“I had not thought, death had undone so many”

—T. S. Eliot, THE WASTE LAND, Burial of the Dead

Violence and Death are not only reciprocal, but they are independent also; violence may result into death as in case of the French Revolution, similarly death may result into violence, as is evident from the action of mob in *Julius Caesar* after the speech of Antony; it is a universal truth that one, who is born must die, and one who is dead must be born again, ‘जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्यु: जनम मृत्युः च’ (*Bhagavadgita* ch. II). However, in the Indian cosmos revealed in Shashi Deshpande’s fiction, violence is limited to the physical, moral and psychological torture that an Indian woman has to undergo, and death is confined to death coming after abortion or, on existential level, tasting the fruit of death everyday in the verisimilitude of the legendary myth of Prometheus whose liver was eaten away and was revived again to be chewed by a demon day by day; thus the plight of Indian woman is no better than that of Sibyll of Cumae:

‘Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse
oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum
illi puerci dicerent : εἰβιλλα νιθελες;
respondebat illa :

(When I saw with my eyes the same Sybill that was of Cuma swinging in cage, and children saying to her, Sibyll what do you want, she replied ‘I want to die’).


A clear and unambiguous definition of violence is a desideratum if progress is to be made in determining the extent of violence in Europe. There is a tendency, at present, towards viewing aggression, bullying and violence as being synonymous. While few will disagree that bullying and
violence are subsets of aggressive behaviour, disagreements are encountered especially in respect of what constitutes bullying and violence.

Woven into the Fabric of most societies, violence exists in many forms and at multiple levels. Whether physical, verbal, sexual, or psychological, whether inflicted by individuals, groups, institutions, or nations, violence threatens the body in numerous and complex ways. At the microlevel, personal violence—acts of aggression or force performed by individuals—may be directed at inanimate objects, animals, one’s self, or other bodies. Although some force of interpersonal violence, such as injuries on the sports field or shooting in self-defence are culturally sanctioned, the more serious forms, like homicide, rape, and aggravated assault, are usually criminalized.

True form of collective violence comes into existence when individuals engage in violent activities in a group or institutional level. Like personal violence, incidents of group violence such as riot, revolutions and gang warfare are typically viewed as local events, tied to a specific cause of geographical cause. Nevertheless, group violence possesses its own unique dynamics and is generally more destructive than personal violence. Institutional violence—violence that serves or results from institutional objectives —can take extreme forms, like concentration camps or murders committed by totalitarian governments, or it can be part of socially accepted economic system of religious organizations goals.

Violence has been defined differently The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines violence as unlawful exercise of physical force. Olweus also confines violence to the use of physical force. He defines violence/violent behaviour as aggressive behaviour where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon an individual. With such a definition there is an overlap between violence and bullying, where bullying is carried out by physical aggression.

A larger tether is allowed to the concept of violence, when it includes a particular behaviour and attitude displayed by people or against people
liable to cause physical or psychological harm (Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995) A further example is seen in a schools programme in Ireland ‘Exploring Masculinity’ one of those themes is violence in the home. Their definition of violence in this context includes emotional abuse is addition to physical abuse. Emotional abuse includes threats, verbal attacks, taunting and shouting. Another definition is found in the policy statement of the Health and Safety Authority in Ireland. It defines violence as occurring ‘where persons are verbally abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work.

A definition of violence should therefore be as broad as possible, taking in aggression beyond physical aggression. Also, as violence is conceived of as perhaps pertaining to the more severe forms of aggression, caution must be exercised that policies do not restrict opportunities to correct aggression that is less severe in nature. According to Webster’s Dictionary,

Violence : Exerting physical force so as to injure or abuse.

Cruelty is the instinct, that becomes explicit through the action of violence, and it covers several facets such as domestic, sexual, academic, work place oriented, medical, sportsmens, medical, racial, insane, criminal, belligerent bestial, psychic and playful. Like other evils, violence also has seed time to growth in the family; it includes parental maladjustment, physical and mental tortures, and child abuse; sexual violence is of two types—the one for pleasure including sadism and the other rape; the puerile violence arises out of bullying, taunting and extortion, the work place violence comprising bullying, sexual harassment and verbal abuse; medical violence, which takes place in the hospitals, arises out of clinical violence caused by abortion and euthanasia, aggressive attitude of staff towards patients, and violence towards staff by drunkards, drug addicts and psychiatric cases; racial violence includes communal riots, persecution, verbal abuses and Ethic cleaning; criminal violence is said to have done, if there is an evidence of murder, extortion, intimidation etc; belligerent violence is for reason of self defence, for reasons of conquest and greed and for
misguided beliefs; playful violence includes guns, computer games, awards and knives.

Domestic violence is usually regarded as violence between adults who are in an intimate or family relationship with each other, most often a sexual relationship between a man and woman. The overriding majority of domestic violence incidents consists of men abusing, intimidating and violating women whom they know intimately and often prefers to love. The violence may be life threatening, systematic and for a long term. It can, and does, occur anywhere although the home is still the main place where it happens. The home is after all behind close doors, away from public eye, protected by spoken and unspoken rules about privacy, about not interfering in other people’s business. It is also the place where feelings between intimates run highest. For women and children, the home that safe haven, that place of comfort and security cushioned from the difficulties of the outside world is not and never has been, a safe place. For many women, it is a place of danger terror and injury, and for some, a place of death. Women often experience several different kinds of violence of combination. The physical violence that women experience comprises many types of physical attack and injury. Sometimes various sexual perversities such as oral sex and coitum rectum are also inflicted upon women under the pretext of aesthetic and orgasmic increments. Commonly, it starts with a single slap or blow, followed by disbelief and shock on both sides and by commitments from the man that it will never be repeated. But sadly, after it has happened once, it is rare for it not to happen again. When someone forces another person to have sexual intercourse by means of physical force, the threat of force, intimidation, or by use of a weapon, it is considered rape. And that is one form of sexual violence. Sexual violence is not something that occurs only between strangers. In fact, a good number of rapes occur between individuals who know each other. Other forms include forced sexual activity (oral sex, sodomy etc.) forced sex with animals, forcing a person to have sexual intercourse or sexual activity with another person, or forced activity with objects. In many states, it is now against the law for a man to force his wife to have sex with him. It is called spousal
rape. Woman who are physically abused are very often also subjected to a range of sexual humiliations and assaults, or men may use threats of violence in order to make women submit to coercive sex. Liz. Kelly, a British Researcher and feminist activist, in her book *Surviving Sexual Violence*, discusses ‘the idea of a continuum of sexual violence, as a result of research in which she talked at length with women about their sexual experience. The continuum includes the whole distressing sweep of women’s experience of sexual violence, from everyday examples of dominating sexual behaviour by men towards women, to sexual assault and rape’.¹

This can be expressed in a number of ways, but essentially it is a systematic attempt to control another person’s thinking and behaviour. Psychological violence includes the following categories of behaviors: isolation, induced debility, pathological jealousy, threats, degradation, forced alcohol and drug use, brainwashing and occasional indulgences. Let’s look more closely at what each category of psychological violence may look like. Isolation would include, not letting her socialize with friends or family members, forcing her to stay at home with you all the time or not letting her leave the house without you, moving away from all her support systems, such as friends or family members. Induced debility producing exhaustion including keeping her up all night during a fight, waking her up to argue with her or abuse her physically or sexually, making her do all the work at home, forcing her into a servant role, keeping her pregnant, or not allowing her to have support in taking care of the children. Pathological jealousy and obsessiveness, having to know where she is all the time, who she is with, accusing her of being with other men, looking at other men or wanting to be with other men, following her, controlling finances wo she cannot leave him, stalking her after a separation or divorce, or refusing to obey restraining orders. Threats to kill her, kill others or yourself are common forms of psychological abuse that are intended to control her and to get what you want. Degradation or verbal namecalling and putdowns are another common behaviour that men use when feeling angry, hurt or fearful. Like physical abuse, the verbal namecalling has as much, or sometimes more, impact on the victim in that it serves to damage the
victim’s sense of self-worth, to make her feel powerless. She has to give up her own values, her point of view, in order to keep him from being out of control. Invalidating your partner’s perception of the situation. Such as trying to convince your partner that she is crazy or is hearing or seeing things that did not happen. Convincing your partner that the problems are actually all her fault, or that you didn’t do the things she thinks he did, or that she can’t live without you. Occasional indulgences illustrated by the statement, “I promise dear, I’ll never do it again.” This is followed with loving behaviour, such as gift giving, sensitivity, tolerance for a short period of time before the old behaviour sets in again.

Women in India have been facing violence in all spheres of life for thousands of years. They face domestic, political and social violence also, making it a multi-faceted and complicated issue. All this concept, analysis and classification of violence and death is exemplified by what happens in the novel *Come Up and Be Dead* which,

...has been compared unfavourable with Agatha Christie’s *Cat among the Pigeons* by one reviewer because the setting for both novels is a girls’ school, where a series of murders take place. The novel which ‘starts briskly enough, falters towards the middle and is unable to hold a reader’s interest in the true tradition of a whodunit.²

In Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Come Up and Be Dead* there are three things: revengefulness, lasciviousness, and proneness to commit murders. Revengefulness is represented in Varma, a member of Board of Governors of the school, who makes school girls serve as call girls for the simple reason that his own wife had deserted him soon after marriage. Lasciviousness makes its appearance in Sanjay, Sharmila, Mridula and the unnamed stranger to whom Mridula is taken as a call girl. Sanjay has made Sharmila his mistress. “She had been only fourteen when the boy, a cousin, had seduced her”.³ Mridula becomes pregnant even though she is unmarried, and the stranger comes to the hotel ‘Open Sesame’ to have a call girl. The proneness to commit murders is there in Sanjay, Girish, and
Mridula. Sanjay kills Pratap and Jyoti, and makes attempts on the lives of Sonali and Sharmila. Girish resolves to eliminate Devayani: and Mridula kills herself. “A young girl’s suicide would be inevitably linked to a love affair gone wrong, to a pregnancy” (9)

Revengefulness takes a very ugly form in Varma as he is driving innocent girls into the morass of immorality for the humiliation he had to suffer on account of his wife deserting him. A revengeful man, if he acts logically, can cause harm to the person who has harmed him rather than the persons belonging to the sex of the offender. But here Varma is causing harm to the girls who have caused no harm to him. If Varma had been an ordinary revengeful man, he would have harmed, if at all, his wife, though it is ignoble for man to cause harm to a woman, especially his wife. But Varma treats the whole female sex as his enemy. That is one of the reason why his behaviour is found to be odd, if not shocking, by Girish and Prasad. Girish tells Devyani;

Strange, isn’t it, that a man who has so much money should make himself vulnerable by going in for a thing like this? When I went to him I knew at once that he enjoyed this trade in girls. It was not just the money for him. Some sort of a kink, I suppose (252).

Inspector Prasad also testifies to the fact ; “Varma carried a canker of hatred for young women within him” (264). Varma’s revengefulness is akin to the revengefulness of Charles Dickens’ Miss Havisham in the novel Great Expectations, who began to hate all male human being; because one of them named Compeyson had humiliated her by not turning up to marry her on the appointed day and had broken her heart, and who took revenge on Pip making Estella break his heart. As a matter of fact, this is a kind of cowardice as instead of inflicting harm on the wrong-doer Varma inflicts harm on the persons who have caused no harm to him and are too weak and helpless to do anything by way of retaliation. Francis Bacon’s remark that,
Vindictive Persons live the life of Witches, who, as they are Mischievous, so end they Infortunate.⁴

appears to be true in Varma’s case. What is noticeable in this regard is that he occupies a respectable position in society, as he is a member of Board of Governors, and also tries to continue to be respectable. He silences the people, who come to know of his diabolical activities, either by bribing them or by getting them killed. This is evidenced by Girish’s remarks: “But this reputation mattered to him, though, and so there I was... I could make a regular sum of money by just holding my tongue” (252), and by his getting Pratap killed.

How degenerate one becomes in the state of lasciviousness can be seen in the character of Sanjay. His relations with Sharmila are, from the Hindu point of view, incestuous, as Sharmila is his cousin and for the Hindus a cousin has to be treated as a sister. Moreover it is Sanjay who is, “responsible for Mridula’s pregnancy” (238). But he marries neither Sharmila nor Mridula. He also tried to trap Bunny who tells, her “father a story of being pestered by a young man” (238), and if she had not left the town she must have met the fate of Mridula. Likewise, the strange man who used Mridula as call girl in the hotel ‘Open Sesame’ was degenerate to the extent that he used her body to gratify his lust when she had been made to drink heavily and was not conscious of what was happening to her body. This events puts a question mark if a woman is to so unconscious on intoxicated, as not to know what is happening to her body; the case of seduction of Tess by Alec in Hardy’s Tess may be cited as an example. Girish reports: “They must have got the girl drunk, I suppose, for the next thing she remembered was that she was alone in that room with the strange man” (251).

It is a well known fact that lasciviousness turns even as average woman to become nymphomaniac; this lasciviousness brought Sharmila “totally under Sanjay’s influence” (261), because if she had not been lascivious she would not have remained under his influence totally even if she had surrendered to him at the age of fourteen. She is fully under his
influence so much so that she acts as an accomplice in his crimes as a murderer and in his efforts to trap school-girls to become call-girls. This constitutes the social impact of sexual violence and sometimes the criminalization of sex; recently Jessica Lal murder case may be cited as its glaring example.

Mridula’s lasciviousness has its roots in her silliness as she tried to have boy-friends and lovers under the impression that by having them she would become ‘modern’. Sonali says:

You don’t think, do you, that Mridula just got into trouble like that? Oh, she was a crazy girl, all right. She was dying to get into the mod crowd and have boy-friends and go running all over town, doing nothing but being silly. She used to flatter Bunny like mad. And Bunny used to ignore her. One day Bunny invited her home and Mridu was so thrilled like as if Indira Gandhi had invited her or the Queen of England (43).

An indomitable craze for modernity also becomes a caterpillar to the blooming primrose of girlhood as Mridula is foolish enough to think that an illicit physical relation is, “just a bit of fun” (72). Had she not been excessively eager to become ‘modern’, even Sanjay would not have been able to do her any harm. Her eagerness to have boy friends clearly indicates that it was her lasciviousness that made her what she become and caused her death. The fact also signifies that the post-independence pseudo-Western values which have become quite popular in, at last, a section of the Indian society, are, according to Shashi Deshpande, dragging young people away from virtues.

The proneness to commit murder is a characteristic feature of Sanjay, Girish and Mridula, who plan six attempts to murder, out of which the three successful murders comprise those of Mridula, Pratap Rao and Mrs. Jyoti Raman, while those made on the lives of Sonali, Sharmila and Devyani are unsuccessful; the significant feature is that Sanjay’s participation, either as a door or as an accomplice is indubitable. Sanjay is participant in all of them either as the doer or as an accomplice. In case of Mridula,
whose is a case of suicide, Sanjay acts as an accomplice. As Sharmaila remarks, Mridula, “went to Sanjay after that. If think he gave her whatever she took” (261). Both Pratap and Jyoti are killed by Sanjay as is evident from Girish’s observation:

The boy Sanjay came to me that night. He told me Pratap had seen the girls, Sharmila and two others, in the hotel. He had followed them to a room and confronted the girl Sharmila with his accusations. And so Pratap had to be got rid of (252).

Devyani also asserts: “Bunny...knew something about this school...As she told Mrs. Raman about this. And because of this knowledge the woman died” (181). Because of the fear of revealing the secret in the trade of call girls prompts the killing of Sonali Sanjay who feels that, “Her mother had told (Sonali) something” (260). He marks an attempt to kill even his mistress Sharmila because she hinders him from killing Sonali. Sharmila avers: “I knew he was going to kill Sona. And When I tried to stop him, he tried to kill me (260).

The process that makes Sanjay, a lover, becomes a murderer trying to kill his own beloved reminds one of the process described in the following verses from Gita:

\[
\begin{align*}
dhyayato \text{ visayan punsah sangas tesupajayate!} \\
\text{Sangat Sanjayate kamah kamat krodobhiyate!} \\
\text{Krodhad bhavati soomohat smrtivibrahmah!} \\
\text{Smrtibhransad buddhinaso buddhinasat pranasyat}^{15}
\end{align*}
\]

(When a man dwell in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory, and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes.\(^1\))

When an attempt at Devayani’s life is going to be made by Girish, she notes “that the number he was dialing was not the one I had given
him” (244). That a murderer is engulfed in a series of murders, in order to hide one murder becomes evident, when it is analysed that Girish was trying to contact some murderer, rather than Prasad, and that murderer presumably was Sanjay. Since Sanjay kills or tries to kill the person who have come to know of the racket in girls being carried on under The Big Chief Varma, it is obvious that he tries to kill those people who can get him punished for his immoral and illicit activities.

Girish’ proneness to get people killed has two emotions at its root—fear and greed. It is fear that leads him to resolve to get Devyani killed because he cannot afford to let her ‘get away from her with that knowledge’ (246).

If Devyani is allowed to survive, he fears, she may give the details of girls in the racket to the authorities and he may have to undergo punishment. Here he is not simply an accomplice in the crime, but the chief, who resolves to eliminate Devyani with the help of a murderer, even though he claims he is, “not involved in anything” (252). The Duke in Browning’s poem ‘My Last Duchess’ killed his wife because he was jealous. *Come Up and Be Dead* projects the view that people kill other human beings in the state of fear.

In the murder of Pratap, Girish acts as an accomplice. When Sanjay wanted Pratap to come out to be killed it was Girish who “got Pratap out of the house” (252) and left him there to be taken care of by Sanjay’s cruelty. That Girish becomes an accomplice of murderer for money is evident from the following extract from the novel:

Resolutely I retrieved it, “why did you get into it”? He shrugged again, with a trace of irritation this time, “Why?” The usual reason of course, money (246).

That the appearances are deceptive when one is given to understand that Girish is so well-behaved that it is difficult for one to detect his vices. Even such an intelligent girl as Devayani finds nothing suspicious about him for
long and reveals even her innermost feelings to him in the hotel, though afterwards she finds it embarrassing as is evident from the following remark:

I was embarrassed enough by all the revelations I had already made to this strange man, I hadn’t meant to say any of it (134).

Devyani’s revealing to him that she has not married because her “mother was epileptic” (133) makes it evident that she is trying to have intimacy with him and all this has been caused by Girish’s simulative good behaviour. It is ironical that, inspite of being an accomplice of Sanjay in the murder of Pratap, Girish does not fail to visit the hospital, where Devyani is nursing Pratap. He pretends to be a well-wisher of the family as is clear from his remark: “They can’t say anything...not as yet. Nothing to do but keep him under observation. How did it happen”? (142). He reminds one of Edmund Spenser’s Archimago who is a villain but pretends to be a saint. Just as Archimago sends the Red Cross Knight away from Una and poses to be absolutely innocent when she comes to ask him where her knight has gone, even though Girish knows all about Pratap’s death, he pretends to have been absolutely unaware of it. It is such a person who in Bacon’s words,

“industriously and expressly feigns and pretends to be that he is not.”

The proneness to kill someone takes another form is Mridula. She kills herself when her pregnancy is likely to result in a scandal. Pratap informs Devyani: “Now Suddenly she began to cry. Noisily like a child. She didn’t even bother to wipe her eyes or her running noise. Just sat and bawled” (72). The suicide committed by Mridula is not so much related with inflicting punishment on herself, as with finding fault with others as Pratap reports; “I never knew” (72), She said when she had calmed down. “They never told me” (72). If she had committed suicide in order to inflict punishment on herself, she would have refrained from vindicating herself.

The vicious activities of the offenders in the novel signify that the Inspector is right who asserts:
I believe in the theory of evil. Just simple evil that drives men and women to deeds that seem incomprehensible to others. And yet, the truth is that all of us carry this potentiality for evil within us. We have to struggle against it all our lives. Some prefer not to struggle, that’s all (264-65).

The potentiality of doing evil, as a central theme of the novel acceptable even to the novelist would imply rejecting the one upheld by non-dualists, i.e. that there exists only Brahman and that there exists no evil. Shankaracharya asserts: The Upanisads teach thus: Starting with the text, “O amiable one, before its creation, the universe was but Existence (Brahman), one without a second” (Chandogya Upanisad VI, II, I). He further says, “That (Brahman) visualised, ‘I shall become many, I shall be born’. That (Brahman) created fire”. (Chandogyapanisad, VI, ii. 3)7 In the Upanisad the universe, manifested as names and forms and referable by the word ‘it’, is first ascertained to be identified with existence ‘before its creation’; then the text shows that the creatorship of fire etc., that follows the visualization of future creation, belongs to that very entity, called Existence...” “Acceptance of the view that evil exists in the world would mean subscribing to a philosophy that accepts the existence of evil”.8

Deshpande also ponders over the question as to what can be done to keep people away from wrongdoing. Prasad maintains: “And yet, the truth is that all of us carry this potentiality for evil within us. We have to struggle again it all our lives”. He seems to suggest that one can keep oneself away from sin of one struggles against evil all one’s life and keep one evil desires under control by making conscious efforts to achieve the goal. Struggling against the evil inside oneself is not a new concept in India Deshpande’s suggestion is that steps have to be taken against people indulging in wrong-doing. When Prasad says: “The heroics are still to come. The man Varma is hoping to get away. But, If I have anything to do with it, he won’t...all his money and influence notwithstanding” (264), or when resolves to arrest Sanjay, as is evidenced by the following conversation between Devyani and Prasad:
“Have you got him? The man who injured Sharmila?
Not yet, but we will. He can’t escape us for long (239),
he is suggesting that wrong-doers are to be punished. And since Prasad’s
efforts to detect the evil-doers have been successful, his approach may be
regarded as the approach which his creator would subscribe to. In other
words, just as Lord Krishna, in the Gita, stands for eliminating the wicked
when he says;

Paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskrtem!
dharmesansthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge!¹⁹

[for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked
and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to
age.]

Shashi Deshpande subscribes to the view that wicked have to be
punished, whatever the odd. Another totally different aspect of violence
and death has been presented in If I Die Today, the title of which, being
conditional opens a new panorama, revealing the visualisation of future
and an introspection simultaneously; the action is ‘set in the resident quarters
of a large charity hospital where again there are a series of killing beginnings
with the murder of the terminally in patient guru’.¹⁰

The murder mystery is provided with ample material the frustrations
disappointments, idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of a large number of
characters. Though it is true that the novel does not fulfill all the expectations
of the readers, yet Deshpande is at her best in ‘the portrayal of human
relationship and the turmoils raging in the minds of her female protagonists,
who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands and society in general.¹¹

Unlike average Indian woman, Manju, the narrator in If I Die Today
does not consider matrmony and maternity as the final joy in human life;
she does not agree that ‘her children are a barrier to her independence.’¹²
Her ideas about maternity are also not very much conducive to the
traditional concept that a woman becomes perfect only by giving birth to
a child, rather she thinks that mother hood “is a trap, keeping you in a
cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget, what the word ‘freedom’ means’. She prohibits her daughter from showing fear or cowardice as they are feminine traits, for she thinks “I didn’t want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent” (45). The novelist unveils the sophisticated persons derising for a son and the successor for a family. Mriga is treated rudely by her father Dr. Kulkarni. With an aim to display male ego that cannot bear the female superiority, Deshpande makes Manju think up: Behind the pipe-smoking perfectly mannered phlegmatic style that he cultivated, was he after all, just a traditional Hindu man longing for a son and heir? And taking it out on poor Mriya because she was only a girl? (36) The identical destiny is faced by Tony whose married life is happy as long as the wife looks after him, but when she becomes oriented and starts earning more than him, the idea of a female patronage torments him and he tells about his marriage problems to a sympathetic listener Manju:

Don’t let them tell you. It doesn’t matter who earns more money is marriage. It does. There was Cyn before marriage crazy about me, looking up to me, ready to do anything for me. It doesn’t matter at all that I was just a Games Master and she was a medico. We were just crazy about each other (84).

Rape, whether marital or non marital culminating into death is the central theme of the novel, The Binding Vine, the very title is suggestive of the vine creeper clinging the feet of a woman and hampering her liberty. Urmila, the protagonist, having just undergone the pangs of her daughter’s death, is sharing her problems with Vanna, her childhood friends, who has become sister-in-law also. The conversation recedes back to the sufferings of the mother-in-law who took marriage as a torture and considers even coitus as marital rape; she records the series of frustration through poetic expression well-maintained in her diary written under pseudonym Mira, bearing the inscription that it is a secret and one who reads it is to suffer from infernal damnation; finally culminating into the maternal worry that none in Indian society will marry a raped girl, Kalpana, who is
hospitalised. *The Binding Vine* As Shashi Deshpande herself said, one of the themes of the novel was, about controlling women’s minds and bodies. It begins with the life of Urmila (Urmi) an intelligent, independent, outspoken woman who is trying to cope up with the grief of her daughter’s death. Taking Urmi as the anchor, Deshpande has rooped in the story of Mira and Kalpana and with them other characters to show the sexual wrongs done to women in patriarchal Indian society. In this process she consequently has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. The sensitivity makes her delve deep into the poems of Mira, her long dead mother-in-law and understand the mind of the young Mira who is subjected to rape in marriage. In spite of the best efforts made by her friend cum sister in law Vaana, Amrut and Inn, her own mother, to bring grieving Urmila back to normal life, Urmila seems to be taking her own time to cope with the untimely loss of her daughter.

Considering the woman as weak and dependent the Indian tradition had empowered the male members to take control of her life. Commenting on Urmi’s attitude, S. Indira writes:

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow she holds, on to it a she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of lose.¹⁴

Mira’s diaries become a connecting link between Urmi and her mother-in-law as the tries to reconstruct the—tragic tale of a courageous girl who expresses her frustration through her poems. “In the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty two”(48). The pages of diaries make Urmila know that Mira, whose father was proud of the intelligence and amicable nature of his daughter, is forced to marry a men who is not of her choice nor liking, and thinks that while her mother herself did not accept the wedlock, questions as to why the poor daughter has to undergo matrimonial tortures; this leads to a dislike for her
husband and the realisation that traditional Hindu society never honours the emotions and feeling of a woman. This submitting to the traditional role of a wife, she writes,

I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I’m doing and he gets angry with me. I don’t mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, 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. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all’. (67)

This age-old cry of woman suppressed under the veneer of marriage has begun to find an outlet recently. Indrani Jaisingh, an eminent lawyer for women, writes :

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces, himself on her, he is not committing an offence (of rape) as her consent is assumed. In this respect, the women’s movement has consistently demanded that the law of rape be changed. A recent judgement of court in England indicated that rape within marriage can be an offence. Several states in the U.S. have specially amended their original law to make it an offence.15

A traditional Indian society expects a woman to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband, as and when he wants; thus a woman’s right over her own body suffers from a sense of negation and her own sexuality is ignored. This forms the theme of Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors and the short story The Intrusion. Such an ignoble tradition empowering a husband to satisfy his physical and biological needs, ignoring the wife’s desires, expectations and sexuality, has met with a severe criticism in the hands of Shashi Deshpande; the consequence of such a privilege is the
marital rape; identical is the experience of Mira, who tolerates the violation of her body in perfect silence and in utter solitude, yet it is ventilated through her poetry:

It runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married. (63)

The poetic and creative bulk of Mira provides a picturesque description of sexual activity precipitated upon an innocent and helpless woman, accompanied by a sense of mute and uncomplaining suffering: thus rape has been depicted as a horrible and torturous indignity thrown on the female species by male brutality. In the words of Adrienee Rich; “It is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well”. Mira dies in childbirth after four years of loveless marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends there is a cry of rape and anguish. To her sex becomes, The sting of scorpion to be borne by women.” In one of her poem Mira laments;

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (66)

Urmila understands that Mira’s marriage is only a ‘black clouded’, haunted night she awaits with dread. She begins to hate the word ‘Love’ as it is uttered always by her husband. When Mira adopts the solitary life, the charge of insanity is framed against her, as she is possessed by an anguish; this revelation makes Urmila realised that the surrendering instinct of mother was not a commonable factor; however, the maternal advice of unconditional surrender is not acceptable to her; “never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise” (83). Urmila learns that Mira was trapped like her mother with no further escape; Whose face is this I see in the mirror, unsmililing, grave, bedewed with fear? The daughter? No, mother, I am now your shadow (126).

Pain, joy and fear are inextricably interwined. The pain of childbirth results in the joy of seeing ones own child and no one, not even Mira is spared...
of this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child her creation, all the way. Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this—she dies in childbirth, “having bled to death within an hour after her child was born” (136).

Thus Mira stand as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. That the torture of sexual violence is not confined to elite class only rather its range of expansion engulfs the life of poor women also, as it becomes evident from Urmila’s involvement with Shakutai, which reveals the fact that Kalpana is also the victim of pre-marital rape, as she falls a prey to her uncle, Prabhakar’s lust; Mira becomes emblematic of marital rape, culminating into her death in childbirth, which is further caused by a nun-like existence in a cloister, where she can’t share her experiences with any man or woman whatsoever.

The intellectual bent of mind possessed by Urmila makes her to present a critique of the situation by exploring a similarity between Mira’s versified tale and Kalpana; It is a well known fact that in the traditional Indian society no mother wants that the contaminating word ‘rape’ should be associated with her daughter, that’s why Shakutai mentions that her daughter was injured in a car accident and in no amorous crime. However, from Shakutai’s life Urmi becomes aware of the suppression and ill-treatment of women in the lower strata of society. Kalpana is raped and the mother assumes that her daughter has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor confirms and informs Shakutai that she has been brutally raped and in the process, she is physically and mentally injured. Shakutai sees her Kalpana who appears to be lying like a vegetable dead or alive. Shakutai is shocked and hysterically she tells Vanaa, “It’s not true, you people are trying to blacken my daughter’s name” (58).

In the verisimilitude of the question mark raised against the purity of Tess, in accordance with the norms of Indian society, the raped girl is as much guilty as the rapist; no more injustice than this can be heaped upon the second sex; this is exemplified in the novel how the Police
Administration takes up the case of Kalpana, while rape is considered to be merely an accident, through it is protested by Dr. Bhaskar. Pointing out to the obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana, he tells Urmī:

‘What about the injuries, I asked him? I’d examined the girl, damn it’, Bhaskar says angrily. ‘You could see the marks of his 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. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks?’ (88)

It is not as if the police officer needs to be convinced that it is a rape case. As he tells Dr. Bhaskar;

She’s going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? We don’t like rape cases,—They’re messy and troublesome, never straightforward. But forget that and think of the girl and her family. Do you think it’ll do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She’s unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared (88).

The police officer’s argument no doubt, aptly sums up the Indian psyche nurtured as it is in a culture which, in general, depicts women as grossly, sensuous and licentious. So much so that in a crime as brutal as rape. The ancient Hindu Law-giver, Manu is of the opinion of women that the creator, “impanted in them carnal passion, love for ornament, impure desire, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct.” It is no wonder, as S. Indira observes;

Kalpana’s mother Shakutai seems to be more worried about the scandal which would certainly ruin the family’s name and impair the marriage prospects of not only Kalpana but also her second daughter, Sandhya.18

It is strange that women like Shakutai who have got nothing out of marriage except children still live in fear of their children remaining unmarried. Her
husband has deserted her long ago for an other woman and left her alone to fend for herself and the children.

Out of all the temptations that lure a woman to marry, security claims top priority and the female sex is more vulnerable as the society prescribes the rigid code of conduct of celibacy, which means controlling sexual desires, as Mulk Raj Anand points out:

No woman is our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male young into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust.¹⁹

The irony underlying such an observation is that, having entered the matrimonial cottage, a woman, in order to avoid one type of brutality, falls a prey to another type of bestial attitude and behaviour; this makes Mulk Raj Anand agree with Dr. Sudhir Kakkar, a psychanalyst, who propounds the thesis that male chauvinism emerges with a glaring lucidity in lower stratum of society, as Anand says:

In the slums men have no property except women, whom they can use for their case, an unpaid slaves in the house, vehicles of lust and as victims from whom they can take out pain, to alleviate their own humiliation when insulted by their bosses.²⁰

Though Shakutai takes pride over her daughter’s beauty, yet she restricts her behaviour, as she thinks that Kalpana herself is responsible for her tragedy:

“She’s ashamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me. What could I do? She was so self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her away. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It’s all her fault, Urmila, all her fault (147).
Urmila, raged at the indignity heaped on Kalpana, wants to report this matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs Urmi not to do that, Urmi tries to explain;

She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn’t do anything wrong. Why can’t you see that? Are you blind?
It is not her fault, no, not her fault at all (147).

Instead of pointing to the bestiality and violence perpetrated by the rapist, most people like Kalpana’s mother find it easier to blame the girl: “And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they will leave you alone” (146). Shakutai, at a point, even wishes for her daughter’s death. She says, “but sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now, is death” (178). The plight of Sulu, Shakutai’s sister, is in no ways different from those of teh others, for her husband does not touch her, as she suffers from the skin disease; she considers it a favour, when, instead of driving her out, he allows her to cook and clean for him; further he, having developed a sort of fascination for Kalpana since she was brought as a helping hand, expresses his desire to marry her, which, having been turned down, leads Kalpana towards molestation and rape by Prabhakar.

It is a matter of grave concern that, when a woman comes to help another woman, the domestic premises hurdle as a hindrance; this is the case with Urmila, who wants to help Kalpana, when the hospital authorities recommend her being shifted to some suburban hospital, she rages in protest and wants to take the matter to the press; there is vast publicity and the involvement of the media, but Shakutai does not like all this and thinks that exposure to the media as evil as rape itself, so far as Kalpana’s reputation is concerned. It is known to Urmila that women, irrespective of their social strata, are kept at a subaltern level, be it the lower class women or the urban based educated womankind, as is the case of Shakutai in the former and with Urmila or Mira in the latter; an Indian woman is destined to surrender her physical and mental self so that marriage might not be broken; it is with this instinct that Akka, being perfectly aware of the fact that her husband, a widower, is incapable of obliterating the
memories of his first wife and is possessed by a sort of filial fixation, mildly bears the yoke of marriage; Urmila’s chain of thought goes on: “The cruelty the enormous cruelty of that silenced us” (47). She is able to see the contrast between her life and the terrible life, that these women have been forced to lead. There is Mira’s mother who, going by Mira’s account of her, could not think of a life of her own separated from the destines of her children. A page in the diary of Mira reveals Mira’s plight:

I remember the day the astrologer came home. He read all our horoscope... only my mother’s horoscope was not read. Don’t you want to know your future? I asked her. And she said ‘what’s there? In my life apart from all of you? If I know all of you are well and happy. I’m happy too. ‘Did she really mean that? Will I become that was too, indifferent, to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don’t want to. I won’t. I think so now, but may be my mother thought like me when she was my age. It frightens me. No. it doesn’t, I’ll never think my life, myself nothing, never (101).

Urmila realizes the difference between her life and lives of the others and thinks: “I’ve managed, but I’ve been lucky that’s all. While these women...they never had a chance” (174). While Kalpana’s mother moans, “Why does God give us daughters...” (60). To Urmila, who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring: “We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of her ourselves” (124). Having lost her daughter, Urmila now realizes that she too is not free from the pangs of guilty conscience and the morbid self-questioning within herself, whether or not she had been a good mother to Anu. She feels that perhaps the answer lies in carrying the burdens of the dying and the dead as life would acquire a meaning by that very act. To Urmila, Priti is a symbol of the shallow female opportunist without integrity. Once she talks with Urmila regarding the judgement in a case filled by a husband against his wife to reinstate their conjugal rights. Priti excitedly says that the judge had delivered his judgement stating that a wife could not be forced to have physical
relationship with her husband against her will. On reading this judgement Priti joyfully cries, “...Isn’t radical, absolutely earthshaking, in this country, I mean? Can you imagine the consequence?” (37). Soberly, Urmila reminds Priti that one judgement by a single judge will not make any difference to all the womankind. She further says that laws cannot change women’s lives and there are not many women who can appeal or file in a court of law in such matters.

Urmila now understands that the relationship between her papa and Inni, Baiajji and Aju, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana, are filled with love and compassion, but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of ego, desires and self-centered interest. Each relationship can be wholesome only when the people themselves are whole. Anu has gone but she still has her son Karthik. She realizes that, however burdensome our ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up.

We struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor (137).

The main urge is always to survive, to get on with the business of living, even if it comprises a daily routine that takes care of a hundred trifling matters bringing an order and rhythm to it. She entirely agrees with Mira who says; “Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me; I am terrified by the thought of dying, of-ceasing to be” (203). She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.

The Binding Vane revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmi, Mira and Kalpana. Deshpande hints at all the raw deal faced by most women at different levels—whether it is women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu, or the urban, educated women like Urmi’s mother, Inni, her friend Vanaa and her mother-in-law, Akka. However, not all Deshpande’s male characters can be categorised as perpetrators of male dominance. There is Dr. Bhaskar who is sympathetic to the problems faced by women.
As the doctor in charge of Kalpana, he gets upset by the rape. He has a passion for justice and truth and predictably falls in love with Urmia who is committed to the same ideal. There is also Malcolm, a journalist, who was Urmia's classmate at one time. In his own way he tries to contribute towards highlighting the prejudices in society. As Muriel Wasi observes.

Dr. Jain supplies an element of hope that there are men in India who feel as strongly as women do. On the brutal atmosphere of real and potential violence in which Indian women live. There are also journalists like Malcolm, who will make use of rape and other items of violence to keep the public conscience alive. There are not heroes, merely working journalists, but they serve a relevant purpose and stand for something positive and essentially humane.\(^1\)

The novel is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande. According to Indira Nityanandam:

The step forward, achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws society's attention to the plight of the rape victim and is determined to get Mira's poem published. This is a positive development in the protagonist, for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting only their own battles.\(^2\)

Deshpande also takes a bold step forward in projecting a woman's biological needs and also raises the question of woman's right over her body which can not be violated even in marriage. The novel can best be summed up in the words of Subhash K. Jha who writes in a review:

*The Binding Vine* is one of the few contemporary Indian novels to discuss its heroine's sexuality, her 'passion', with a measure of unrepentant concern. In this novel Deshpande travels much further down the road in exploring the working
women’s needs of the head, heart and further down the anatomy, than her earlier novels.  

The tridimensional analysis of three novels, thus, presents the role of that infernal serpent who tempted the mother of mankind to taste the fruit of that Forbidden Tree, in the form of sexual upsurge in the modern era, side by side sublimating this instinct through coiled Kundalini in towards procreation and bringing in the world, what Neitzsche called Superman, and the Enlightened One warned against as the cause of sorrow in the desire oriented world simultaneously; Shashi Deshpande puts a question mark, and ‘does not wait for an answer:

Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief
But how escape th’ cord
This Binding Vine of love?
Fear is coiled within this womb piercing joy.

— The Binding Vine.
REFERENCES

5. The Passion of lasciviousness has been described as one’s enemy by Lord Krishna in *The Gita*, 125-26.


CHAPTER-III

THEME OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH