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DECONSTRUCTION – A REFERENCE TO NAMITA GOKHALE’S “SHAKUNTALA”: THE
PLAY OF MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

Namita Gokhale ranks among India’s most distinguished women for her achievement as an author, writer, novelist, translator, publisher and festival director. Her supreme themes of writings include Reflections on literature, Contemporary literary practices, Myths and the place of women in Indian Society and their bearings in the modern world. The present paper focuses on Deconstruction with reference to Namita Gokhale’s “Shakuntala- The Play of Memory”. In all her novels Namita Gokhale has put in the Deconstruction theory. All her protagonists are the reflections of Deconstructed femininity. She deals with the psychological struggles of the female characters. In her novels the essential elements are the desires, efforts and the failures faced by women in the traditional Indian Society. Being a woman novelist, she has thoroughly penetrated the inner feelings of women. Deconstruction is confined not only to literary texts but also can be applied to all the concepts whether they are social, philosophical or literary. All these concepts are arbitrary and thus open to Deconstruction. She has also applied and blended concepts of Freud skillfully.

Keywords: Reflection-femininity-deconstruction-arbitrary-text.

Introduction

The term “Deconstruction” was formulated by French Philosopher Jacques Derrida. It denotes a particular kind of practice in reading, a method of criticism and a mode of analytical inquiry. Derrida stated to the question when asked about Deconstruction “All my essays are attempts to have it out with the formidable question”. Deconstructionist approach came in trend in France towards the end of 1960’s and the beginning of 1970’s. This approach has been in functional in modern feminist criticism. Feminist critics have through their use of intertextuality deconstructed the representative of women in cultures. They have found women as beautiful, glamour and passion as a mother. Deconstruction element is needed in functioning analytical therapy and contemporary Psychoanalysis.

According to Deconstructionist, all cultural, social literary courses have lost their meanings and now open for Deconstruction, Concepts like goodness, purity, naturalness and truth are arbitrary and tentative which were supposed to be self-evident and correct are now bound to be deconstructed. One cannot obtain a final meaning out of this pattern. Thus femininity, which aimed at docility, modesty, chastity and sacrifice on the part of women is also open to Deconstruction.

Psychoanalysis is the systematic study of human psychological behaviour. Psychoanalysis is developed by Sigmund Freud, a Neurologist in 1890. Based on his observations, Conflicts that occurs on personality and behaviour remains throughout their life. Psychoanalytical theory is a powerful force during the first half of the twentieth century. It can be categorised into three systems. They are the Conscious mind, Subconscious mind and unconscious mind. Conscious mind consists of everything that we are aware of. The subconscious mind consists of information for thinking process that can redeem easily into awareness which lies outside conscious awareness. Freud feels that our behaviour and experiences continues to impact the unconscious mind. He expresses that the unconscious reveals true feelings, emotions and thoughts of an individual. There are numerous psychoanalytical techniques ranging from procedure like Hypnosis, free associations and dream analysis.

Psychoanalytical theory argues that literary texts like dreams reveals the secret unconscious desires, anxieties and conflicts of the author. A literary work is a display of the author's neuroses. A particular character may be psychoanalysed in a literary work but is inferred as projection of author's psyche. Freud's theories focused upon the association between authors, readers or characters in psychoanalyzing literature.

A psychoanalytical analysis of the author intensifies indepth understanding of the text apart from getting closer to the writer's mind. The Indian women novelists, one among who achieved global recognition and risen to celebrity heights for her psychoanalytical approach is Namita Gokhale. She has Deconstructed the very concept of feminity through Shakuntala. Feminity itself has no definite meaning. It has been assigned a particular meaning by a male dominated society which can be deconstructed

"Sipping it, I felt an exaltation I had never before experienced, a limitless freedom. Like the bird in the sacrificial altar, I too could soar across the sky". (Pg-54)

"I remembered the day of the Agnicayana ritual, when my husband had worn the golden breastplate, draped the antelope skin around his shoulders. We had drunk Soma juice together, it had been a time of fulfillment". (Pg-86)

Srijan had met a soothsayer. He suggested to perform Agnicayana ritual. This ritual helps Shakuntala to bear child. So Srijan decided to initiate the prayers. The priest Adhvaryu came from Kashi conducted the Pooja by reciting Vedas and offering altar into the sacrificial fire. Then the Soma wine was offered to different Gods and then to both on the tenth morning. By sipping soma, Shakuntala felt bliss which she had not experienced before in her life and felt like a bird flying high freely in the air. In Indian society, women does not have the custom of drinking wine. Shakuntala tasted it, felt ecstasy and satiated to the fullest.

"Unfastening the leather flask hanging from the Yavana's shoulder, I drink deeply of it. The flask is filled not with water, but with a sweet, rich wine". (Pg-116).

Shakuntala fled in a hurry and reached the riverside where she heard Yavana's laughter and ran towards him. They travelled a long distance by riding a steed. It was a hot sunny day. Shakuntala stimulated by the hot breeze felt thirst, she unlock the flask which was hanging on Yavana's shoulder and drank sweet rich wine enormously.

The ancients thought that dreams were messages from Gods. Every dream of an individual is a message from conscious part of the mind to the unconscious part. It is explicated in a language and believed that it is window to the soul. Dream plays crucial role in the promotion of individuals which enables to keep healthy and leads to social harmony. At the end of the 19th century, the interpretation of dream is considered as a part of psychoanalysis. "Aristotle knew that dreams give a magnified construction to small stimuli arising during sleep". Daydream, a visionary fantasy while awake, can be constructive and connected with some emotion. Interpretation of dream focuses on Freud's theory. It is therapeutic and can lead to holistic self and community development.

Namita Gokhale's novels have dreams with a hidden meaning. She makes use of visual auditory and olfactory perception in psychosis. During Daydreaming mental imagery helps to gain thorough knowledge of mental state to make diagnoses.

"Sometimes, in my dreams, I saw my little brother, wrapped in a shroud, lying still below the unceasing motion of the river". (Pg-10).

Shakuntala had two siblings. Guresvara, as predicted by an astrologer became a great sage. The other brother whom his father left his seed in her mother's womb when died. He born with disorder. Shakuntala's mother tried to heal him with herbs and invocations, but to no effect, he died. They wrapped him in a shroud and sank him into the river water. Shakuntala gets the dream of his death brother which haunts her psyche.

"I was hungry for experience .There were things I wanted to see, to know, to do. What had sparked such wild, dangerous dreams I could not say. Perhaps it was my husband Srijan and his tales of travel". (Pg-46)

"I knew there was more inside me than the limits of my experience dictated. I thirsted for glimpses of new lands, people, ideas". (Pg-48)

Shakuntala admires Adventure. Shakuntala had a dream of exploring and had a thirst in experiencing to visit new lands and know about that vicinity of that people and their ideas and many more. She does not know how the intense feeling aroused in her. Perhaps it has evoked in her due to her husband Srijan's travel or effect of her stupidity, imagination and unmindful of nature.

Namita's unconscious is expressed through Shakuntala. Shakuntala is the story of Gokhale's personal myth. The story projects author's reactions, inner dynamics of how she feels and thinks of the outer world through filtering. Her psyche reflects what actually exist between the inner and the outer and also clarified the way of life she lived in this world. The archetypes, in psychological language the God and Goddess are called the Energies, that escorts our actions which we are unaware of and employ own desire and thrust an individual to act accordingly. It makes Shakuntala to neglect her responsibility as a spouse and a mother.

In Jungian psychology, the shadow archetype refers to an unconscious aspect of the personality that the darker side of the psyche such as undomesticated and disorder. Shadow archetype consists of the sex and life instincts. According to him, Ego follows inner voice that directs. The Self does not follow the rules and law of restricted society and also does not damage the self and drop down into the impulse of Shadow.

"My life has changed; I feel that I cannot go back to where I have come from." (Pg-110)

Shakuntala's interest kindles to reject responsibilities and the comforts of her joyous married life. She believed that numerous possibilities awaiting to discover. She joined Nearchus, who led her to his horse to the shore .She did not care for Srijan and her home. She wanted to fulfill her desire and felt very happy now.

Shakuntala depends on her intuition rather than her logical thoughts. Rashna interprets: Intuition is a sudden insight, an apprehension of a complexity of life processes that one grapples with. Intuition forces Shakuntala to do the action in her life, the ideas about the choices are clear and they demand sudden action. Idea occurs to her surprise. Shakuntala reacts accordingly that creates the way for her present dilemma. This becomes witness as she makes depart from Srijan. Her intuition acts as a force to escape from him and the world she discovers through Yavana it widens her outlook about it.

"Two voices rise within. One guiding me to return home, away from this violation, this absolute mockery of the matrimonial promises of love. The other, buzzing about my ears like a bhrumari, a lascivious bee, urges me to flee, run away as far and as fast as I can, before Kamalini and the palanquin bearers, intruders from another life, come in search of me". (Pg-111)

Shakuntala was leading a happy life now .She was conceived and her husband Srijan loved her very much but she was very much fascinated towards Yavana. Her inner voice aroused and telling to redeem from this violation and become free from sarcastic matrimony promises of love. Another voice aroused and buzzing like bee in the

ears to flee from the trespasser. Her mind was wavering to take decision. She look at the river to find an answer. Her eyes fell upon her anklets which left by the shore and decided to walk in a specified way to home.

Shakuntala aspires Equality which is fiercely unequal in a culture.

“A man’s equal in bed, why could I not desire what men enjoyed: the freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and perhaps find.... Something?”. (Pg-48)

Like men Shakuntala has yearning desire to travel. From the hilltop, she noticed many men, traders, visitors, pilgrims passed by her house. Shakuntala believed that there was limitless possibilities to discover. Though all comforts are provided by Srijan to her, she inclines towards to be equally men which is not accepted in culture. Shakuntala before marriage dominated by her mother and later by husband. Like Guresvara, she wants to get religious knowledge but she knows scriptures were not allowed to women to read.

The culture that Shakuntala grows up is still caught up in the traditional thoughts and experiences. But she didn’t submerged in the present patterns because she is a free spirit and modified the old attitude. Shakuntala moved towards combining her feelings which are rooted in intelligence gave a healthy sense of self-awareness, emotional autonomy and intellectual capacity. At the end she transforms herself without being dependant on the other. Shakuntala breaks the habits of past to create the possibilities for the future and attains this by holding the presence of mind, heart and soul. She learns her mistakes through experience. Finally she becomes an individual. At the end she regrets that life as meaningless to her and to the world.

“I thought, unaccountably, of Srijan, where he must be and what he would be doing. I tried to think of Nearchus as well; he would have discovered my absence by now. Both these men seemed like shadows, I could not believe that they had existed, that my life had once been a part of theirs”. (Pg-181)

The sun god Ashvin began his journey in the chariot and Shakuntala realized the warm of the first rays of sunlight on her skin and decided to start her journey to Kashi. With the help of an old man, a keeper of mrighastin, reached river wharf. The mahout paid for her to the boatman .Crossing the river was exhilarating. She arrived the other shore. The sights remained significance. She had never heard before the sounds of gongs and conches. They were ominous, even menacing seemed like summons to an impersonal higher presence which makes feel humble and deeply afraid. She was thinking of Srijan and Nearchus who existed in her life once part of theirs inexplicable. Now Shakuntala was alone. She was no one spouse or sister. She lacked courage and sat down by the river and stared at the other shore left behind

At her departure, a nun spoke softly to Shakuntala

“The world has abandoned you, and perhaps it is now time for you to abandon it. Fate has brought you to the sanctuary of the Deer Park, the most blessed spot on the face of the earth. There is a pattern to fate’s tricks.” (Pg-195)

Shakuntala’s story is a changing stage of the woman’s psyche today. She learnt from her past experiences and a new Shakuntala appeared. It is her instinct that controls her when she moves forward or backward. She learns through Individuation and lives according her own insight. Rational perception never satiated her. She never afraid to live life’s irrational nor she allows herself to be occupied into shame or guilt. Her ability to make out the perplexed element of her own life enables other to deal with the undemocratic rules and grips of the society. She was a new woman in every sense who had the courage to deconstruct feminism.

In this novel, Namita Gokhale reveals the psyche of the protagonist through her dreams, love, passion, emotion, rejection and miseries. The dreams in reality are not able to occur. It may occur through Fantasy. This highlights the psychoanalytical analysis that strengthens complete understanding. Thus, Namita has Deconstructed feminity among the frightened by physical and psychological violence and moved into expulsion.

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