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Reflection of Myth and Folklore in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract:

*The current study will examine Shashi Deshpande's use of myth and folklore as a means of investigating the deeper recesses of the woman-psyche, who has been a silent witness to every suffering committed on her kind by no one other than her counterpart and a society that all too often acts as a villain with all its means since the beginning of time. The word 'myth' comes from the Greek word mythos, which literally means 'story'. It seeks to explain how the world was created or why the world is the way it is by storing all the knowledge that has existed in the human mind since the beginning. Myths, like allegory, are frequently symbolic and vast, encompassing an entire work or story. However, it is no longer limited to a single civilization and is no longer ubiquitous in that society. It examines how allusions enrich both the individuals and the events. She believes that myths are powerful cultural and social influences. A variety of mythologies are featured in the novel *That Long Silence*. Some of them include Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari, Maitreyee, Savitri, and so on.*

Keywords: *Myth, Folklore, Indian Tradition and Culture, Indian Society, Superstition*

Introduction:

Among Indian writers who write in English, Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique position. In her fictional world, she raises the voice of the suppressed woman-class who is also the creation of God and the role assigned to her by him is also superior, but the attitude of her counterpart and society has reduced her to a pathetic condition. She portrays a positive journey of her female characters from silence to speaking and from self-surrendering to asserting identity. In brief, her female characters break their age-old silence.

Myth is a traditional, usually old story about supernatural entities, ancestors, or heroes that acts as a fundamental type in a people's world view, such as explaining parts of the natural world or

defining society's psychology, customs, or goals. It is a popular concept or narrative that has become connected with a person or organization, particularly one that is thought to reflect a cultural ideal or is a fiction or half-truth, particularly one that is part of an ideology. It can also be characterized as a narrative about ancient superhuman creatures, usually concerning how natural occurrences or social conventions came to be. M. H. Abrams claims that, "*if the hereditary story concerns supernatural beings who are not gods, and the story is not a part of a systematic mythology, it is usually classified as a folktale*".

Reflection of Myth and Folklore in *That Long Silence*:

A crisis in a middle-class household sets in motion a cycle of reflection and introspection in *That Long Silence*. Jaya, a middle-class city lady who has been exposed to liberal western concepts, is attempting to break free from Chauvinistic ideals such as her husband's "sheltering tree." status. Furthermore, as if constructing a tapestry, multiple tragedies of subordination are woven throughout the weave of a narrative ostensibly about Jaya and Mohan. In an honest moment of self-doubt and self-evaluation, Jaya asks herself the question at the end of the novel: "*but why am I making myself the heroine of this story?*"

Simple living and high thinking, Ramu Kaka's favourite credo, are phrases Jaya had heard many times as a youngster in *That Long Silence*. Gandhi was driven by a tremendous desire to transform human nature via the application of his beliefs, which included truth and nonviolence. Isn't it the irony of his life that the man who lived his entire life by the philosophy of nonviolence was assassinated? Jaya recalls what she said to Mukta:

When we were children, my father was in the Hindu Mahasabha. And after Gandhi died, he had to go into hiding; you remember how they were persecuted then because of Godse? And one day, a mob came to loot our shop ... And they called themselves Gandhians, those men who were after men like my father. Poor Gandhi, he thought he could change human nature, but people don't change". (Deshpande 180).

Gandhi's disciples, known as Gandhians, didn't hesitate to attack and pillage members of the Hindu Mahasabha, demonstrating that they were far from Gandhi's beliefs.

Jaya is a huge fan of Indian film music in general, and Rafi and Lata's songs in particular, as seen in *That Long Silence*. When she and her spouse go to the movies, she even enjoys the commercials. Advertisements give her the false impression of a blissful married life, one free of hardships, miseries, setbacks, failures, and disasters. She's happy to follow in the footsteps of fabled heroines like Sita, who followed her husband into exile, Savitri, who pursued death to reclaim and win back her spouse, and Draupadi, who patiently shared her husband's woes. She desires to be the ideal Indian woman by following her husband blindly, as Gandhari did in the epic *The Mahabharata* when she bandaged her eyes to become blind like her spouse. At one point, she tries to

compare herself to Gandhari.: *"If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I don't want to know anything "(144).*

Deshpande goes back to Ramayana when she feels that Jaya's consciousness needs a comparison with the classical Indian concept of sin and retribution.

Dasarath, Rama, Sita, Draupadi, and Gandhari are all iconic characters in the tale, with connections to Indian epics. On rare occasions, popular beliefs are invoked: "tell lies now and you'll be a lizard in your next life, steal things and you'll be a dog, cheat people and you'll be a snake" (128).

After their marriage in *That Long Silence*, Jaya and Mohan are initiated to play a post-wedding ceremonial game, according to Indian culture. According to Mohan's family, whoever finds the coin first at the post-wedding ceremonial games dominates the other at home. Jaya, being a typical Indian woman, caught in a trap of Indian conventions and traditions, beliefs and superstitions has been moulded in such a way that she deliberately accepts the role of being ruled and to be dominated by her male counterpart just by moving her fingers in a mound of rice in a plate, and by making her husband to find the coin first and win the game with the intention of having a delicately balanced relationship between them. She herself decides to accept a secondary role in her marital life. She considers herself a trodden worm. The Indian woman rarely wants to see her husband defeated in any game. It is her sensibility developed in the Indian patriarchal set-up that makes her accept defeat in that game in the post-wedding ceremonial game that she plays with her husband.

If Mohan is a sinner, Jaya believes she must embrace herself as one as well. She declares that Dasarath murdered Shambuka, an innocent young child whose parents died pleading for their son? Dasarath died a few years later, reaching out for his son 'Rama Rama'. Finally, she realizes that in order to assert her individuality, she must make her own decision. Maitreyee chose her own path. Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the Bhagavat Gita he had to make his own decision. *"Yathechassi thatha kuru"- "Do as you wish"*. After all those millions of words of instruction, Krishna bestows humanness on Arjuna with one line. *'I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire "(192).*

The narrative is given a distinct touch by Deshpande's version of the crow and the sparrow story. The bed-time story remembered by Jaya in *That Long Silence* is about a wise sparrow who builds her nest of wax in which no outsider is allowed to enter even at the time of any problem. The story's dumb crow has a dung nest that is washed away during a rainstorm, and the crow knocks on the sparrow's door and demands that she let him in. The sparrow keeps him waiting in the rain outside for a long time, saying that she is feeding her babies and is busy with other jobs. Deshpande's

characters too relate their lives and situations with the various myths and legends. It helps the novelist illustrate the thoughts and feelings of the character.

She believes in the sparrow and crow story, in which the sparrow is content in her home and with her young. She was inspired by a song that youngsters used to sing as children. It was a game, something to do with a mulberry bush, in which we pretended to be moving, progressing, and moving forward, but we were simply going around in circles, returning to the same location over and over. Jaya's sensibility has been formed by Indian tales, and philosophy, and it is this song that makes her believe that the only purpose of her life is to keep living.

The crow is thought to be an unlucky bird. It is also believed that the crow visits the pindas of the deceased who has left nothing undone in his life, and that if the crow does not visit the pindas, all of the deceased's desires are unfulfilled. A confused bird's cry is thought to foretell someone's death. Jaya remembers:

In Saptagiri... sometimes, even at night, there had been a confused cry of a bird, a cry that, for some reason, had terrified Ai. A woman full of portents and omens, she always claimed that it was this unnatural sound that had given her a premonition of Appa's death. (Deshpande 55-56).

Vanitamami, a typical Indian woman, performs her tulsi-puja in the early morning almost every day. Her existence becomes inexorably bound to Tulsi-puja. She fasts and performs ritual circumambulations of the tulsi plant in the hopes of achieving her goal. Mukta also fasts more days than she eats her daily meal in order to prevent becoming a widow, which is the fundamental purpose of Hindu women's fasts. She feels a sense of pride as she informs Jaya. *I'm fasting today. Hartalika. I made this shira for Nilima. She wanted it and Mai got into a temper. The girl should be fasting today, not eating sweets, she said. (Deshpande 133).* It has long been believed that if a young girl fasts on Hartalika, she will find a decent husband. Mukta, Nilima's mother, is chastised. Nilima genuinely reacts angrily to long-held assumptions and views that are hostile to Indian women. Vimla, who is also yearning to become a mother, performs Mangala-Gouri puja in the hopes of having a child, demonstrating an Indian woman's naïve confidence in the power of puja.

In most circumstances in India, applying haldi and kumkum to the forehead, wearing green bangles, and wearing a green sari are marks of wifhood. They are regarded as a married woman's jewelry. When Jaya pays a visit to her husband's father's house, she notices the mother and daughter portraits on the walls. The mother, who appears to be like any other lady of her era, staring blankly at the world, the big kumkum on her forehead obliterating everything in her face except the blessed woman who died with her husband still alive, is noticed by Jaya.

Conclusion:

Shashi Deshpande has built a new world in which true experiences of Indian women's interior terrain are vividly conveyed through myths and tales. Myth in literary form retains its symbolic meaning that extends beyond the historical surface. Myths demonstrate man's deep and active curiosity in the world and in himself. Through myths, man has attempted to connect and interpret one by the other. It uses an expressive metaphor to express reality. It strives to depict a particular era of experience in its entirety. Most legendary realms are shattered by women writers like Shashi Deshpande in order to establish new worlds from their perspective. Deshpande's mythology is seen to be important to her way of life. Thus, from her perspective, she might be considered to be innovating by giving myths a new biological importance and stature in the modern world. In her literature, Deshpande makes great use of mythical allusions and parallels. Although there is minimal evidence of sentimentalizing or overdramatizing women's hardships, the woman's point of view is portrayed throughout. She has given an old phrase a new meaning, in which actual experiences of Indian women's interior landscape are vividly presented using tactics such as reinterpretation of mythology, folklore, and so on.

Shashi Deshpande argues that myths are not, can not, or should not be gendered and that myths must be liberated as well. She accomplishes this by retelling these fabled legends and refers to them in her other works. Shashi Deshpande believes that rejecting ideas is unnecessary. The important thing is that women should be viewed as individuals rather than as idealized versions of themselves.

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