It's only when the 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'm in full control of myself, (p.20) .

Speaking about the mammoth effort one has to put in for the wholeness of one's 'self', Dr. S. Radhakrishnan comments as follows:

A true self comes into being as the result of continuous effort and the same effort is needed to hold it together and ensure its maintenance, for the danger of disintegration is always present.¹⁸

Though Urmi is trying badly to integrate her 'self' she is not able to cope with her immediate environment due to the hurting memories of her dead child. She rushes into fury when her own mother tries to put a picture of Anu on the wall. Urmi doesn't want Anu to be put 'among the dead', who are no longer part of this world. Time, Urmi hopes, is the only remedy of her sorrow, but it is Anu, who would not let her 'go'. She comes to her 'over and over again'. She has 'hallucinations' at times. Time consciousness poses a danger to the growth of her true 'self'.

For the first time, it is Akka (Kishore's stepmother) who comes to the rescue of Urmi and is able to bring about a sea-change in her thought-process. She tries to inject sanity and balance into Urmila's life, and warns

her in the following manner: "You can't hold on to your grief that way, you have to let it go, Only then our dead stay with us", (p. 155).

As soon as the truth of this eternal reality dawns upon Urmila, the herculean burden of her lingering grief crashes with a thud, greatly relieving her depressed soul. She then thinks as under :

Yes, Akka is right, our dead are always with us. I have tried not to be snagged to the past, to leave it behind and go on.

Anu will always be with me. The link between us stays vibrant, alive. A kind of comforting warmth suffuses me at the thought thawing the chill that has been with me since Anu died. (p. 155).

Urmila now feels off-loaded, and her slowly corroding 'self' starts recouping itself. At the same time, the scars of grief, which have been dissipating her 'self' so long, get healed up, and she starts seeking justice for all the cruelties inflicted on Mira and Kalpana.

Thus, Deshpande deftly works out the stories of three women characters--Mira, Kalpana and Urmila through Urmila herself. Acknowledging the superiority of *The Binding Vine* in plot- construction over Deshpande's previous novels, i.e.. *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Lakshmi comments that her earlier novels are "novels of memory and recovery, moving back and forth thematically rather than chronologically, gradually bringing to light one incident after another, until the entire book is revealed. . . But in *The Binding Vine*, the individual 'plots' are more strongly developed, with different emphases at different times on the sharply particularized portraits of the three protagonists"¹⁹. S. Indira also comments in this context as follows:

With a new understanding of life and relationships, Urmila realizes that with all the betrayals and cruelty, life is worth-living as there are flashes of love, concern, understanding and reconciliation that brighten it. The bonds thus help us to continue with life, the greatest gift to mankind.²⁰

Towards the end of the novel, Urmila realises that it is 'love that absolves us from being cruel'. She finds that love and cruelty, two concurrent human emotions, are always playing upon each other. For example, her father who loved her mother so much was callous in sending Urmila away to Randurg with her grandparents, thus separating a mother from her child. Shakutai is also unkind to Kalpana for holding her accountable for her own rape. Nevertheless, she loves Kalpana and wishes her to enjoy a better life than her own Urmila herself is sometimes rude to her mother and her husband despite the fact that she loves them deeply. Brooding over this paradoxical nature (containing the emotions of love and cruelty simultaneously) of homo-sapiens, Urmila thinks :

Perhaps it is this, the divide in ourselves, that is the great divide. Perhaps it is this divide in ourselves that's the hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with (p.201).

In her final assessment, at the end of the novel, Urmila finds out that only 'the spring of life', i.e. love, acts as a bulwark against the impulse of cruelty in human beings. According to her, 'love' is the 'anchor' of human personality, sustenance, and existence, a type of redemptive force. The novel lands on the same plane of simplicity from where it took off. It had started with a dialogue between the two friends, and it ends with the simplest lines ever written :

This is how it is for most of us most of the time; we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is to survive. Mira realized that, (p. 203).

Dr. Taisha Abraham feels that the ending of this novel is a little 'disappointing'. She would like to 'imagine that by using fragments of lamentations from Mira's poetry and the sordid story of Kalpana Deshpande was cumulatively building up a sharper awareness in her characters against an unjust system, but this is not so. The novel ends with Urmi racing through her household chores hiding under the daily routine of living".²¹ This is, however, the general trend of life with most of the middle class Indian women. They cannot disturb the

harmony of their family life at any cost, though sometimes they could offer a helping hand to the less fortunate of their class.

Besides, the theme of mother-daughter relationship (which is strained in most of her novels) is also discussed in this novel. Mothers seem to fail the daughters. Urmila always blames her mother for sending her to Ranidurg to the grandparents, till she discovers the reason behind this act. Mira, as a girl, never wanted to repeat her mother's 'history', but after her marriage she also became her mother's 'shadow'. Shakautai, Kalpana's mother, wants a better lot for her than her own but she hates Kalpana's fashionable nature, since it lures menfolk. Shakutai's fears turn into reality when Kalpana is raped by a close relative of her own. Vanna (a close friend and sister-in-law of Urmila) is always at war with her daughters, who do not want their mother to work. Urmila also plans a freedom of choice for her daughter Anusha, but she dies untimely. While the heroines of Deshpande's novels accuse their mothers for their unhappy state, as mothers themselves they totally shun all the myths and emotions connected with motherhood. Urmila opines that it is the male-dominated society that "brainwashes us into this motherhood thing. They make it seem so mystical and emotional when the truth is that it's all just a myth", (p.76).

Deshpande also keenly observes the tension between sisters or cousins. Their relations are marked with "a shame at being too close, too much alike", (p.79).

The reader feels as if he has been on a tiring emotional journey. The novel reflects the writer, living fully up to the yardstick set out in the lines below :

...he/she [the writer] must have the gift of guessing and retracing the life experiences of other people, the gift of grasping the image of other souls in his/her own soul. To achieve it, some clues must, however, be sufficient to him/her. The novelist must be able to retrace, a personality from some gestures alone, the same as the paleontologist is able to reconstitute an animal, which has disappeared, from a few bones. Those are what we call the writer's intuitions.²²

'Nostros', the Greek word meaning 'returning home'; which may be applied to Mrs. Deshpande's earlier novels like *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence* in which the heroines make an escape to their parental home in order to seek for their lost selves, cannot be applied to this particular latest novel because Urmila, the female protagonist, searches for her 'self' amidst the hubbub of her hectic daily schedule. It seems, the writing-skills of Mrs. Deshpande have developed to maturity, and accordingly her heroine Urmila has also become mature enough to handle her routine rut and search for herself simultaneously. Moreover, the heroine of *The Binding Vine* successfully arrests the demolition of her 'self' in the earliest possible stages. While the deep remorse on the death of her baby girl is sure to split Urmi into pieces, she tries her best to look into and eradicate the miseries of Mira and Kalpana. The magnitude of their respective miseries belittles Urmila's own sorrow, thus saving her from losing her own 'self'. All this shows that Mrs. Deshpande's latest novel is certainly an advancement upon her earlier novels. In this context, Lakshmi Holmstrom, a writer, editor and IRB correspondent in the U.K. reviewing the novel, comments thus :

The canvas of *The Binding Vine* is broader than that of Shashi Deshpande's previous novels. For although neither woman in complete without the larger context of the extended family, *That Long Silence* is essentially Jaya's story, told by herself as *Roots and Shadows* is Indu's. And *The Dark Holds No Terrors* centers on Sarita and the terrible conflicts with mother and husband into which she is (almost) locked. But in *The Binding Vine*, the three stories are interwoven imperceptibly and comment on each other.²³

Similarly, establishing the supremacy of *The Binding Vine* over Deshpande's previous novels, Indra Nityanandam opines :

Deshpande's earlier women had already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviour. They realized that they had to unshackle themselves from centuries of bondage to societal norms and pre-ordained roles. Yet, they succeeded in doing it only within the limited purview of their own lives. They showed no indication of rising as feminists with the capacity to purge society of

its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory (as Urmila does in this novel). *The Binding Vine* is a novel with a difference.²⁴

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