

## Devayani and her Subconscious Mind : A Critical Approach to Shashi Deshpande's *In The Country of Deceit*

<sup>1</sup>Garima & <sup>2</sup>Dr Navjot Kaur

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Punjab (India)

<sup>2</sup>Co-supervisor & Associate Professor, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College, Sec-26, Chandigarh (India)

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Article History

Published Online: 10 December 2018

#### Keywords

Prudence, unconscious mind

---

---

### ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande understands the importance of mental and spiritual strength and advises her readers to control their passions, obsessions and emotions. A rational approach has got to be adopted for the solution of contemporary economic and social problems. After all Rome was not built in a day. The people who possess wisdom and prudence, can achieve higher aims of life. Here she asserts — Emotional approach often proves to be disastrous in life. *In The Country of Deceit* she exposes the evil doers who are responsible for rape, violence, exploitation, lechery and poverty of people. Here Ashok Chinappa S.P. is blamed for exploiting Devayani's single life. Due to her insecurity she surrenders before S.P. though he is a married man. He can't betray his wife and daughter though he can afford to play with the emotions of Devayani and pretend to love her. His love is mere hypocrisy and has been exposed by the artist. As good sense prevails in her, she decides to join Iqbal's legal office as an Assistant Lawyer. She does not lose hope in future and prepares herself for the new job. The artist analyzes the subconscious and unconscious mind of Devayani and Ashoka.

---

Shashi Deshpande describes the difference between pure love and false love in the novel *In The Country of Deceit*. Here the heroine Devayani settles in her new home all alone as her mother and father are dead. Her sister Savi got married with Shree against the wishes of her mother and feels settled in life. Her cousin Dr. Gundu has returned to Rajnur as he has failed to adjust in U.S.A. He is satisfied with his wife Asha and leads normal life without bothering for his parents settled in U.S.A. At the outset Devayani makes it clear that destruction of the old house gives no pain though a few memories exist in the mind. But the joy of the construction of new house can't be neglected at any cost. Who can ignore the cycle of destruction and construction as it is the law of Nature? Time continues to run with its usual speed and birth and death are beyond the control of human beings. She served her sick mother for a long time and the latter died without leaving any assets. Yet time continues to move with its speed and Devayani does not have any regrets in life. Aged nearly twenty-six she has no ambitions in life. Quite often she sees dreams at night and feels a lot of fear. When mother was in bed she had a lot of work to do for her. Now she is free from every bondage. Her aunt Sindhu writes letters to her almost regularly and even mentions the names of a few bachelors for her hand. But Devayani knows the practical side of marriage as there are no funds for the celebration of marriage. None of her relations will come forward to manage the whole ceremony and hence she has compromised with her situation. But there is no tension in her mind so far as marriage is concerned.

Quite often she recollects her irresponsible father who used to work in a private bank. He had shared the family responsibilities for a long time and remained a pauper. After reading the works of American transcendentalists like R.W. Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, he resigned his job without any reason. He became famous as 'a failure' and his plans flopped one after another. Eventually he committed suicide. By temperament Devayani is an optimist as she has LL.B. degree and is qualified for the job of a lawyer. Here the artist refers to the real fact that many Congress leaders established colleges in Southern India for professional degrees and a lot of students reached there from Northern India. As a result Vidyanagar came into existence in Rajnur and many rich students joined the professional courses there. A lot of local people got jobs on account of them and Devayani also starts teaching English to nearly twelve students.

Devayani is above greed, lechery, lust for power, violence, jealousy, pride and ego. She believes in simple living and high thinking. Of course she enjoys the letters that come to her from aunt Sindhu, Kshama, Shree, Savi etc. and reads them with interest. Once the film actress Priya Ranjan known as Rani visits her as the latter gave shelter to former's children in rains. Rani is extremely delighted to meet her and Devayani is translating a book these days on Rajnur. Since Rani is interested in the life of this small urban area, she wants to gather details about it. But Rani is pretty rich and spends a lot of money on cosmetics and luxuries of life. Quite often she

finds life dull here as she has lived in States and Bombay. Even now she visits Bombay twice a month for minor jobs. But she has an eager desire to take part in some new film. As Devayani is a writer, she requests her to suggest a new idea for a new film. But Devayani has no interest in films at all.

Devayani is very much interested in growing her own garden and enjoys blossoming of flowers. This shows her interest in Nature. She intends to develop a pond for frogs as well as fishes. Her sister Savi lives in Delhi with Shree and two children but Devayani has no interest in the hectic life of the capital of the country. Here the artist describes the physical growth of Rajnur as many new shops have been established by the merchants. Many colleges attract students from Northern India. A lot of hotels and restaurants have been established for the convenience of students. New buildings and hostels have recently been built in the secluded areas. Her cousin Kshama lives in Bangalore and the same changes are noticed there too. Of course, Devayani does not want to go against the progressive rhythm of Rajnur. She believes in moving on and not the least rigid and conservative. Soon the students address her as Devayani Madam and feel elevated with her teaching methods.

She enjoys reading the letter of her aunt Sindhu who has discussed her family life of U.S.A. She is happy with her grand child as a baby keeps all the members of the family happy as well as busy. In this letter she proposed the name of Alexander for her and asks her to think seriously about this American young man aged nearly thirty four years. As usual Shashi Deshpande refers to the problem of old age and death here also though Sindhu has interest in life even now. Yet nobody is certain about the time of death. Of course, she regards herself a 'coward about pain and suffering'. (CD 20)

In this novel the artist probes into the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind of major characters so as to analyze their motives and reactions. Actually Devayani wants to enjoy some happiness in her life which situations have denied her so far. Due to her desire for joy she wants to 'touch the sky'. She reveals her feelings to her cousin Dr. Gundu and tells him that she can't live with a stranger in U.S.A. How can she survive in an unknown country among strangers? It is true that she is nearly twenty-six years of age. Yet she has not crossed the age of marriage. Moreover, age has nothing to do with marriage. Sindhu writes another letter to her to give a second thought to this proposal with a cool mind. She advises her to keep her mind open for marriage as there is no hurry. But she is advised to remember that marriage provides security to a woman. It is a good thing to get married as a gamble and yet everybody takes a chance in life at one time or the other. How long can she survive all alone by herself? Her

husband Keshav also writes to her to assert the importance of marriage. How can she be left to lead the life of Jane Austen?

Now Devayani thinks of the intelligent and witty heroines of Jane Austen who don't marry just for money. They marry men of their own choice after having observed them minutely. They marry the men after loving them in a rational way. For example, Elizabeth Bennet marries Darcy after many meetings and feels interested in him quite late. In the beginning she notices pride in him and finds him prejudiced against herself. She does not like her friend Charlotte Lucas for getting married with Mr. Collins. She does not approve Lydia's elopement with Wickham. Devayani needs time to take her own decision.

She observes differences between herself and Rani as the latter is proud of her money and beauty. She is always planning for the next film and can take any risk for coming back in film industry. Moreover, she is not worried about the education and future of her children. It is true that a rich and glamorous lady is her friend and yet Devayani fails to imitate her. Then Rani has lived in U.S.A. for a few years and left the same due to bomb blasts there. She finds no security in the daily life of U.S.A. and hence returns to India. Every time she expects a new idea to haunt her so that she may develop the same for the film. Quite often she recollects the days that she has enjoyed in U.S.A. At times she misses her companions of American life and hollywood. Now she buys a new car for herself though Rajnur is a small place. Yet car provides her freedom and status. One feels attracted towards physical beauty when one looks at her.

The artist refers to the mythological tale of King Yayati who wanted to enjoy eternal youth even in old age and requested his sons to sacrifice their youth for him. One of his sons obeyed him and Yayati became young again. After many years he realized that there is no end to physical pleasures and hence returned youth to the obedient son. In this tale the artist has described the jealousy that existed between Devayani and Sharmishta as the latter was haughty and stubborn since childhood. Shashi Deshpande's Devayani is not possessive, aggressive and stubborn at all.

Her cousin Kshama requests her to join her school for teaching the children. She hopes to gather wealth with the passing of time. Like Shashi Deshpande, she knows the reality of human nature. But Devayani does not feel interested in Kshama's offer as it is meaningless for her. Kshama further informs her of her growing interest in painting and she frequently paints various trees for personal delight. Now Devayani recollects her childhood when she was only a child aged eight years. There was a

gap between both of them and yet she admired Kshama's brilliance. Due to a series of death Kshama felt heart-broken quite for some time.

Again Devayani gets a letter from aunt Sindhu and the latter reasserts the importance of security for a woman. She accepts that only emotions are not important and body is equally significant. How can one ignore the requirements of body for a long time? Even the Indian saints put 'Ananda' with 'Sat' and 'Chit'. She herself wants to experience whatever life provides her at different times.

In the party arranged by Rani, Devayani meets lawyer Iqbal, district S.P. Ashok Chinappa, Kailash Navilur, Naseem, the District Collector, Uma, Shivanna etc. As she has no means of transport for going back home, Ashok offers her a lift and drops her home. Now he frequently makes telephone calls to her as he has fallen in love with her and frankly reveals the fact that he can't offer her anything except love. He is a middle-aged married man and father of a daughter aged eight years.

Devayani feels surprised when Iqbal visits her and informs her about a piece of land (thirty two acres) left by her grand father Krishna Bhat in the name of her mother Pushpa. Now the land has been transferred in the name of a Trust by some anti-social element and may be Naik is behind the whole game. The brilliant and active lawyer wants to know if Devayani is interested in contesting a legal case to possess this costly land. As she replies in the affirmative. Iqbal is asked to proceed further. Sindhu, Savi and Shree are interested in the land when Devayani shares the secret with them.

In the beginning of the second part of the novel entitled *Epiphany* the novelist probes into the past of Rani. Even now she is interested in producing film on Rajnur as she is eager for a comeback in the film industry. At the moment Devayani does not have any idea for the theme of a film. However, she promises to help her. Once she saw a dream in which she is coming back from school with four young girls and ruffians catch hold of their friend Shanti whereas others run away from there. She still sees dreams and feels a lot of fear in the midnight. This dream of Devayani gives the idea of rape to Rani and she wishes to develop the theme of rape in the new film. But Devayani does not accept an ugly idea to be the main theme of a film. Then Rani suggests the word *Sannata* as the title of the proposed film so as to stir the emotions of the audience. Here the artist satirizes the contemporary film producers who produce films on sex, violence, bloodshed, revenge, communalism, class-conflicts etc. In place of realities of social life, they concentrate upon dreams as tensions of 21<sup>st</sup> century people have increased enormously. Devayani is fed up with her dreams and remarks :

... I had shadowy memories of strange recurring dreams. (CD 77)

Here Shashi Deshpande develops the theme of the novel in the epistolary form, on the pattern of Richardson's *Pamela*. Sindhu, Kshama, Vivek Rao etc. write letters to her due to the land dispute case. Iqbal advises her to take care of Naik since the latter uses violence as his major tool to grab the land of widows and lonely women. Here the artist satirizes the working of land-mafias in the nation as civil cases take a lot of time in the law-courts. Ashok confirms the integrity of Iqbal and asks her to proceed further. Here the artist asserts the basic truth that 'land, women and gold' are the root causes of many social and political vices in India. Ashok meets her again and promises to make love to her without any self-interest.

A few questions can be raised regarding Ashok's love for Devayani such as — Is his love for Devayani pure? Does he not exploit her lonely status? What is the aim behind all this show of love? What is the future of their love-story? How can society accept such love-affair? Is Savi not justified in raising objection against this unethical sexual affair? Why does Devayani not give a matrimonial column seeking a suitable life-partner? Any sensible young man would have come forward for her if she had given the column in the newspapers. Everybody is not a dowry seeker and yet an intelligent girl takes the risk of her reputation for temporary sexual pleasures. Why? How can she trust a man who can't desert his wife and daughter? Is love not only a physical affair for Ashok? Why does he feel ashamed of himself in the company of Savi? What arguments does he have to defend himself? Why does he not think of extending help for Devayani and seek a bachelor for her? Why is he not prepared to spend money for her marriage? Is his love not merely a lust for physical pleasure? Why does he keep silent after he is transferred from Rajnur? Had he been a true lover, he would have sacrificed some money for the marriage of Devayani? He could find a suitable match for her after satisfying his emotional lust. But alas! He is a selfish fellow who does not feel interested in the future of Devayani. He does not take any interest in her land dispute. Had he desired, he could have traced the person who prepared false documents of the transfer of her land in the name of a fake trust.

Actually Devayani is humble, polite, sincere, devoted and an ordinary girl who fails to understand the wicked people of society. Out of love for Ashoka she becomes blind and irrational. Almost every beloved wants to know the future of her love-story? Why does she surrender herself totally to Ashok just for sexual love? Had she possessed some self-restraint, she would have waited for some more time for her marriage. After all she is free to seek the help of Dr. Gundu, Asha, Savi, Shree, Sindhu, Kshama

etc. Even Iqbal and Naseem could prove helpful to her in her journey of life. As ill luck would have it, she loses her sense of judgment and thinks only of emotional love. For her love enters the body and body leads to sexual intercourse. Nothing else. Her love for Ashok becomes her weakness and she does not want to lose him in spite of the warning of Savi and Gundu. Love overpowers her mind and she fails to come out of the quagmire of sex.

Regarding her nightmare she informs Savi and shares her grief with her :

Your usual nightmare? Savi asked me. But this was not the nightmare which had fitted my nights with such fear when I was a girl, dreams from which I woke up, my body wet with sweat, my heart hammering as if it was going to burst out of my ribcage. (CD 93)

Actually Ashok remains loyal to his wife and daughter and does not want to disturb his family life. Had somebody informed his department secretly of his extra-marital affair, he would have suffered suspension and inquiry. But he plays safe with Devayani and she does not have the boldness to assert her rights. Just she surrenders her total self to Ashok and forgets future. It is true that none thinks of her future. It is also true that she has not experienced sexual bliss before. But she is only twenty-six years of age. She could get every joy if she had waited for some time. She was quite frank with Sindhu, Gundu, Asha, Savi, Shree, Kshama, Rani etc. and could share her desire for marriage with them. But alas! In the end she gathers courage in herself as Ashok has been transferred from Rajnur. He leaves a lot of memories for her and forgets his past.

As an optimist Devayani does not regret for what has happened with her. It is too late when she accepts that love is only an emotion, an idea (CD 255) and one can't survive simply with the help of loving days of the past. Now she accepts that :

Things pass, things change. Rani, no philosopher, had said. Yes. Nothing lasts. This grief of mine would pass too ... (CD 255)

She decides to come out of her 'emptiness' and 'loneliness' and starts planning to join Iqbal's office as a junior lawyer. If Ashok has his own future, she too has her own future waiting for her. After all God has given this life to everyone and it depends upon us to make use of it for good deeds. Why to have negative approach towards life as negative thoughts create gloominess for everybody. She decides to lead a meaningful and purposeful life and achieve the target. After all life is 'precious' and the best gift of God to human beings. Only cowards surrender before the problems of their way. Why should she bow down before this calamity as she has been cheated by

Ashok. Here the artist uses the world 'atonement' (CD 257) and she does not want to accept any 'disaster' for herself. Sindhu also asks her to think on positive lines as there is no other choice for her. There is always a difference between past and present i.e. between 'was' and 'is'. The profession of law promises her a bright present and future and she decides to work efficiently with Iqbal. This is a world in which —

Love gets diluted, hate is forgotten and friendship and enmity keep shifting all the time. One day, when you look back, you will ask yourself — What was it all about? They say that to the creator, centuries, yugas, are only the blink of an eye. Think of that. What a wonderful thought. Give us a sense of proportion. (CD 257)

This novel *In The Country of Deceit* ends with a note of instruction for the readers. The artist accepts that things change with time and nothing is permanent. Life is given to us by God for noble actions and everybody is supposed to work regularly with love. Let time and nature take their own course and frustration is no solution to human problems. One can always begin a new journey with full vigour and zeal. After all Devayani is young, robust, zealous and dynamic. She is intelligent enough to decide her own future. Her relations and friends are there to help her at every step. She asks herself — Is she alone in life? No. Certainly not. Divine forces are there to help her at every step. Let Ashok mind his own business. How can he spoil her future? Heaven is the place where 'things never change'. (CD 258) She aptly decides to struggle for future and survive with dignity. As a woman she is not weak at all. Her positive approach has been analyzed by Shashi Deshpande for the inspiration of her readers. Positive values survive in the world of violence, rape, deceit, bloodshed and materialism.

## Conclusion

As a creative artist Shashi Deshpande writes her novels freely and does not want to make any political propaganda in favour of any theory. Yet she follows the theory of art for the sake of morality. Her novels answer the question — How to live? She never shows any indifference to ethical values and does not write 'pulp fiction'. Due to her sense of judgment she understands the difference between negative psychology and positive psychology. A lot of research work has already been done on negative psychology and hence she explores the various shades of positive psychology. Her heroines such as Saru, Sumi, Urmi, Aru, Devayani etc. follow the principles of virtue, courage, vigour, right conduct etc. and condemn hatred, violence, lechery, gluttony and pride and hope for bright future. As followers of Lord Krishna's theory of action, they work sincerely for tomorrow and come out of the world of imagination. As a psychologist the artist analyzes the motives,

obsessions and emotions of her people because they are afraid of dreams. A lot of impressions come to their mind regarding their past, present, parents, schools, rapes, violence etc. and yet they try their best to gather mental strength. In spite of a lot of social chaos, economic hardships and psychological tensions, they have the power to prove heroic in adverse circumstances. In *A Matter of Time* Aru remains bold when her mother and grand father die in the accident. In *The Shadow Play* Seema controls her sense of fear and prepares herself for her regular usual life. Detached Gopal becomes quite active in *Shadow Play* and proves a great moral support to his three daughters.

In her novels she does not appear to be nervous on account of death as nothing stops with death. Life continues as usual. Then she finds that things change with time. Fate often brings miseries and situations change. Nothing is permanent and everlasting. Yet God remains the same divine force behind all actions. The devotees of God seek His blessings everyday everywhere and adopt ethical ways to get good results. As a moralist she asserts the importance of Gandhism and asks people to adopt the weapons of truth, non-violence, non-possessiveness detachment,

regular action, love for all, equality, liberty and fraternity. As a democrat she wants that the government should grant equal opportunity to all citizens for progress. In *Shadow Play* she shows her sympathy for the victims of delayed justice. As a follower of ancient Hindu Classics she quotes many opinions of Lord Krishna so that people may realize that life is worth-living.

Thus, she exposes pseudo-spirituality, false modernization, fake promises of politicians etc. Many people befool the innocent poor people and cheat them in the name of friendship and love as happens in *In The Country of Deceit*. Bold people face and mould the adverse circumstances and support the right cause. As a humanist she supports the Have-Nots and mildly satirizes the working of capitalism in India. Of course, she is conscious of the limitations of Indian Communists. She hates people who put on the mask of simplicity, honesty, integrity, goodness and yet remain wicked at heart. She is aptly put in the category of great novelists of the world as she follows her own theory of fiction. Like E.M. Forster and George Orwell, she understands the value of particular words and uses them carefully.

#### Works Cited

1. Deshpande, Shashi, *In The Country of Deceit*. New Delhi : Penguin Books. 2008.
2. Radhakrishnan, S. (ed.). *The Bhagwadgita*. Bombay : Blackie & Son Pub. Pvt. Ltd. 1982.