

# Tradition and Modernity in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*

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## Abstract

Any discussion of modernism is closely associated with the broadening of the thematic range in Indian English fiction. It is a transition from Gandhian era of village centrism to the city centrism. Here we are going to talk about the facts which influenced the development of woman psyche, the role of Indian women in the traditional society as well as modern. It is changing gradually with positive rays. Women, who constitute half of the world's population, are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. But with the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that their inferiority is not ordained in heaven. They want to be free not only from men but also from their own psychological fears and enslavement. Keeping in mind these points the main concern of this research paper is on *The Binding Vine* written by Shashi Deshpande, which focuses primarily on the psychological exploration of the inner mind of women characters. She presents both the weaknesses and the strengths of the women. In her own words, she is portraying in her writing

Keywords : Modernism ,Feminism ,Injustice ,Tradition ,Patriarchal System.

## Conflict of tradition and modernity

Tradition is the collective wisdom and modes of behavior of the ancestors and modernity rest on a rational interpretation of religious, social and economic phenomena. Women are treated as mute objects around which the meaning of tradition is debated and decided by men. As far as the voice of Bollywood is concerned, it is indeed ironic that female actors claiming to celebrate their freedom and beauty routinely defend their portrayals of 'item girl' in terms of fulfilling viewer demand.

The main objective of the present study is to deconstruct the prototype image of a woman. The analysis is based on the thematic location that the selected novels portray the tradition and modernity of women. Tradition sanctioned or promoted unscientific and superstitious conduct and beliefs. Modernity, as opposed to tradition, refers to an outlook that is generally future-oriented and forward-looking. Modernity rests on a rational interpretation of religious, social and economic institution. Modernity is identified very often with industrialized western civilization where the family relationships underwent tremendous transformation. Movements for abolition of slavery, voting rights to women and universal suffrage were the natural outcome of the abandonment of traditional belief. Apart of its external glamour, modernity actually refers to an outlook in life which is rooted in a

scientific temper of mind. We need to face tradition squarely remove from it what is unwanted and retain what is good in it. Then alone we can preserve and revive old virtues that made the country great and famous all over the world in the past. Anita Myles remarks, "The concept of feminism pendulates from time to time and place to place".(1) "The vulnerability of women, the power of women, the deviousness of women, the helplessness of women ,the courage of women ."(2) In the novel, women are fighting against injustices, inflicted upon them by domineering patriarchal system. Shashi Deshpande attempts to show the path which is necessary for a happy life for a modern, emancipated, educated and intelligent middle class working woman.

*The Binding Vine* gives an insight into the psychological sufferings of the women characters. Urmila, known as Urmi, the protagonist of the novel, has married a man of her own choice, but she desperate of her married life. She has developed a kind of super ego in herself which denies her to submit before her husband. The novel vividly depicts the initial trauma and the intense anguish that Urmi goes through. One another female character, Mira, stands as a classical example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. There is a resemblance in the attitude of Mira and Urmi. Mira has worn the armor of aloofness and detachment against her husband.(1993) As Kamini Dinesh observes, "The wife, in the end , is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife-one who has broken the long silence , one who is no longer afraid of the dark. She is a wife reconceptualised as woman and an individuals..."

Deshpande reflects a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class woman caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from traditional to modern. Traditionally marriage is the only goal of a girl's life. They may not get a better match. Mira's parents decide to marry her to a man much older to her in age, instead of letting her discover her poetic talents or pursue studies. The assertion of her identity in "I am Mira" is the example of her strong personality and modern outlook. Mira's stand against her mother's insistence on the conventional role of daughter-in-law is implicit that she does not want to become a victim of the trap in which woman are being caught in their lives. Though Urmila is a modern educated woman, she does not reveal any radical attitude towards her own marriage. When Dr. Bhaskar declares that he is in love with Urmi and proposes to her indirectly, she is shocked and refuses to forsake her virtue because she believes in the sanctity of marriage.(2015)

In the novel, women are fighting against injustices, inflicted upon them by domineering patriarchal system. Shashi Deshpande has specially concentrated on the theme of lack of identity experienced by women in tradition-oriented society. The reality of modern Indian women is that even with regard to the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex, they are in a state of subordination. Shashi Deshpande attempts to show the path which is necessary for the happy life of a modern, emancipated, educated and intelligent middle class working woman. Alike this novel, another Indian writer, Anita Desai, in her novel *Cry, the Peacock* has created a feminist discourse of literary writings showing signs of a seething discontentment, hatred for the patriarchal norms of civilized human existence and aspiration for liberation from societal and traditional family norms made compulsory for their acceptable existence in the mainstream male-dominated society. She basically portrays the plight of modern women in the existing man dominated society where she makes an effort of

voice herself. She portrays disparity in temperament as affecting the man-woman relationship. The uniqueness of Anita Desai lies in giving voice to the psychological, emotional as well as physical needs of women which are hardly considered in an Indian society. She portrays her characters as individuals “facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.” (1980)

It brings out the uniqueness sensibility of a sensitive woman in sharp contrast to the detached and practical attitude of an insensitive husband. This novel can be seen as spectrum of presentation of the ways of dealing with the binary opposition of the male versus women as object. Human identity is usually connected to and defined by societal and cultural norms. When it comes to woman, she is defined only in relation to a man as she is deprived of an identity of her own. It is easy to liberate woman in primitive social structure even if she is uneducated. Simon de Beauvoir put it in a right way in her *The Second Sex*, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”(1) In this novel Anita Desai portrays a hyper sensitive and cultured Maya dived deep into her trapped feminine psyche from childhood to her ultimately death as youth. She becomes an easy victim of many known and unknown traumas. This novel highlights the female predicament of maintaining self identity as an individual woman.

## Conclusion

Finally it must be said that the tradition and modernity are not always contrarian values as the self-proclaimed custodians of Indian culture would have us believe. While tradition has typically been the grounds to sustain the subordinate position of woman, economic modernization has ridden on the backs of women’s body and their labor. It is in our ability to recognize and combat these covert forms of violence in both tradition and modernity that rests the freedom and dignity of women. So, with the help of novel *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande, I have tried to show women’s transition from a village girl to city girl.

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