CHAPTER -2

Victims Of Oppression
What do I want. I ask myself

The mind- slate wiped clean

Mocks me with its blankness. (Deshpande: 173)

The need to express one’s feeling and the need to be heard by the society is an all persuading urge for the present –day girls. Girls, when they undertake a journey in pursuit of self-knowledge, they do not start light. The fact is that girls don’t start with a picture of themselves on a clean slate. Inscribed on it are things told by others. In this regard Shashi Deshpande says in her book Writing from the Margin:

... We are already burdened with a baggage that has given to us. The fact is that we don’t start with a picture of ourselves on a clean slate. Inscribed on it already are things told to us by others that determine our behaviour, ideas, expectations and dreams. (Deshpande: 87)

Girls who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated equally to boys in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for fulfilment of their lives.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the contemporary writers who has given the graphic detail about the girl child and her psychology. Since her childhood, the psyche of a girl-child is moulded in a particular fashion to inculcate in her all types of feminine qualities. Shashi Deshpande uses this point of view of present social reality as it is experienced by girls. Shashi Deshpande’s fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child’s particular position, social reality, identity and psychological growth determine her personality.
In this chapter Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* is taken for study. There is a clear picture of different ways in which girls are oppressed and deprived of different opportunities. In this novel Shashi Deshpande has beautifully depicted the plight of many girls in India. In this modern world also when girls seem to be liberated from much societal and traditional bondage, there are many girls who are still deprived of opportunities and have to suffer silently. They are rather victims of oppression by men in different ways. Deshpande has tried to give them voice by depicting their plight in the novel, as Viney Kirpal notes in the analysis of *The Girl Child in 20th Century Indian Literature*:

...there is one gaping hiatus in the portraits of this period. They do not depict the victimization and violence upon the girl child in today’s India. There is a telling silence about present day cruelties and oppressive practices that mar the life of the growing Indian girls.

(Kirpal: X)

In this modern world where there are many ‘new girls’ who rebel against society and fight for their right, there are girls also who want to fulfil their inner desires and want to be their selves only, but tradition, custom and patriarchy oppress them in various ways.

*The Binding Vine* is the narration of Urmila, who is grieving over the death of her baby daughter and surrounded by the loving care of her mother and her childhood friend and sister-in-law Vanna. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of her mother-in-law Mira, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, who exists only in the notebooks, she has left behind, discovered by chance in a dusty storage trunk. Mira’s journals and poetry reveal the pain of a vibrant young girl, trapped in an unhappy
arranged marriage. Urmi also narrates the story of Kalpana, the victim of a brutal rape and a young girl, who has also been silenced, as she hovers between life and death in a hospital ward. Kalpana is a young girl from a lower class background. She is Shakutai’s daughter. Shakutai has a sister, Sulu. Sulu's husband wishes to marry Kalpana. Kalpana however, has her own aspirations. She likes to marry a young man of her own choice and rejects Prabakar’s offer. While Kalpana admits in the hospital, the outside world moves around her. Shakutai does not want the case to be reported to the police. She is afraid that it will spoil their name and it will affect the marriage of her second daughter. The police officer wants to project it as an accident case because rape cases are complicated. It is clear that nobody wants to make it as a rape case. Urmi helps Kalpana and she decides to fight for the justice of Kalpana. Kalpana becomes the victim of lust and she is brutally beaten and raped. Urmi is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot-free. Shakutai doesn’t like the case to be registered and given publicity. At last Urmi gives out Kalpana’s story to her journalist friend and it is published. Shakutai gets social attention. Questions are raised in the Assembly and the hospital authorities are instructed to let Kalpana remain in the hospital. Thus, Urmi breaks the silence and manages to get justice for the suffering family. The police have to investigate the case, and when Sulu realizes that her husband Prabhakar is the culprit, she commits suicide. In the course of the events Urmi understands how the tender vine of human understanding, empathy and sympathy binds us all. Urmi is emotionally numb in the beginning after realization that her daughter has gone. She learns, however that pains can be mended by reaching out to those who need her. Realizing others tragedies, she tries to cope-up with her own tragedy, the death of her
child Anusha. Urmia symbolizes a modern Indian woman, who stretches her hand towards other unfortunate girls like Kalpana and Mira.

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande. 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 dreams societal attention to the plight of the rape victim and is determined to get Mira’s poem published. Urmila gives voice to the voiceless sufferings of the girls. This is a positive change.

Kalpana and Mira are girls who represent the crucial issues like sexual harassment outside marriage and inside marriage. Kalpana and Mira both are rape victims. Whether it is rape inside marriage or outside marriage, society is very rude and unsympathetic towards girls. More than the rapist, the victim of rape becomes the centre of crime. A rape victim is both, mentally and physically harassed by the society. One of the primary projects of modern feminism has been to restore women’s bodies. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, women have learned to fear or even to hate their bodies. As Lipkin has said:

As girls mature into young women and enter adolescence, the physical changes of teen hood accelerate them into awareness of the body as a site of sexuality. Will this girl be proud of her changing body’s size and shape? ... And will she be safe walking home alone at night, or will she be more at risk than her brother simply because she is a girl? (2)

When a girl is raped, she is not just physically ruined but psychologically also she gets frustrated and disturbed. Rape of body makes a girl remember of her state in a
male dominated society where a man wants to dominate a girl if not mentally than physically. As Andrinee Rich says:

> It is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind as well. The feeling of being victorious and gloating over the act makes the rapist even more detestable. (qtd. in Indira: 61)

Shashi Deshpande has presented the realistic picture of the agony of the rape victims and their family members. Reddy has correctly said in praise of Shashi Deshpande:

> In writing about rape, Deshpande has not attempted anything new but the way she has portrayed this sordid drama is very realistic. The characters spring to life and the anger, frustration, helplessness and despair of the victim’s family are brought out evocatively. (Reddy: 91-92)

The partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society is seen in the outburst of Shakutai. In the patriarchal society, if a girl is raped for no fault of her, she alone is censured and victimized. Thus, Shakutai in spite of all her motherly love and sympathy for her daughter thinks that Kalpana as a girl, is very bold, independent and fearless. This fearlessness and boldness according to Shakutai, causes her tragedy. Shakutai tells Urmila:

> She was so self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It’s all her fault Urmila, all her fault. (Deshpande: 147)
Society finds fault with the raped girl just like Shakutai has done. The only conclusion that people like Shakutai can arrive at is, “We have to keep to our places, we can never step out. There are always people wanting to throw stone at us, our own people first of all.” (Deshpande: 148)

Traditional patriarchal society has created a boundary for a girl. It is rigorously expected from a girl to limit herself in that frontier. Societal codes and conduct, created for girls are partial to them. Society never allows a girl stepping out of the border line. Besides the reality of Kalpana being raped, the police prefer to record it as a car accident. The police officer tries to convince Bhaskar and Urmila that if they declare it as rape then Kalpana’s name and her family’s name would be smeared. Hence, it is advisable that the victim chooses to remain silent and anonymous rather than attract notice by making hue and cry demanding justice.

Urmila tries to explain Shakutai, the horrible incident happened to Kalpana. Kalpana has gone through a malice done by a man. She is injured and hurt. But Shakutai does not like the case to be registered and given publicity. She says, “No, no, no ...don’t tell anyone, I’ll never able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl. We are decent people....don’t tell the police.” (Deshpande: 58)

Shakutai says so because she is afraid of the society. Generally when a girl is raped, no one thinks of the culprit (a man) but everyone points a finger on a poor victim and blames her. Shakutai is also afraid of telling truth to the police because she has another daughter too and she thinks that if society knows the truth, no one will marry Kalpana and even her younger sister. This is the grief of a mother in patriarchal society. Mother dreams for her daughter but tradition, custom and society makes her helpless and unwillingly she has to see her daughter as her own shadow. Mother, desperately wants to give her daughter a better life than her but bondage of
patriarchy prevents her to do that and makes her silent sufferer. That is why Mira writes, “I feel the quickening in my womb, he moves, why do I call the child He.” (Deshpande: 149) Mira wants a boy child not because of the love of boy child but her words are the result of her experience. She does not want a girl child because she cannot think of her child facing the same problems which she faced in her life not only as a wife but also as a girl. In a patriarchal society girls are always deprived of opportunities which boys enjoy. Simone De Beauvoir has cited Baudouin who in his work *The Mind of The Child* mentions the study by Karl Pipal. According to the study, out of twenty boys of twelve to fourteen years of age, eighteen said they would rather be anything in the whole world than a girl; out of twenty-two girls, ten wished to be boys and gave following reasons:

Boys are better: they do not have to suffer like women…My mother would love me more…A boy does more interesting work…I would have fun frightening girls…I would not fear boys any more…They are freer. (Beauvoir, 2011:321)

Shashi Deshpande has beautifully depicted the picture of society, which is partial to the girl. She portrays Mira’s grief in desiring a boy child. It is only because Mira does not want her daughter to go through the same sufferings which she has gone through as a girl and woman.

Ordinarily childhood is valued as a period of happiness, one of innocence and protection and enough importance is not given to the influence childhood has on later life. But the fact remains that a woman’s mature years are already determined in her childhood. In Indian society that is essentially patriarchal, the female child is
under the watchful eye of the parents, constantly being trained for her new master who should find her acceptable according to his expectations.

Shashi Deshpande has depicted another brutal picture of male dominated society through Mira’s story. Though Mira does not exist in the novel except, in her diary and poems that she has written in private. Mira, like Kalpana is a rape victim. She is the victim of rape inside marriage. She is raped by her husband. Mira’s writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity. Mira is subjected to rape in her marriage. Mira dies in the childbirth after four years of loveless marriage.

Every day and every moment that she spends there is a cry of rape and anguish, there are feelings runs all through her writing, a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she marries. (Deshpande: 63)

Mira symbolizes the mute suffering of many such unfortunate girls. Rape has always been a horrible indignity happened to women by men merely on the strength of brute force. Marital rape is one form of sexual assault where a husband gets license to rape his wife night after night. In this regard Barbe Kiffe says:

Marital rape is seldom given the legitimacy or validity of other forms of sexual violence, but it can be just as devastating. What sets marital rape apart is that the victim has to live with the rapist. (Qtd. in Dr. Kavya)

Forced sex on wife is not identified as the crime of rape rather it is viewed as ‘wifely duty’. It is a very violent method of man to show his power over woman. It is widespread problem for a woman that man wants to dominate her. Indian
traditional marriage provides ample opportunities for this. Husband wants his wife to be patient, all suffering, ever faithful and ever-pure wife. Deshpande portrays the plight of a young woman, Mira who is victim of marital rape and a girl, Kalpana, who is raped outside marriage. Both of them have to suffer in the name of family honour. In her essay *Sisterhood* Bell Hooks writes:

> Sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures, by the individuals who dominate, exploit or oppress and by the victim themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. (Hooks: 45)

Submissiveness of the woman is ensured with the help of socialization that begins in early childhood and extends well into adolescence and adulthood. Girl children are taught to shape their conduct in such a way as to incline to the male around them. A girl is admired not for her wisdom but for her elegance. Acumen and intelligence seldom count as qualities of recognition for a girl. Patriarchal ideology is imposed on girl’s autonomy and deforms her personality. As Mira says in her poem:

> Fixed forever in our places, Face to face the two of us,

> Like Siva and his nodding bull. (Deshpande: 82)

Relationship of a man and woman is like relationship of Siva and his nodding bull, master and servant, superior and inferior, who are always opposite to each other and never side by side. Man is considered as Siva, God, superior and woman is always nodding bull, inferior and submissive. Simone De Beauvoir points out:
…in the master-slave relation, the master does not ‘posit’ the need he has for the other; he holds the power to satisfy this need and does not mediate it; the slave, on the other hand, out of dependence, hope or fear, internalises his need for the master; however equally compelling the need may be to them both, it always plays in favour of the oppressor over the oppressed. (Beauvoir, 2011: 9)

Tradition is so deeply rooted in woman’s psyche that woman like Mira’s mother advises her daughter:

   Don’t tread paths barred to you,

   Obey, never utter a ‘no’,

   Submit and your life will be,

   A paradise... (Deshpande: 83)

Tradition is belief or practice transmitted from generation to generation. In India patriarchy is the prevalent system and male dominates in society. As a tradition it is taught from generation to generation and mother makes her daughter a shadow of herself and nothing else. But girls like Mira and Kaplana have their own aspirations and ambitions. Mira’s will rise up against her mother’s advice as she writes:

   No, growing painfully within,

   Like a monster child was born. (Deshpande: 83)

Girls, when they think of protesting against or questioning some codes of tradition or saying ‘no’, that thought itself makes her guilty of committing some
crime. Mira also considers her thought of saying ‘no’ to be a ‘monster child’. As Lipkin has said:

...a few of the subtle ways in which girls learn how their gender (broadly defined as the sets of behaviours, expectations and limitations imposed by culture on girls and boys simply because they are female or male) defines the roles available to them. The messages start in infancy, and they continue steadily, filtering into girls’ consciousness so that they think these definitions simply seem to be just “the way that things are.” (3)

Generally speaking, marriage is understood as an ever-lasting relationship between two people. It also connotes men and women sharing love, affection, companionship, understanding, security, sex etc. Many feminist theorists have painted out marriage as a bond that thrust women into the role of servants or slaves and creates a negative image within them. According to Beauvoir:

The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness—there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness, but that it mutilates her, it dooms her to repetition and routine. The first twenty years of woman’s life are extraordinarily rich...she discovers the world and her destiny. At twenty or thereabouts mistress of a home, bound permanently to a man, a child in her arms, she stands with her life virtually finished forever.(Beauvoir: 496)

Shakutai, when she talks about her sister, says that before marriage Sulu was a talented girl and she kept on doing something like making embroidered
tablecloth for the table, making little boxes of coloured paper etc. Shakutai shares her agony saying:

After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened.
What if he doesn’t like this. What if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out?...Nobody should live like that
Urmila so full of fears, what kind of life it is... (Deshpande: 195)

Urmila understands how self confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by Indian institute of marriage system. It transforms her into a fearful and nervous woman. Deshpande is concerned with the middle class and lower middle class where male repression takes an ugly face especially within marriage. She also shows marriage as a patriarchal institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. Marriage and sanctity accorded to it is the strongest weapon in the hands of men to silence women. One of the major rituals of the marriage ceremony is the renaming of bride. It is a symbol of her relinquishing her identity and independence. For a sensitive and independent girl this amounts to the virtual murder of her psyche. But she knows that she has to oblige. Mira also has gone through the same ritual and writes:

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. (Deshpande: 101)

Girls like Mira can not think herself to be an inessential personality. She has her own identity. A person’s name suggests his/her identity which he/she
carries since birth. Changing the name here is symbolic of changing Mira’s personality and her identity as an individual. Mira’s agony can be explained in Simone De Beauvoir’s words:

She spontaneously grasps herself as the essential: how will she decide to become the inessential? If I can accomplish myself as the ‘Other’ how will I renounce my ‘Self”? Such is the agonising dilemma the woman-to-be must struggle with. (Beauvoir, 2011: 359)

Mira got married at the age of 18 and died in child birth after four years of loveless marriage. She became a traditional Indian wife who looked after her husband and never disobeyed him. But Mira dislikes it strongly. Mira lives as an instrument for her husband’s sexual gratification. Rape is violence and it becomes worse when it occurs within marriage. Mira’s poems are all about her husband’s cruelty. Mira writes poems in secrecy. She never publishes them but keep them in her box. Her poems are her suppressed feelings and agonies. She wishes to be free from rules and tradition and clutches of unfair marriage. Mira never receives any understanding or empathy from her husband. Society considers marriage a mean of security as it provides safety from other men. But in Mira’s case her own husband gives a feeling of insecurity as she writes:

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too,

Twist brocade tassels round her fingers

And tremble, fearing the coming

Of the dark-clouded engulfing night? (Deshpande:56)
Mira here mocks at tradition of comparing every wedded couple to Laxmi-Narayan. If every married girl is Laxmi then Mira wonders whether as a girl, goddess Laxmi had to go through this fearful experience of surrendering everything to her husband. A man like Mira’s husband claims that he loves his wife but does he really love her? If he loves her, he can’t hurt her and takes care of her likes and dislikes. The fact is that a man loves his wife as child loves his toy, as an object. “He wants to have possession over her body and not her heart.” (Deshpande: 67) Jasbir Jain comments on the issues of gender embedded in Mira’s poetry:

In her poems, there is convergence of the universal facts of female existence like desire, childbearing and maternal feelings and specific social conditions like paternal control and male will, which differ from culture to culture, generation to generation and class to class. There is, in Mira’s poems, a sense of enclosure, the feeling of being in cocoon, reflecting a child’s relation to the mother. (247)

What Mira has suffered from is generally not acknowledged by our culture as rape, but the legal right of the husband to enjoy his sexuality; with or without his wife’s permission. Mira’s obsessed husband has exercised this right against her will, against her strong dislike of him. Mira belongs to a privileged class because she writes poetry. Mira’s story has other implications too; besides the aspect of rape within marriage, primarily there can be of lack of communication between the husband and wife. In a male dominated society, a wife’s wishes and desires are not given any priority, and social constraints compel them to behave within a social framework.
Mira’s poems become a symbol of female oppression. Mira too had nurtured a deep desire of being recognized as a creative writer and a poet, but was scared of being laughed at. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty were all in her heart and her poems were true reflections of her latent feelings. In male-dominated society men always find one or the other ways to discourage girls or to prevent them being themselves. In Mira’s case society prevents her to be a great poetess. Society has created such a border for a girl so that marriage is the only important thing for a girl. Mira also has to leave her studies only because some man ‘sees’ her and desires to marry her and Mira has no choice but to follow silently. The attitude of condescension to a girl is a reflection on the male perception of her as an inferior being. On the part of a girl, the sense of inferiority that she has internalized over the ages proves to be a debilitating factor which stands in the way of her progress. She does not dare to aim high under the influence of it. As Simone De Beauvoir says:

This inability to be self-sufficient brings on a shyness that extends over their whole lives and even marks their work. They think that brilliant triumphs are reserved for men; they do not dare aim too high.  
(Beauvoir, 2011: 358)

In education and in career, it is her limitations as a girl -- physical disadvantages and more important, the male perception of her as an inferior being. Mira, during her college days, had a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet, but she feared of being laughed at by the society; as Mira writes in her diary, an incident when Venu, a popular male writer came to her college. She was amazed by his personality and says:
...I am filled with awe. Will I ever be able to write like this? Today, after hearing him, I know, this is what I want- to be able to write like this. But I can’t believe I ever can. And thank God, I never say this aloud. They will laugh at me. I can imagine how they will. I can hear them laughing. (Deshpande: 66)

The cruelty and domination of males are clearly seen here. When a girl thinks of doing anything new, she is not at all accepted by the society. A girl has her own dreams and ambitions. In patriarchal society it is always seen that no one bothers to know, what a girl aspires. On the contrary, family members always impose their wishes, desires on her. Tradition teaches girl to be submissive and have limited desires and vision and this prevents the writer like Mira to show her talent to anyone. Girls are always taught that their ultimate goal is to be married. That is why when Mira meets Venu and speaks to him of her poetry and gives him some of her poems to read, he said, “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men.” (Deshpande: 127)

The institution of family which, is at the core of a patriarchal set up has necessitated and promoted the concept of division of labour on the basis of gender. Patriarchal culture insists that a woman should confine her life to cooking, cleaning, washing and bearing and rearing children, ignoring her intelligence, education, human potency and even her selfhood. Simone De Beauvoir has said:

It is this complex as well that will weigh on her intellectual accomplishments. It has often been noted that... the girl loses ground in intellectual and artistic fields. There are many reasons for this. One of
the most common is that adolescent girl does not receive the same encouragement accorded to her brothers; on the contrary, she is expected to be a ‘woman as well’ and she must add to her professional work the duties that femininity implies. (Beauvoir, 2011: 357)

Girls are interior colonized by men and that is why as the colonizers they want to show or impose an inferior position to girls. Another point also can be raised that men don’t want to give girls a chance to flourish because men are insecure of their position in society. Men are so coward that they fear of losing their position at superior place. In this regard Urmila also says, “Something comes through when I think of Venu’s poems everywhere and Mira’s voice silenced.” (Deshpande: 128)

Kalpana’s case is also the same. When a girl, like Kalpana flourishes as a free and confident girl, the man always tries to let her down anyhow, either by laughing at her or by proving the physical power and authority by raping. When Shakutai tells Urmila about Kalpana’s nature and behaviour she says,

She is very smart, that’s how she got that job in the shop. Kalpana even learnt how to speak English. People in our chawl used to laugh at her but she did not care. When she wants something, she goes after it, nothing can stop her. (Deshpande: 92)

In this cruel male dominated society men find one o the other way ‘to stop’ a girl to do what she wants and does not let her be what she wants to be. She is compelled to live in expected periphery prepared by society for her.

Girls like Mira and Kalpana are deprived of opportunities; otherwise they are also confident and talented. They are girls having their own ambitions. The cause of
Kalpana’s grief is her boldness, questioning attitude and in Mira’s case she as a visionary girl is ruined because of unfair societal norms. Mira is a scholar girl and she used to publish her poetry in journals, during her college days. One of such poems shows Mira’s confident self who asks youth to join hands and welcome a new age. She writes:

Come my brothers, come my sisters,

Let us join our hands,

A new road, a new way,

A new age begins. (Deshpande: 44)

Mira was so confident that she could boost up the youth to join hands and work together for the new age to come but, her marriage had played a role of catalyst in transforming her from a confident to a fearful nervous girl and that is why after marriage she starts using diaries as her companion with whom she could share every happy and sad moments of her life. She doubts,

Huddled in my cocoon,

A somnolent silkworm,

Will I emerge a beauteous being?

Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist? (Deshpande: 65)

Mira is a very good writer and if one looks at her poems one can feel her deep insight but then again she doubts whether she could be recognized what she really is or she has to end up being herself and has to join the beaten track by following traditional norms silently. In male dominated society, a girl when she refuses to adjust or
conform is generally branded as out of ordinary or even abnormal. There is a conflict in the minds of these girls between societal expectations about them and their own individual aspirations as Phyllis Chesler in her book *Women and Madness* records:

> It is clear that for a woman to be healthy she must ‘adjust’ to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex even though these kinds of behaviour are generally regarded as less socially desirable...The ethics of mental health is masculine in our culture. (69)

Mira also faces the same problem; she admits it in her poems by saying:

> They called me mad, They, who cocooned themselves
> In bristly blankets    And thought themselves warm
> That boiled and seethed
> They called me mad, They, who were entranced
> By a single white ray of light, When I spoke of the magic
> Of the seven colours in a prism. (Deshpande: 100)

When a girl is confident, visionary and has a capacity of thinking ahead of others, society cannot bare it and tries to consider her mad and laugh at her. Kalpana starts earning and live the way she wants but Shakutai, being her mother also cannot understand her desires and dreams. Mira has very clearly depicted society’s point of view in this regard and she gives a very good answer of society’s doubt about a girl’s wants. She says:
To you who are satiated, content

How do I speak of my wants? (Deshpande: 146)

In *The Binding Vine* there is a depiction of middle class and lower middle class girls who are brought up in traditional environment and struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self identity and independence. Shashi deshpande, an eminent novelist has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the material relation she seeks to expose a tradition by which a girl is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novel reveals the man-made traditions and uneasiness of modern Indian girl in being a part of them. Mira also shares her uneasiness by writing:

...will I become that way 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. (Deshpande: 101)

The image that man has succeeded in evolving for woman is just as he would like her to be--as his helper, dependent and slave, leading a vicarious existence for promoting his welfare and happiness, denying her own self. Mira, before her marriage, thought of a different life that of her mother but tradition and society compel her to destroy her self-identity and accept her inferior position in society. Kalpana also dreams a better life by educating herself, earning money, speaking English and living on her own terms, but she is ruined physically and psychologically. Rape of her body and mind leads her to a tragic life.
In spite of belonging to the modern, educated, urban society and being exposed to the liberal revolutionary ideas and changes, shaping in the world in the name of women’s liberation movement, the role and position of Indian women has been just relegated to that of wives and mothers only. The only difference between human being and animal is that God has given human being a free will, which means freedom of choice. In male–dominated society girls are not provided with their basic right to choose. Freedom of choice is God’s blessing to human being but men are so cruel that behind the name of society and tradition girls are treated like dumb animals, that don’t have any choice but to follow without raising any question.

Activists the world over have raised their voice against the patriarchal tendency to look down upon girl as an object or a possession of man. They raise voices against it for denying her the right as a free individual who can exercise her discretion and intellectual capabilities, make her own choices in life and play her role in decision-making. These factors can bring about drastic changes in her life and in the life of the universe. In spite of this there are still girls like Mira and Kalpana who are deprived of opportunities and become victims of male supremacy. There are girls like them who cannot raise their voices against the brutality of male- dominance and cannot fight their own battle. Such unfortunate girls have to depend on women like Urmila who understands her duty and fight others’ battle. As Urmila says she has been lucky to manage everything but girls like Kalpana and Mira, “What happened to them- under the carpet forever because we are afraid of disgrace. (Deshpande: 174)

Commenting on this new dimension of theme, Indira Nityanandam observes:

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 poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist, for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting only their own battles. (Qtd. in Dhawan: 66)

In India girls are waiting for such a time when girls from all classes are provided with equal opportunities, freedom of choice and chance to flourish like free birds. They don’t want a society where, “One Indira Gandhi in charge of the nation and a country full of women not allowed to take charge of their own lives.” (Deshpande: 38)

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande. Saraswathy Amma in her *Purushanmarillatha Lokam* dreams of her ideal utopia where she images women to be totally free and safe. To make a woman be free first of all the girls should be free of oppression and the mind set of whole society towards girls needs to be changed, then the new age will emerge where girls:

...Would have much more of comforts and conveniences. They could venture out anytime anywhere without company...They could go anywhere, do whatever job they liked and live happily... They need not hear anybody's dictates; nor take anyone’s permission, nor do they need to suffer slavery... Can I speak out my individual opinion?.. I like the condition where limitations on the freedom of movement and freedom of job opportunities for them are removed. (Saraswathy Amma: 14-15)
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