CHAPTER-VII

THE BINDING VINE

The emancipation of women which Shashi Deshpande discusses in the previous novel *A Matter of Time* has again caught the fancy of the writer in *The Binding Vine*. Women in *A Matter of Time* grapple with their own emancipation. Sumi, the female protagonist, deals with her own catastrophe. She knows that she should not crumble down before the adverse circumstances that have engulfed her life. Picking up the same theme more seriously Shashi Deshpande here in *The Binding Vine*, creates a vine of love, trust, solidarity among the women of different strata of society so that true emancipation can be achieved.

The novel *The Binding Vine* is about a lady who fights for other women’s cause; an idea which in itself is unprecedented for Shashi Deshpande too. Starting from her earlier heroines whether they are Sarita, Indu, Jaya or Sumi; no heroine of Deshpande has ever thought of crossing the boundaries of their own lives. They introspect on their lives and redefine their roles but they have never tried to awaken the spirit of feminism among the sisterhood. This very spirit of solidarity, binding and sisterhood is quite remarkable in this present novel. It is Urmila the woman protagonist of *The Binding Vine* through whom Shashi Deshpande thinks about the emancipation of women. Urmila joins hands with other suffering women and creates that vine of love through which women can think of and work for their emancipation. Urmila is the protagonist who is quite unlike the earlier protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. Indu, Sarita, Jaya with the exception of Sumi can only think of their roles and grapple with identity loss which however they are able to understand gradually. These heroines of Shashi Deshpande do not move out of their own lives after coming to terms with their own identity rather they resolve to break silence and redefine their roles. But what Urmila is remarkable for is the fact that she does not keep content with changing her own life. She shares a bond of solidarity with other women and makes them aware of their own rights.

The world of *The Binding Vine* is populated with three generations of women. As in the earlier novels of Shashi Deshspande, the plot does not limit itself to pointing out the troubles that the one or two main characters face rather here the concern of the novelist is with the whole lot of women and she holds the strong view that the predicament of women through different generations is identical. Mira’s mother, Vanna’s mother, Urmila’s mother Inni and Mira belong
to the first generation of women. Urmila, Vanna, Shakutai and Sulu form the second generation. In the third generation there are characters like Mandira, Urmila’s daughter Anu and Kalpana. The plot moves around all these women. Urmila being the main character binds them all and through her a deep understanding of all these characters can be had.

The story of _The Binding Vine_ revolves around Urmila who is the female protagonist of the novel. She is a lecturer in a college and is the wife of Kishore who is in Merchant Navy. It is through the character of Urmila that the writer has hinted at the true emancipation of women. When the novel opens Urmi as Urmila is fondly called is mourning the loss of her daughter who has recently died. All her family members try to console her but her heart is never at ease. Her mother Inni, her sister-in-law Vanna and her brother Amrut strive hard to wean her away from the loss that has engulfed her. But she finds no solace in any of their advices which she believes are useless. These advices seem hollow to her as what she believes is that forgetting one’s own child is a treachery which she would never dare. She lapses in a loss from where she finds it really very hard to bounce back into life. She cannot leave the dead behind and move on in life. The trauma for her is too much and it hangs heavy on her.

She believes in the fact that one has to face every moment of life however bad it is. One can never avoid any moment just because it is very painful and hurting. She is of the opinion that her daughter’s loss has to be faced as, “There can be no vaulting over time. We have to walk every step of way, however difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing.”\(^1\) (TBV 9) Though her daughter’s memories make her life miserable yet she has no wish to forget them completely. She does not wish to, “project myself into a time when all this pain will be a thing of the past, healed and forgotten. This pain is all that’s left to me of Anu. Without it, there will be nothing left to me of her; I will lose her entirely.” (TBV 9) She believes if she forgets the memories of Anu, she would be left with nothing of hers. Anu is already dead and she knows that she will never return back but even then she does not want to forget her memories despite the best efforts made by every one of her family members as she believes, “To forget is to betray.” (TBV 21) She does not want that she will be flocked by all of them as, “I wish they’d realise it makes no difference to me, whether I’m alone or whether someone is with me.” (TBV 13) she time and again requests them, “…please leave me alone… Why don’t you all leave me alone? Do you think it helps to have you watching me all the time?” (TBV 14)
Vanna tries her best to make her cry. She does not like that Urmi should keep her feelings of sorrow pent up in her. She is so mindful and caring of Urmi. She is not only sister-in-law of hers but also a very good friend. Thus she exhorts her to let her emotions loose. Urmi must weep over the loss. But what happens is that she does not feel any pain that could find expression in tears. Her plight is that of a person who is too stunned to weep as the shock has been internalised. She even hits her head against the wall so that she may feel the pangs of pain. It is a deliberately taken decision so that she may realise the loss of her daughter in tears. Vanna’s advice falls flat on her when she says, “Don’t keep it bottled within you. Why don’t you cry, Urmi? It’s unnatural not to cry.” (TBV13)

The memories of her daughter haunt her day and night: “I remember the sound of Anu’s heart beating, her breathing. I knew the exact moment she died: I heard her expel her breath- a loud harsh sound that tore into me. Then all the tumult died down and there was silence.” (TBV 14) Her memories pinch her. They are too heavy a burden to be shaken off the heart. She has her bouts of hallucinations as:

I wake up to hear the soft snuffling sounds of her breathing by my side; I can smell her sweet baby flesh. Sometimes as if I have gone back in time, her milky, ammoniac, talcum odour comes back to me; my breasts feel heavy and painful, as if they are gorged with milk. Once again I can feel the softness of her body in my arms, the heaviness of her head flopping over my shoulder; I can feel her toes, scrabbling at my midriff. (TBV 21)

She is a woman who is caught into a dilemma. The dilemma is of the death of her daughter. On the one hand she wants to let go her memories but on the other she does not want to do that as: “No, I must reject these memories I have to conquer them…This is one battle and has to win if I am to go on living.” (TBV 21) She again advises her: “What’s broken cannot be mended. But I’m not broken, I’m not going to break.” (TBV 19) But still it is tough for her to forget her memories. The picture of Anu is so fixed in her that she cannot forget her. That is why she does not like the words of her mother when she says that the framed picture that Urmila has brought must be of Anu as she would hang it on her wall in her bedroom so that she may not forget her. But to Urmila it is nonsense as she can never forget her completely. “I don’t need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life.” (TBV 68)
Urmi is a woman who is so shocked and paralyzed over the death of her daughter who died at the age of one that she has lost the capacity to shed tears. She is shocked to see others shedding tears so easily. She has seen her husband Kishore crying after the death of Anu but she feels so indifferent that she does not wipe his tears and let him weep. In a way Urmi has been stuck dumb; she is so much shaken that tears refuse to come down. It is a more dangerous situation as the tears over the loss of a dead purges the soul of the sorrow and burden whereby bringing catharsis but what is remarkable in the case of Urmi is that her inner heart has not been purified of the sorrow and the dark clouds of Anu’s memories overcast her. Hence where others have quite moved on in their lives including her husband Kishore, she has still been crawling. She knows that in order to live life, she must leave her memories behind as it would serve her no purpose otherwise but the dichotomy is instead of her best efforts to do so, she cannot really help herself. Although she affirms the will to survive as, “Each breath I struggled to take was an affirmation of my will to live.” (TBV 20) She exhibits the spirit to live. She believes till the time there is a hope and will to live, the person cannot so easily succumb to the problems. It is the will that helps to make life endurable. She hits on a positive note: “We’re connected to our physical selves by the fragile thread of our wills. It’s only when the thread snaps that it’s all over. That hasn’t happened to me, not as yet. I want to live. And I won’t break down. I’m in full control of myself.” (TBV 20) Indira writes:

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as 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 loss.²

She sees the face of her son Kartik. She realises that she is doing wrong to him. He needs her motherly love and affection. She is so absorbed in her loss over the daughter that she has completely forgotten her son’s needs. She realises the fact that she has to live with the reality of Anu’s being dead. She must squarely face the truth. She does not want to wrong Kartik. So she decides, “I must let Anu go.” (TBV 22) Urmila’s latent heart which has been some sparkles of Anu’s memories is ignited by Lalita’s question, “How many kids do you have?” (TBV 106) Urmila though answers that she has only one Kartik but is replete with angry feelings. She is
quite repentant of what she has said. She feels guilty of wronging her daughter Anu. She reflects: “Only one, a son… the words keep hammering in my mind. How could I, oh God, how could I? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu?” (TBV 106)

Urmila’s own pain makes her quite sensitive to the pain of other women. The same loss brings her in close contact with many of other suffering women. She shares a bond of sympathy as she empathizes with their condition in which they have been restricted to. It is the same sensibility that draws her closer to the suffering of Kalpana, the daughter of Shakutai. It is again the same sensibility that makes her read the poetry of her dead mother-in-law whom all considered a mental patient. Mira’s poems and knows the truth of her life. Mira appears to her as a suffering woman; a woman lost in the world of her husband’s caprices; a victim of marital rape. Shashi Deshpande has very well addressed the issue of pain and suffering. She has hinted if one’s suffering takes one near to the other’s suffering, there is no better treatment then of it than the feeling of empathising and sympathising. It is what is seen in the present novel in the very character of Urmila whose own suffering is so acute that she becomes highly aware of the suffering of others. Commenting on the novel, Indira Nityanandham has written:

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes to her protagonists here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact, that though, here are Mira’s and Kalpana’s and Shakutai’s, we also have our Urmila’s.³

The title *The Binding Vine* is a metaphorical one. The vine is a creeper that entwines itself over the tree in order to grow itself. Without the tree it cannot further its development and growth. So women in order to come out of their shackled atmosphere must be like the vine bind themselves with love and affection. If only they develop sympathy and empathise with one another, their very sisterhood will be forged and then the dream of true emancipation and a world without any disparity can be envisioned. Concepts like women are different from men because of their sex have from the very beginning of civilization been sticking to the Indian society which has created a big chasm between the both sexes which is very difficult to fill in but only through awareness among women of their subjugated lot. Women like Shakutai and many more are in deep slumber as they have imbibed the very values and ideals which they have inherited from the
earlier generation. The inherited values by which Shakutai blames Kalpana considering that women must keep themselves to their limits, are the vociferous values created by the patriarchal set up. Women like her need to be shaken off her sleep. Such women must know the whole reality. Women who are rich and educated like Urmila must come forward to enrich the uneducated and unaware women like Shakutai, the only way to salvation.

It was Vanna’s mother and Urmila’s present mother-in-law Akka who tells Urmila the story of her real mother-in-law Mira. In fact Kishore and Vanna are children of same father but their mothers are not same. Kishore’s mother Mira died while delivering him and after Mira’s death, his father married another woman who bore a girl child Vanna. The story was how Mira got married. It was a one sided love marriage as the man was involved as he took fancy to the woman when he saw her for the first time. He was so spell bound to see her beauty that, “…he became a man in single minded pursuit of an object: marrying her.” (TBV 47) She however died after he got married to her within four years’ duration while giving birth to Kishore. It was really astonishing that he undertook journey of finding himself another wife after Kishore’s birth when he was only a day old.

She gets a true view of Mira as she confesses: “I’ve worked hard at knowing Mira, I’ve read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira.” (TBV 174) She comes to know that Mira stands for female victimisation and subjugation. Mira is a woman: “who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty two.” (TBV 48) Through her poems she knows that her father was very proud of her. He even presented a gift in the form of a book of poetry “The Golden Treasury” to her. Mira’s school notebooks which Vanna’s mother hands over to Urmila are all over lined up with sentences and in a file there are poems. She therefore for the first time comes to know that Mira was a poet. On further browsing her poems, she comes to know that Mira used to write her diaries in English but “her poems are in Kannada.” (TBV 50) The reason for writing poems in Kannada can be traced back to Wordsworth’s definition of poetry where he says that poetry is really embedded into the personality that writes it. It is a very powerful overflow of a poet’s personal emotions. Thus Kannada being the mother tongue of Mira can well express her pent up emotions. Poetry for her plays the part of a good companion who stands by her through thick and thin.
Mira’s poetry is the poetry replete with her sexual exploits. Her poems vibrate with pessimism. It is a pessimist soul that writes those poems. Her poems are the exquisite instances of her intimate experiences. Urmi can decipher Mira’s dislike of the sexual unison with her husband as almost in every of her poem the dislike is rampant, “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.” (TBV 63) She suffers in a marriage devoid of love. She adopts silence as a part of endurance. Silence and compromise seem to be her main weapons and she bore everything. The condition of Kalpana is not confined to Kalpana only but it is a universal predicament. Urmila sees the affinity in Kalpana and Mira. She thinks, “I’ve suddenly realised—what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too.” (TBV 63) Rapes are so heinous crimes. Even today in the country despite the fact that so many laws to curb the social disgrace and evil which is such a slap on the face of our country which was considered some centuries back as the golden sparrow of the world and is still famous for its rich Vedantic philosophy and ideals, rape crimes have not ceased. Mira, “…never write any poems about love. Yes, that is odd, most women poets do. But Mira didn’t. There’s not a single one about love.” (TBV 82) Mira’s poems are pessimistic as they present to the world her own condition and life. She was subjected to rape all night. Her mind was filled with anti-love feelings. There were feelings of animosity and hatred. Love can never find a place in that. There was no love that she received from her husband. It was sex and lust that drove the man crazy. Seeing Mira’s poems, Urmila knows that even Mira felt the harrowing pain of the handcuffs and fetters of the very womanhood. She knows that her mother’s pain and anguish that she experienced because of being a woman has been transferred to her as she herself is a woman: “Whose face is this I see in the mirror, unsmiling, grave, bedwed with fear? The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow.” (TBV 126)

Shashi Deshpande in this present novel has picked up the issue of rapes. Rape stands for having sexual intercourse with a woman against her consent. Rape is a crime under the law. Rape is not the physical act of deflowering a woman against her wish but it is a mental torture also. A rape victim is mentally and psychologically traumatised. It is very difficult for them to forget the trauma as the impression of the hurt is so indelible that even time cannot rub it from the heart and soul. Moreover the society pours oil over the troubled water and converts the life of rape victims a hellish experience for them. It becomes not less than an inferno for the victims. The society lands the whole blame on the rape victims of the crime whereas it is really a shocking
and appalling truth the culprits, the men who are responsible for the hurt go scot free. No one blames them for what has happened. No one holds them responsible. They even if they are arrested, convicted and sentenced to jail, come out after their sentence is over and life a normal life. Whereas society should hate them but on the contrary is hates women. It makes faces at them. Rape victim sets the tongues of the people wagging and they talk all nonsense about them.

In her heart she nurtured a dream of being a successful writer and a poet but the male dominated society hinders her way as it believes that there is no place of women in it as far as profession as a writer is concerned. Mira was scared that she would be the butt of laughter and ridicule in society. It is something that reminds us of Jane Austen and Mary Anne Evans who have to use male names in order to publish their works. It is obviously a negative atmosphere where a woman has been denied creativity. Even if women have been allowed to write down they have discouraged as in the case of Indu and Jaya. Urmila can read between her lines and comes to know that, “yes, she is already a writer, I can see it here, I can see her preparing herself, flexing her muscles, aspiring for eternity.” (TBV 65) Venu told Mira when she handed him to read some pages of poetry that she had written after mustering up courage, “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.” (TBV 127) Mira’s urge of being a recognised writer and its failure finds expressions as:

\[
Huddled \text{ in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm,} \\
Will \text{ I emerge a beauteous being?} \\
Or \text{ will I, suffocating, cease to exist? (TBV 65)}
\]

Urmila as a child has seen so many wedding ceremonies and functions. She has seen many wedding related rituals. A picture through her past comes alive to her mind. She remembers brides who never nervous and their hands trembling. Urmila deciphers the nervousness as their inner fear of coming of the first night, the fear of sex with the partner that turns them into a trapped animal. She reflects: “And the back of her neck, I can remember that, looked like a lamb’s, waiting for the butcher’s knife to come down upon it.” (TBV 63) Like the lamb, the bride is to be slaughtered. Her slaughter is not the killing her to death but in terms of her sexual union which in most of the couples go on against the women’s consent. After marriage the same is repeated with Mira. She was subjected to rape every day. It is not that marriage gives the right to
men to possess women but there should be equality. Men must behave properly so that a balanced relation might be kept alive. But that is a distant dream and as such the poetry of Mira is replete with instances of her being subjected to physical and mental anguish. She was brutally raped and she died when she was giving birth to her child after four years of her marriage when she was only twenty four. Rape is not a physical torture rather a mental one as, “It is not the rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well.” Mira writes about her fear of the coming night in symbolical language: “But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark clouded, engulfing night?” (TBV 66) Mira hates the word love and thinks it is not to be found in marriage. Love is a word which her husband speaks and therefore she scorns it. Instead she likes her anger as, “I’ve my defences; 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 a bliss when he does that…why can’t he leave me alone?” (TBV 67)

“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 her rapist.” Society often gives sanction to a man to possess his wife even if the wife is reluctant to such a sexual union. Reputed Indian Lawyer Indira Jai Singh comments:

> 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 (or rape) as her consent is assumed. in this respect, the woman’s movement has consistently demanded that the law of rape be changed. a recent judgement of a court in England indicated that rape within marriage could be an offence. Several states in U.S. have specially amended their original law to make it an offence.

Urmila comes to know that Mira was renamed after marriage which is a common practice. In most of the novels of Shashi Deshpande, the author exposes the motive behind this practice which is to subjugate and to rob the woman of her identity. In That Long Silence and Roots and Shadows the examples of name changing can be seen. But Mira resents her new name ‘Nirmala’-

_A glittering ring gliding on the rice carefully traced a name ‘Nirmala’._
Who is this? None but I,

my name hence, bestowed upon me.

Nirmala, they call me, 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. (TBV 101)

Mira married at the age of eighteen. Bearing the life that she led was quite normal and common place thing in the age of Mira but Mira found it humiliating and unendurable. It was a life as, “Cloistered in a home, living with the man she could not love, surrounded by people she had nothing in common with-how did she go on?” (TBV 127) But perhaps Mira found solace in her writing. But she could not a space, a room of her own to concentrate to writing, to pour her feelings and heart into it. Probably she wrote at night when the torture ended for her after her husband has gone for sleep that she wrote as, “Yes, I imagine it was there that she wrote, late at night, after the man had gone to bed, sitting down on floor by the window perhaps, forgetting everything while she wrote.” (TBV 127)

Mira experiences loneliness even in her own family before marriage. Urmila sees a family picture where Mira can be seen standing aloof. It is the aloofness which is, in Mira’s life “not not physically.” (TBV 101) Mira’s in-laws thought she was a mad woman. They thought perhaps she could not meet her own mother before her death turned her mad but it was not the fact. Mira was quite sensible. Mira’s writes her anger:

They called me mad

they, who cocooned themselves

in bristly blankets

and thought themselves warm

when I spoke of my soul

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. (TBV 100)

Mira’s life is reflected in her writing. Urmila who has never seen her mother-in-law as she died when Kishore was just a day old, sees her actually through her writing which includes both her writing and poetry. She knows that Mira has put her life into the few pages that she has. Yet she has not depicted her life fully. It is only through symbolism that she hints at the kind of life that she lived. Urmila first tried to set her diaries and poems apart but then realises, “How could I have been so naïve as to imagine that I could keep her life and her poetry apart? The diaries and the poems complement each other, the gaps in one are filled by the other.” (TBV 99) But Mira’s poetry though just scribbled in her school note books is like a message which is tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell.

Mira has even articulated her days when she had menstruation. Urmila can visualise through her poems a picture of her during those days as,

When I read the poem I can see Mira sitting on the floor, hair dishevelled, wearing an old sari, her plate and glass by her side. I can see her drawing herself into a huddle each time someone entered, tucking her sari under her feet, drawing it tightly round her shoulders when the children ran in, afraid of polluting them with her touch. And then, when she was alone, looking out of the window, listening to the cries of the hawkers. (TBV 98)

Urmila wants to get Mira’s poetry published. Vanna does not like the idea of publishing Mira’s work. She is angry with Urmila. She is infuriated as it will blacken the family name. Mira’s husband is her own father. It is a disgrace of the family honour when the skeleton will be brought out of the cupboard. The society will at large come to know that it is so. It is obvious that Vanna’s reaction is what is expected from any child as, “One can never see one’s parent as a sexual being….a man who tried to possess another human being against her will.” (TBV 83) Vanna charges Urmila: “You’re so insensitive, how could you ask Akka to help you with the poems? Didn’t you imagine what she would feel? You saw her that day when she read them, you
saw how she cried….Once people read those poems, how can she hold her head up again? (TBV 172)

Urmī’s next door neighbour Priti is a woman with feminist ideals. She is over excited as she says, “Let’s make a movie on Mira, let’s recreate her life.” (TBV 38) She even persuades Urmī for that but Urmī does not share the same feelings with Priti. Urmī is quite scornful of the sycophant peoples. She does not like Priti’s hypocrisy. On one hand she talks of having a greater understanding with one’s mothers and grandmothers, but on the other she herself has blotted out the image of her mother entirely. In her decision to come back from America to India, she credits it to the conditions prevailing in America though the truth is that her mother suffered from mental illness and was given to alcohol due to which her own life was quite unendurable which propelled her to leave America. Urmila does not want to work with such people and moreover she does not want to intrude upon the privacy of her mother-in-law’s life as the poems are, “Strictly private and confidential.” (TBV 51)

Priti’s ideals have been scoffed at. It is not the real feminism but a shadow of that which Priti holds in her kitty. She is enthusiastic about a case where the court has pronounced its verdict that, “…wife could not be forced into a sexual relationship with the husband against her will.” She thinks it very radical in a country like India which is quite traditional and is hopeful that the consequences of this decision can take the country a long way in ensuring equality in the matters of sex. But the reality is contradictory. It is not possible for the weak Indian women to knock at the doors of courts every time such a situation arises for them. Urmila understands and, through Urmila, Shashi Deshpande rips the semblance of equality of sexes that the law tries to usher in apart. Urmila underlines, “No…laws can’t change people’s lives…I’m a realist. Nothing will change.” (TBV 38) Shashi Deshpande affirms her belief in the fact that laws can only assist a woman if they are first aware of their situations. Moreover the society in itself should change its viewpoint towards women. In a married life it becomes impossible for women to seek refuge in a law as it would bring their whole life collapse into nothingness.

The other rape victim is Kalpana. She is the victim of rape outside marriage. She belongs to the lower strata of life. Kalpana has been very brutally raped and is lying in an unconscious state. Urmila’s own sense of grief has connected her not only to Mira but also to Kalpana. Her heart is rent with pain when she comes to know about the accident. But Urmila is however shocked to
see Shakutai’s reaction. Shakutai does not want that the doctor’s report should carry the stigma of rape in it. She is quite familiar with the Indian society and knows well that it becomes very tough for a woman to live her normal life in the society with the stigma of rape. It brings whole lot of trials and tribulation for the women. The social stigma of rape clinging to a woman’s face is really very difficult to erase. She pleads, “If a girl’s honour is lost, what is left? The girl doesn’t have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her.” (TBV 59) But Shakutai denies believing the fact at first that her daughter Kalpana has been raped as, “It’s not true, you people are trying to blacken my daughter’s name.” (TBV 58) But later as the case is confirmed a rape case, she says, “even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don’t let anyone know of it, I have another daughter, what will become of her…?” (TBV 59) Bell Hooks is right when she says: “Sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures, by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress, and by the victims themselves, who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the social quo.” It is what is seen in the case of Shakutai whose daughter is raped but she instead of trying to get her justice, seeks to hush up the matter in the name of family honour.

Shakutai heaves a sigh of relief when she comes to know that the Casualty has reported the case as rape. Even Doctor Bhaskar despite his best efforts cannot report the case as rape case as the police men are not willing to accept that it is a serious rape but they try to convince everyone, “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.” (TBV 88) Urmila is quite uncomfortable at the situation as well as Dr. Bhasker who denies to accept that the case is of car accident as there are substantial evidence of Kalpana’s body has been brutally raped. Like a typical traditional Indian woman Shakutai scolds her daughter of what has befallen her. She blames her fully and holds her responsible for the heinous crime that has disgraced them in society. She is quite angry:

Here boys are like…they’re like dogs panting after bitches. And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they’ll leave you alone? Ever since Kalpana grew up, I have had to live with this fear. But Kalpana doesn’t understand. Once she started earning, she thought she could do what she wanted. (TBV 146)
Urmila tries to convince Shakutai that it is no fault of hers. It is not she who is to be held responsible for the rape. It is the man who did it who is to be held responsible. Kalpana has no fault. Wearing make-up, lipstick, nail paint and good dresses, does not make her guilty of anything. It is every individual’s right to look good. Urmila tries to tell her, “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?” (TBV 147) But Shakutai further blames her for the disgrace as:

She’s shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me. What could I do? She was so self willed. Cover your self 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…we have to keep to our places, we can never step out. (TBV 147-148)

In this context Vikas Malik writes:

Shakutai who keeps meandering between praising her daughter and criticizing or blaming her is a victim of her own values. Yet she wasn’t born with these values embedded within her mother’s womb someone had to shape their values, make her believe that they were her own. Who? Her mother, her mother’s mother, her mother’s mother’s mother? Not at all. It was her father, her father’s father, her father’s father’s father…

It is quite astonishing that despite the fact that Shakutai’s own life has been so devoid of marital joys as her husband has walked on her by marrying another woman, she thinks of her daughter’s marriage prospects; believing that without marriage her daughter’s life would be a hell. That is why she does not want that the matter be reported as a rape case. It is better to talk about this case as an car accident as in society they would not have to hide their face to avoid people’s glares. They would be able to find a suitable match for Kalpana too. But if rape is reported then no one will marry Kalpana. Her future as Shakutai thinks will be bleak. Dr. Bhasker is puzzled as: It takes a hell lot of courage for a woman like that even to think of marriage.” (TBV 87) The cries of the mother Shakutai stun even Dr. Bhasker and puzzle him, “Why is the mother so anxious, frantic almost, about her daughter’s marriage? Who’ll marry her if this gets known, she keeps saying. Can’t she see the girl’s condition?” (TBV 87)
What is more surprising is the behaviour of the police which is considered the watch dog of the justice. The callous behaviour of the police in not recording the rape cases or distorting and diluting them comes as a big jolt. Many of the evil in the society is perpetuated by the police’s inactivity to respond on time and nab the culprits. If police understands its responsibility, the crime rate will definitely fall down. Bhasker informs Urmi that the police officer argued there is no benefit of recording the case as rape. Kalpana is so critical and it does not matter whether she dies as a victim in car accident case or as a rape victim. The police officer further suggests that she is unmarried and has sisters who are to be married. If rape case is reported people will talk loosely about Kalpana. The police officer blames her for being a professional prostitute as, “…she may be a professional…she must have been out with a boyfriend….may be after they had a bit of fun she was knocked down by a car.” (TBV 88) He exhorted reporting the Kalpana case as a rape will bring misfortunes to all of them, “But publicising it isn’t going to do anyone any good. It’s going to mean trouble for everyone-the girl, her family, your colleague who first examined her, us.” (TBV 89) Mulk Raj Aanad rightly observes about marriage, rape and men when he comments:

No woman in 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 wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust.9

Urmila’s efforts for helping Kalpana are thwarted by her own family members. Her mother Inni and her friend Vanna cannot understand why she is getting involved with the problems of others. For them it is a stupid thing to be done. But despite the fact that no one likes her decision of helping the woman in distress i.e. Kalpana, Urmila is persistent in her efforts as she believes that awakening can only come when all work together in unison. Kalpana is to be transferred to some another hospital and it will pose certain difficulties for Shakutai as, “I can’t go there, it’s too far, even to come here is hard. How much money it’s going to cost me to go there every day, and how will I be able to find the time?” (TBV 166) The basic reason for shifting Kalpana to other hospital is to vacate the bed on which Kalpana has been lying for the last four months unconsciously. Urmila through Vanna comes to know that the Administrative Officer ordered this transfer and there is no use going to talk to him of this. But Urmila through her friend
Malcolm who is a journalist finds out some way of helping Kalpana but for that Shakutai must give her consent to publish in the newspaper the truth that Kalpana was not a car accident victim but a rape victim. Shakutai finding no solution complies to her suggestion.

Shakutai fills with grief when the publicity in the paper is given to Kalpana. There are different articles about her. Different papers try to expose different realities. One paper talks about the callousness of the country that the patient is being expelled as there are no beds. One other talks about the truth whether Kalpana is a prostitute as police say. Shakutai is pained to know the different stories. She feels she made a mistake by giving her consent to her, “I should have kept quiet. I thought I was helping Kalpana. But sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death.” (TBV 178) Her cries and anguish find expression as: “I’ve had enough. What have I had all my life but troubles? I should die, I’ve had enough. The kind of things they are saying, the police people, about Kalpana. Such dirt.” (TBV 177)

But soon there is the impact of all the newspaper articles. There is women led rallies in the support of Kalpana. They protest against the hospital authorities out the hospital. Due to the protest and the sympathy that Kalpana gathers from all corners of the city, Shakutai starts believing that, “The whole world is my friend.” (TBV 179) Due to the protest in the Assembly as Malcom says, “There were questions about Kalpana, noisy scenes, I believe the women were especially loud. Anyway, what will interest you is that the Government’s backtracked. They’ve ordered an investigation into Kalpana’s case and she won’t be transferred.” (TBV 183)

The government has ordered a fresh investigation of the Kalpana case. The announcement of it brings sad news of Sulu’s death. She has set herself on fire. The reason being, as she told Shakutai one day before her death, her husband has come to her to tell, “If police ask you, tell them I was at home with you that whole evening and night.” (TBV 189) This was an eye opener and she comes to know that it is her husband Prabhakar who has raped Kalpana. The fact was too heavy for Sulu and she killed herself with kerosene. Shakutai comes to know from her that Prabhakar always was mad after her. He lusted after her. Even as a child when she went to their home, he tried to have physical union with her. That is why she ran away from there. Prabhakar used to call her, “My beauty” (TBV 190) but Shakutai could never realise that he had other intentions for her. Even Sulu did never tell her all this before except one day before her death.
Sulu once came with a marriage proposal to Shakutai of Kalpana with her husband. At that time Shakutai had thought it was Sulu’s thinking and idea but after her death she comes to know the reality that it must have been Prabhakar who had tortured her to arrange the alliance, “Get me Kalpana” (TBV 193) Even Shakutai found at that time this idea good as Sulu has no child and Prabhakar even was not drunkard. But Kalpana did not like to get married to the man, her own uncle.

Different socially held views regarding the causes of rape have been picked up in the novel. Some believe women are sole responsible for it, “There can be no rape, because it can’t be done unless the woman in willing.” (TBV 182) Many people in the society hold this viewpoint that woman allows a man to rape her as it is not possible to be done if a woman does not allow a man to do so. Others believe because women flaunt themselves, they wear gaudy dresses and expose themselves is the basic reason of the rising number of crimes like rape. People even believe that for rapes capital punishment must not be given as an article in the paper says, “Forget the rapist for he knows not what he is doing!” (TBV 182)

The questions are like eye opener. It is the 21st century can we live in those backward and dark ages where women had no freedom at all? Can she be made to hide herself fully without even giving her freedom to expose her face? Where is the so-called freedom then? In the 21st century when everyone keeps on talking about the emancipation of women, can this notion be held? The answer is obvious, a big no. The issue is even if a woman be made to cover her body fully, would it ensure safety for them? There are many instances of rape with Muslim women who do not show even their face and keep their bodies covered from head to toe. It cannot bring social honour for women. Covering up cannot put a check on the rape cases. Moreover it is the age of democracy and it demands equality for all, equality in the matters of social, economic, religious and personal life. If a man has the freedom to dress up as per his own will then how can women be restricted? All these are misconceptions regarding the safety of women. It is actually not the woman who is responsible for rape, it is man who is the wrong-doer.

The institution of marriage has been made to stand in the dock again. What is there in marriage that attracts people to go for it? Urmila is of the opinion that in reality marriage is a cold-blooded bargain. She reflects: “I’ve seen people weighing up the families, their social status, money. And the couple too-height, weight, education.” (TBV 37) But still women have to marry as they feel
there is a sense of security, at least from other hungry and lusty men though their husbands can turn into rapists. Marriage has nothing to offer to women. There is Shakutai who has been left alone in the world to feed herself and her three children as her husband has gone away after he fell in love with other woman. There is Sulu, sister of Shakutai, who is a victim in marriage as “She was afraid he would throw her out, take another wife. And then she started getting these white patches on her face, her arms, her neck. He stopped touching her after that” (TBV 192-193) She even was tortured to arrange the marriage of Kalpana to him.

Then there is Vanna herself. She is the childhood friend of Urmila who stayed in the neighbourhood in Ranidurg where Urmila was sent to live with her grandparents by her parents. Vanna in the course of time becomes the sister-in-law of Urmila as her step brother Kishore marries Urmila. Vanna herself marries Harish. After her marriage, she transfers into a subservient wife. She acts as per the demands of Harish, her husband. She imbibes his sense of cleanliness and discipline in her so spontaneously it looks that she has fully lost herself. It is nothing bad if one imbibes good virtues of others but what is bad is Vanna has not adopted those virtues just for the fact that a good person must have them but she has adopted these as she wants to please her husband. Urmila does not like her sycophant show of virtues. She detests her for being a woman who for whom the end of everything is to keep the man satisfied. Urmila voices her anger: “It irritated me terribly at first, her constant refrain of ‘Harish says.’ She says it less now, but her submissiveness, her willingness to go along with him in whatever he wants, makes me angry.” (TBV 80) Vanna does everything that Harish likes. Many times Urmila and Vanna have small arguments over this issue of her being docile. On a particular occasion Urmila charges her that she crawls before him all the time. She does not dare to muster up her courage to assert herself. Even Vanna calls her daughters by their names because he does not like them to be called by anything else like a pet name. Even in the matters of having children it is Harish who has a saying. Vanna wants to have a son after her two daughters but Harish gives her a detailed lecture on the rising problem of population and tells her that even after having another pregnancy how she would be sure that it is a son. Urmila tells her that, “You let me bulldozer you, you crawl before him.” (TBV 81)

Even in the case of Urmila marriage is a setback. She marries Kishore the next door neighbour and brother of Vanna. He works in merchant navy. Their marriage is a love marriage. Even
despite the fact that even her own parents have warned of this alliance, she marries him. Her mother had different dreams about her daughter’s marriage. She wanted for Urmila, “…a kind of marriage that would let me live the life that was her ideal, a ‘pearls and chiffons’ sort of existence.” (TBV 124) But she marries quite the contrary of that. She marries a man whose father used to eat paan and whose mother was a school teacher. It was the marriage quite opposite to the expectations of Inni. But after marriage, she finds herself torn into anguish. She finds that he remains on to his job mostly of the time and comes back to her occasionally. He does not come back except one or two months in a year. Urmila has craved for physical satisfaction which only Kishore can appease. During his absence she finds it difficult to control it but does so. When he is back he cannot give her anything but sex. He does not feel her emotions much. There is not much spiritual connectivity. After marriage Urmila from being a confident girl is transformed into a nervous woman who has fears: “Now there is fear- the fear of Kishore never returning back, lost in the seas somewhere as one of his friends was; the fear of his not wanting to come back to me. Yes, that’s the thing, that’s what I am most afraid of.” (TBV 82)

Urmila’s own frustration in marriage is accountable for her closeness to Dr. Bhaskar. Urmila shares a bond of intimacy with Bhaskar. Her own life has led her into it. Bhaskar’s ability to listen to her stories, to her past, to her experiences makes her quite easy with him. During a dinner she realises, “…how intently he has been listening to me, forgetting even to eat, as if this means something to him.” (TBV 123) she has some idea that he likes her and even Vanna and Inni do not like her getting involved with him. She goes to his home for a dinner. The presence of Bhaskar’s mother makes her uncomfortable as she is quite rude in her comments some times. Urmila feels that in fact his mother is weighing her up as a daughter-in-law for herself. This thing makes her quite angry. Then Bhaskar asks her when he drops her to her home regarding her marriage and husband. He asks her whether she loves her husband. Her silence gives him the answer that she loves her husband and that is the end of her relationship. She feels cheated, “Bhaskar has no business stepping out the role I’ve allotted him in my life. I don’t really know what his role is to be, but certainly it’s not this, not that of a lover.” (TBV 162) Though she feels tempted for some times and thinks she could have given in to his advances but she knows that she has a family and she has some responsibilities. Vanna however cautions Urmila to be aware of Dr. Bhaskar’s intentions. Urmila is filled with anger:
But how can Vanna, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand what it is like-marriage with a man who fits into my life a few months in a year and fits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind? Often, after he has gone, I find myself a frantic grappling for his image, as if in going he has taken that away as well. *(TBV 164)*

Urmila however does not have feelings of radicalism regarding marriage. Using radical feminism means inverting the power of sexes which earlier had vested with men and giving it to women. But she believes it that in marriage there should be equality. She does not feel the need of radical rendering of feminist ideals of rooting out the very existence of marriage. She tells Dr. Bhaskar that women marry men because for the women like Shakutai who hail from the lower strata of life, it is imperative as it provides them security from the lustful eyes of other men. She finds good company and friendship in the male members especially Dr. Bhaskar and Malcolm. She does not have the feelings of antagonism towards the men. She believes that the society is changing although at a snail’s pace but it will definitely bring equality between the men and women. Commenting on Urmila’s relationship with Kishore and Dr. Bhaskar writes J.P.Tripathi:

> Urmila, the sailor’s wife and college teacher, is more self-reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore’s money. She is, however, a sensitive vine and need Kishore as an Oak to entwine herself around.*

Mira’s mother too suffered in marriage. She has no power at home. No one bothered about her likes and dislikes. No one consulted her in the important family matters. Mira’s mother did not make any efforts to think of her daughter’s happiness. Through Mira’s diaries, Urmila comes to know that Mira’s mother had no say and authority in the family. She saw Mira married and pregnant and knew that she was unhappy but still did not bother about her unhappiness. To Mira it never mattered, “whether she dies happy or unhappy?” *(TBV 126)* Mira is happy that she did not tell her misfortunes to her. Even if she had done so, she would not have done anything. She wants to ask her a question, “Why do you want to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?” *(TBV 126)* But Mira’s mother died before she could ask it.
The relationship that Shakutai had with her husband bespeaks of the inequality and women as being victims in the marriage. Shakutai’s husband went to Bombay after marriage though he made a promise that would return he did not come back to take her along with himself. So Shakutai resolved to go there to find out the man herself. He was lining in Police chawl in Bombay with his cousin. Shakutai found that the man her husband did not have a good job. He did not want to work for months and preferred to live idle without a penny in his hand. She was welcomed there because they got a servant to care for them. Shakutai started working and did every type of work whatsoever came her way. She even did not mind cleaning the filth of a paralytic patient. But what she minded worst was, “…they made the couple sleep in the common passage outside their room.” (TBV 110)

Then she got pregnant. She did not want to have her eldest child Kalpana to live as she thought they had no money and a life to give to the children but it did not bother her husband. So she had three children in the course of her life- Kalpana, being the eldest. It was her sister Sulu who helped her with the upbringing of the children when she went out for work. And then as luck would have in store for Shakutai miseries, her husband took fancy to another woman and starts living with her. It was Sulu again who promised and offered to bring up Kalpana. Shakutai could not give her good life. Sulu’s offer seemed to her a good relief but Kalpana ran away from them and went to her father. It was a fact that Shakutai could never grapple with. How can she run away and go to her father to live with? Her father brought her back to Shakutai. Despite of the best efforts, Kalpana did not move to Sulu’s house. Shakutai affirms, “That’ been the greatest misfortune of my life, Urmila, marrying that man.” (TBV 110) Kalpana considered Shakutai responsible for what has happened to them. She holds her responsible for her father’s desertion. Kalpana charges her, “You’re always angry, always quarrelling, that’s why he’s gone.” (TBV 93) Shakutai wanted to give her, “I wanted Kalpana to have all that I didn’t.” (TBV124) But Kalpana has her own dreams:

To make myself into your image
was never the goal I sought. (TBV 124)

Urmila’s mother Inni herself is a sufferer. She suffers in marriage too. She has to send her own daughter to her in-laws house as her husband did not trust her fully in the matters of child-nurturing. She suffered the pangs, the pain of separating her own child from her. It was the fact
that actually created divisions between Inni and Urmila too. She blamed her mother for this separation all throughout her life. The clothes that she brought and sent for Urmila, she never wore however costly and swanky they might be. But later on this doubt is cleared as Urmila’s father himself acknowledges his fault and says, “It’s not fault entirely..I shouldn’t have sent you away to Ranidurg, I should have kept you with us.” (*TBV* 112) Even Amrut informs her, “Papa was dominating…How often and how long did you live in his house? I did. He was absolute master in his house. I felt sorry for poor Inni.” (*TBV* 133) Her mother tells her that it is her father who should be held accountable for what has happened. Her father never trusted her mother for child care and as such:

> He didn’t say anything to me, he just took you away…I begged him, Urmila, I cried, I promised him I’d never leave you alone, but he wouldn’t listen. Nothing could make him change his mind. You know papa…I didn’t want you to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmila, I didn’t want that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea of your being in Ranidurg, I wanted you with me…(*TBV* 199-200)

The realisation is too much for her as, “I do not feel weighed down…A sense of being vulnerable and naked, as if some armour I’ve been wearing all these years…has fallen off.” (*TBV* 200) Urmila feels light as if the weight of some armour, some kind of shield to defend herself against something has finally been removed and she starts crying. She feels herself quite light and easy. She realises the cruelty of the man who could go to the extent of separating his children from her mother. The cruelty that he imposed on Inni makes Urmila to see the big chasm, the wide gap which is quite difficult to fill in between the man and woman. But for Urmila, she is gradually reconciled with her mother.

The other important question that Shashi Deshpande raises in the novel is regarding the balance that needs to be maintained in the family if a woman is working. Mandira’s relationship with her mother Vanna smells of hostility. Mandira does not want herself to be left with the maid Hirabai. Vanna cannot stay with her throughout the day as she is a working lady. Mandira cannot comprehend Vanna’s concern with her job. Being a child, Mandira feels that Vanna is neglecting her and her sister. But the reality is Vanna is sandwiched between her family life and professional life. She cannot help it. When one is sailing in two boats, some problem is definitely
bound to crop up. Hence this is what happens in Vanna’s case. If she had been just a house
woman, she would have accomplished all her duties regarding her family but being a working
woman, the duties and liabilities double. If she does not pay attention to her professional work,
she may be expelled from the job and in that case their financial status will crumple down. It is a
fact that Mandira cannot understand. She is a small kid only. In Vanna’s situation is aggravated
as her husband also stays for work outside of his home for many days. In the case of working
women, there needs to be a perfect understanding at home. The family members must cooperate
with her. If a woman lives with her in-laws then, they must partake in her family duties like
upbringing of the children and cooking. They must understand her situation. If a working woman
lives alone with her husband and children, then husband must cooperate. Only with peace,
harmony and coordination can the family life go on peacefully. Women however they are
working are never left apart from the family responsibilities. Society has marked the roles of
both man and woman. There should be no deviation from those roles. A man must go for
professional work and earn money and a woman must bear children and take care of the home.
But with the change in times, it is becoming difficult for a man to shoulder the family with the
meagre salary that he earns. So a woman is expected to go for some help in earning money.
Besides there are many other facts too which propel women to shed their traditional role and
move for economic earning. These factors are their own felling of being independent
economically, their awareness to excel in life and so on. But whereas a woman starts
contributing in the family life by doing what traditionally was expected from man, he does not
share any contribution in the house holding responsibilities like cooking and taking care of the
children. Thus the situation aggravates and the peace of the family is disrupted.

Chris Weeden comments on the power relationship within marriage as: “Men by the virtue of
their penis, can aspire to a position of power and control within the symbolic order. Women on
the other hand, have no position in the symbolic order, except in relation to men, as mothers, and
even the process of mothering is given patriarchal meanings, reduced, in Freud, to an effect of
penis envy.”¹¹ This is particular the case with Vanna. She has to contribute in the economical
front by working. She has to take care of the family also as her husband does not think it is his
responsibility also. He is out of the house for many days for his work. What happens is she alone
has to bear the brunt. She alone is made the scapegoat of what is happening in the family front.
That is why Vanna says, “Why is it nobody thinks of blaming Harish? He’s never around, but
it’s never his fault.” (TBV 75) This is what happens when Pallavi falls ill and Mandira after trying to call Vanna so many times finally calls Urmila as Vanna’s phone number was not reachable. Mandira shows her anger. She feels that she willingly does so. She though a child announce to Urmila, “…when I grow up, I’m never going to leave my children to go to work.” (TBV 72) Urmila tries to convince her that her mother cares for her and, “That’s why she kept Hirabai for you. Hirabai is always here….” (TBV 72) but Mandira announces, “I don’t want Hirabai, I want my mother.” (TBV 72) Vanna expects that Mandira should understand that her mother is a working woman. She tells Urmila that her own mother was working in a school. She lived with this understanding that her mother was working so there was never a clash at home. She believes that she never thought, “…she wronged me by going out, I was proud of her.” (TBV 74) But she does not like the way Mandira responds and throws tantrums. Vanna as a child never talked to argue with her mother but she is angry and disappointed that her own daughter behaves angrily and speaks loudly at her.

Urmila’s intimacy with Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu makes her aware of the fact that it is not only she alone who is suffering. Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana and Sulu all have suffered and in one or more case their suffering is too much. By contrast she however realises her own life is better and she has certain advantages. So she knows that one has to live on. She regains her lost vision. She knows it that there is her husband and son Kartik who need her. She hopefully nurtures a vision that one day Kishore may be back with her leaving all his feelings of withdrawal towards her. She realise the fact that the main urge in life is to go on living even if it means messing with the mundane daily life. She remembers Mira, “Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me; I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be.” (TBV 203)

Shashi Deshpande, through Urmila, sees a vision and thinks that the changes might sweep the sky if women forge sisterhood. Female binding as a theme is quite dominant in the novel. A woman helping out the other woman in distress is quite a rare case in Shashi Deshpande’s earlier heroines. But Urmila is unique she sees not only her own miseries rather the miseries of the world and feels sympathetic. She does not remain a bystander in their miseries like most of the people who, as Shakutai says, come and after sympathy go away, leaving the wretched to mourn the grief rather she takes the lead and helps them in the possible manner she can. She is out for the concept of female bonding. This bonding, this very vine of love, is quite significant that
binds her into the life itself. Praising the character Urmila and her female bonding, Indira Nityanandan says, “the step forward, achieved in the novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws a 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 their own battles.”

REFERENCES-


