

MANIFESTATION OF SELF IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S IN THE COUNTRY OF DECEIT

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Abstract;

Deshpande's last but one novel *In the country of deceit* (2008) differs from her other novels in terms of its bold subject matter. The title of the novel is straight forward and is capable of drawing readers' attention. The use of term 'deceit' in the title of the novel raises several questions in one's mind such as who is deceived and who has deceived in this novel. Though an apt title, in the country of deceit, the novel throws open the issues of how one should view India. Can the deceit of the novel be regarded as the play of Maya? How can men and women emerge from the vertex of the physical desires they are enmeshed in? Through an emotive man-woman relationship, the novel provides a platform for one to transcend to higher realms of experience.

KEYWORDS; Desires, Marriage, Traditional Norms, Deceit, Guilt

The novel *In the country of deceit* deals with the interior landscape of the psychic journey of the main protagonist, Devayani, in search of an identity. The main theme of the novel is deceit and revelation. The novel starts with Devayani and her elder sister Savi rebuilding their old house in Rajnur. After the house-warming party, Devayani wants to live alone in the new house. She had lived all her life in Rajnur. Devayani spends her time giving tuitions to students. She is also translating a Kannada book based on the History of Rajnur. Devayani, conventional and traditional in appearance, is actually a woman having unconventional ideas. She does not believe in marriage without love, nor has she any hesitation about living alone in a small town. Devayani desires to live life on her own terms. In order to preserve her privacy and hard won independence she decides to never get married.

Devayani is introduced to Ashok Chinnappa who is middle aged DSP of Rajnur, married and father of 10 years old daughter in a small gathering. Unexpectedly after some days Ashok proposes Devayani by promising her nothing in life. His call for love stimulates Devayani in such a way that she breaks all social restrictions and steps into what Shashi Deshpande calls 'the country of deceit'.

Shashi Deshpande focuses more on the adult love between two highly matured individuals. Devayani's fall in love is though unexpected but not sudden because she thinks seriously over the pros and cons associated with her would be relationship with Ashok. Devayani is a prism like character with many potential shades which emanate only when the spark of Ashok's love falls on her. He is many times deep inside than what she appears on the surface. She has an insightful, meditative and philosophical temperament which gives her an independent perception of life uncontrolled by social conventions.

In the Country of Deceit could be interpreted in various ways. Apparently it seems to be the world of love and desires. At the same time it also refers to a state of mind, when she is conscious of some guilt. "Why did I do it? Why did I enter the country of deceit? What took me into it? I hesitate to use the word love, but what other word is there?" (257). It shows that the protagonist is conscious of her act of hiding the reality and it is largely due to this reason the author has given the title in the country of deceit to the novel.

Devayani has given all her youthful years to her invalid mother Pushpa's care, and after the latter's death there is emptiness in her life. Pushpa suffered from epilepsy. As long as her husband lived, Pushpa had to bear the burden of his unhappiness. Her husband's life was a series of disappointments. Pushpa's last days were full of pain and suffering. Devayani has seen her parents' marriage which was a kind of compromise. She also knows that her father's death was not an accident but a suicide. Having witnessed her parents' anguish, she does not want to settle into a marriage of compromise. She rejects the marriage proposal sent to her by Sindhu who warns her that the Indian society permits marriage as the only option to a woman's bodily demands.

Devayani meets Ashok at Rani's house in a party and is haunted by his magnetic personality: "It was like a Picasso painting— eyebrows, cheekbones, ears, hair, nose, mouth, eyes, yes his eyes looking at me, resting on me..." (ICD: 77). The desire for the union of her female body with Ashok becomes intense and uncontrollable, "It's only the body's response to desire. I knew that I know the desire for a man, the longing to be held by a man, to feel his body against mine" (ICD: 89). Devayani becomes aware of her 'body consciousnesses - feeling one's emotions and desires, being in contact with

bodily processes, listening to body's needs. Devayani says: "I cannot tell Savi that this time I am frightened, not of the man but of myself, of my desire to run, not away from him. But in his arms" (ICD: 94) She knows from the very beginning that their relationship has no future. Still, she chooses an adulterous relationship over marriage. Why she makes this choice is difficult to understand. It may be her loneliness that makes her respond to Ashok's overtures. It may be that a man of Ashok's stature has never come in her life. Ashok's honesty and directness impress Devayani. He promises her nothing except truth and honesty. When Ashok expresses his love for her, Devayani realises that she is quite ready for a relationship with him. Once she has accepted his offer, she knows that she has entered the country of deceit. She falls in love with Ashok breaking all societal norms and morals.

Soon she realizes that she is the other woman in Ashok's life. Devayani constantly veers between euphoria and emotional turmoil and questions herself guiltily, "do I look like adulteress?"(ICD: 148). Both Devayani and Ashok Chinnappa knew very well that such a relationship had no future, yet they spend their happiest moments in each other's company. Ashok can promise nothing "except love and honesty" (ICD: 131). Though Devayani longs for a happy married life, she experiences sex with him without any guilt and fear. "This is what I want. I don't want clandestine meetings, drama and constant fears.... This is what I want. I will never have" (ICD: 192). Thus with utter confusion she enters into the country of deceit. She defends her act: "No, not that. I have nothing to do with his wife and daughter. I don't need to speak of them. What difference does it make to me that he has a wife and a daughter?"(ICD: 94).

When she was alone at home she feels guilty: "and then I thought what I had done, I thought why I had done this? I knew it was wrong... Why I had done it?"(ICD: 142) Many a time she tries to leave Ashok but she cannot control the desires of her mind and the needs of the body. The day she spends with him give her conjugal bliss. She observes, "This is what marriage means: knowing that the years lie ahead of you, a long stretch of time waiting for you to occupy together" (ICD: 191). In one of her interviews, Shashi Deshpande observes, while writing this novel, John Donne's poem kept haunting my mind: "for god's sake hold your tongue and let me love,"(ICD:163). Devayani's only realty is Ashok, in her emotional turmoil and she confesses that only he could give her joy with his love making.

Devayani regrets what she had done, she is not thinking it is a mistake but regrets that she could not admit the relationship openly to her dear relatives, "I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them" (ICD: 147) She wants the

relationship to be a secret thing and she is scared that people would find out and gossip around. When people say that her face look bright nowadays, she is frightened whether her face gives any clue to adultery, “I turned my face from side to side and wondered, do I look like an adulterous?” (ICD: 148)

Ultimately Devayani realizes that adultery remains adultery and that pleasures of illicit love do not last long. It is a relationship swinging between euphoria and despair. She strengthens her resolve to call off the affair and toughens herself to break free of it. Like a surgeon, she cuts herself away from Ashok. Devayani knows full well that adultery is unethical as well as illegal. She also knows that the affair will not give complete fulfilment to her. Devayani consoles herself with the thought that love is only an idea and that she will cherish her relationship with Ashok all her life. Devayani herself is deeply hurt by bringing the affair to an abrupt end, yet she knows that it was only Ashok who could have given her a glimpse of freedom, love and exhilaration.

Even when she enjoys sensual pleasures with Ashok, she does not fail to realize her guilt. When Ashok offers to divorce his wife for Devi, she opposes. It is noteworthy that Ashok neither deceives nor deserts Devi and their physical separation is in accordance with the decision of Devayani. She tells, “I’ll give up Ashok, I’m doing wrong, this is a punishment, but I’ll give up Ashok, I promise” (ICD: 177). She steps out of the country of deceit. She feels relieved. She further observes:

I had a strange sense of being rift into two selves: one doing things and the other watching, thinking, I will never forget this; I will remember this all my life. Now both of us were aware that we were coming to the end of this time together. Only a few hours, but we had crammed a whole lifetime into them, we had lived a whole life together (ICD: 195).

Through the novel, Deshpande depicts a woman’s struggle to live life at her own terms and her endeavour to get her share of joys at any cost. She points out that women must use her agency to do what they think is right. Yet, Deshpande avers that such illicit affairs tear women between ecstasy and guilt. Women get a brief happiness, that too at the cost of compromising their integrity towards their loved ones. Devayani’s story may be seen as the victory of a woman’s essence over patriarchal constructs. Devayani chooses to opt out of an arranged marriage unlike many Indian women who lead unhappy lives in order to conform to the society. Devayani has seen enough pain to be duped into such a settlement. Her quest for love and euphoria is fulfilled through a brief, yet passionate, affair although she has to pay a heavy price for it.

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