



## MYTH CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S 'THE DAY OF THE GOLDEN DEER'

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### ABSTRACT

*Storytelling is common in Indian culture. Story tellers have realized the need of a 'good story' since the beginning of civilization. The stories include myths, legends and folklore. A myth is a story based on tradition or legend, which has a deep symbolic meaning. A Myth conveys truth, rather than necessarily recording a true event. Girish Karnad, Sudhin Ghose, Balachandra Rajan, Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh, have written stories with myths incorporated in them. They have used myths in their works for different purposes. Some writers like Girish Karnad have used myths to redefine the concept of religion. while some have focused on nature myths. Shashi Deshpande is a literary voice who has redefined the traditional role of women with the help of myths.*

**Keywords :-** Myth, Women Character ,Hindu Epic, Shashi Deshpande

### INTRODUCTION

Every story in the world can be found in *the Mahabharata*. It is an epic about the great war between the feuding cousins; this book is the key element of Hindu mythology. Like Hinduism itself, *the Mahabharata* and its sister epic *the Ramayana*, are sweeping in scope and constantly evolving. These collections of fables and parables serve as ways to set down rules and maxims to guide our daily lives.

Storytelling is common in Indian culture. Story tellers have realized the need of a 'good story' since the beginning of civilization. The stories include myths, legends and folklore. A myth is a story based on tradition or legend, which has a deep symbolic meaning. A myth

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conveys truth, rather than necessarily recording a true event. Some myths can be the account of actual events. Myths have been transformed by symbolic meaning and their meaning has been changing with time or place. Myths are used to explain universal and local beginnings and involve supernatural beings. These stories have a great power of meaning, to the culture. It is a major reason for their survival through thousands of years. "Myths like poems paintings and rituals reflect reality in a creative fashion that captures its salient features for contemporary audience and offer explanations and deeply felt meaning"( Michael Witzel 34).

The term myth is derived from Greek word '*mythos*' which means a story or a word. There are certain theories which explain the nature of myths. The study of myths began in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century scholars framed myth as an obsolete mode of thought, by interpreting myth as the primitive counterpart of science. The structural use of myth is clearly a twentieth century phenomenon. The revival of interest in myth derives largely from the works of W.B Yeats, T.S Eliot and James Joyce; each of them made myth meaningful in the modern world. They used mythical situations and characters in a modern context, thereby seeking to illuminate the predicament of contemporary man, viewing him in a larger perspective of time. One of the four basic functions of myths as defined by Campbell is -"The fourth Function of mythology is to initiate the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him toward his own spiritual enrichment and realization" (521).

Writers have often been inspired by classical myths. Indian writers such as R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Girish Karnad, Sudhin Ghose, Balachandra Rajan, Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh, have written stories with myths incorporated in them. They have used myths in their works for different purposes. Some writers like Girish Karnad have used myths to redefine the concept of religion. while some have focused on nature myths. Shashi Deshpande is a literary voice who has redefined the traditional role of women with the help of myths. Deshpande has presented the myths and the stereotypes in Indian culture bestowed upon women. Through her stories she has expressed how women are being marginalized. She has focused on the delineation of miseries of the life of a woman, sexual differentiation and restrictive pattern of behavior. The sense of alienation, temperamental incompatibility in man-woman relationships, and their inner conflicts are the themes of her short stories.

Shashi Deshpande gives voice to women who step out of the patriarchal practices. Her short stories are imbued with myths. She uses mythical situations and characters in the modern context, thereby seeking to illuminate the predicament of contemporary women. The title of the story 'The Day of the Golden Deer' (Vol 2 133-142 ) is symbolic. The story starts from the golden deer episode in Ramayana, when Lakshmana (brother in law of Sita) informs Sita about her husband's decision to forsake her because of the gossip by a washerman. The first feeling therefore, in Deshpande's Sita is that of blankness followed by a strong fearful agony.

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She wonders why and since when her husband, the king, had to pay any attention to the gossip of common people. Her anger at being addressed as 'Queen' astonishes Lakshmana and she realizes that it is tears, reproaches and entreaties that is expected of her. She decides to hold on to her anger as she knows that it is only anger that can uphold her at the moment because if she grieves or cries or complains now, she would indeed be lost

Curiously, Sita is reminded of Bali's unfair death at the hands of Rama. She questions Lakshmana about fairness of the action, who agrees that it was wrong but had to be done for her sake. The question that promptly comes to her mind is "And this now, what he is doing to me for whose sake is this?" and Lakshmana replies unhesitatingly, "why for his people" (136). And then Sita realizes that for Rama the desire to be loved and admired had become a passion to be always in the right, never to do any wrong. It was because of this passion that he had made her to stand on trial to prove her purity.

What hurts her is that a trial once was not enough especially when he knew only too well that she was pure. Lakshmana tries to explain by saying, it is not he who has any doubts you know that. He knows you and what you are. But he has to do his duty, he owes his subjects that. She believes that perhaps it would have been easier to bear the pain of this rejection if in place of hiding behind the pride of doing his duty, Ram had shown her his grief at having to be cruel to her. At that moment she thinks that perhaps Ravana, the man who was responsible for ruining her life was more humane. His tragedy was that he could never force his will on her against her will, because his feelings for her were far too strong.

This Sita created by Deshpande, does not believe in fate. She knows one can't escape the consequences of one's actions. She accepts that her abduction by Ravana and her subsequent suffering were a consequence of her actions. She realizes that it was her desire for the golden deer first and then her excessive love and concern for her husband that had made her say those cruel words to Lakshmana on that fateful day, which finally drove him away leaving her lonely and vulnerable. Similarly, the first time she had come to the forest with Rama was the result of Dashratha's weakness of a doting old husband for a young and beautiful wife. She realizes that this time she will have to suffer for her husband's weakness, the weakness of a desire to be perfect to be the king who put duty before self.

Eventually in the end Sita decides to be silent and accept Ram's decision not because she wishes to be remembered as one who submitted, endured, forgave, or because she is good and merciful, a virtuous and devoted wife, but because she pities him. According to Shashi Deshpande what stirred her in the character of mythological Sita in Ramayana "was the contrast between the young girl whose innocence made this going away with her husband a



joyous adventurous journey and the woman, older, mature, soon to be a mother, once again getting ready for exile” (Deshpande *The Stone Women* 91).

She knows he is chasing a mirage, a delusion, a chimera of perfection. He is in fact a victim of his own idea of himself, still chasing the deer of perfection where he can never be seen to do wrong. He has sacrificed Sita to his God. His belief that his image as the righteous, the perfect ruler should not be tarnished. Thus by peeping inside the mind of Sita, Deshpande bestows her with flesh and blood and she suddenly becomes real and plausible any woman would be able to identify with. Her Sita also remains silent like the Sita of mythology but the probe into her psyche has revealed that there is a reason behind her silence. Shashi Deshpande asserts in an interview that it is not her duty to replace one model with another. She says:

It is not my idea of replacing one model with another. I am just deconstructing these myths... I'm not saying don't take these women role models. See them for what they are otherwise the pressure on you is going to be very difficult, if you are expected to be a Sita, a 'Pathivrata' in the sense of Sita, who never wrongs her husband, never does anything wrong gentle, loving motherly. You can never be like that and you will always feel guilty, I am not like Sita, I can't be. I am just telling you that let us see Sita as a human being.  
(Prasanna 157-158)

Shashi Deshpande feels that myths are not, cannot and should not be gender circumscribed and believes myths need to be liberated too. By rewriting these mythical stories and by referring to them in her other stories she does exactly that. Shashi Deshpande is of the view that it is not needed to reject the ideals the important thing is that woman should be seen as an individual rather than from the perspective of ideal womanhood.

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