

## Changing with Time: A Study of female characters in Shashi Deshpande's novel, 'In the Country of Deceit'

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### Abstract

One of the most influential Indian English novelists of our time, Shashi Deshpande is well known for her grounded and solid female characters. Her female protagonists evolve dynamically by negotiating with adverse circumstances in their own way. Almost all female characters of Deshpande pave their own way towards assertion of their individual choices. Devyani alias Divya and Rani are the two major female characters in 'In the Country of Deceit'. Both of them negotiate with their situation in their own way. They evolve and change as per the changing time. The modern world of technological development has its lasting impact on the mankind as a whole. These self-dependent women depicted by Deshpande present us a true testimony of evolution of modern Indian women within the space newly offered to them in the newer world of today.

**KEYWORDS :** Indian English literature - Post-independence Indian writing -- female and feminine sensibility - Changing time and space - Changing world – modern world – dynamic – tradition and modernity

### The Plot of the Novel '*In The Country of Deceit*':

The plot of this novel is very plain one. It describes the life of Devayanudhol, a lady of about twenty six year old living in Rajnur. Rajnur is a small town of Karnataka. Devyani is unwilling to get married and keeps avoiding the discussion of her marriage. Her father had died many years ago and lost her mother three years back. Her aunt Sindhu and sister Savitri keep convincing her on marriage. Suddenly, Priya Ranjan alias Rani, a former actress of Bollywood, enters her otherwise very silent life. Rani who is alien to the town of Rajnur befriends Devayani. Devyani is interested in reading books about the history of Rajnur. Rani wants Devayani to help her by giving excellent idea for her comeback movie. Rani has married to Kailash Navilur i.e. K.N. a millionaire of Rajnur after abandoning her former husband Prem and Daughter Roshni. Rani has also walked off Mahesh Tiwari, her mentor, lover and the director of her blockbuster films. She is very desperate to reenter in the world of glamour and is confident that Devayani would accompany her in an unknown place like Rajnur.

Devyani's life is completely shaken when Ashok Chinappa, the District Superintendent of police enters in her life. He is a married man in his forty with wife and a daughter at Bangalore. After friendship of some days, Ashok extends a bold proposal of love before Devayani but promises nothing about future. She has to make a choice to refuse him or accept his word and establish a secret relation. She is quite aware of the fact that the relationship will be unacceptable even to her family and it would be difficult to keep such a relation secret in a small place like Rajnur. But she could no longer keep herself from this adventurous self-exploration in the company of middle-aged man. They establish physical relation and enjoy each other's company.

Neither Ashok make any promises about marriage nor does she expect marital life with him. Savi her sister is shocked when came to know about Devi's relationship with Ashok and warns her against this sort of relation that has no name and no future. Ashok's delicate love and caring attitude gives Devyani pleasure beyond any bounds.

Rani, meanwhile, goes ahead with the film and finalizes shooting plans with the producer and director. But Rani and Devayani meet a fatal car accident. Devayani is all right except a few minor injuries but Rani has to be taken to Bombay for surgery. Rani's plans to make a film are shattered and she decides to leave for the U.S.A. Here Ashok Chinappa gets promotion and has to leave for Bangalore. Once again, Devayani becomes alone and has nothing substantial to fill her emptiness. She finds herself in the country of deceptions.

### **Important Characters of the Novel '*In The Country of Deceit*':**

#### **1. DevayaniMudhol:**

Devayani is a central character of the novel around which the plot revolves. Devayani is a character that has already appeared in Deshpande's earlier novel '*Come Up and Be Dead*'. Deshpande admits that this character has lingered in her mind for last two decades. But of course, DevayaniMudhol in '*In the Country of Deceit*' is altogether different character from the earlier one. Devayani, the name refers to mythical character in 'Mahabharata' who was the wife of king Yayati. The mythical Devayani was a woman who never got what she wanted instead she had to accept the presence of Sharmishtha, the second woman in her husband's life.

In this novel, DevayaniMudhol is a young woman in her thirties trying to come out of grief of her mother's death. She teaches English to local boys and is translating a book on the local history of Rajnur. Like all Shashi Deshpande's earlier female protagonists Devayani is also trapped in a situation where her individuality confronts against the social norms and ethics. Devayani has some convictions about her life one of them is that she won't marry. Everybody around her keeps insisting on her marriage but she is absolutely sure that marriage is not her lot. Her aunt Sindhu tries to remind her that this society does not allow women to fulfill physical desires without marriage.

Ashok Chinappa, the D.S.P. enters in the life of Devayani and suddenly she is driven into what she calls it as, 'the country of deceit'. Ashok is a married man and a father to ten year old daughter with an ambition to achieve higher career goals. After some formal meetings Ashok proposes Devayani and in plain words refuses to make any promises about marriage:

"I am a married man. I have a daughter, she's nine, no, she'll be ten this year. I don't know your age, but I know you are much younger....' He paused and then burst out, 'I can promise you nothing Nothing. He paused again, 'I know I have no right to say any of this to you, I know this is very wrong. I've tried not to, I've tried to control myself, but let me say this just once, just once.'" (Page no. 05, '*In The Country of Deceit*', ShashiDeshpande)

It is not that Devayani accepts his proposal in haste but as she usually does she gives it a deep thought. She thinks about adultery and the guilt consciousness that the person has to carry throughout life. She had seen and heard about many such instances around her. Finally, she decides to live with guilt. She responds to Ashok's proposal positively but more than Ashok's proposal it is her inner instinct to achieve

highest pleasure that leads her to establish an illicit relationship with Ashok. She knows right from the beginning that this relation will not survive in future and would definitely end at some point of time. Her secret meetings with Ashok give her everything that she had longed for. It is not only physical gratification but his tenderness and attentive listening that he gives to her that makes her intoxicated for him. She believes that it would not have been possible in marriage. She maintains her dignity and individuality intact by refusing to an expensive birthday gift offered by Ashok.

She frankly tells him that she feels as if she is paid for whatever she was doing and make her feel cheap if she accepts the gift. She even does not give her consent to Ashok's idea of divorcing his wife. She decides to give up the relation when she feels that the things are going beyond the limits and she could no longer continue with him this secret relation. Devayani does not succumb neither to social conventions nor does she try to convince Ashok for a marriage. She very easily let Ashok go and decides to go on with life with the memories of love with Ashok.

## **2. Ashok Chinappa:**

He is the only important male character of the novel. But since it is the story of Devayani, the character of Ashok remains complementary to that of Devayani. He is the D.S.P. and the man in his forties. He has a wife and a daughter of ten years. The character of Ashok is important since it is through Ashok does Devayani achieve physical and spiritual exploration. The novelist does not throw any light on his relation with his wife nor on any other dimension of his personality hence can't we judge his personality as a whole. But as Devayani says, he is definitely honest and cheerful person. He makes Devayani experience some magical moments of love those were yet unknown to her. It is through his body and touch Devayani reaches to the state of 'ananda', the ultimate sexual experience.

He does not deceive Devayani as right from the beginning he makes it quite clear that he cannot make her any promises. Ashok keeps his usual violent and angry policeman away when he is with Devayani. But he is an ambitious man and wants to achieve higher goals in his professional life similarly; he does not want to deprive his daughter from fatherly love. He admits that it is because of Devayani he could live some happy moments in his life.

## **3. PriyaRanjan alias Rani:**

Rani is a former Bollywood actress. She has settled down in Rajnur recently with her second husband KailashNavilur, a rich industrialist of Rajnur. She has undergone many phases of success and failure but failure in the relations disturbs her more. She has walked out of her married life for her lover Mahesh Tiwari leaving behind a young daughter Roshni and husband Prem. She could not experience stability with Mahesh after his successive professional failures. Finally, she marries to KailashNavilur and gives birth to twins Neha and Roshni. She feels alienated in Rajnur hence keep thinking about returning to the world of films and glamour. Devayani help her a lot in making her stay at Rajnur slightly bearable. Devayani even gives her an idea for her movie. But a car accident brings her a sudden shock and she decides to leave for the States.

## The Structure, Time and Space and its impact on female characters in '*In the Country of Deceit*':

The structure of the novel is quite plain. It is divided into four parts namely; Ground Zero, Epiphany, The country of Deceit and Unspooling. The first two parts simple serve as the background for the third and in the final part, the novelist winds up the story. Devayani, the central character of the novel is the first person narrator of the novel. The novelist has employed the device of letters which is surprising since the novel has been written in an age of information and communication technology. One of the characters in the novel, Roshni mentions that it is because Devayani she did not use e-mails, she had to write letters. Now, this could be the valid reason, that the secluded and homesick person like 'Devayani' is the central character of the novel and hence the letters would for her be the usual mode not only of communication but of passing her time. In this age of I.C.T. writing lengthy letters has become symbol of having leisure. Everyone around us is so busy that emails, SMSs and online chat are the usually preferred mediums for faster and swifter communication. But, while writing letter people had to think a lot which was important for knowing oneself and also for analyzing one's own problems. In this novel, letters from Sindhu reflect the depth of thoughts. She elaborates on various issues like marriage, sex experience etc. in her letters that would not be possible through other means of communication than letter. It might be a possibility that Deshpande wants the readers to think on this issue. The letters serve the purpose not only of communication but they are also the tool to purge one's emotions.

The first part, Ground Zero, refers to a new beginning in the life of Devayani. Devayani herself invents this word when the older house built by her father has been demolished. The older house symbolizes her father's failure and the suffering that her mother has undergone. Devayani and her sister Sumitra plan and build this new house. The new house leads her life to new direction. It asserts her individuality and freedom to take future decisions on her own. The second part, Epiphany describes Devayani's meeting with the D.S.P. Ashok Chinappa and his bold but honest love proposal. The third part '*In the Country of Deceit*' describes tender moment that Devayani and Ashok enjoy in each other's company. But, this part also describes Devayani's transformation from Devayani to Devi and Dei to Divya. Divya is a bold lover who does not hesitate to go against the social and ethical norms of society. The final part, Unspooling, depicts the dilemma of Divya whether to continue with the illicit relation or to give it up. She contemplates on her state and prefers to give the relation a full stop. In the end, Divya is neither depressed nor did she enter in the country of Deceit. It is simply because she wanted it. She will not try to forget these memories but would live with them, instead.

The question remains unanswered that who is deceived? But it is quite clear that everything between them was so open and clear that the question remains irrelevant. The time in the novel is the first decade of twenty first century. This is the Time when the changes that globalization brought could be seen visible in all spheres of Indian life. The changes percolated to the small towns of India like Rajnur. The novelist does not refer to any contemporary event as she has done it in '*Small Remedies*' by making Mumbai blasts in 1993 after Babri mosque demolition as a backdrop of the novel. But there are certain clues which suggest the Time and Space in the novel is that of post-globalization India. Devayani the narrator alludes that there are not many friends of her school days in Rajnur now most of them had gone to big places like Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore. Everybody had a goal to get away from

Rajnur as quickly as possible. This refers to Time of two decades after 1990<sup>s</sup> when Information Technology Industry and service sector was blooming in big place like Bangalore, Pune, and Bombay. But at the same time, small towns like Rajnur were becoming education centers for villages around. Devayani refers to one such educational campus getting developed called vidyanagar in Rajnur. This was again the time when Bangalore was getting shaped as an IT hub of India. The government was spending money on air connectivity to Bangalore and places around. There is a reference of proposed Hattihola airport near Rajnur in the novel. The novel therefore depicts the time when India was gearing up for major economic, social and cultural change.

The Space in the Novel is Rajnur, a small town in central Karnataka. But, Shashi Deshpande depicts Rajnur as a microcosm of changing India. The changes that Rajnur was undergoing replicate the changes that the country was going through. The space in the novel shifts from Rajnur to Chandarpur, Pune, Bombay, Bangalore, Delhi and United States of America. The novelist thus, connects remote but important places in India and abroad. The narrator Devayani had lived in Bangalore for two years but when she visits Bangalore this time she could notice drastic changes taking place. Devayani's sister Savitri and sister in law Shree have settled in New Delhi so Devayani visits their house. She spends a few days with Ashok in Mumbai and in Pune. The socio-cultural changes at the places like Mumbai, Pune, and Delhi have not become the part of novel since Rajnur is a place around which the plot revolves. We get to know about U.S.A. through letters of Sindhu, Devayani's aunt. Sindhu describes about life in U.S.A. as whatever little she could observe during her stay there.

We can certainly claim that the Time and space in '*In The Country of Deceit*' depict the most crucial phase; in fact, people in India were becoming the part of global process of acculturation.

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