
DESHPANDE'S SHORTER FICTION-A BLOW TO THE CENTURIES OLD 'ESTABLISHED IMAGES'

DR. LOVLEEN BAINS

Assistant Professor in English, Guru Nanak National College, Doraha.

Email ID-lovleenbains.bains@gmail.com

Abstract: Shashi Deshpande's 'deconstructive' approach in 'reconstructing' the 'formed' images of the female goddesses, brings out an entirely unique aspect of her writings, as a votary of female choices and voices. The myths have accorded her an appropriate pedestal to prove that when celestial beings had to undertake an agonized journey towards self annihilation, how can the mortal feminine beings be left out? The self-worthiness of these spiritually established beings was met with no less than *agni pariksha*. Myths, as depicted by Deshpande in her *The Stone Women*, hold an entirely different purpose for Deshpande. She avers- "Myths have given us a moral framework by which we live"

Keywords: Identity, Negotiate, Indian psyche, myths, feminism, challenging, *agni pariksha*, Self - annihilation, voiceless, sensations, feelings, desires, phoenix, paradise, horizons

Introduction: In her onward march from femininity to feminism, Shashi Deshpande approximates the mythical women to the contemporary ones and tries to negotiate a deserving place for them. The angelic halo that wields immense influence on the Indian psyche is foregrounded to the extent that the reader succeeds in getting a considerable peep into the *Inner rooms* of these *Stone Women* with the help of *Mirrors* that clearly reflect the agony of these revered beings. Deshpande is in no way oblivious of the integral part these myths have played in the integration of the cultural and moral fabric of Indian life. She says-

"Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large dent in the fabric of our culture. On the other hand, if we are not able to make them meaningful to our lives, they will cease to survive."

Shashi Deshpande's 'deconstructive' approach in 'reconstructing' the 'formed' images of the female goddesses, brings out an entirely unique aspect of her writings, as a votary of female choices and voices. The myths have accorded her an appropriate pedestal to prove that when celestial beings had to undertake an agonized journey towards self annihilation, how can the mortal feminine beings be left out? The self-worthiness of these spiritually established beings was met with no less than *agni pariksha*.

In 'And What has been decided?,' a story contained in the anthology *The Stone Women*, it has been decided that the five Pandav brothers are supposed to share the win amongst themselves. Unfortunately it is Draupadi who is counted as a win and shared by all five of them. The pain of Draupadi's heart and the intense longing for Arjuna, whom she had chosen and garlanded, 'deceived' her for the other four as he placed duty above everything even his beloved wife. The intense carving of Draupadi for Arjuna, who alone mattered to her, crumbled like the house of sand as the latter turning towards Yudhishtar had said:

"Brother, you are the eldest, you marry her". It was at that moment of time that Deshpande, as if having read the voiceless protestations of a lone woman's aspirations, makes her yell, waking up suddenly, as if, from a dream. She realizes now through Deshpande's expression:

"I should have walked away from you, from all of you, but it was already too late."

No one had ever tried to measure the depth of her heart that longed for one and only one. None but Deshpande, trying to be in thoughtful unanimity with Draupadi at the time, had regarded her as a human being with flesh and blood capable of sensations, feelings and desires. The hunger of her heart remained unsatiated as she says:

As Draupadi's fathomless desires remained unfulfilled, voices unheard, feelings secluded, aspirations unmet and hopes vanquished, she instead of being bowed down, emerges phoenix like from the entire ordeal to declare to the wide world once and for all-

"We had to be, free to be the selves we wanted to be. Each day complete in itself, ending where it began, enclosing us in its security. And I, going to bed each night happy to be by myself, to have no one to share my bed"

Jaya too in 'That Long Silence' was named Suhasini by Mohan as he wanted her to be always at the service of himself and his family. But when Jaya could make it no more she blurts out:

"Suhasini was dead, yes, that was it, she was the one Mohan was mourning...No the fact was that I'd finally done it-I'd killed her."

'The Day of the Golden Deer', another story in the Anthology, again represents the male voice to be the ultimate one while that of the female to be weakened to the extent of oblivion. But at the same time it witnesses the *sati savitri Sita's* social and psychological emergence in a way that Lord Rama stands exposed. She questions the prudence and wisdom of the so-called God of Gods, Lord Rama and in turn renounces him from her side-

"It is time for me to do so, to give up the idea of perfection in any man, in any human."

Sita feels doubly exiled when she hears her husband, the Lord God of the universe, doubting her like ordinary humans and expecting her to pass one test of purity after another. She recalls the fateful day of the abduction when she felt the villain Ravana clutch her tightly in his embrace. But that day and this day of her renunciation, she says, are no different as she says-

"Yes, I have, on that day, the day of the golden deer, when I had felt the iron hands of the seemingly gentle hermit grip me. Now I feel them again, alien hands on me, cruel, hard and hurting. With an effort greater than I have ever made in my life, I take hold of myself".

She no more wishes to be a queen, especially the queen of that king who though may be supreme in the eyes of his people but is fickle in his mind, weak in spirit and non-resolute in commitments. She wishes to go back to being what she was. 'The daughter of king Janka. No, not even that. I am just Sita,' as she shuns the very idea of associations especially with those who are male in nature.

Sita, at this juncture resembles Kshama of Deshpande's novel 'Come up and Be Dead', who was in full acquired full command of the existing situation and was better positioned now, than had been ever before. About Kshama, Deshpande asserts proudly as she presents her in the following words -

"There was no doubt at all that the woman who stood on the dias was fully in command both of the situation and herself. Small made and dumpy though she was, there was an unmistakable air of authority about her. It showed in her perfect composure, in the way she dressed...each hair in place, the sari hanging in geometrical straight lines from waist to feet, from shoulder to hip, in the subdued faces of the teachers and the awed silence in which the girls shuffled in. Looking at the steady eyes that watched them, one would have thought...here's a woman who knows what she wants. And gets it."

The traditional woman is apparently witnessed to be breaking the cocoon of protection, in which she had been pitted both by society and her own self and in turn pitting those who have been the framers and moulders of her destiny ever since.

With clearer perspectives and awakened posture, she generates a mature outlook towards her role and position in the socialized set up. As per her newly developed understanding of male psychology, she utters:

“For what is he but a victim of his own idea of himself? He is still chasing it. The golden deer of perfection, while I... Not, for me, the day of the golden deer is over, I know it is nothing but a mirage, a delusion.”

It is the new women, appearing in the guise of Deshpande's Sita, who after shunning enforced confinement and subordination to either the commonly placed word 'duty' or frequently quoted word 'fate,' is all set to redefine her role by declaring once and for all that 'It is finally over.'

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