



# Chasing the Rainbow: Love, Lust and Remorse in Shashi Deshpande's *In the Country of Deceit*

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## Abstract:

Marriage has always been considered to be the purest and sacred of all social institutions. A successful marriage is always a key to lead an everlasting happy life. But when someone knowingly enters into the country of deceit, failure is a matter of time. The novel's title, *In the Country of Deceit*, is simple and effective at attracting readers' attention. The phrase 'deceit' in the novel's title creates various concerns in our minds, such as who is tricked in this story. Who has been cheated or duped? Is it about a location where deception occurs? Or is it only depiction of a mental state? The purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer these issues while highlighting the novel's narrative from the perspective of love and adultery. Deshpande's unrelenting vision follows those entangled in the web of deception as they suffer, evade, and lie. In the land of deception, there are no hostages taken, no winners, only scarred lives. With this modest but sensitive and compassionate exploration of the meaning of love, dedication, lust, deception and repentance, Deshpande's reputation as a finest and remarkable novelist of India is solidified once more.

**Keywords:** Deceit, deception, marriage, self-realization, patriarchal, identity.

## Introduction:

*In the Country of Deceit* (2008), like her past works, features some of Shashi Deshpande's distinctive themes, but it is distinguished by its bold subject matter and wholly original handling of the entire theme. In the story, Devayani is one among Shashi Deshpande's aspiring heroines, who could blossom in about twenty years, roughly. In an interview with the author Deshpande says to *The Hindu* that the character of Devayani had already in her mind since years.

“Devayani, a character in an early novel *Come Up and Be Dead* lingered. I ignored her, but she was quietly persistent. Five novels and 20 years later after completing *Moving On*, I realized that the next novel would be Devayani’s story”(ambianny.blogspot).

Devayani was first introduced to us in an earlier work, *Come Up and Be Dead*, a crime thriller. However, as the author herself admits, this is not a sequel. Devayani is reintroduced to us in her new residence in Rajnur, a tiny village in India. The house was erected after their parents' house was demolished, and we're told right away that several former devils will be interred. Devayani will embark on a new adventure ahead in life. This adventure reveals itself to her in the shape of love. For a moment, she is ready to challenge anyone who advises her against her choice.

The novel's plot is separated into four sections. The initial two sections i.e. "Ground Zero," "Epiphany," serve as a form of set-up for the upcoming chapters. The third and the fourth i.e. "In the Country of Deceit," and "Unspooning" are presented as a careful wrap-up of the whole narrative. Each segment's title serves as a metaphor for the details in the story. The narrative opens with a comprehensive exposition of the setting, in which the protagonist Devayani Mudhol –the narrator of the story, is seen rebuilding her ancestral home after it was demolished. As Devayani says it at the outset:

‘Ground Zero’. It was I who said the words. And, in spite of the death knell sound of the words, in spite of their association with destruction... For us, this was not an end, but a beginning. A fresh start.

A clean state. (1)

In "Epiphany" we learn that Devayani's soul is moved by tender sensations, a feeling of pure and pleasurable love emotions and deep passions. She is deeply moved by her desires and passions for Ashok, her sweetheart –Ashok Chinappa. The novel's third section is crucial because it gives readers a deep insight into the protagonist's conflict and mental preparation, which she subsequently overcomes in the next section of the story. In the last segment, the protagonist acknowledges all her guilt and prepares herself for the punishment through spiritual understanding.

The novelist connects here Devayani Mudhol's persona to the Mahabharata's mythical character of Devayani. The Mahabharata’s Devayani and Sharmishtha are balanced in the scale of measurement. King Yayati’s queen was Devayani. Yet Sharmishtha who was often referred as the other woman shared king Yayati's love. Sharmishtha was the beau of King Yayati. King Yayati considered Devayani as an allegory of a wife who never received what she expected or never had a proper knowledge of love. Deshpande demythifies and retells this entire story from the angle of Devayani Mudhol –the heroine. Aside from that, the novelist has used other letters sent by her loved ones to Devayani as plot fillers. The novel is a record of Devayani’s

reaction to these letters. With the passage of time we see how Devayani grows up to maturity and evolves throughout the narrative. Devayani becomes Devi. Devi eventually becomes Divya, who is a modern version of the legendary Devayani of Mahabharata.

At the opening of the narrative, we find Devayani in her thirties, twenty-six to be particular. After her parents' death, Devayani decides that she will live all alone by herself in Rajnur. Rajnur was a very small town of Karnataka. Devayani ignored all the disapprovals of her close relatives, her friends, near and dear ones. After wrecking and dismantling their older house, which was erected by their forefathers, she and her sister Savi worked together to rebuild this ideal mansion of their dream. This action had raised many voices as they demolished not only the house but the age-old patriarchal values associated with it and assert their individuality. The new house was planned and designed according to the desire and necessity of its new inhabitants. Therefore, they start from the 'ground zero' once again. Teaching English was one of her passions. Her passion was creating and nurturing a garden as if the little plants were her own children. She became a very good friend of Rani who was a middle-aged former actress. Rani settled in Rajnur with her three children and husband. She was fascinated by the kind of life Rani led there in Rajnur –her attitude, her enormous wealth, her glamour –something that Rajnur had never seen before. What intrigued Devayani most was Rani's "careless acceptance of everything that life had given her –her beauty, her fame, her present wealth, even her children." (29)

As the voice of the 'new woman', Devayani led an unperturbed, simple life that is very tranquil and uncomplicated. She is always calm, free from sudden anxieties or agitations and her entire life is imbued with her self-earned hard-won independence. She frequently receives numbers of letters from her near ones asking her to either abandon this place and return to her relatives, or to marry and start a family. They very often ask her to settle down in life because of their concern for her for being single in a society where without the presence of a man in her side a woman is felt inferior, poor and helpless. Then there's Rani, a former star who resides in just the same town as Devayani and eventually becomes a close friend. Finally, Devayani encounters DSP Ashok through Rani. He falls in love with her right away regardless of the reality that he is married and has a daughter who is ten years old. He's enamored with her and can't seem to get enough of her.

Ashok Chinappa is Rajnur's recently appointed District Superintendent of Police. He is a husband and a father and is also much aged than Devayani. Each of them is painfully acknowledged from the beginning with the absolute truth of their relationship. They knew it well that it is a relationship which has no future – "a clandestine affair" which has no prospect, which is doomed from the beginning, and ends predictably. Devayani acknowledges: "the word love is too simple for the complicated emotions and responses that made me do what I had done." (257)

Devayani approves and accepts Ashok's illicit love and emerges forward into 'the country of deceit'. The region of deception, in the novel, is nothing other than 'deceitful love,' in which Devayani landed

unknowingly. She continues to lie and deceives her near ones and clandestinely confronts this man and hooks up to him. True love is arbitrary and follows no custom or limit. Their love grew without knowing any bounds, etiquettes, ethics, or moral standards of the orthodox society. It's all impure, obsolete, vulgar and illicit from the beginning. She is aware that whatever action she is doing in love is wrong and has no prospects, yet she is helpless and powerless to stop her soul and self. She ignores Ashok's warnings: "I can promise you nothing. Nothing"(91). But Devayani does not want to understand anything as if she has stopped thinking and accepted defeat before love. She can't resist herself from having a glimpse of her lover, Ashok. His face started haunting him everywhere. Like a stupid teenager, she waits eagerly all day long to meet with him. "What am I doing! What am I saying! This is madness." (91) She had never done this before, never felt this before, since the day she had his first glimpse. He is her first thought on waking up in the morning, the only voice she wants to listen to all day long. She says: "I don't understand anything, either. My world has turned upside down. I know I am wrong." (92) She has "left floundering in a sea of uncertainties". (107) The only thing remaining constant to her was the voice – the voice of Ashok echoing "I can promise you nothing". (107)

Deshpande does a fantastic job depicting the complex relationships. The author always conveys the emotion of love with much seriousness. The reader appreciates and is influenced by the vivid emotional outburst provided in the explicit picturesque descriptions. The novelist explains how she uses the issue of relationships in her works:

"Relationships are not something one decides on. They happen naturally, especially adult relationships, and one must know what the consequences are and take responsibility for it. It is very difficult to judge if adult love is good or bad. Human beings always crave for love, even in death a dying man wants to hold someone's hands." (IANS)

During a conversation with Keshavkaka, Devayani relates her beliefs with that of the characters of Jane Austen and her propaganda of marriage. She explains how Austen always believed in marriage and marriage should always happen with the right person. Austen gets all her women married may be by the end of the novel, therefore. Devayani questions why then Austen herself remained a spinster. She says how Austen herself suggested that "anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection" (28). Devayani argues with Keshavkaka that he may say affection will follow a marriage. He may give ample of examples. But this is not true in her case. Therefore, like Austen's Elizabeth, Devayani exclaims : "Let me shift for myself". (28)

Devayani wonders what Ashoka thinks of her madness, her craziness in love and desire. Deshpande here highlights two dominant factors influencing man-woman relationship. The novelist forces upon the

psychological as well as the sexual aspects where later one is more dominating. The gratification of the desire of the flesh is heightened in the novel through Devayani's plight : "...body's response to desire. I know that too. I know the desire for a man, the longing to be held by a man, to feel his body against mine..." (115) What she was not sure about was whether Ashok was pretending or it was true love or was it only the craving of his body.

"I believe in marriage, I believe that marriage means loyalty, it means being honest, I think it is wrong, treacherous to deceive your wife (or husband –yes there's that too). I am always on the side of the wronged wife or husband, I'm against the wrongdoer. As for love, I think it does not justify deceiving another person, I don't think it excuses cruelty..." (94)

She questions herself why she had done all these. She was well-versed with the answer. She did it just because she wished to be forever in love with Ashok. "I wanted to be in his company, I wanted to sleep with him, I wanted his relationship". (142) Though she had no idea about what kind of relationship she was expecting back was unrevealed to her. She exclaims with wonder "Relationship? What relationship? Mistress? The other woman? The kept woman?" (142) Devayani realized that how she was totally engrossed into the 'country of deceit'. There is probably no escape. She could no longer be truthful to people around, she could no longer be honest at all. She has deceived them all. She has deceived herself –the thought made her nervous, fearful as if she was seeing her secret on her own face. It will now be visible to all easily. She realizes that adultery is adultery, whoever the couple is. Guilt and fear engulfs her –the euphoria of love vanishes; disappointment, despair and frustration constantly swings in her moods. "We would never be able to live together" (152) –this hard truth settled down in her swift swirling line of thought.

After a few moments of hesitation, Devayani finally decides to break off the cocoon of silence. She decides to assert her voice, her identity. She protests through her uncompromising voice: "I must stop this. We can't go on. We must stop. I will stop, I won't go on with this, I must tell Ashok I can't go on, I will tell him it's over." (162) She recalls each happy moments that she had gladly shared with Ashok. She understands that it was not only the voice or presence of Ashok that had given her pleasure through all these days but it was her cravings, madness for sex, physical love and sexual process of gratifying the body she enjoyed the most. She can badly resist herself from this temptation of Ashok and her body inviting her to explore more. She never blames Ashok too as this man was very clear from the beginning. It was her utter despondency that had put her into the deceit land. Physicality, intimacy, sex and Ashok became her new meaning of life after coming to her new house:

Nobody, but nobody has the words for what sex with your beloved is like. It's the same with music. You have to hear it, you can't describe it. "You want sex," Savi [her sister] had said, crudely, savagely, deliberately trying to shock me. Perhaps. But there was much more. Only this man could give me such ecstasy, only he could give me such joy with his lovemaking. Ananda, Sindhu had called it. Yes, more than joy. Bliss. And he could give it to me with a touch, with a word. It was this man, not the sex. This man's love, not the sex. And yet, the sex too. (193)

She has to get on with her life. Feeling of guilt was killing her conscience. She questions and solves the riddles herself. "Ultimately, I did it because he was Ashok, because we meet. That's all. Our meeting –it was a miracle, a disaster". (257) She is left with no choices. She feels in her soul a deep void, an everlasting emptiness that leads her to destitution. Yet she decides to live on with the remaining intact of memories, pictures and goodness:

"Pictures of Ashok's face looking at me, loving, wanting, enjoying me, Ashok kneeling before me, his face humble, supplicating, Ashok on the beach, holding out his arms to me, Ashok folding me in his arms. These images etched on my mind, they will stay with me forever." (258)

## Conclusion:

Deshpande, as always, satisfies her readers' intellectual curiosity. She guides the reader on such a thrilling and adventurous journey that not only defies the patriarchal society's prescribed concept of happiness for women, but also creates a unique definition of happiness. She teaches her protagonists how to relate one's own soul and self with independence. Arushi Garg in her essay "Shashi Deshpande's *In the Country of Deceit*" says that throughout the novel Deshpande takes her reader to the ride of a rollercoaster: "intrepidly questioning what we have been taught and coming up with a new, hedonistic definition of a happiness that consumes them and allures them, all at once." (Garg, 2009) Devayani continued with her silence for long and endured the psychological trauma of being called the other woman like Sharmishtha of Yayati. But it was all for love. Blind love had led her into the paths of lustfulness and adultery. However, she eventually discovers her own voice and her vision and, as a result, repents and regrets. The book's blurb correctly highlights the following excerpt out of the novel. These lines elucidate the heroine's sorrow and predicament once she arrives into the land of dream, love, lust, deception and repentance: "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)

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