

**THE BINDING VINE AND THE BLUEST EYE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM A FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVE**

A Dissertation submitted to the Central University of Punjab

For the Award of

Master of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

BY

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March, 2012

CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled “THE BINDING VINE AND THE BLUEST EYE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Paramjit Singh Ramana, Professor and Dr. Zameerpal Kaur, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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ABSTRACT

The Binding Vine and The Bluest Eye: A Comparative Study From a Feminist Perspective

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Degree for which submitted : Master of Philosophy
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School of Studies : School of Languages, Literature and Culture
Key Words : Feminism, Feminists, The Binding Vine, The Bluest Eye, Shashi Deshpande, Toni Morrison

Feminism in various forms and places has grappled with the question of gender, that is, of the power relationships among men and women. It is defined as cultural, economic and political movements that are focused towards establishing legal protection and complete equality for the women. It focuses on the gender politics, power relations and sexuality and gives voice to the problems of women. There are various authors all over the world who portray the sufferings of women in their creative works. The foremost objective of this research is to analyze the societal norms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social inequalities within the reference of the writings of Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Deshpande (Indian novelist) and Morrison (Afro-American novelist) are two significant women novelists who have made a bold attempt in raising voice against the frustrations and disappointments of women in the patriarchal world. Both Shashi Deshpande and Toni Morrison portray the concealed world of women in their fictional narratives. They depict that women either in India or in America or in any other part of the world, or belonging to any strata of the society suffer the same plight due to the patriarchal setup. A thematic approach from feminist perspective has been adopted for this study.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the deepest corners of my heart, I want to express my gratitude to the greatest source of inspiration – Almighty. Without His wish, this work would not have ever been materialized.

Thanks are due to my supervisor Professor. Paramjit Singh Ramana, Dean, School of Languages, Literature and Culture and my dissertation Coordinator Dr. Zameerpal Kaur, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature. I was fortunate to have such scholars to help and advise me. They have been an endless source of inspiration, motivation and support.

I am also grateful to Dr. Neetu Purohit, Research Associate, Dr. Amandeep Singh, Assistant Professor and Dr. Rajinder Kumar, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature for their acute insightful suggestions, ungrudging assistance and guidance.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their untiring support. With all the continuous inputs from my father Sh. Braham Pahuja, mother Smt. Pushpa Pahuja, Sister Smt. Himani Bhusri, Brother-in-law Sh. Vijay Bhusri, I was well able to keep myself up, both mentally and emotionally. I highly appreciate for unsolicited cooperation and cheery assistance of my dear friend, Shyam Kiran Kaur.

I am thankful to the employees of the Library and the Computer Centre, Central University of Punjab for providing me the opportunities and materials to pursue my research.

(Poonam Pahuja)

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CHAPTER 1

Feminism: An Introduction

The term feminism is a problematic term and it can mean different things to different people. It is difficult to define feminism in a way that is acceptable to all. There are various opinions about when or where it originated or when or by whom the term was first used. According to Bryson, the term 'feminism' originated from the French word 'feminisme', which was originally used by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier and the term 'feminist' first came to be used in English during the 1880s, indicating support for women's equal legal and political rights with men (1). But according to Jane Freedman, the term 'feminist' seems to have been first used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessation in the development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients who were perceived as thus suffering from feminization of their bodies. Then the term was picked up by Alexandre Dumas Fils, a French writer, who used it as a pamphlet published in 1872 entitled 'l'homme-femme', on the subject of adultery, to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine way. But in the modern society, the term feminism is modified and is perceived as challenging differences between men and women (Freedman 2).

Ukagba says that feminism emerged as an organized movement for women's rights and interests, and the political, economic and social equality of sexes in the male-dominated society. It stands for not only an awareness of women's plight but also a determination to change the situation. Thus feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms (66).

Feminism in various forms and places has grappled with the question of gender, that is, of the power relationships among women and men. Denise Thompson describes:

Feminism as a moral and political struggle of opposition to the social relations of male domination structured around the principle that only men count as 'human' and as a struggle for a genuine human status for women outside male definition and control (4).

It not only exposes the existence of male–domination but also challenges it. It can be defined as a social enterprise, a moral and political framework which is

concerned with readdressing the social wrong. Theorists describe it as an ethical stance which is centrally concerned with the question of value, of good and evil, right and wrong, of what is worthwhile and significant and what is not.

Generally speaking, feminism is a political stance taken to highlight women's inferior position in society and Bryson says that the problem which women face is not discrimination or capitalism but male power in the society (1).

The novels of Shashi Deshpande and Toni Morrison testify to the above. The twentieth century women writers- Shashi Deshpande, Toni Morrison, whose novels *The Binding Vine* and *The Bluest Eye* are selected for this study speak for those females who are the victims of male power, the protagonists, meek and submissive. Deshpande, an Indian writer and Morrison, an Afro-American writer, represent in their works different cultures but what brings them together is how they situate their characters in a similar predicament. The authors show that women, either Indian or Afro-American, have to suffer. But it is interesting to see how these women given their limited capabilities either succumb to or overcome a tight situation. But their failures, in most cases, do not deter them pressing ahead to meet life's challenges. A thematic approach from feminist perspective has been adopted for this study.

Barbara Bergs defines feminism as a "broad movement embracing the numerous phases of women's emancipation." She adds:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from x-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationship of her life. (qtd. in Hooks 25)

According to Bell Hooks, Feminism is a struggle to end the sexist oppression. Its purpose is not to give advantage to a particular group of women, or a particular race or class of women. Actually, it does not privilege woman over man but it talks about equality among male and female (28). It comprises of various social, cultural and political movements which are concerned with the eradication of gender inequalities and fight for equal rights for women. As Nancy Cott says:

Feminism asks for sexual equality that includes sexual difference. It aims for individual freedom by mobilizing sex solidarity. It posits that women recognize their unity while it stands for diversity among women. It requires gender consciousness for its basis yet calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles. (qtd. in Becker 103)

Only confirming to the norms and the set code of the conduct by a patriarchal set up did not appease the great philosophers and women were thus subjected to insults and abuses. To quote a few examples, Aristotle distinguishes women on account of “a certain lack of qualities.” St Thomas Aquinas called woman an “imperfect man.” Philosophers like St. Thomas Aquinas, Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Sartre have also considered women morally inferior. As propounded by them a woman is charged with so many drawbacks. According to Prasad, woman is considered as the symbol of temptation; she is more a fury than a fairy; her charms are so irresistible that it spells rain and disaster (6). But one should not forget that most of the charges laid down against women are concocted and deliberately made by the powerful male dominated society. A woman is generally more emotional, sensitive and kind than a man. She is also endowed with a great power of endurance and patience. One can see her in the role of another, a wife, a beloved and a friend. She forms the pivot and nucleus of family life. Without the presence of a woman, a home is just like a flower without fragrance (6). So, a woman must be paid due respect both in the family and society because the process of socialization begins in the family and is conditioned by culture. Since every society has its own culture, the process of socialization also differs from society to society. Family is the basic social institution built around the biological and psychological needs of the people which are based on three bonds: marital, parental and sibling.

Feminists raise questions about the place assigned to women in the social setup. Issues of women’s status, as well as the sexual division of labour, and the issues of family structure and responsibilities for child care are dealt with by the feminists. They focus on the institutional change and reform, appealing to the notion of justice, freedom and rights.

Feminists are those, who, in principle and practice, clamour for the liberation of women from the shackles of a male-dominated society. (Ukagba 66)

According to Onimhawo, feminists believe that women should have the right and freedom to choose what happen to their bodies. They should have equal rights like men in the society. For this reason, Mira in the novel *The Binding Vine*, Indu in the novel *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in the novel *The Dark Hold No Terrors* do not let their bodies become procreating systems.

Hooks says that such beliefs and arguments are rooted in the notion of feminism. According to him, the feminist struggle takes place anytime anywhere when any female or male resists sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (xi).

In the history of Feminism, some strong feminist movements came into being and the origin of feminism can be categorized in the three waves:

1. First Wave Movement
2. Second Wave Movement/Women's Liberation Movement
3. Third Wave Movement.

The First-wave of feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in various countries like Britain, Sweden, Germany, United States etc. The major feminists of first wave movement are Elizabeth Garrett, Mary Wollstonecraft, Adelaide Anderson, Annie Besant, Susan B. Anthony, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Cahtharina Ahlgren etc.

These feminists participated in the suffrage movement; they also focused on the equal legal rights of contract and property in Britain. 19th century feminism evolved very much in response to the specific difficulties which individual women encountered in their lives.

The novel *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1742, is considered as the first work of feminism. Wollstonecraft is the foremost of the women whose contribution to the development of feminism is discussed. She protested against the stereotyping of women in the domestic roles and she also raised her voice to provide education to girls. It is education which trains the mind of women to fight against enslavement and other tortures. Her emphasis was on the need to make women rational. Far from portraying women as superior to men, Wollstonecraft wanted to raise their moral and intellectual stature to make them rational citizens. She says, "I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves" (Wollstonecraft 134).

William Thompson's *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men* (1825) is considered as one of the

best known feminist book of this time by Sarah Gamble. The work emphasizes on the different, conflicting needs of men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and daughters. Thompson said that even women, whom society treated as fortunate, were also suffering from unacknowledged needs and repressive treatment from their husbands (Gamble 18).

In 1839 Caroline Norton raised a voice against the injustices faced by women in their unhappy marriages. William Blackstone says:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law that is the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and, cover, she performs everything. (qtd. in Mays 91)

Doepke says that in 19th century, ladies after having divorce had no right to keep their children with themselves but with the combined effort of Caroline Norton and William Blackstone, the Infant Custody act was passed in 1839 (6). According to this act separated wives bearing good character possessed the right to get the custody of their children under the age of seven and access to their older children. Furthermore, eighteen acts were concerned with the married women's property, of which the most significant was the act of 1870. This act stated that married women could keep their earnings and also inherit personal property, with everything else going to their husbands.

Due to economic hardships faced by women, voice rose for the economic independence being given to women. One great corresponding cry rose from the suffering multitude of women saying, "We want work" (Gamble 23). Harriet Martineau in an article "Female Industry" and Barbara Bodichon in the article "Women and Work" said that more professions, more opportunities should be opened up for the women of middle class so that they become economically independent. As a result of these efforts, women got various new opportunities in the public and clerical work. Clerical work was the area of major expansion in 1860, especially in the government departments such as the post office; while the access of women also became possible in the local government positions in the same period.

Then at the end of the nineteenth century, in Britain, according to Legates, activism focused primarily on gaining political power and women's suffrage (285-

286). The suffragettes campaigned for the right of women's vote. And then in 1918, the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed, which granted the right to vote to women over the age of 30. But in 1928 this was extended to all women over eighteen. This can be considered as the best achievement of First Wave Movement.

On the other hand, in America, Feminist movement started with the Seneca Fall Movement of 1848. The demand of this convention was to end the discrimination which is based on sex. At this time the issue of women's right also emerged for the rights of black women. The little girl, Pecola in the novel *The Bluest Eye* also depicts that black female has to suffer the double assaults of being black and a female. Morrison desires that black women should also be provided the rights which are not bound in the categories of sex and race. Black female must enjoy that freedom which is enjoyed by the men in society. This issue was raised by the blacks during the first wave movement.

There is no relevant data as who first used the term "Women's Liberation". But, charting the history of contemporary feminist movement, it becomes clear that since a long time, women have been rebelling against sexism all over the world. So when those women began to meet and talk, the collective rebellion came to be known as women's liberation and later evolved into a feminist movement (Hooks x). This women's liberation movement aimed at making women the social equals of men.

The second-wave movement or Women's Liberation Movement refers to the resurgence of feminist activity beginning in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s in various countries like Japan, Britain, Germany, America etc. The major feminists of this wave are Susan Brownmiller, Simone de Beauvoir, Cynthia Enloe, Anne Koedt, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Carol Giligan, Michele Wallace etc. These feminists dealt with the inequality of laws, and cultural inequalities. Beaulieu says that it was in continuation of the earlier phase of feminism which sought the legal and political rights of women. This movement encouraged women to understand various aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of a gender-based structure of power (62). The second-wave feminism was mainly related with the issues of equality, such as the end to gender discrimination in society, in education and in the workplace. It fought against specific injustices such as lack of reproductive freedom, the lack of equal pay for

equal work and women's inability to receive equal access to jobs and education. This wave attempted at highlighting the ways through which society legally and professionally subjugated women, and then turned women's personal struggle into political action. Anne Koedt in the article "Women and the Radical Movement (1968)" says:

Within the last year many radical women's groups have sprung up throughout the country. This was caused by the fact that the movement women found themselves playing secondary roles on every level – be it in terms of leadership, or simply in terms of being listened to.... They found themselves (and others) afraid to speak up because of self-doubts when in the presence of men. Their roles ended up concentrating on food-making, typing, mimeographing, general assistance work and as a sexual supply for their male comrades....And the deeper we analyzed the problem and realized that all women suffer from this kind of oppression; the more we realized that the problem was not just confined to movement women. (Keetley 18)

On the other hand, almost in all states of America, the black women became very active in the formation of first radical feminist group. Black women were therefore considered to be the greatest inspiration to the growth of Women's Liberation.

During this time various groups were organized by the social workers who wanted equality between male and female.

Friedan says that in 1966, Betty Friedan had herself founded National Organization for women (370). It represented one of the largest coalitions that sprang from the second wave because the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission had failed to root out sexism in the workplace, instead focusing on racial discrimination. When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission refused to ban gender-specific job advertisements, Betty Friedan and other leading feminists formed National Organization for Women. The main issues on which this organization focused, were, reproductive freedom, gender equality in the workplace and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Various other groups such as the New York Radical Women, Redstockings and Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell aimed at eradicating

sexism by reforming the relationships between men and women. The Redstockings group encouraged women to assemble and voice their thoughts for creating awareness and consciousness among their fraternity, which involved sharing their personal experiences in the feminist struggle. Such discussions led to the foregrounding of issues like, rape, conjugal brutality, abortion and access to childcare. This time the protest was mainly launched to achieve equal rights for women in the domain of family, sexuality and work.

In Britain, the first national conference was held in 1970 and the main demands of this conference were, equal pay for equal work, equal education and equal opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand and free 24 hour nurseries (Fairbairns 7). Moreover, on the literary aspect, the year of 1970 marks the outburst of theoretical writings which were based on feminism, for example Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Eva Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* etc. The Second-wave feminism movement was considered to be largely successful. Its effects can still be seen in the everyday lives of women. As a result of this movement, women began to attain equality in all aspects of the society, including education, employment, health, and many more. Today, more women get their bachelor's degrees as compared to men, many women of different countries have attained a position as high as the president, and the numbers of women in government sectors have dramatically increased, and enjoy 33% reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies in different countries of the world (Thornham 79). However, inequality still exists, and so the efforts of the Second Wave of Feminism will continue to be relevant as long as women are not equal to men.

The third-wave of Feminism gained ground in the early 1990s in various countries of the world. The prominent proponents of this wave are Margaret Atwood, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, Ellen Page, Joan Smith, Rebecca Walker etc. Sajal Roy in the article "Entering Towards New Vision: Feminism A Historical Pathway of Knowledge- World" says that, this movement is considered as both a continuation of and a reaction to the failures of the second-wave. It focused on the circumstances of lower-class women, minorities and women living in other cultures. This wave often challenges the paradigm of second wave as to what is, or what is not, good for females.

Third wave feminism typified a feminism mediated by the terrains of race and multicultural alliances, rather than age. This movement addressed domestic violence, sexual harassment, access to safe and legal abortions as well as ensuring equal status for women in education, work, and social environment.

The first two waves of feminism had emerged largely from white, middle class perspective. In the third wave movement, activists attempted to broaden the scope of freedom by including perspectives of coloured women and different social classes. Third wave feminists also looked at all the aspects of society, art and science through a feminist lens. This perspective provided great insight into where in equality persists and how women often contribute to supporting the status quo instead of actively fighting for change. The third wave also focused on the humane measures, such as by promoting flexible work scheduling, demanding the availability of child care, and making time-off available for maternity leave and caring for sick family members.

During this time, writers like Mary Wollstonecraft in her novel *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), J. S. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family* (1884), Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Three Guineas* (1938), Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) etc. wrote of the need to rethink the role of women in society.

In the wake of these movements, women hoped of seeking liberation and equal status in all walks of life. They recognized their own self, their own identity.

Tracing Feminism in India, one has to study the various factors responsible for allocating a dependent status to woman.

In India, in ancient period, women were glimpsed with treasured eyes but gradually why and how her situation changed, why she no longer was respected as a human being, these are some of the questions which need to be thought about.

The recent Indian women novelists reflect on the gender issues through their powerful portrayal of man-woman relationships in their writings to improve the status of women in society. For example Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* (1973), Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Moving On* (2004), Bharathi Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), *Desirable Daughters*(2003), Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of*

Night (1992), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passions* (1984), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) etc. Protagonists in these novels raise questions, analyze and focus on the impact of male domination. They try to portray women with a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. They throw deep insights into the female psyche and present a full range of feminine experience. An effort to re-define the man-woman relationships can be seen in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sahgal, Uma Vasudev, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and others. These novelists present the predicament of women and explore the emotional world of a woman with great insight.

Besides the waves of feminism, different ideologies, different opinions from different people came to the fore. These opinions were divided in categories. The basic classification of feminism can therefore be divided into three categories:

1. Liberal Feminism
2. Radical Feminism
3. Socialist/Marxist Feminism

Liberal feminism developed between 1960s and 1970s. It appears to be the earliest form of feminism. Feminism has a particular relationship to liberalism and it has been said that all feminism is 'liberal at root' (Hoffman 326). Liberal Feminism has been called the mainstream form of feminism. It is said that liberal feminism is a personal, idiosyncratic, individualistic form, which focused on women, having the capability to sustain their equality through being responsible for their own actions and choices (Brooks 1). The goal of liberal feminists was to create "a just and compassionate society where freedom flourishes" (Tong 13). Only in such a society women and men thrive equally.

The principle of the liberal feminism was that women will transform society through their own personal relations with the opposite sex. The liberal feminists believed that:

All women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society. (qtd. in Ukagba 76)

Liberal feminists also believed that the equality of men and women can only be attained by making some changes which can be brought through political and lawful reform. They wished for the abolition of institutional partiality and wanted

that fairer laws should be put into practice towards women. This form of feminism helped a lot of women to achieve more fairness in pay and access to a broader range of careers. According to Lucy Brooks, some of the foremost issues with which liberal feminism deal are marriage equality, abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting rights, education, reasonably priced adolescent childcare and reasonably priced health care. Liberal feminists took a laissez – faire attitude to the issues of pornography, prostitution, lesbians because they constructed these practices as personal choices and committed to protect women’s choice and autonomy (1).

Liberal feminists insisted on the equal access to the symbolic order, and they also focused on the prevalent ways of imaging women in media. They, therefore, urged media to contribute to transform the image of female by portraying female and male in nonconventional and nontraditional roles and by using nonsexist words in verbal communication (Enriques 1). For example, both women and men should be presented in positions of power and authority, in equal measure, such as heads of corporations, presidents of countries, etc. In other words, Liberal feminists believed that women must be considered equal to men. They should not surrender to patriarchy’s values, norms and ways of being.

Liberal Feminists thought that by changing the legal system, social change could be brought. All those events and persons are included in the liberal feminism who campaign for the equal rights for women within the framework of liberal state. They argue that the rights built by a state must be extended to women because these rights give them equal citizenship with men. Liberals think that the state should confine itself to protect civil liberties, for example, property rights, voting rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association etc. State should thus provide everyone with an equal opportunity to determine his or her choice.

According to Enriques, Radical Feminism describes patriarchy as a social system in which all men are assumed to have the naturally evil inclination to dominate and oppress all women (1).The domination of woman is the result of patriarchy. Jone Johnson Lewis in the article “Radical Feminism” says:

Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. (Lewis1)

The purpose of Radical feminists was to deal with the question of male power, issues of equal job opportunities and equal pay for women. Kate McGuinness in the article "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power: A Feminist Critique of Consent" says that Radical feminists believed that "men, collectively and as individually have an interest in maintaining woman's oppression." Radical Feminism "contains within it a call to action to change the world." They said that all human beings have equal rights in the society. In 1970; they also supported the rights of lesbians. They encouraged them to join their groups and supported their demands for legal and social equality without encountering damaging repercussions (Carden 53). It explores:

Gender-role stereotyping, women's oppressed position in the family and work place, the political significance of lesbianism and critiques of male violence in terms of power (rape, battery, pornography etc.). (Carden 12)

A group of radical feminists, formed in Newyork in October 1968, stated in their manifesto: "Women", or "females", were the first class to be separated out from humanity and thus denied their humanity. The Newyork Redstocking reads (1970):

Male supremacy is the oldest, the most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women: a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male oriented. (Thompson 133)

Radical feminism believed that humanity has begun to outgrow nature and therefore one cannot justify the maintenance of discriminating class system. It analyzed the relationship between social inequality and social indifference. The dominance of women by men is seen to provide the foundation for social inequality, and the social oppression of women is seen to underlie the economic, cultural and social subordination of women. The Newyork Radical Feminist Manifesto claims:

Radical feminism recognizes the oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression wherein women are categorized as an inferior class based on their sex. It is the aim of radical feminism

to organize politically to destroy this sex-class system... (qtd. in Madsen153)

Thompson says that Radical feminists' writing has not on the whole tended to engage in explicit theory-making in the sense of building on, extending and engaging to say what feminism is (3). It has meant that radical feminism has remained tied to the issues of real concern to women, rather than to prepare the principles of theory. They challenged the prevailing notion of power as domination and attempted to transform it.

Radical feminists emphasized on women's oppression in the patriarchal world. The oppression of women includes the objectification of both mind and body. This oppression, however, centers fundamentally on woman as body. Woman's body is treated not as for-itself but as for male. She as a body performs many services for man. Woman's body is arranged, mutilated and modified for the purpose of satisfying man's lust. This can be defined as eroticism. The eroticism of a woman is a form of rape in its own right. It involves the violation of one's body for the sexual pleasure of another. Woman is not seen as a living being but as a conglomerate of parts that exist to please and serve the male.

Radical feminists view patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by gender, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men. The oppression of women by men created a world where no one could be free. According to Ti-Grace Atkinson:

A human being is not born from the womb; it must create itself. It must be free, self-generative. A human being must feel that it can grow in a world where injustice, inequality, hatred, sadism are not directed at it. No person can grow into a life within these conditions; it is enough of a miracle to survive as a functioning organism. (qtd. in Thompson 135)

For the most part, radical feminism has focused on exposing the social system of male supremacy. It has, from the beginning, been concerned with the domination of man against woman which affects the dignity of woman. It talks about the lives and experiences of women. This thing shows that this radical movement posits an integral link between practice and theory.

Marxist/Socialist Feminism was a powerful strand during the late 1960's and 70's. It focuses upon power relationships, especially the intersection of

capitalism, racism and patriarchy, and the production of a politicized personal (subjective) life. Socialist Feminism is concerned with the roles allocated to women that are independent of class status (mother, sister, housewife, mistress, consumer and reproducer). Feminism within the socialist framework offers the analysis of the ideological construction of femininity under the patriarchal capitalism. It analyzes how women's domestic labour is constructed by and reproduces the sexual division of labour. The primary task of Marxist feminists was to see the complex relationship between gender and economy (Selden 135). These feminists mainly consider capitalism rather than patriarchy as the fundamental cause of women's oppression. Marxist Feminists argue that women are viewed as subordinates to men because of this capitalist system of private property rather than sex or gender system. According to Marxist Feminism "sexism, like racism, has its roots in the private property system" (Mclaren 9). They talk about the gender inequality and oppression of women at the levels of production and division of labour consistent with the capitalist system.

Apart from capitalism, Marxist/Socialist feminists question the patriarchal system of marriage that views a woman as a male's property and nothing else. They focus on the material base of social relations and the ways that it creates and maintains patriarchy. Like radical feminists, socialist feminists are concerned with the issue of sexuality and the body, such as reproductive issues and regarding violence against women. But they view these issues, and patriarchy itself, related to economic issues. The power relationships between men and women within the family reproduce the power relationship that exist in society; so women find job opportunities primarily in the nurturing professions – like teaching and nursing – and the clerical posts that require the same kind of organizational skills that a woman needs to run a household.

Socialist feminists claim that the labour of women in the domestic realm serves not only the interests of specific families but also the interests of capitalism in that the family reproduces the attitudes and capabilities needed to enter into the wage labour force. (Madsen 184)

Socialist feminists also claim that women's liberation is an unrealizable goal in a capitalist society because capitalism is structured around maintaining specific sex-roles, a traditional definition of family and the women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labour. They think that social and economic institutions need to be

transformed, for example the family and capitalist economic system. In fact, socialist feminists view the sexual division of labour as helping to create and maintain gender, by perpetuating a gender division of labour. As Hartman says:

The strict division of labour by sex, a social invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and a need for men and women to get together for economic relations. (Mclaren 10)

The sexual division of labour takes place both within the home and in the public sector. In the domestic sphere, the sexual division of labour includes reproductive works such as bearing and rearing children and other household tasks such as shopping, cooking and cleaning etc. In the public sphere, the sexual division of labour includes divisions along traditional gender lines. This sexual division of labour creates and reinforces gender differences. These gender differences are perpetuated through various reasons like traditional family arrangements, including women as primary care-taker of children, and women's economic dependence on men etc.

Collectivity of oppression is the fundamental assumption of socialist feminism. The social class structure is seen to be inseparable from gender divisions: just as the rich oppress the poor, so men oppress women and this is not something that can easily be blamed on the individual man who oppresses the individual woman. This collective oppression of all women by men is the effect of culture or the social relations which define the existence of human beings as gendered individuals. According to socialists the social changes could be brought about by changing the economic system of society and pointed out that woman workers are being exploited as they often earn very little as compared to men. Bringing about a change in the socio-economic condition is therefore necessary, prior to any significant changes in gender relations can be brought about. As Nancy Hartsock claims:

Since we do not act to produce and reproduce our lives in a vacuum, changed consciousness and changed definition of the self can only occur in conjunction with a restructuring of the social (both societal and personal) relations in which each of us is involved. (Madsen185)

Socialist feminists represent not only female oppression but also the entire oppressive patriarchal power structure by exposing the male domination, especially in relation to capitalist mode of production. They see a close

relationship between capitalism and patriarchy to create sexual differences and they believe that both capitalism and patriarchy are the sources of women's oppression. Therefore according to Marxist/Socialist feminists, the way to end women's oppression is to kill the two – headed beast of capitalist patriarchy or patriarchal system (Tong 5). Actually they seem to be engaged in a double assault on both capitalism and patriarchy.

In the book *Women's Estate*, Mitchell claimed that women's condition is determined not only by the structures of production (as Marxist Feminist think), by the structures of reproduction and sexuality (as Radical Feminist believe), and by the changing legal structure (as Liberal Feminists argue), she stressed that woman's status and function must change in all of these structures if a woman wants to achieve full liberation (Tong 5).

Deshpande and Morrison too through their respective works depict the role of the social and cultural structures that enable the perpetual reinforcement of gender inequalities. They depict the alienation of women in their creative world. In most of the cases, their women characters suffer indignation, submission and helplessness in a rigid patriarchal system.

The foremost objective of this research is to study the concept of Feminism and to analyze the societal norms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social inequalities with reference to the writings of Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in which they portray the intriguing problems and suffocation of their female protagonists who struggle hard in this cruel and callous male-oriented world to discover their identity as daughter, wife, mother and above all as a human being. The study aims to find out the causes of exploitation, oppression and subjugation experienced by women and an analysis of these causes. The study also analyses the greatest contribution of feminist theory to give a voice to women in the fields of familial and social relations.

In the ongoing chapters, various themes and techniques employed by Deshpande and Morrison have been discussed in detail and is a study in the feminine and the feminist approaches. 2nd and 3rd chapters deal with the situation of women in the middle and lower classes of society, the chapters reflect their miserable plight in the traditional patriarchal system where they are the helpless creatures who spend their lives in making compromises and adjustments. The fourth chapter is a summing up and deals with the style and techniques used by

both writers - their use of symbols, imagery; their art of narration and other structural aspects of novels.

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CHAPTER 2

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*: Portraying Middle Class Femininity

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant Indian women novelists in English who has made a bold attempt to raise voice against the frustrations and disappointments of women in the patriarchal society which, "is the constituent form of gender hierarchy in India; it governs the functioning of the home, the workplace, and the community" (Puri 436). Deshpande, born in 1938 in Karnataka, acquired her love for reading and writing from her father Adya Rangachar, a famous Kannada writer and Sanskrit scholar. She studied Economics, Law and English literature, acquired a diploma in Journalism and Ph.D in English from the University of Mysore.

Deshpande emerged on the Indian fictional scene in 1970s. She is gifted with a rare literary mind. The transparency of her language, her spontaneity makes her novels highly readable. Her literary creation involves twenty-two books, which include nine novels, eight volumes of short stories, four books for children and one collection of essays. She came into literary prominence with the publication of her first collection of the short stories *The Legacy* (1978). Her first book for children *A Sum Adventure* came in 1978 and other books for children *The Only Witness* and *The Hidden Treasure* appeared in 1980. *The Dark Hold No Terrors* also came in 1980 and *If I Die Today* in 1982. The novel *Roots and Shadows* was voted as the Best Indian Novel in 1982-83 and it also won the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize in 1984. The novel *Come Up and Be Dead* was published in 1983. In 1986, she composed a collection of three short stories: *It was Nightingale*, *It was Dark* and *The Miracle*. *That Long Silence* was published in 1988 and in 1990 she received the prestigious National Sahitya Academy Award for this novel. She has even been honoured with the National Sahitya Academy Award for the novel, *The Binding Vine*, published in 1992. In the same year 1992, she also wrote one book for children named *The Narayanpur Incident*. *The Intrusion and Other Stories* was published in 1993, followed by *A Matter of Time and Small Remedies* in 1996 and 2000 respectively. Her sixth collection of stories *The Stone Women and Other*

Stories and collection of essays *Writing from the Margins and other Essays* were published in 2003. In the year 2004 came the book *Moving On*.

She, as a novelist, selects her themes carefully, weaves her plot around them and creates convincing characters. Usually all her novels have women protagonists. Generally, she offers her characters a canvas where their conflicts, anger and frustrations are brought out vividly. A time comes when they seem to be too unhappy to cope with life. And then somehow, they understand the deeper meaning of existence, they learn from life's experiences, and finally they reconcile. This reconciliation gives optimism to her novels. Her characters do not break away from the family; they maintain family ties and feel secure.

In the creative world of Deshpande, characters are taken from almost all the segments of life. They are doctors, writers, educated housewives, uneducated ones and maidservants. Besides poverty and such other common adversities, there are similar causes of sufferings for the females of both upper and lower class. They are not able to enjoy the legal status bestowed on them. Women have equal rights like men by law but on the social level, they have been struggling since ages to assert themselves. They are still being jeered by their male counterparts who force them to remain soundless. This suppressed voice of both the educated and uneducated women is heard in the writings of Shashi Deshpande. Deshpande presents sympathetically the problems, sufferings, a woman has to undergo.

Deshpande wants to show that women belonging to any strata of life have to undergo the problems of oppression, repression due to the domination of male. Traditionally, a woman is supposed to involve herself only in the domestic tasks emphasizing child care and household chores, but in the modern age, a woman in order to make both the ends meet, has to step out of the four walls to work. The employment of the woman is accepted by her husband but majority of husbands do not recognize their work (Mishra 47). A woman thus finds it difficult adjusting between tradition and modernity, between the old and new, between idealism and pragmatism. Deshpande's real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, yearnings and aspirations, dreams and disillusionments of the Indian women of middle class. In this way, Shashi Deshpande seems to grapple with the identity crisis of women in her creations.

In her works, there is a sensitive and authentic description of the problems of women. The patriarchal set - up expects obedience, devotion, self-denial and patience from women but in reality, it is very difficult to fulfill these expectations

because to fulfill these demands, women have to struggle between the expectations from them (as per the patriarchal idea of womanhood) and their aspirations (to be an independent human being). They then turn their aggression against themselves and this enigma creates feelings of insignificance, irrelevance and inferiority in them.

The main reason of Deshpande's writings about women is that most of her writings appeared in the decade of 1970 and 80 and in this period Women Liberation Movements were at their full fervor in India. That's why women occupy an important place in her creations and her own emphasis is mentioned in the lines from *A Matter of Time*:

My own intense and long suppressed feelings about what is to be a woman in our society comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of a consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. (Deshpande 264)

Deshpande's focus, in her fiction, is on the status of woman and her role in man - made mundane society in which:

A woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. The series of adjustments she makes and yet she is not equal to man. This is the predicament of woman all over the world. (Sree 1)

Deshpande, in her novels, has depicted the situation of a middle class Indian woman of 1980's - her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and her endeavour to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being in the tradition-bound, male dominated society. For her portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated and uneducated Indian women, their exploitations and disillusionments and their quest for self – identity, Deshpande has been called a 'feminist.' In an interview, she said to Geeta Gangadharan:

... I am a feminist in the sense that, I think we need to have a world, which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings.

There is no superior and inferior; we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that the fact that we are human is much more important than our being men and women'. I think that's my idea of feminism. (qtd. in Sree 23)

As a writer, Deshpande finds it difficult to admit that everything is right with the patriarchal traditions. Deshpande's poignant portraits of women trapped in the patriarchal set up crave for freedom, space and identification as a human being. They are considered as second-rate beings and live in subordination to men. Indu in the novel *Roots and Shadows* is always suggested by her surrogate mother that a girl has no identity in front of a boy so she must be meek and submissive. When Indu asks why she should behave like this, her mother replies:

Because you are female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl...it is the only way for a female to live and survive. (Deshpande 158)

In a similar vein, citing another example of Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*, the protagonist Ammu, also suffers this gender discrimination. Her brother says to her: "What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine" (57).

Deshpande's protagonists realize the male chauvinism in patriarchy but they fail to cope up with its unfavourable conditions and remain submissive and marginalized.

Simone de Beauvoir says that history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She states:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine. (Beauvoir 273)

Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* was published in 1992. In the novel, Deshpande focuses on woman: her travails and privations; pains and anguishes; tensions and irritations. She tries to expose the male domination in middle class society. The main themes on which Deshpande focuses in the novel are marital rape, marital frustration, gender discrimination, tradition and modernity, hypocrisy of cultural values, rape and significance of male child. Female quest for identity is also another theme of the novel. This novel represents the struggle of women to attain selfhood. Shashi Deshpande has developed these themes

through characters like Urmila, Mira, Vanna, Kalpana, Shakutai, Bhaskar, Prabhakar etc. and she has achieved these themes through domestic or familial relations.

The story of the novel has three strands running equivalently. These are the stories of three women who are dissimilar in age and time: Kalpana, who is insentient; Mira, who is lifeless and Urmila, who discerns the gist of life through the stories of Kalpana and Mira. The main plot of the story revolves round Urmila. The stories of Mira and Kalpana are the two sub-plots that join the main plot. The total effect is of a cohesive story-the story of women's lives, their fears, problems and aspirations.

Deshpande, in *The Binding Vine*, uses the combination of first and third person narration technique, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, irony to satirize the morals and manners of middle class society.

The novel portrays the sufferings, disappointments and frustrations of women and this makes the novel 'a feminist text'.

Deshpande makes the readers aware that discrimination between sexes starts in the family first. Anungla Imdong Phom in the article "Resistance to Socialization in Shashi Deshpande's Novels" states that Deshpande bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation effective within the institution of the family (Phom1). In Indian families, a girl is treated differently from the boy because when a boy is born, parents are congratulated by friends and relatives because a son means insurance. They grant greater independence to boys because they consider boy as an heir to the family whereas parents mourn the birth of a girl child. A daughter is considered as just another expense and a burden, as; they have to spend a lot of money on her marriage. Bonnie aptly remarks in this context:

A girl receives less attention than her brother. While the boy is encouraged to venture out in to the world, to explore and to go about his projects, the girl is encouraged to stay at home; she is forced for household chores, in some cases adorable and in almost all cases to help mother and to be very, very obedient. She is being moulded in a body that needs care and body that exists for the pleasure of others. (Burstow 10)

Vanna in the novel *The Binding Vine* feels that her father was attentive towards Kishore only. She often expresses amusement at her father's jokes to attract his attention but "he never did. For him, there was only Kishore" (52). Later she says sadly: "I wonder, whether he knows I exist" (53).

Saru in *The Dark Hold No Terrors* grows up as a victim of gender based discrimination. Since her childhood, she is conscious about her mother's preference for her brother Dhruva. He gets the preferential treatment because he is the propagator of his parent's ancestry and also their means of salvation, unlike the daughter whose providence is only to get married and leave home but after marriage also, a woman has no rights because society grants the husband, the right, to retain all the powers over her to the extent that he could imprison or beat her. Matthias Doepke in the article "Women's Liberation: What's in It for Men?" remarks:

Once married, a bride was obliged by law and custom to obey her husband.... After all, wives were considered as husband's "property," alongside his cattle and his slaves. (Doepke 1)

A woman's identity, her existence is minimized in her own family; she is recognized only by the name of her husband or her son.

Down the ages woman has borne the social inhibitions and cultural prejudices. Being a victim of silent submission, she still struggles for that space which she deserves to have as a significant and pivotal part of the society (Prasad 292). The novel *The Binding Vine* highlights the need for redefining man-woman relationship and removing the injustices and inequalities to which women are subjected. Deshpande, through Mira and Shakutai in the novel, focuses her attention on a woman being a victim of a man's lust and presents the most shocking aspect that these women prefer to suffer in silence than to raise a voice of protest for the sake of social and moral security. This illustrates the element of fear engrained in the female psyche.

Deshpande in the novel deals with the issues of marital rape, marital frustration, domestic violence and sexual abuse in marital lives which are regarded by the victims as degrading, humiliating, painful and unwanted throughout life. Marital Rape, which is also known as spousal rape, is non- consensual sex in which the executor is the victim's spouse. Various steps were taken up by feminists regarding this issue for not only pressing for legislative changes but also

in challenging inequitable laws. Several women's organizations in different cities were formed and launched a sustained agitation against it. The government took note of various points raised by women's organizations and activists and held discussions with them before finalizing its recommendations. One of the eminent lawyers Indrani Jaisingh proclaims:

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence [of rape] as her consent is assumed. (qtd. in Mohan153)

In the novel, Mira is forced by her husband to have sex even without her consent. Mira is not happy with her husband and does not like any kind of physical intimacy with him because her marriage was only "a dark-clouded engulfing night" (66). She even fears the coming of the night, though she quietly surrenders herself to her husband who only wants to possess her sexually. This thing is revealed through this conversation between Mira and her husband:

Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something... But ... I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings... it makes him leave me to myself... But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins. 'please,' he says, 'please, I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you'. Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. (67)

This incident highlights the psychological and physical sufferings of Mira. What Mira suffers is generally not acknowledged as rape, but the legitimate right of the husband to possess his wife sexually, with or without her consent.

With the portrayal of Mira, Deshpande wishes to show that Mira is not alone in her sufferings. It is symbolically suggested that there are many women who are doomed to silently suffer nightly assaults by their husbands.

Deshpande also discusses this theme of marital rape in her story *The Intrusion*. In this story, the newly married bride feels uncomfortable to have an immediate intimacy with a stranger who is now her husband. But for her husband, there is no need to get fully acquainted with her before indulging in sexual affair.

The bridegroom has taken it for granted that a wife can have no other identity than the sexual one.

Through the pathetic situation of Mira and this young bride, Deshpande elucidates the core of the patriarchal ideology where husbands take advantage of their wives because of their lesser physical strength. They force themselves upon their wives. It is an obvious insult and rape of the wives. But enclosed in the patriarchal walls, their revolting voices are impenetrable. Brown Miller brilliantly argues in this context:

Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation used against all women by all men. (Walters114)

Shashi Deshpande projects a realistic picture of the women. She depicts that not only the women of rural mass, but women of middle class also, in various towns and cities of India are exploited by men. Deshpande articulates the feelings of the people belonging to different strata of society, the educated upper middle-class women and lower middle class women in the novel.

Urmila, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to upper middle class. She is intellectual, aware, independent woman; even then she faces so many problems in her married life because she wants to reach her husband's spiritual centre but unfortunately does not succeed in it because her husband Kishore, a Merchant officer, stays away from home most of the time. Urmila herself has been a self confident lady, but after her marriage, she loses her self confidence, for she is not very sure of Kishore's love. She fears and thinks what she will do if Kishore would leave her because a woman's mind – set conditioned by patriarchy, has an image of the husband as a "shelter-provider" and that a lady gets no respect if her husband leaves her. Urmila's fear is revealed through these lines:

Somewhere on the way I seem to have lost that confidence. Now there is fear- the fear of Kishore never returning home, lost in the seas somewhere as one of his old friends was; the fear of Kishore turning away from me, a distant look on his face; the fear of his not wanting to come back to me. Yes, that's the thing, that's what I am most afraid of. (82)

The novel portrays another affected character of male domination, Shakutai who belongs to the lower middle class of society. Shakutai, wife of a jobless man, too steps out of the domestic walls to earn the livelihood for her family. Her life

illustrates the agonized, helpless existence of a woman who is used only as a sex object by her husband who made her mother of three children and then leaves her for another woman. So she takes up all odd jobs to provide all the facilities to her children which were denied to her—good education and a respectable marriage. Further all of her dreams are shattered by her daughter's rape. Her daughter is raped by the cruel hands of a male and this incident spoils Shakutai's life as well as her daughter's.

Like Shakutai, Urmila, Mira, Urmila's sister-in-law Vanna also is not satisfied with her marital life. Her husband, Harish has a very aggressive temperament. In order to maintain a peaceful atmosphere at home, she accepts everything what he says and does not show her own feelings and emotions. She does all that Harish thinks right. She even loves her daughters in a way as Harish likes. It is of no matter at all what she wants, what she thinks. But Urmila gets irritated with Vanna's attitude and her irritation is indicated through these dialogues:

You let him get away with too much, I tell her.

What do you want me to do?

Assert yourself. You don't have to crawl before him, do you?

I don't crawl, I do what I want.

No. you don't. You're scared of him, yes, you are. I've seen you. You don't even dare to call your daughters anything but

Mandira and Pallavi, no, not even when you pet them, because Harish doesn't like baby talk... (80-81)

Women, be it from any strata of society Urmila, Shakutai, Vanna, Jaya, Saru, Indu etc., long for companionship, support, love which they do not get from their husbands.

Even Indu, other submissive character of Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows*, faces similar situation like Vanna. Indu is not satisfied with her married life because her husband Jayant expects her "to submit". Like Vanna, Indu too thinks of pleasing Jayant only. She says:

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him...? (Deshpande 49)

The appeasement tendency is also revealed by Deshpande in the other novel *The Dark Hold No Terrors* through the character of Saru. She feels that a

lady has to spend her life according to her husband's wishes if she wants happiness in her life. She says:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband... That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, principal – teacher role. (Deshpande 124)

This ushers that in the patriarchal society, woman has to surrender her own self entirely with or without her own consent because she considers it her destiny.

In the novel *The Binding Vine*, apart from the man-woman relationship, Deshpande also depicts the mother-daughter relationship in a family with different perspectives that show how the two have to face the problems of life together. Urmila and Anu, Inni and Urmila, Shakutai and Kalpana, Vanna and Mandira, Mira and her mother, highlight the mother and daughter relationship in the novel.

The Binding Vine, in its beginning, witnesses a personal loss – the death of Urmila's daughter Anu. The happiness of her life is marred by the unexpected death of Anu. She struggles with her memories and realizes that forgetting is betrayal:

I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray. (21)

When Inni, Urmi's mother wants to have a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly because she has the picture of her daughter in her own mind. She says:

I don't need a picture to remember her; I can remember every bit of her, moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture....?
(68)

But when her friend Lalita asks how many kids she has, she replies. "Only one. A son" (106). Then immediately she feels that she has shown prejudice towards her daughter, Anu. She says:

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?... Only one son...how could I? (106)

The experience of frustrated motherhood keeps on growing at her soul. She feels the emptiness of life very intensely and suffers from utter helplessness about

it. Under the loss of her daughter, Urmila realizes the importance of daughters for mothers. She now realizes her own mother Inni's dreams for her as now she herself has a lot of dreams for her own daughter Anu. Therefore she feels guilty of not fulfilling those dreams of her mother. She says:

I wanted so much for Anu, it's all gone. There is nothing left of all my dreams for her. We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves...now I realize Inni and her dreams for me... (124)

The emotional vine that binds her to her dead daughter cannot be severed even after the death of the baby.

According to Anita Myles, frustrated motherhood of different kinds is depicted through the picture of Shakutai who is shocked to learn that her daughter has been a victim of rape by someone. She has been spending her days in the hospital attending upon Kalpana. Urmila happens to meet Shakutai in the hospital. Though there is no relationship between these women as such, but instantly a vine binds these emotionally disturbed women (Myles 75). Urmila takes up all the responsibility of a poor girl like Kalpana and in this way Kalpana becomes her surrogate daughter.

Rashmi Sahi in the article 'Mother- Daughter Relationship in the novels of Shashi Deshpande' says that the mother-daughter relationship has always occupied an important place in Deshpande's fiction. Deshpande does not glorify motherhood. For her, mothers are also human beings and suffer imperfections, weaknesses etc.

Deshpande presents different facets of mother-daughter relationship. She usually portrays bitter experiences which are riddled with tension and conflicts, love and cruelty, joy and pain. The conflict between mother-daughter, in most cases, can be the conflict between tradition and modernity because of generation gap. Most of the female protagonists of Deshpande reject their mothers as role models because their mothers represent to them limited options and a narrow outlook on life but the daughters want to live a life very different from their mothers. For example in the novel, Mira rejects her mother's dreams and she explains her rejection in one of her poems:

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

Urmila also did not have a compatible relationship with her mother Inni. She is always disturbed as to why her parents had sent her away while her brother continued to live with them. She bore a kind of bitterness against her mother because she held her mother responsible for sending her to Ranidurg. But at the end of the novel she realizes that it was her father who dominated over her and her mother and he made this decision without even consulting his wife Inni. When the truth is revealed to her, she feels guilty and forgives her mother. At this point Urmila understands the power of male dominance that rendered her mother a helpless victim. Walters explain the patriarchal system and says:

Mothers are denied rights over their children and over family property, and most are treated like 'any upper servant'. (Walters 44)

Mandira also protests against her mother Vanna. Shakutai too keeps vacillating between her grudging admiration of Kalpana's independence and her beauty and her displeasure at Kalpana's stubbornness.

Thus through these characters, Deshpande shows the complexity of mother-daughter relationship. This relationship is very complex because in this relation, on the one side there is a traditional mother who is careful towards the honoured traditional values of her time and on the other side there is a modern daughter who is peevish in her attitude towards her traditional mother and her traditional values. The mother in order to survive in patriarchal suppression projects her own aspirations on her daughter. On one hand, she wants her daughter to imitate her; on the other, she wants her daughter to be different from her and to fulfill her unrealized aspirations. These contradictory demands put her daughter in a dilemma. Actually in any society, whenever a new ideology emerges, several emotions and deep rooted feelings of large number of people get affected. Both sides-adherers of an old ideology and propagators of a new one—suffer emotional and intellectual crisis. Such a social phase becomes a powerful source of creative writing of Deshpande and thus her writing becomes the example of intensity, emotion, passion etc.

Deshpande, in the novel, tries to show the hypocrisy of cultural values by considering society as an institution. Society is the condition in which the members of community live together for their mutual benefits. In society, culture is like the manner which is favoured by the social group which always considers women inferior to men. According to Bartky:

The situation of woman is such that she- a free and autonomous being - nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of Other, an Other typically inferior to whatever man imagines himself to be. Social definitions of womanhood have most often condemned her to immanence... Women are bound to their oppression ... by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology.... (Bartky 321-322)

In the article “Self Pitying Specimens Emerging as Confident Neophytes in some writings of Shashi Deshpande” Gowri Sivaraman remarks:

Considering woman as weak and dependent, the Indian tradition had empowered the male members to take control of her life. Mira is one such woman who becomes the victim of such tradition. (Mohan 152)

In the novel when Mira comes to her in-laws house, she is given a new name, Nirmala as it is a common tradition of various cultures to give a new name to a newly wedded bride on the day of wedding which signifies her husband's control over her after her marriage as before marriage she is under the dominance of her father. This thing also signifies that now, after her marriage, she has no association with her parents. For her, her husband is everything. Mira silently accepts the new name but does not use it. She feels that with a new name no one can change the personality of the woman after marriage. She remains the same as earlier and gives a vent to her aggression through her poems. One of her poems is written in reaction to this incident:

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

Simone de Beauvoir says that a woman is required by society to make herself an erotic object. The purpose of the patriarchal mind – set, to which she is enslaved, is:

Not to reveal her as an independent individual, but rather to offer her as prey to male desires; thus society is not seeking to further her projects but to thwart them. (Beauvoir 506)

Patriarchal middle – class society does not allow a woman to choose an occupation for herself because it is against the norms of patriarchy that woman should come forward and do anything without the consent of her husband (Puri 436). In the novel, this thing is illustrated through Mira also. Mira, frustrated with the physicality of marital life, uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from the house of her husband which is like a prison for her. She tries to achieve her true identity by writing poetry. Once at an occasion, she meets a young poet, Venu who suggests her to leave writing. He says:

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. (127)

This reflects the agony of a creative woman in the male-dominated world. Mulk Raj Anand aptly remarks, “It connotes the handicaps of women writers in a male chauvinist society” (Anand 2). This is subordination by domestication. The dialogues spoken by Venu show that, in the culture of a middle class family, the main function of a woman is to beget children. She has no need to do job of her own choice and it is decided by the male members of the society.

The same kind of anguish was given a vent by Kamala Das in her poem An Introduction:

Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers.

It reflects sufferings of thousands of females who have no choice in the existing patriarchy. This is like a scheme to deprive women from imagination and power of communication. As a result Mira could never expect any recognition or acceptance of her poetry. Anungla Imdong Phom in the article “Resistance to Socialization in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” aptly remarks:

This is the kind of subjugation Indian women are faced with and so the recognition of such ideology works as a mode of resistance in Deshpande’s novels. (Phom 1)

It is ironical that Urmila reads Mira's poem to find out the real self of Mira but every time while reading the poems, she herself is filled with a great energy and discovers the succour she is in search of. She says "It is Mira who is now taking me by the hand and leading me" (35). After the death of Mira, Urmila decides to publish her poetry.

The effort of Urmila to publish Mira's poems aims at discovering the strangled voice articulating woman's silenced discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. This may be taken to mean that Deshpande converts a muted woman to a "talking woman" and provides the cause...to articulate the silence of women. (Phom 1)

But Vanna (Urmila's sister-in-law), who has internalized patriarchal values, feels enraged and thinks that by doing this, Urmila will destroy the honour of the family. Vanna's feelings are revealed through these lines:

It is as if the knowledge of what her father did, of what he was, has threatened something, disturbed the inner rhythm of her being, so that there is a sense of disharmony about her. (181)

In fact, it has become part of the society to nourish women in such a way that they also start looking and interpreting the world from the eyes of patriarchy. With this example, Deshpande seeks to expose the ideology:

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. (Beauvoir 120)

On the basis of this ideology, a woman is trained to play only her subservient roles, like household works, satisfy her husband sexually, become a mother, care for her children and family members etc. She is not supposed to do anything which satisfies her own fancy and goes against the reputation of her family.

The character of Sulu exposes another aspect of society in which a woman, as a wife, is valuable only when she is a mother of a child because she is considered nothing but only a child bearing machine. According to Pradyot Kumar:

A childless lady gets universal contempt and disgrace in her life. Barren woman are looked down upon in Indian culture. She is not allowed to join in any auspicious ceremony... It was also considered

inauspicious to sit in the same seat with a barren lady and it was believed to touch her is nothing but to commit numerous sins. It was also believed that if a virtuous person sees a sonless person, all the merits (punyas) he has acquired throughout many births, will be of no effect. Sometimes the barren woman is deprived of the sympathy of her own husband too. (Maity 28)

The character of Sulu in the novel cannot give birth to a child. Her husband thus feels that she is not fit for him and for his family and he thinks of getting married to another woman. Sulu herself has internalized the values of a male dominated society so she considers herself inferior for not being able to give a child to her husband. She, to save her married life, even tries to persuade her sister's daughter, Kalpana, to marry her husband, Prabhakar so that she can at least continue to stay in the house. Because a house is considered as a shelter, security for the physical body which a wife always expects from her husband.

Through the character of Kalpana, Deshpande wants to expose the mindset of a society, where, if injustice is met out to a girl then nobody will blame the person responsible, rather everyone starts blaming the girl, for their minds are cast with the thoughts:

Women's chastity is more important than men's... women should not go out to work; that a woman who is sexually harassed...should keep quiet. (Fairbairns 16)

In the novel, Kalpana becomes a prey to her own uncle, Prabhakar who molests her. Kalpana's mother Shakutai does not want to expose this thing publically but Urmila raises her voice against this rape and wants to take up the case of Kalpana. She raises a question with which every woman will identify:

Why have women passion, intellect and moral activity – these three – and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised? (Walters 50)

She goes to the police station to file a complaint against the rapist but the police officer does not take it seriously and makes fun of this incident. He says:

Let it remain an accident... Why make it a case of rape, he asked? She is going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? We don't like rape cases, the man said... But forget that and think of the

girl and her family. Do you think it'll do them anything good to have it known the girl was raped. She's unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared. For all you know she may be a professional, we see a lot of that... She must have been out with a boyfriend ...Maybe after they had a bit of fun she was knocked by a car. (88)

Even Kalpana's own mother, Shakutai wants to conceal this incident from society. She requests Vanna to stop the doctor to make the report:

No, no, no. Tell him, Tai, it's not true, don't tell anyone, I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people. (58)

She further says:

If a girl's honour is lost, what's left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong, people will always point finger at her. Doctor, she turns to him, '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...? (59)

Shakutai's insistence that the police should not be informed as it will lead to Kalpana's disgrace and exposure is, in reality, an exposure of the societal attitude towards the rape victim and the patriarchal ideology that rape disgraces the victim rather than the culprit. She believes that her other daughters too will be victimized because of this rape and nobody would marry them. Such a framework of a woman's mind:

Reveals the control that a traditional patriarchal society has on the women in India. It is a statement that combines many issues and reveals the frightening importance given to chastity of the woman and to the necessity of marriage in order to fulfill the life of a woman. (Tondon 66)

Deshpande tries to bring to fore the plight of women and the restrictions heaped on them in the name of tradition- a girl must protect herself from the evil gaze of males and thus should not walk openly according to her own wish on the road or follow her whims and fancies for that matter. That's why Shakutai feels that her own daughter is responsible for this injustice towards her own self as well as towards her family. She says:

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....I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me. "I'm not afraid of anyone," she used to say. That's why this happened to her...women must know fear. (147-148)

Through these dialogues, Deshpande, on one hand, exposes that if a middle class woman tries to be bold and daring; consequently she has to face many problems and harassments because of her boldness. She has to suffer harsh criticism from people. And on the other hand, Kalpana's rape by her uncle exposes the hypocrisy of the cultural values of middle class family where the relationship of uncle and niece is one of respect.

On the other hand Sulu cannot bear the truth that her husband can do such a wrong thing to Kalpana and she commits suicide because she does not want to tell a lie in order to save her husband from the punishment of the crime. Sulu's suicide, on one hand, symbolizes the anguish of the weakened soul of the typical Indian traditional women and on the other hand, mocks at the middle class patriarchal society where to establish one's own identity, woman must die. Mulk Raj Anand aptly remarks:

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 young males into wanton animals who assault any possible victim, when possessed by lust.
(Anand 33)

Thus in this novel Deshpande has depicted the problems of women in the patriarchal mind – set. Women of different classes have different problems but their sufferings, exploitations due to the supremacy of males bind them together.

The plot of *The Binding Vine* does not follow the traditional pattern of unity of time and action. It uses the technique of stream of consciousness. In the novel, action moves back and forth with the past and the present overlapping. Urmila, Kishore, Inni, Harish, Vanna, Dr. Bhaskar are all denizens of the Indian urban middleclass, while Shakutai and her family are from the lower class. Mira and others belong to the time past. In order to bring them close to the readers, the author uses memory. Her characters go through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization. The time-shift is managed through the interweaving

of the subplots. The two subplots-one of Mira and the other of Kalpana-are intricately woven with the main plot of Urmila. Urmila and Mira are related but they are separated by death. Urmila and Kalpana are strangers but they are united by human concerns. In Mira-Urmila case, Mira's writings provide the bridge; in the Kalpana-Urmila relations, Shakutai becomes the link. Although the story does not have a traditional beginning, middle and an end, the overall effect is of a unified whole. The opening is grim but the end is optimistic.

The novel *The Binding Vine* tries to conform to the metaphorical structure. According to Sree, the title of the novel is appropriate in this way. Its symbolism has got what Empson calls the first type of ambiguity – that is the words or phrases connoting several things, some in one direction, and some in other one. The title suggests various following things, for example: the protagonist's bond of familial ties- of parents, husband and children, her bond of love for her last daughter, her bond of love of Mira's poems, her bond of sympathy for the wrongs done to Kalpana (who has been raped and killed), her being bound by the chains of circumstances (here bond suggests chain or fetters) (Sree xi-xii).

Through her characters in this novel Deshpande has presented women of different categories. Shakutai, Sulu and Vanna are the traditional women who accept the patriarchal system without any revolt. In this category of traditional women, patriarchal ideology brainwashes the women into believing the stereotypes of strong men and feeble women. In fact such stereotypes secure such an ideological climate that women themselves help in perpetrating the subservient role of their own sex. Here the concept of "feminine mystique" seems to play its role. While defining this concept, Betty Friedan in her revolutionary and gyno-critical text writes:

... that the core of the sexual problem for women today is not sexual but problem of identity... a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by feminine mystique. It is my thesis that as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit them to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role. (Friedan 137)

In the book *Feminine Mystique*, Friedan has highlighted the image of 'the happy housewife'. This image expects women to happily mould themselves into the roles of wifehood and motherhood that the mystique has ordained for them. According to the mystique, the real state of bliss for a woman lies in a lifelong service to the husband, looking after his home and children. Obsessed by feminine mystique; traditional women in Deshpande's work fit in their role. They are the forerunner of patriarchy – a fact which seems somewhat ironical because patriarchy itself means 'a rule of father'. Kate Millet in the book *Sexual Politics* has used the term patriarchy to describe the cause of women's oppression. Patriarchy subordinates a female to a male or treats female as an inferior human being. The traditional women can not escape the harmful patriarchal ideology in which she has grown. Here, the word 'ideology' suggests:

Artificially constructed set of ideas, somewhat remove from everyday life, (which) are manipulated by the powers that be- and want to be. They attempt to control the world of politics and to force us into a rut of doctrinaire thinking and conduct. (Friedan 1)

The characters of Shakutai and Vanna conform to this rut of doctrinaire thinking.

The second category includes those women who suffer the patriarchal bias by realizing their victimization in patriarchy, but even then they cannot do anything against it. They go on making adjustments and compromises and become victims of situations which they want to change but cannot. They suffer alienation but do not leave patriarchy. Patriarchal mind – set make them helpless mothers and wives who adopt meek and reticent attitude in front of their provoked and aggressive husbands. For example Mira and Urmila are the modern women who want to revolt against the patriarchal system but 'patriarchal ideology' does not sanction any revolting attitude for ideal females. Thus Mira's wish of writing poetry is not accepted by the middle class patriarchal mind-set. On the other hand, Urmila's effort to publish Mira's poetry and to publicize the gruesome reality of Kalpana's life is also not accepted but it is considered as an effort to oppose:

Culture in which such feminist dreams have been replaced by fundamental patriarchy that divided women into rigid categories based on function. (Anand 33)

Despite opposition from Vanna and Kalpana's mother, Urmila takes the matter to the press. She gets the case reopened and with this the identity of the

rapist is revealed who is no other than Prabhakar, Shakutai's sister's husband. According to Neeru Tondon, with this incident, Deshpande also tries to satirize at pseudo – feminists like Priti, who are over – enthusiastic about fighting for equal rights of women, but harbour displaced notions about women's freedom. Thus by making a dig at pseudo –feminists like Priti, she puts forth her own brand of feminism taking by this bold step to reveal the issue of rape. Although the effort of Urmila could not get success but women like Mira and Urmila enliven the image of 'the independent women,' as conjured up by Simone de Beauvoir, who

... wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking actions, working, creating on the same terms as man. (Walters 98)

In spite of their disenchantment from tradition, they are forced to be a part of traditional system of living represented by patriarchy; the only way for them to seek comfort is through escape in reverie. Thus through her characters of the novel *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande shows that women, both educated and illiterate, even in twenty first century, are suffering for their identities, struggling for their existence in this patriarchal world. Her novel sympathetically records the lives of such women as her theme. She has endeavoured to transmit the basic anxiety, loneliness and helplessness of their situation. Deshpande herself says to S. Prasanna Sree that:

My focus is on women. Even in the real life, during the last 30- 40 years, you see women have changed so much. There is a lot of change in the attitude of women, but there is no change in men. This is the reality I've seen. Men are reluctant to change. They still expect things to be what they were? But I don't mean to say that all men are hopeless. (Sree 151- 152)

The novel *The Binding Vine* reconstructs the various aspects of a woman's experience and attempts to give voice to 'muted' ideologies of females' world. The lives of Deshpande's characters go around the words of career, success and love. For example Mira is conscious about her career. Unlike other women who found satisfaction in begetting children and looking after the family, Mira found satisfaction in copying scores of quotations from different writers, which she constantly devoured. She was forever "preparing herself, flexing her muscles,

aspiring for eternity” (65). She continued to write her poems even though she had doubts about her success because she knows that middle class patriarchy never allows a woman to get success.

Women long for love, understanding and appreciation from their husbands after marriages. But women like Sulu, Urmila, Vanna, Mira live their lives in fear. They linger insecure, frightened and unloved throughout their lives. In order to provide peaceful atmosphere at their homes, they suffer till the end in silence. Along with the physical, sexual assaults, they have to suffer mental assaults. They are not able to express their own emotions, feelings etc. They continue to be mute till the end. In *The Binding Vine* Deshpande charts, “the inner landscapes of women” (Phom 1). But she does not give any final touch to it. She explores the nature of the female world and reconstructs the suppressed records of female experience and ends the novel abruptly. But the themes of gender discrimination, sexual politics find a full fledged description in Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* and these themes nominate Deshpande as a feminist writer.

Generally the purpose of feminism is to identify the inequalities and injustices in the way girls and women are treated in particular societies and the disabilities and disadvantages which result from these. Feminism also asserts the worth of women and also the distinctive contributions that women make to their culture. Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* accordingly delineates the sufferings of women in the inhuman conditions of patriarchal mind – set. Thus women in Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* occupy a feministic position, but there feminism is ‘victim’ feminism. They have yet to embrace the ‘power’ feminism where they will not be merely a complaining victim. They have yet to achieve – in the words of Lynne Segal – the radical feminist movement’s goal:

A world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women. In what I still call a socialist feminist vision that would be a far better world for boys and men, as well. (qtd. in Walters 139)

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CHAPTER 3

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: Critiquing Racism and Gendering

Toni Morrison/Chloe Anthony Wofford is one of the most prominent authors in the history of African - American literature. She, in her artistic world, deals with the women of first half of twentieth century who, brought up in a traditional environment, struggle to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. As a child, she was an avid reader, constantly reading various novels, stories etc. and her favourite authors were Russian writers Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy, French writer Gustave Flaubert and English novelist Jane Austen (Haskins 25). Morrison's father told her numerous folktales of the black community that worked their way into Morrison's writings.

Toni Morrison, besides being a novelist, editor, scholar, teacher, and mother is also regarded as a contemporary griot for the African American community. She is considered as one of the most influential writers in the history of America. Nearly eighty years old, she continues to produce eloquent, groundbreaking novels. Morrison's writings imbued with wisdom and eloquence, provides her readers the much needed understanding of the past in order that they recognize the urgent promise of future (Beaulieu viii). Her troubled characters seek to find themselves and their cultural riches in a society that warps or impedes their essential growth. Each of Morrison's novels:

Is as original as anything that has appeared in our literature in the last 20 years. The contemporaneity that unites them - the troubling persistence of racism in America - is infused with an urgency that only a black writer can have about our society. (Malinowski 431)

Morrison was the first black female who became the Nobel Laureate woman novelist in 1993. Upon awarding the prize, the Swedish Academy describes Morrison as a writer who, in her novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American life (Beaulieu ix). Swedish Academy describes:

Her recognition was the official in scripting of a worldwide recognition and appreciation of the intellectual stimulation and awesome power of her writing. (Beaulieu ix)

She has been bestowed upon with honours like, the National Book Foundation Medal in 1996, the Pearl Buck Award in 1994 and Distinguished Writer Award in 1978. For her precious writings, she has brought acknowledgment in the form of the National Book Critics' Circle Award in 1978, the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, the Nobel Prize in 1993 etc.

Writing has become an essential tool of her existence. She states, “the only one thing that I couldn't live without is the writing” (qtd. in Li xi). The fundamental need to write highlights Morrison's deep commitment to the African-American community. Despite having published nine remarkable novels, Morrison continues bringing alive the ways of African American life through fiction. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970 and received Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel *Sula* (1973) was nominated for the American Book Award and obtained the Ohioana Book Award. In 1977 the novel *Song of Solomon* brought her national acclaim and fetched various awards like the National Book Critics' Circle Award, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the Oscar Micheaux Award, Friends of Writers Award, and the Cleveland Arts Prize for Literature. *Tar Baby* was published in 1981, followed by a short story, *Recitatif*, in 1983. In 1986 her play *Dreaming Emmett* came and in 1987 Morrison's novel *Beloved* was published. This novel won the Anisfield Wolf Book Award, Pulitzer Award, the Melcher Book Award and the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award. The novel *Jazz* appeared in 1991. The novel *Paradise* (1998) received the Ohioana Book Award and Oklahoma Book Award. Her literature for children appeared on the scene in 2002, namely *The Big Box* and *The Book of Mean People*.

Toni Morrison, as a writer, personifies courage. She dares to speak in a world that still undervalues the voice of a black woman. She is fully aware of the wrongs inflicted on the blacks and elucidates upon this in her writings. Her writings centre around the predicament of the blacks in the past as well as present, but she carefully maintains a balance in her portrayal of the race relations.

Morrison, in her fictional world, depicts the actual experiences of women - silence, repression, oppression etc. - which they suffer in the patriarchal/racist world. Sunanda Pal in the article “From Periphery to Centre Toni Morrison's Self Affirming Fiction” describes that Toni Morrison in her novels tries to explore how the intersection of race, class and gender in the American society influences the

shaping of black female life. She feels that the major problems of females are caused due to gender oppression. Even Morrison herself says:

My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderised, sexualised, wholly racialised world. (Pal 1)

Morrison's novels show the victimization of black people within the context of racial-gender social order. In one of her interviews, she says:

I don't want to bow out with easy answers to complex questions. It is the complexity of how people behave under white duress that is of interest to me. (qtd. in Batra 4)

According to Beaulieu, Morrison very strongly feels that art should have meaning - to depict African American culture and social history, and she does so in a way that resonates for readers of all ages, races, ethnicities and genders (viii). About her art, she says:

If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write), isn't about the village or community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams - which is to say yes, the work must be political... (qtd. in Batra 4)

The imaginative process is a key to Morrison's fiction especially the way in which a single description can capture the complexities of human relationships. She frequently uses images to generate an entire dramatic episode and to highlight essential qualities of certain characters, for example, in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's delight in drinking milk from Shirley Temple doll reveals her desire to imbibe a new persona. Actually Morrison writes in order to understand certain dynamics or nature of specific relationships- how does a child come to hate itself? What will a mother do to protect her child? How does a man achieve self-understanding? For Morrison, the process of writing is a way to explore the central challenges of human existence- how individuals flourish and hurt one another, how oppression operates. Despite these issues, Morrison insists that her novels are unified by one central issue:

All the time that I write, I'm writing about love or its absence.... About love and how to survive- not to make a living- but how to survive

whole in a world where we are all of us in some measure, victims of something. Each one of us is in some way at some moment a victim and in no position to do a thing about it. Some child is always left unpicked up at some moment. In a world like that, how does one remain whole-is it just impossible to do that? (qtd. in Lii xiii)

Toni Morrison has been recognized as a strident voice for the exploited black people as well as the master craftsman of the dominant artistic form. Trudier Harris analyses:

By any standard of literary evaluation, Toni Morrison is a phenomenon in the classic sense of once-in-a-lifetime rarity, the literary equivalent of Paul Robson, Michael Jordan... the superstars whose touch upon her profession makes us wonder if we shall ever see like her again. (qtd. in Batra 4)

Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu in the article "Approaches to Morrison's Works: Feminist/Black Feminist" says that Morrison's novels lend themselves to feminist readings because of the ways in which they challenge the cultural norms of gender, race and class (Beaulieu 12). She, in her novels, emphasizes on the discovery and rediscovery of black life especially that of a black woman, as it has been lived in America. Some of her works deal with the issue of identity, a few raise the question of the denial of self to the racially and sexually marginalized category of black women. Her fictional world is a commitment with the question of female subjectivity under removal, and with the search for an authentic, real, valid self against the forces of division and alienation. She describes the situation of a black female within the framework of race and gender and writes about the female's quest for identity in the patriarchal world.

Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970. This novel is concerned with the painful sufferings of the black characters who are forced to measure themselves in terms of Western standards of beauty. In the novel, Morrison talks about the issue of Black Feminism which argues that sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together. This issue was also raised by feminists during the first and second wave movements when women were facing the problem of inequality due to sexual/ racial discrimination. To remove this inequality, various women organizations like, National Black Feminist Organization, Combahee River Collective etc were formed. The demand of these

organizations was that a black woman should be recognized as a citizen, companion and confidant, not a worker or baby-maker or a mere colour.

In this novel, Morrison shows the adverse effects of sexism and racism as the major themes by focusing on the lives of her characters, especially those within an enclosed society in which the ideal concept of woman is not only racist and sexist but also classist. Since black females were, by nature of their sex and race, conceived of as lower class, they could hardly approximate the norm:

They had to work; most could not be ornamental or withdrawn from the world; and according to aesthetics of this country, they were not beautiful. But neither were they men. Any aggressiveness or intelligence on their part, qualities necessary for participation in the work world, were constructed as unwomanly and tasteless. (Sumana 21)

The *Bluest Eye* is a world of grotesque individuals whose psyches have been deformed by their efforts to assume false identities. The other theme of the novel is the quest for individual identity and the influences of family and community on that quest. The novel portrays the psychological ramifications of the racial/sexual politics upon a teen-aged black girl's self, Pecola Breedlove. Morrison has delineated the miserable plight of Pecola in patriarchy which implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. Thus patriarchy is considered as a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it and this girl, in the novel, discerns the injustices which are forced upon her by patriarchal values. She discerns the patriarchal prejudicing against her but she fails to revolt against the system and the novel depicts this system of patriarchal ideology in the arena of the consciousness of the female protagonist in a way that the protagonist submits to the social power of patriarchy. She fails to realize the constructed nature of social power which is "the power to get one's class or group interest served by the social structure as a whole (Fiske: 255)". John Fiske aptly says:

The subject ...is a social construction, not a natural one. A biological female can have a masculine subjectivity (that she can make sense of world through patriarchal ideology). (Fiske 258)

In the novel also, social construction of the society is responsible for the embarrassment of Pecola throughout her life. This convention is not constructed

by God but by the male members of the society. In the novel, Morrison focuses on how race and gender discrimination could take root inside the most delicate member of the society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female.

Shakti Batra says, in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison investigates the effects of beauty standards of the dominant culture on the self image of the African female adolescent. According to the standards of African- American ethnicity:

African – American represents the shades of evil, the devil' s aspect, night, separation, loneliness, sin, dirt, excrement, the inside of the body; and White represents the mark of good, the token of innocence, purity, cleanliness, spirituality, virtue and hope. (Kovel 232)

This reflects that the American community bases the ideals of beauty on “whiteness”, so Pecola Breedlove, a poor, black, love starved girl, protagonist of the novel, believes that her quest for self becomes fruitless because she is ugly. To present this theme Morrison makes use of nature imagery as a major structural element to divide the book into four sections/ seasons – autumn, winter, spring, and summer – reflecting ironically on the tragedy of Pecola Breedlove. The reason for using natural imagery in this way is that Pecola’s story does not follow the usual mythic cycle of birth, death and rebirth or the planting – harvest – planting cycle. Instead it proceeds from pathos to tragedy and ultimately to madness. On the other hand, the nature imagery begins with the symbol of the marigold seeds. In the year of 1941, no marigolds grew in the community of America. It symbolizes Pecola’s tragedy as in the end, she could not give birth to her father’s baby because going against the laws of nature never bear any fruits.

The title of the novel *The Bluest Eye* refers to Pecola Breedlove's intense desire for blue eyes. She believes herself to be ugly and unworthy of love and respect, but is convinced that her life would be magically transformed if she possesses blue eyes. So she makes efforts to come to terms with the world by saying prayers. She seeks the help of a person, Soaphead Church, who gives her false assurance of getting her eyes changed into blue ones. She thinks that blue eyes will make her look beautiful and this will allow her to finally fit in the environment of white society. She feels that with blue eyes, she will look attractive and then people will look at her, so that her world will be different. Pecola connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she would just have blue eyes, all the

bad things in her life would be replaced with love and affection. Yet as her dream grows more fervent, her life slowly starts to disintegrate in the face of adversity and strife. Her obsession with the blue eyes makes her slip into a state of insanity wherein she starts believing that she has got blue eyes and has become beautiful. The longing for a pair of blue eyes symbolizes the African – American girl's yearning for impossible white ideals.

The *Bluest Eye* is basically a black feminist novel in which the author has primarily focused on the gender exploitations which are faced by black women:

Being a minority in both caste and class (being poor, black, female) we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of garments. (Gupta 62)

Morrison understands and underscores the point that being black and female is a double jeopardy because to have dark skin means to suffer inequities in the white America where whites are considered superior, more intelligent and virtuous than blacks. Racism coupled with sexism proves to be more oppressive for African – American women. Owing to their complexion and sex, they have to confront double atrocities. They are sexually exploited by African – American men as well as white men. They are victims thus to the double atrocities of racism and sexism. "To be black and female was to be in double jeopardy" (Arya 21). In *The Bluest Eye*, the greatest sin of Pecola, thus, is to be born as African – American female.

The protagonist shows the feministic tendencies. She is completely fed up with the dull routine of her life; craves for love, care and concern which she is denied by her parents and society and everyone whom she encounters during her brief life, has consciously or unconsciously upheld the ideals of white skin, long blonde hair and blue eyes as the epitome of beauty and goodness:

Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow- haired, pink skinned doll was what every child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." (14)

This prompts her to pray for a pair of blue eyes that would make not only her family but the world to accept and love her.

Pecola, a victim of her surroundings, is constantly reminded of the fact that she is on the margins, an invisible being. The white store clerk, Mr. Yacobowski does not take notice of Pecola when she enters the store:

He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see ...She does not know what keeps his glance suspended ...But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes...It is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (36- 37)

When Pecola looks up, she finds in the shop owner's eyes what she has seen lurking in the eyes of all white people - the absence of human recognition of black people. Yacobowski's glance reinforces her own negative self perception. She begins to believe that she is ugly and people avoid and ignore her because of her dark colour.

From the store, Pecola purchases Mary Jane candies, for Mary Jane is considered as the symbol of white beauty in their culture. "She eats the candy... To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (38).

Moreover the billboards along the streets, graced with the images of beauty, constantly remind her of her shortcomings. Thus white standards were instrumental in corrupting the minds of black people and consequently the blacks developed the notion of self – hatred and felt humiliated.

In another incident, Pecola becomes an object of mockery while returning from school when a group of boys from her school start teasing her. Dancing a "macabre ballet," they sing a verse made up of two insults: one concerning the colour of Pecola's skin and the other, speculations on the sleeping habits of her father. They say:

Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps naked.

Stch ta ta stch ta ta

Stch ta ta ta ta ta.

On hearing their voice, Pecola laments and

dropped her notebook,

and covered her eyes with her hands. (50)

Pecola is demoralized by Maureen Peel too when Maureen accuses of seeing "her old black daddy" (56) naked. Pecola is bewildered on hearing

Maureen's dreadful remarks about her father. She feels so humiliated in front of her friends, that she becomes dull and listless. She makes no effort to strike back but simply yields to Maureen's claims:

Pecola tucked her head in- a funny, sad, helpless movement. A kind of hunching of the shoulders, pulling in of the neck, as though she wanted to cover her ears. (56)

Morrison, in the novel, poignantly brings forth the human psyche. The masters of the black patriarchal community accept the mythical norms of beauty that blue eyes, yellow hair, and pink skinned doll are the criteria of measuring the beauty of a girl. Consequently, their affection for white dolls is transferred to white girls or light skin girl like Maureen Peal, who is defined by Claudia as:

...a high yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynche ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the highest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me. Patent-leather shoes with buckles, a cheaper version of which we got only at Easter and which has disintegrated by May, Flubby sweaters the colour of lemon drops tucked into skirts with pleats so orderly they astounded us. Brightly coloured knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff. There was a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk. (48)

Maureen receives the attention of the entire school, whereas, Pecola is cast aside and ignored by her school teachers.

Through the portrayal of the character of Maureen, Toni Morrison tries to bring out the subtle distinction between coloured people and niggers in a society that discriminates between the whites and blacks.

A black female has to suffer the assaults of whites daily throughout her life due to patriarchy. The most horrible rejection occurs in the life of Pecola when she accidentally meets a young boy named Louis Junior whose mother Geraldine does not allow him to play with Pecola, a black girl because she:

... did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained him the difference between coloured people and niggers. They were easily

identifiable. Coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud.... The line between coloured and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant. (68)

But Junior, without the permission of her mother, invites Pecola at his home to show the kittens. Instead of showing them, he throws her mother's cat at her. After that he throws the cat flying into the radiator and blames Pecola for killing it. Geraldine, the mother, infuriated not as much as by the death of cat, as by the presence of an African - American girl in her home, lashes out at Pecola in words that cut deeper than the cat's claws, "Get out... you nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (72).

This incident ironically presents the imitating of white values and attitudes by the African – American woman herself because she considers that by imitation, she will be able to raise her own living standards among other African- American women.

Pecola's family is not free from the clutches of the patriarchal racial society. They have to struggle a lot to survive in the society. For blacks, it is a question of survival. The members of Breedlove family are aliens in a foreign land, enmeshed by alien values. They look at their homes, their life-styles and their families, and the stark reality faces them in the face that they are "the other", the deviation from the norm. They look at themselves in the mirror, and the face of this 'other', this 'ugly' black person stares back at them. Rejected by the whites, they are constantly threatened by self-disgust and self-rejection which leads to disintegration. Like Pecola, her parents Pauline and Cholly too suffer from a sense of inferiority complex:

The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly...it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had

accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right”. (28)

The disintegration factor, robs the Breedloves of the feeling of security and they do not possess a legacy of love, positive self – image to be passed on their children.

Cholly had a very unfortunate and unhappy experience while growing up, and these experiences had a distorting influence. As an orphan, he was looked after by an old aunt but she also left him anchorless in the world. Unloved and uncared for, he grew up without learning the meaning of love, compassion and kindness. Further, as a teenager he suffers humiliation at the hands of a white man who catches him in the act of making love. His marriage to Pauline also proves disastrous as both of them are not only unsuited to each other but are also incapable of giving love. Pauline too has a miserable childhood, and she too has grown up, unloved and uncared for.

In African-American naming practices, every child receives a given name at birth and a nickname that generally follows the individual throughout life. As tradition shows, almost every black person in slavery was known by two names: a given name and a name used only within the family circle. Pecola’s mother, Pauline is distressed for not having any nickname from her family and relatives because to be called by one’s own name has a negative impact, whereas a nickname makes a positive impact on the psychology of a person (Arya 31). She “never felt at home anywhere or that she belonged to any place” (86). Being frustrated she starts ignoring her family and community, which is why she starts seeking love and adulation in her master’s home from where she gets a nickname ‘Polly’ – they “gave her what she never had” (99).

Pauline Breedlove, disappointed by her family, moves away into a world of dreams. She is inclined towards movies. This is the only consolation she enjoys in an otherwise lonely and alien land. In the theatre, she allows herself to be enslaved by Jean Harlow, the white skin beauty. Morrison, through her narrator, suggests that romantic love and physical beauty are “probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought” (95).

It is because of these two destructive ideas- romantic loves and physical beauty, that Pauline is unable to accept Pecola's appearance. The kindness shown to Pecola by her mother, for the most part, begins to end with her daughter's tenure in the womb because the remarks which she overhears from the white doctor in the hospital during her labour, compounds to the self-hatred that she already experiences: When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. (97)

This formulates Pauline to criticize her newly born daughter. While she slowly destroys the spirit of Pecola, Cholly Breedlove (Pecola's father) ruins her totally. Having been abandoned by his father and mother, and emotionally raped by the white men who looked upon him during his sexual relationship with some girl and insisted Cholly and the girl to perform as they watched, Cholly becomes emotionally impotent. Not having experienced the love of his parents, Cholly does not know how to act like a parent. One Sunday evening, when he walks unsteadily home, fully drunk and sees his daughter in the kitchen:

Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he felt. Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort into pleasure. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love... Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child – unburdened – why wasn't she happy... Guilt and impotence rose in a bilious duet. (127)

At this moment, he indulges in the most heinous and heart rending crime, he rapes his eleven - year old daughter, Pecola. Neeru Tondon in her book *Feminine Psyche: A Post Modern Critique* says:

We must trust psychological point of view that rape is the product of men. They are men who are caught in the web of burgeoning frustration, one who are not getting what they want, so they find a release or a satisfaction for their male ego in rape. (Tondon 62)

Cholly, caught in the web of sexual and economic frustration, rapes her daughter. Thus it can be said that for Pecola, her own familial home, like the patriarchal society, like the racial community, like the larger society of Lorain, becomes a frightening and soullessly cruel place.

The damage done to Pecola is unforgettable. Her identity, already feeble and fragile, is completely crushed. After rape, Pecola never becomes the same. "The result of rape is more frightening. It distorts the female psyche" (Tondon 66).

Pecola began her search for self by looking at herself: for hours she sits looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of ugliness that left her ignored or despised at home, at school, or in the society. The incident of sexual assault rapes her of all her senses and drives her insane. As she could not face the real world, or her own real self in the mirror, she starts living in a world of illusion believing that God has answered her prayers and given her blue eyes which she alone can see. According to Holloway

Morrison has written of desolation and decay, because this is where as victims of our environments, we are left. (Holloway 39)

Black females have to suffer not only because of sex and colour, but because of poverty too. This gets illustrated through the characters like Claudia, the narrator, and her sister Frieda, who are stopped by their rich friend Rosemary Villanucci, from entering the car because she wants to eat bread and butter "which these two sisters have been staring at wanting her bread" (Shmoop 23). These two girls also don't get too much attention, care etc. from their parents. Poor parents caught in the web of earning their daily bread and butter, are not left with any time to express love and concern for their children.

When these children do not get emotional security from their parents, it affects their thinking; they feel disconnected and do not find any ground to stand firmly on. The grief of Claudia and Frieda comes across in these dialogues:

Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration. How, they ask us, do you expect anybody to get anything done if you are all sick? We cannot answer them. Our illness: is related with contempt, foul Black Drought, and castor oil that blunt our minds. (Gupta 68)

Deborah Plant realizes that the theme of love is given a central place in this novel and the novel sees the fate of the black people depending on family relationship and community relationship built upon love and fellow-feeling. The

novel implies that only love can provide true stability to the black American psyche and give it a sense of identity. In the novel, the Macteer family is poor and black, even then they offer some presents to their children at the occasion of Christmas as a token of their love. Claudia gets dolls as Christmas gift, dolls that are made according to the white ideals for beauty. But she does not, unlike Pecola, hanker after the possession of the white beauty traits. She is free to take out her anger on this beauty ideal that is impossible for Pecola to reach. Claudia confided:

I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulse to little white girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. "To discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say "Awwwww", but not for me? (Plant156)

Claudia is thus able to deal with her feelings of anger and revulsion because she gets a chance to take them out on the dolls that are offered to her by her family. But on the other hand, Pauline, Cholly or Pecola are unable to deal with their hidden feelings which drive them to the verge of insanity. Cared for, and looked after, Claudia has not internalized the rejection from the racist-sexist society, and so she can grow up into adulthood retaining her sense of self, and an objective vision of the world around her.

What really supports the MacTeers is the understated love that forms the bedrock of the family. Mrs. MacTeer too is a poor, black lady but when Cholly puts his family outdoors, she immediately takes in his daughter and shows a community feeling. Claudia and Frieda also love Pecola. Mrs. MacTeer grumbles when Pecola drinks too much milk. But Claudia tells Pecola that she should not feel hurt because Mrs. MacTeer would have done the same thing if one of her own daughters had drunk the milk but it is her true deep love that sustains this family.

Morrison in the novel, through her strong narrative technique, delivers a sensitive delineation of intolerable plight of black female and also shows the economic exploitation of that girl in the African – American society through the first three symbolic passages of the novel (Arya 38). The first passage has simple sentences, but later on it is repeated without pronunciation and a third time words are jumbled together.

The first paragraph shows the world of the secure, suburban and white family, which has leisurely father, non – working mother, two children-Dick and Jane and a dog and cat:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green- and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. ..She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat... Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother... Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs...See Father... Mother, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling...See the dog...Do you want to play with Jane? Run dog, run...Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (1)

This version signifies, on the one hand, an alien white world, represented by the Fisher family that violates the lives of the African – American children. On the other hand, it signifies the archetypal happy and wealthy family of ‘Dick and Jane’ that models as the standards and components of family’s happiness which MacTeers can seek in life but the Breedloves cannot get.

The second version is the replica of the first. This version is without capitals and punctuation, yet the words are recognizable:

Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy see Jane... she wants to play who will play with Jane see the cat... come play with jane...play jane play. (1)

This version signifies the life – style of two African – American children Claudia and Frieda, who despite their financial hardship try their best to survive and cope with the world.

The last and third version lacks spaces and pronunciation. It wholly runs together and appears like one long collection of consonants and vowels seeming to signify nothing. This version reflects the psychic chaos of the novel:

HereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappyseeJane...shewantstoplaywillplaywithJaneseethecat...comeplaywithjane...playjaneplay. (2)

This paragraph indicates the disturbed life of the Breedlove family. Their daughter Pecola who is mutilated physically and mentally by her family and society, survives in a deformed world. In the third version, individual space evaporates as it does in the novel. The father meddles and distorts the child's space (Arya 40). Pecola's life is smashed as it was indirectly reflected in this version by disturbing letters.

The novel tries to hit the raw nerves of racial-sexual self-contempt, expose it and then soothe it. On one hand, Morrison raises questions on the existence of black female's identity with the varied and distinct characterization, and on the other hand, she gives answer to all her questions in the form of love. Toni Morrison's virtuosic novel *The Bluest eye* asks powerful questions about race, class, and gender with the subtlety and grace that have always characterized her writing.

Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu and other critics opine that Toni Morrison's contributions to literature are vast- the characters and places she has created, the situations she has imagined, public assertions, private agonies and celebrations she has dramatized- this entire make up composition is unrivalled in American Literature (Beaulieu ix).

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CHAPTER 4

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Despite their marked cultural and geographical differences, a close examination of the works of Shashi Deshpande and Toni Morrison reveals a definite similarity between the two authors when their works are studied within the framework of female marginality. Both these writers chart the unacknowledged private world of women in their fictional works. The protagonists of both the chosen novels, *The Binding Vine* and *The Bluest Eye* show how women grope for an identity; they may be black or brown, may be located in America or India.

Deshpande usually portrays middle class women, who are denied any access to power and are treated as procreating machines or objects of gratification for men. Although capable of taking decisions, women, in most middle class households, are denied such opportunities. They work within ideological frameworks where they are practically reduced to nothing and are merely a reflection of their husbands or their fathers. The society's double standards come to the fore when women talked about as the embodiment of purity and spirituality are labelled by the same patriarchal setup as meek and weak, one who constantly requires the protection of man as her lord and master.

Deshpande in the novel *The Binding Vine* depicts the exploitation, manipulation, pain and anguish felt by women in all walks of life. On other hand, Morrison exposes the impact of racism and gender discrimination on the lives of black women in America. Right from the days of slavery, the blacks have suffered the cruel reality of racism. Sexism, more oppressive physically and mentally, was the cause of grievance to the black women who were sexually exploited by both the black and white men. Confronted by racial and sexual discrimination on all sides, the black woman had no friends but only liabilities and responsibilities.

Though there has been a progressive development in various fields over the years, the social system in the different countries of the world is yet to see any drastic changes with regard to the status of women. In spite of enjoying the ever-increasing privileges, women still continue to be largely dominated by their husbands and patriarchal mindsets. They cannot aspire for anything more than what is allotted to them in life; that is why they continue to be insignificant, "the other". Despite various laws and constitutional rights, woman continues to be

defined in terms of man and regarded as a subordinate to him. Deshpande and Morrison through their respective works depict the role of the social and cultural structures in perpetual reinforcement of gender inequalities. But they do not take the extreme stand of fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination.

The basic difference between them is that for Morrison both race and gender are the major elements of oppression of females while race does not appear as a matrix of oppression in Deshpande's fiction, because almost all her characters belong to the same race. Instead of race, the dominant patriarchal behaviour patterns and ideologies are inscribed more prominently in the interaction of gender categories in her fiction located in urban India.

The prime concern of both the novelists is to portray the constrained world of a woman where she has a very precarious existence and focus is on the personal freedom, individual choice and identity. They are concerned with the treatment of woman as a normal human being and not as ideologically constructed feminine beings. They do not want women to be revered as Goddesses but to have their rights and dignities as equal human beings. Thus, they do not want their protagonists to be meek, submissive and lonely weepers but ambitious and able beings, ready to make decisions, perform actions, and ready to face whatever the consequences are. Their protagonists go through a process of introspection, self analysis and self realization. Self-discovery is the major theme of the two novelists.

A number of common thematic concerns have been identified in the works of Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, on the basis of which the narratives as well as the characters may be grouped as evolving around the motifs of oppression, resistance and emergence. The characters presented by both these writers question the authority of the established order, its assumptions of male infallibility and the self-interest in viewing woman as the frail, frivolous, and unenlightened other. The women visualized by Deshpande and Morrison in their novels challenge man-made rules and assumptions regarding the feminine and the institutions that legitimize these. Their silences do not signify surrender, but have the subversive potential to shock the patriarchy out of its complacent assumptions; their bursting out into speech undermines the discourses that ratify dominant practices.

Marriage and family are largely taken into account as the centres of oppression more predominantly in Deshpande, while in Morrison these are factors that add to the unbearability of female existence in an ethos of sexual and racial oppression.

The social life comes alive in the novel *The Binding Vine* in a very authentic manner. Through the character of Kalpana, Deshpande exposes the hypocritical values of society. Ironically, the traditional Indian society holds a girl responsible for being raped whereas the boy goes almost blameless. More often than not rape cases go unreported. Kalpana's own mother Shakutai too does not support Urmila when she wants to get justice for Kalpana.

Deshpande in her works portrays the plight of a woman who is considered as an object of desire and gratification. This is where marital rape comes into the picture. Mira in the novel bears the sexual assaults of her husband silently because as conveyed to her that it is a matter of duty, a cultural and religious tradition for a woman to satisfy her husband. She has no right to say 'no' to him for anything. She is expected to give in to the wish of her husband, come what may. In the novel what Mira suffers is generally not acknowledged as rape, but is seen as the legitimate right of the husband to possess his wife sexually, with or without her consent.

In a middle class society, marriage is considered to be a license of security for a woman. But in reality, after marriage she generally becomes a silent sufferer who never does anything for her own self but always tries to satisfy the biological, emotional etc. needs of her family. Deshpande paints characters like Mira, Shakutai, Urmila and Vanna who accept their dependent, inferior status in marriage silently because they do not consider themselves capable enough (as conditioned by society) to seek answers or support from within themselves, and for this they have to cling shamelessly to their husbands. Mira, Vanna and Urmila suffer various problems in their marital life; even then they do not want to get separated from their husbands.

Morrison's characters too are presented as a picture of suffering in one way or the other. Pecola Breedlove is suppressed by the brutality of the society, who struggles for the visibility in a society in which black female signifies invisibility and finds herself enclosed in a male-oriented society. She inevitably suffers from loneliness and a sense of guilt and failure.

Both Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* and Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* have explored the inner world of women in their novels. But their articulation differs to a large extent. Shashi Deshpande employs the stream of consciousness technique. The random and rambling thoughts are conveyed effectively through the stream of consciousness. Deshpande uses it to reveal the character's inner self, for example, Urmila, the protagonist, is undergoing the traumatic pain of her baby daughter's death and her state of mind is revealed in her words, "This pain is all that is left to me of Anu. Without it, there will be nothing left to me; I will lose her entirely" (9).

This technique lets the readers enter into the past of Urmila as well when she thinks of her parents' relationships with each other:

Papa's anger and silence were weapons against which Inni had no defence. At such times I could sense her constant pre-occupation with his feelings, her groping towards him, her hurt when he rejected her overtures. (81)

Through this dialogue with herself, Urmila thus perceives how much her mother depended on her husband emotionally. Deshpande uses the flashback technique too that makes her protagonists arrive at the proper knowledge of the self and the "other" and of the nature of life as well.

She sometimes avoids literal translations, using commonly, among other words, the vernacular allocations denoting family relationships, like Aiji (grandmother), Aj (mother), Appa/Baba (father). Usually she addresses this by appending a glossary of non-English words, proper nouns, local rites and customs at the end of the book.

On the other hand, Morrison uses myth to narrate the story. She arranges the story around a seasonal myth. Pecola's story begins in autumn, and each section corresponds to a season. Spring, the season of birth and new beginnings, corresponds with Cholly's drunken physical attack on Pecola, consequential in pregnancy. Cholly's disappearance, the remaining Breedloves' isolation, the baby's loss, and Pecola's madness, take place in summer, traditionally the season of fullness and growth. Thus Morrison has used the technique of undercutting traditional mythic associations with irony. Another innovative feature of this novel is the multiple points of view Morrison uses to tell the Breedloves' story. Claudia MacTeer narrates the first section of each of the seasonal chapters that make up

the novel. The remaining sections are told by an omniscient narrator, who seems intent on providing a sympathetic account of character's history: of Cholly's youthful humiliation, Pauline's contentment in nature etc.

At some places, both Shashi Deshpande and Toni Morrison use similar narrative techniques also. Deshpande uses the combination of first person and third person narrative coupled with the flashback devices to depict the feminine world in a realistic manner. With the combination of first and third person, she wants to depict the situation in order to take both the subjective (first person) and objective (third person) approach. In the novel *The Binding Vine*, Urmila acquaints the readers about the exploitations of other characters like Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana and Vanna using as an observer narrator.

Morrison also uses third person as narrative to make the events, situations and also judgments objective so that the vision can become impartial and unbiased. In the *The Bluest Eye*, the sufferings, pains, exploitations of Pecola are defined from the view point of third person Claudia.

From an analysis of the protagonists in the novels so far, it can be understood that it is ultimately women's own meekness which has become a curse for them. On examining the issue of gendering as suffered by the Black American or the coloured Indian women, one is struck by the similarity in the deep structures of oppression that female experience yields as well as the diversities governing this experience. Both the Indian and the Afro-American women try to explore those strategies which are responsible for the oppressiveness at the every stage of their lives. In their fictional version, the concepts of culture, tradition, values etc. of middle and lower class societies are seen to sustain the ideology of gender; these turn out to be universal metaphors for male domination and female subordination. The consequence of this phenomenon defines the relative status of man and woman in the patriarchal set-up where language and power is attributed to the male, and silence and powerlessness to the female. Her voice is suppressed and she cannot free herself from the shackles of patriarchal society. One would like to agree with Gerda Lerner who says that the contradiction between women's centrality and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition.

The women characters in both these novels long for their recognition from the male dominated society. They need their freedom and fight for their individualities. They wish mutual love from their men and not mere lust. Deshpande and Morrison, through their poignant female characters champion the cause of drawing society's attention towards the societal roles and attitudes inflicted on women. The present work is thus an attempt at bringing to light the subversive reactions of women across different cultures, of different environments to oppression of all kinds.

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