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**RECONSTRUCTION OF MYTHICAL SITA IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
SHORT STORY, *THE GOLDEN DEER***

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Abstract:

The present paper reinterprets mythical Indian Character Sita in the short story of Shashi Deshpande. Literature particularly Indian literature is unfinished without these subjects and characters of myths and mythological stories. These stories impacts on us. These stories teach us the ethical values, customs and rituals to every person of the society. The characters of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas are being reshaped, re-constructed in different ages. In the stories of Shashi Deshpande, the characters of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and Puranas have been retold. These Mythological stories, characters are not to be understood as the stories of super-human personalities but these are the part of human psyche, part of their life and religion. The image of woman projected through these myths. For the centuries submissive, subordinate and beautiful image of woman is celebrated and appreciated by people. But Shashi Deshpande 'Inner Voice of Womanhood' very effectively and strongly reconstructed the image of woman. Here in present paper I specially highlights the reconstructed image of Sita by Shashi Deshpande to whom she treats as human being and focus on situations, emotions, psychology, questions of a woman.

Keywords: *Mythology, Reconstruction, Human Psyche, Puranas, Religion, Image, etc.*

Myth is simply known as the type of story from ancient times which typically or simply explains the natural events or describes the history of the people. Myths are primeval stories through which worldly form is given to what beyond known and perceptible reality. The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'Myth' is an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts.

It is a traditional or legendary story, usually about some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural description, especially one that is concerned with divinities or demigods and explains some practice, ritual, or phenomenon of nature. Myths are ritualized stories expressing the ultimate realities.

The traditional ideas about the place of woman in society have been passed on to us by the scriptures like Rig-Veda, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. The myths of Sawitri, Sita, Shakuntla, Damayanti, Sarswati, Lakshmi, Droupadi etc. find place in almost all genres of Indian literature. These stories so deeply ingrained into psyche of Indian women that husband are kind hearted, it's the duty of a wife that she must be submissive, devoted, family care taker etc. she must be keep the whole family together for that she has to spent every moment of her life. She has to consider herself family means her life, no other definition of her existence.

As Shashi Deshpande defines, "Every one of the women in the legends have been made by men to satisfy their different needs. There is unceasing tyke to be secured and controlled, the generous mother to the support and love the best accomplice to ensure selective customs of the man over her body just as an undoubted paternity of kids and the flirt to titillate and give sexual delight. Lastly, the goddess to



give ethical quality. What put does a genuine reasoning? feeling lady have in this motivation? Women will undoubtedly have these questions.” These Mythological stories, characters are not to be understood as the stories of super-human personalities but these are the part of human psyche, part of their life and religion. The image of woman projected through these myths. For the centuries submissive, subordinate and beautiful image of woman is celebrated and appreciated by people. But Shashi Deshpande ‘Inner Voice of Womanhood’ very effectively and strongly reconstructed the image of woman. She describes the sculptures of exquisite on the walls of Channakeshwara temple at Bellur in Karnataka. This is the experience of Shashi Deshpande when she was bride and has on tour, she observed these woman sculptures keenly, and she found that all woman images are carved with astonishingly beautiful and delicate details. After the observation of these sculpture Shashi Deshpande was restless and having so many questions in her mind.

Each woman in this sculpture has her own style, have all kinds of poses like looking in mirror, doing hair, dancing etc. Physic of these woman which was carved on the walls have high firm breasts, straight noses, beautiful large eyes, very short waist size and so many things. Shashi has raised the question, is this mean a perfect body shape of a woman that every man likes? A sense of uneasiness overcomes her and a voice comes inside her protests. She thought that all these figure are only for man fantasies, it’s for their pleasure. The realization leads her to wonder and indeed to fear, whether she is turning into one of these women too, being hammered by her husband into the shape he wants her to have. Worse than this is the thought that she is letting herself shaped by him by willingly agreeing to his demands.

All men in Indian Culture have same psychology, they have same tendency even though from ancient days she has posturized as beautiful, devotee, Pativrata a very submissive character in the family and society too. Myths are the part of our history, which draw the image of woman and we cannot detach ourselves from this. As Deshpande says, “.....there is no doubt that these stereotypes are powerful influence on us. To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Lakshmi, as bountiful as Annapurna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, as strong as Durga- these have been ultimate role models for Women” (Deshpande, *TOOS*,89).

In mythologies she definitely sketched in same manner as the patriarchal mind-set wants to see it. As in the story entitled, ‘The Stone Woman’ Shashi Deshpande describes the perfect woman who is beautiful, well-shaped, kind hearted, motherliness etc. All these features are created by the male fantasy for their pleasure and nothing more. And some woman appreciates this male psychology and tried to put themselves fit in this frame. Shashi got the idea from these mythological characters. That inspires her to think about the constructed image of patriarchal this society. She says that one day she saw the Bhagvat Purana copy of her father and seen the images of Goddess Lakshmi and have a curiosity to read it and then she found out the perfect woman shaped as their wish. She says, “Bhagvat Purana, my father’s copy of which I opened one day and, curiosity and aroused by his pencil markings, read Kurma Avatara Chapter. About the churning of the ocean and Lakshmi who arose out of it, so beautiful that ‘Everybody desired her, gods, demons, mortal.: The perfect woman at this same time, the newspapers were full of yet another beauty contest, searching for the perfect woman, with the perfect proportions. These came together in a story I called “The Story” (Deshpande, *ASW*, 90).

These stories points out that the myths are basically a man’s story, told from his point of view. Even though the paradise or heaven is also the idea of man which is the beautiful place where the man doing nothing and lying on the bed surrounded by beautiful Apsaras. Woman always been presented as the symbol of purity. Here Shashi Deshpande presents women in a very different way by using characters from mythology. In an interview she says that replace one character with another is not the aim of her work. 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 'Pativrata' 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 human being" (S. Prasanna Sree, 157-158)

She writes about strong women, realities of her life, she treats the women personality as human being. She looked towards them as the person not superhuman. Women's voices are missing in Epics like in Ramayana and Mahabharata, she feels to present new approach to choose some characters from these Epics and reveal the new facet of their lives.

The story entitled *The Day of The Golden Deer* (The Stone Women, 65-73). According to mythology Sita is the archetype character of the perfect woman-sacrificing, uncomplaining, submissive. No reaction comes from Sita on her desertion by her husband or else appropriately left out in the epic. Through this story she presents a very natural and real character Sita. The story starts at the moment in Ramayana the epic when Lakshmana informs to Sita about her husband's decision to leave her because of the gossip by was her man. Deshpande looks in the mind of Sita and presents her emotions in her own words. "According to Shashi Deshpande what motivated 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 mother, once again getting ready for exile" (Afterword, 91).

The story explores the feelings of Sita on her desertion by Rama. She is anguished by Rama's belief that his image as the righteous, the perfect ruler should not be tarnished. She asks Laxmana, who has accompanied her into the fort "he is dutiful, I know that Laxmana, and righteous too. I never doubt that, but tell me this, Laxmana, what happens to those who are crushed under the chariot of his righteousness?" (Deshpande, *TDG*) Deshpande's Sita does not believe in fate. According to her one cannot escape the consequences of one's actions. She accepts that her abduction by Ravana and her subsequent sufferings were a consequence of her own actions "first, her desire for the golden deer and then her love for the husband that made her afraid that he had been hurt and she said the cruel words to Laxmana which finally drove him away leaving her lonely and vulnerable. The first time she had come to the forest with Rama was the result of Dashrath's weakness. "The weakness of a doting old husband for a young and beautiful wife. She realises that this time she will have to suffer for her husband's desire to be perfect "to be the king who put duty before self. Sita decides to be silent and accepts Rama's decision not because she wants to be remembered as the one who endured and forgave, or because she is good and merciful, a virtuous and devoted wife, but because she pities him. She knows he is chasing a mirage, a delusion, and a chimera of perfection" (Deshpande, *TSW*, 68).

Shashi puts the question before the society that how would Sita feel when her husband ditches her, abandons her when she was pregnant? How can one forget the cruel injustice which was enforced on Sita? Deshpande has analyzed Sita through a kaleidoscopic view. The transition in the life of Sita between the two exiles, her suffering, her mistakes, the sacrifices & a new level of maturity she attains are portrayed poignantly by Deshpande. Sita reminisces on the day when she had come to Ayodhya with Rama as a bride. There were a lot of people along the way to the palace who were there just to have a glimpse of their king Rama. Rama turned to her with wide beaming smile. Sita now feels "what a fool I was when I was young. The beaming smile on Ram's face at that moment was telling her -Do you see how they love me? Do you hear them? (Deshpande, *TDG*, 136)

Sita now realizes that Rama at that moment was intoxicated with the wine of too much love and admiration of his subjects. She was shocked when he had killed Vali for her sake. Now it had dawned upon her that the desire to be loved & admired had become a passion for Rama and that was the reason he had abandoned her -merely to please his people. She realizes to be admired had a passion for Rama. For that he announced that Sita must prove her purity. But the question quickly



raises the question to Lakshmana, “And this now, what he is doing to me- for whose sake for this?” He replies, “Why for his people?” (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 68)

It was because she must stand to give trial to prove her purity. She never understood, if Rama knows her that she is pure even though why does he is examining her. At her question Laxmana tries to explain that Rama loves her but only for the people of the state he is decided this trial, “It is not he who has any doubts-you know that. He knows you and what you are. But he has done his duty, he owes his subjects that.” And in pain Sita left him and have the thought in her mind, “Duty, - I know that word would come. Yes he is dutiful, I know that Lakshmana what happens to those who are crushed under the chariot of his righteousness” (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 68).

Sita ponders over her past and thinks how her life had been ruined by two persons who were very much alike in their passion. She had two experiences of agonizing fear when she felt she would collapse. The second experience is of now when Rama had taken the cruel & hurtful decision of abandoning her. Comparing the passion of both the men, she feels Ravana’s passion was a simple one but Rama’s passion was “to be always in the right, never do any wrong”, (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 137) due to it Rama had asked her to prove her chastity. He was too much into his duties as a king and that led to the catastrophe in Sita’s life. Rama’s duty washer greatest rival. Sita abhors the word ‘duty’ since the day Rama asked her to prove herself chaste. She was grieved because Rama had taken pride in fulfilling his duty but was unmoved by his unkindness to her. Sita yearned for that moment when Rama would come to her and tell her the reason for abandoning her. Sita feels that she has done no wrong. It is only Rama’s fault. It is his weakness; his belief that he can never do any wrong – a desire to be right always in the eyes of his people. Sita’s tears & reproaches are gasping for release and want to shout at Rama who abandons her – “I am innocent, I am blameless. How can you do this to me? I have your child in my womb” (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 135).

But she chose to endure & be a silent sufferer by suppressing herself. She hasn’t submitted to him, but she forgives him as he is a victim of his own self-image. She thinks that the day of the golden deer is over for me, “it is nothing but a mirage, a delusion. But Rama is still chasing the golden deer of perfection” (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 141).

Sita decides to be silent and accept Ram’s decision not because of she is merciful, devoted wife but she because pities him. Her silence has reason. Silence pervades there as she gets prepared to enter the forest again in her life with a strong will. In the end of the story Sita tells Lakshmana, “Tell my husband that he could have done something worse. He could have forgiven me” (Deshpande, *TDGTD*, 142). Saying this she enters the forest to face the long terrible years of her life. Nayantara Sahgal rightly points out that the re-examine the mythological characters are very important for us and exactly Shashi does this. She says about these characters of Shashi, “through such rewriting.....New Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage then at last we will know why they did what they did.....” (Sahgal)

To conclude, Deshpande’s stories are an example of courage and openness not found in other short story writers. She creates characters who become the creators of their destiny without any crutches. The dilemma of her characters is cleared by them on their own and they reach a stage of self-discovery. She has beautifully and thoroughly understood the psyche of a woman in every role – a mother, a daughter, a wife and most importantly as a person who is bounded by the conventional male – dominated India.

The characteristics that come to light based on the above discussed stories are that – A New Woman is one who has a different mindset compared to other women around her. She is the decision maker of her life – for education, marriage / pregnancy or anything related to her. She is capable of voicing her opinion with a firm determination and courage. She is very intuitive and self-aware of herself and her surroundings. What Deshpande is doing by giving voice to these woman characters is



not rejection of myths. But it is creative interpretation. She peeped in these characters and presents them as human being.

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