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PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES AND A JOURNEY TOWARDS EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

In the post- independence period woman was struggling in patriarchal societal set up for her identity. In 1960, feminism rose against the colonial rule, patriarchal practices and traditions enhance the ideology of female subordination. Shashi Deshpande's novel *In the Country of Deceit* is a story of a woman Devayani who began to see the universe with their own eyes and not through the male gaze. She is shown recovering from the stage of catastrophe and mental dilemma through spiritual realization. Deshpande portrays the power of individual self. She presents a fully awakened woman, ready to fight against the patriarchal norms in order to live a meaningful life. The purpose of present paper is to present an inclusive study of different issues related to woman suppression and her evolution from the stage of catastrophe with special reference to Deshpande's *In the Country of Deceit* in which she presents a fine balance between traditionalism and progressiveness.

Key Words: Catastrophe, Evolution, Women suppression, Realization, Patriarchal

As a mirror of society literature appears to be the most apparent record of human spirit. It can never be dissociated from the reality. The socio-cultural-political ambience is bound to find artistic interferences in a writer's texts as an indirect commentary on the behavioral ethics at that time and place and beyond its immediate contexts. In India, feminism appeared as an organized movement in the late 1970's. Many feminists have realized that in the Indian context the subject of women's emancipation should not be reduced to the contradictions between man and woman.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the best known and celebrated Indo-Anglican novelists has gained peculiarity in exploring the human psyche specially woman psychology and their emotional ecology. Going deeper into the complexities of women existence, she seeks to evaluate various formidable factors that make their life uncomfortable and unendurable. Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Simone

de Beavoir, Kate Millet and Elaine Showalter are some western authors who reject equally the polarities and uni- dimensional portrayal of women; who deconstruct both romantic and heroic images of women. Like them Deshpande catches feminine sensibility as a perennial context. She writes about family relationship, women issues in most of her novels such as *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *The Stone Women* (2000). Her female protagonists Saru, Indu, Jaya, Urmi, Sumi, Madhu evince sufficient vigour and courage to question the oppressive role of society, religion and culture and choose their own path. The central theme of her stories is the emergence of a 'new woman' in the fast changing social milieu.

The present paper is an analysis of a great story born out of her pen *In the Country of Deceit* (2008) in which she concentrates on the psychological trauma of a woman, a stage of catastrophe which initiates the process of self-

discovery leading to a new perception of life. In classical tragedy Catastrophe is defined as the tragic conclusion of a story or play, an action at the end of a tragedy that initiates the denouement or falling action of a play. Here it is explained as a situation causing great and usually sudden damage or suffering; a disaster where one can think only about the sufferings, failures and agonies. Unlike the other women authors Deshpande shows a protest against it. Her forte is the quest of sensibility and her writing expose inner realities and psychic echoes of her characters. Their self-realization helps them to get evolution.

Although the novel comprises the moniker themes of Shashi Deshpande's writing, differs from her other novels in terms of its bold subject matter and entirely novel treatment. It is a story of Devayani Mudhol, a young unmarried woman who is living alone in a small town named Rajnur. She has lost her mother and is trying to recover her loss. She is very ambitious and starting a new life in a modern house. Her elder sister, Savi and brother-in-law, Shree, live in Delhi. Devayani's aunt Sindhu has gone to stay with her daughter Tara in the USA. Devayani looks like a conservative lady having unconventional ideas towards life. Rani, a retired actress and Ashok Chinnapa, a police officer enter in her life as the messengers of these changes. Devayani gradually matures and evolves from Devayani to Devi and finally to Divya, a modern embodiment of mythical Devayani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the preceptor of the demons.

The narrative is divided into four segments. First two segments "Ground Zero", and "Epiphany", seems to be a kind of groundwork for the third segment "In the Country of Deceit" whereas fourth segment "Unspooning" is a meticulous summing up that complements the whole narrative. The title of each segment symbolically notifies about the content. The story begins with a detailed description of the background where the heroine Devayani is shown recovering from the demolition of her ancestral home by building a modern house. It symbolized her first step toward evolution from depression. As Devayani puts in the beginning: " '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 (ICD 1)." The image of house plays a significant part in Deshpande's writing. In *The Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard said, "The house image would appear to have become the topography of our inmost being" (xxxii). In *Roots and Shadows* the importance of house in the life of Indu can't be neglected. Indu experiences the house in its reality. When she visits her house after many years, she recalls her childhood memories. But after the family has broken up the house becomes a symbol of decay.

In the Country of Deceit endures Deshpande's earlier probing into women's experience, women's immersion in and the restraints of family life, and the problematic of matrimonial relations. She explores extra-marital relationship-pre-marital, in-marital and post-marital relationships in most of her novels. This novel is not a story of an individual but of the institution of marriage, culture and tradition of society while it is threatened by the forces of change and faces dissolution. She considers marriage a very important institution but not a sacred institution. She thinks that fidelity, loyalty and sacredness of marriage are hard for human beings to adhere to and, therefore, majority of men and women find it to be a very difficult institution. Devayani meets Ashok in a party hosted by K. N and Rani at their residence. Ashok, is much older, married and father to a ten year old daughter feels attracted towards Devayani and proposes her unexpectedly. Devayani having a heart of a woman feels herself in a world of love and desires. In these moments of love, Devayani lets herself be ruled by emotions rather than reason. Deshpande is almost obsessively concerned with the inner world of her characters controls by their intense feelings for love which is also the reason of their psychological trauma. They are alienated from the world, the society and the family around them because they fail to meet the challenges of life. Their inability to face life forces them to regress to their childhood world of fantasy.

In the present novel Deshpande focuses more on the adult love between two highly mature couple. Ashok's love forces her to break all social

barriers and steps. But at the same time Devayani thinks about seriously over the pros and cons associated with her would-be relationship with Ashok. When we carry out a compassionate examination of the narrative we find that the threads of love, loyalty and deception closely crisscross each other in the novel. As Deshpande states: "It is very difficult to judge if adult love is good or bad. Human being always crave for love, even in death a dying man wants to *hold* someone's hands...My novel is about adult love... In my book, the first thing the man tries to tell the woman is that 'I promise you nothing. But I stand outside your gate and cannot get you out of my mind'. I think that's the real sign of love." (*dnaindia.com*)

But fortune rides faster than man. Devayani's struggle reached to catastrophe with her desire for Ashok. She feels entrapped after reading the letter of her aunt Sindhu telling the story of a man wishing to return to his wife after 15 years of abandoning her and his children to live with a much younger woman, and watching of a movie dealing with a classic story of adultery starring Rani as the betrayed wife uttering a primitive cry for help- 'Mai,Mai...'. She recalls her first love that deceived her and finds herself again in the country of deceit. But all these can only check her mind, not her body. Her desire for a man, the longing to be held by a man, to feel his body against her, remind her of Ashok and his words: "I would wait all day for a small glimpse of you." and "I can promise you nothing." And when Ashok invites her to join him, she drifts towards him. They make love twice at a secluded place with ease and intimacy.

At the same time the narrative also refers to a state of mind when an individual is conscious of some guilt. Because of their values her protagonists always feel guilty for their adulterous relationship. Devayani also feels guilty and conscious of her act of hiding the reality and it is largely due to this reason that the author has given the title *In the Country of Deceit* to the novel. As the protagonist says: "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 feels herself deceived as well as thinks that she is deceiving others. This consciousness is one of the reasons of her

catastrophe. Although she is an insightful, meditative and philosophical lady who thinks over it for several days, evaluates every idea and then proceeds, her consciousness is one of the reasons of her stage of catastrophe. It is noteworthy here that a woman like Devayani who loves her alienation and solitude accepts Ashok's proposal of marriage. After her mother's death she decided to engage herself in the task of gardening and takes up the job of teaching English to the school children which offer her immense tranquility. But her illicit relationship with Ashok again changed her life. Though in India same-sex love and live-in-relationship are gradually getting legal and social recognition, such relationships are still outside the purview of marriage and come under extra-marital relationships. Deshpande's protagonist is the representative of those Indian women who are trapped in the enigma of right and wrong, love and the less accepted versions of love in the society. The story is adequate in the modern Indian context and depicts inexhaustible and the changing time and changing social situations. It gives new dimension to extra-marital relationship which starts with physical desire but ends at self-realization.

Devayani thinks maturely about herself, about Ashok, about love, sex and society. As a lover, Ashok's role is to a great extent justified though he fails to prove full loyalty to his wife by breaching the sanctity of his marriage. Devayani too acknowledges the austerity of his feeling and emotion but she is exhorted so much by her sister and relatives in the name of social interpretation of extra-marital relationships that a sense of guilt creeps into her conscience. She undertakes a turbulent journey of guilt and involuntarily decides to dissociate from Ashok: "I'll give up Ashok, I'm doing wrong, this is a punishment, but I'll give up Ashok, I promise..."?(ICD177). Actually this is the most tragic situation of her life but she comes out from it because of her mental strength. It is not only her guilt but her selfless feelings for love also. She believes in the concept of pure love which is highly respectable and doesn't demand or promise anything. It could be deceitful from societal point of view but is divine if selfless and unconditional in nature. Her mental dilemma gives us an elaborate

examination and explanation of what a true love should be like. She again wins and feels evolved.

The subject of adult love between Devi and Ashok has been boldly yet convincingly discussed in the novel from hedonistic point of view. As Deshpande proclaims about *In the Country of Deceit*: "This one is purely about love... 'Come Up and Be Dead' is wholly realized here" (*hindu.com*). Through the presentation of Devayani love affair Deshpande does not favour extra marital relationship. She is trying to fight against conventional resolutions of the society. Her protagonist is ready to protest against the catastrophic situation created by double faceted society. Devayani's sister warns her about the future of her love affair with Ashok that is not acceptable in the society. She said society would call her Ashok's "girl" or "mistress" or a "whore" or "flossy" for her relation with a man who is already married. But Devi, another form of Devayani character is ready to fight against the social norms and openly access individual reality. She has great faith in the institution of marriage as she says: "I believe in marriage, I believe that marriage means loyalty, it means being honest... As for love, I think it does not justify deceiving another person, I don't think it excuses cruelty..." (ICD 94)

Actually she wants to enjoy the sensuous experiences with her lover Ashok and his ecstatic endearments but she also has guilt in her heart. Ironically, this catastrophe comes in the form of confusion between love and sex. The narrative projects a true picture of the mental dilemma of tradition and modernity and how the protagonist manages to come out of it and strikes a balance between these conflicting values. Devayani strongly behaves in the situation of psychological trauma. She decided to conclude her relationship with Ashok as she knows that it can't be accepted by the society. But it doesn't mean that she accepts her failure against the conventional societal norms, she ends her relationship in a very intellectual and dignified manner. She herself finds out, such joys are ephemeral, and thus, meaningless. Her lover Ashok who couldn't prove himself a loyal husband proves himself a true lover as he was ready to divorce his wife for his love for Devayani. Deshpande who always shows the inner strength of her characters

again presents Devayani's strength as Devi and then Divya. She fights against her physical and psychological needs and chooses the right path. She reached at the heights of self-realization as Divya. She however doesn't stop loving Ashok but realizes her own limitations. About her concluding meetings with Ashok she says that nothing changed between them "not our feelings for one another, but our recognition of what was possible, of what was not possible" (ICD 211). She discards every social norm to be called 'right' and 'innocent'.

Satisfaction, gratification of desire, fulfillment and not deferral, are the central trepidations of this novel. Deshpande deals with the psychic turmoil of women within the limiting and restricting confines of domesticity. *In the Country of Deceit* depicts the marginalization, insecurity and segregation experienced by the women in the conventional society. Here, Deshpande exposes the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in society. Ashok, being a man has no fear about his love and ready to accept his love but for Devayani it is like a crime. It is their lust that makes them seduce innocent and lonely women like Devayani. Society does not contempt men for indulging in extra-marital affairs. As we find that Ashok family is a great support for him after this break up. Devayani, however, has no such relief. But she finally makes a truly empowering choice when she decides to break free of this adulterous affair which will give her neither security nor permanent happiness. Devayani's story shows how even morally upright women may make mistakes in their lives and can come out of it because of self-control and self-indulgence. Deshpande seeks to reveal the post-modern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs and exposes these to be manmade constructs. Through her rebellion view she presents the true evolution of her heroine personality.

In the Country of Deceit is a story of choices. Seen from the Indian ethos, Devayani's choice for her love and exploration of her sexuality is a bold decision. Devayani's evolution, self-realization and self-empowerment are the result of her choice of getting real pleasure beyond the physical inclination. She does what she wants to do.

Biased and corrupted social system and the world of patriarchal constructs raised her to the catastrophe but her endeavor to get her share of joys at any cost turns her to evolution.

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