

Cultural Quelling of The Female Gender in The Country of Deceit by Shashi Deshpande

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ABSTRACT:

Explores the mental agony of the young protagonist Devayani, who falls prey to the futureless love with a senior, married man Ashok Chinnapa. Indian culture does not permit a man to have two or three wives at a time. Devayani has been trapped in a mesh of cultural and psychological quelling, which does not permit her to continue the relationship with him. Her deep love towards him does not allow her to put an end to her relationship with him. The mental struggle, companionless life, loss and solitude compel Devi to undergo mental pressure and wound her psyche. The paper presents the psychic disturbance of the protagonist which in the portrays the situation of modern women who are the victims of futureless love. Culture plays a vital role in human life. Various countries from West to East have various cultures. India is known for its rich culture and heritage there is a big gulf between the culture which persists among the women of East and West. In spite of this variation one can find similar agonies and stress among the women though they are varied by caste, creed, culture and country. Indian culture treats women as Goddesses and deities but fail to give liberty in the sense of thinking, deciding and performing. There will be always a man before her in role of a father, husband, brother, lover or son who will lead her into his path, his desire, his decision. This kind of secondary treatment of the woman haunts her, agonies her mind and causes certain impulse in her psyche. Culture now becomes a burden a hindrance an obstacle for her free will and carefree life. Certain things according to Indian culture are restricted to women which is still blindly followed in certain families. She cannot decide her life partner without the will of her parents. She cannot go away or abroad to get education, she cannot stay in her friend's house even if it is a girl friend. These don'ts are allowed to men. Her condition is all the more worse when she gets into the marital life.

One important difference between western and eastern culture is that western culture permits the women to enjoy her free will with men without marriage, whereas, the Eastern culture, especially Indian culture does not permit it. The women will be accused of committing adultery and prostitution, whereas, it least bothers about the men. There are certain cultural restraints which prevent her to lead her life in her own way. All these constrain create a great disharmony in the mind of the women. The tension or agony caused by culture has been portrayed in this chapter. Devayani the protagonist's mental agony, loneliness, sexuality in the name of cultural suppression has been depicted. Cultural psychology is a field of psychology which assumes the idea that culture and mind are inseparable, and that psychological theories grounded in one culture is likely, to be limited in applicability when applied to a different culture. According to Richard Shweder, one of the major proponents of the cultural psychology writes: Cultural psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express and transform human psyche resulting less in psychic unity for human kind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self and emotion (Shurder: 1991). He attempts to discover the relationship between culture and the psychology and how it affects and reshapes an individual behaviour. Abha Shukla Kaushik, gives a brief summary of the novel as: In the country of Deceit is the tenth novel penned by famous writer Shashi Deshpande. She continues probing into women's experiences, constraints and problems in this novel also. Here, she brings back to life Devyani, a young spinster, a character from one of her earlier novels Come up and be dead. It is a subtle mixing of desire and deceit that makes the novel so convincing and serves as a constant reminder that most of the time it is women who have to suffer and that bliss often has to be purchased at a high cost and that too will not last. Devyani's aunt Sindhu who is a breast cancer survivor writes letters to her from the US where she lives, functions as a conscience keeper and her letters give voice to a perspective of age, wisdom and balance.

She points out to Devyani in one of her letters, “Our country does not allow women to fulfil these desires without marriage.” (ICD 42-43) Deshpande describes the suffering, evasions and lies that overtake Devyani as she is caught in the web of subterfuge. As expected ‘happiness’ has to be ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of ‘reputation’ (Sites. Google.com). The narrative of the novel has been divided into four segments entitled “Ground Zero”, “Epiphany”, “In the Country of Deceit” and “Unspooning” where the first two segments appear to be a kind of preparation for the third segment whereas the fourth one supplements the whole narrative with a meticulous summing up. The title of each segment metaphorically informs 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. 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 next segment Epiphany enkindles delicate feelings in the heart of Devayani who experiences the epiphanic ecstasy of love and sex with her lover Ashok. The third segment is of immense significance in the novel because it offers a close view to the dilemma and mental processes of the protagonist who wins at last over the circumstances with a spiritual realization in the fourth segment. The novelist remarkably presents the dilemma of the protagonist Devayani who dwindles between her love affair with a married middle aged man and the societal norms. Presenting a fine balance between traditionalism and progressiveness, the narrative offers a realistic portrayal of wistful pursuit of Devayani for love. In the novel, Deshpande touches upon the themes of desire, guilt, deceit, adult-love and sexual relationship outside marriage. Devayani had earlier appeared as the protagonist of Deshpande’s suspense novel *Come Up and Be Dead*.

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 announces about *In the Country of deceit (ICD)* during one of her talks: “This one is purely about love... “*Come Up and Be Dead*” is wholly realized here” (hindu.com). Devayani decides to live alone in her newly built house in the small town of Rajnur. 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.

Devyani meets Ashok who takes a liking to her. Both embark upon a passionate affair. Ashok, however, is a married man and Devayani is aware of the fact that their relationship has no future. Eventually, she realises the futility of clinging on to Ashok. Her sister and aunt are shocked to know about the affair. Devayani and her actress friend, Rani, meet with a road-accident. Rani sustains heavy injuries leaving a distraught Devayani to pick up the threads of her life. Devayani wants to live life on her own terms. She longs for a moment of supreme happiness in life: “I want that, I thought, I want a needlepoint of extreme happiness, I want a moment in my life which will make me feel I am touching the sky” (ICD 24-25). The protagonist Devayani’s psyche is divided into three as she has been named in three ways in the novel. (1) Devayani alias Devi (2) Divyani and (3) Divya. The way her names are represented shows the way she is related with other characters. Her character and difference in the psyche has been portrayed by presenting Devi in three different ways. Devi is an unmarried woman of twenty seven years. She has faced only the dark side of the life. She lists out a series of happening which have happened in her life where she acted the part of an “accompanist to other people’s lives” (ICD 8). Almost every time she moulds her psyche to the companion of somebody else and she had no time to think about or feel for companion for life.

Devyani 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 wonders why her mother named her after a “stupid” (ICD 36) legendary queen who lived a loveless life. She has a foreboding that like the queen, she, too, would be unable to find true love. The novelist contextualizes the character of Devayani Mudhol with the mythical Devayani of Mahabharata. In this story, though Devayani was the queen of king Yayati but it was Sharmishtha, the other woman who enjoyed king Yayati’s love.

Yayati's Devayani allegorically presents a woman "who never got what she wanted, who never understood what love meant" (ICD 36). Through the context of Devayani Mudhol and Ashok Chinnapa, the author re-tells this story from the perspective of the protagonist Devayani in the first person. Apart from this, the novelist has made use of numerous letters written by other characters to the heroine as fillers in the narrative. In due course of the novel, Devayani gradually matures and evolves from Devayani to Devi and finally to Divya, a modern incarnation of the mythical Devayani. Devayani narrates to Rani the legend of her namesake Devayani from the Mahabharata: I told her the story of the reckless, arrogant, stupid girl who thought that her father's position would get her what she wanted. Who fell in love, twice, with men who didn't want her and married the second man, a king, against his wishes. And then had to live knowing that the woman she hated most, the woman she had wanted to humiliate, was her husband's dearly loved mistress. 'So she got nothing?' 'Nothing. She was the queen, but it was the other woman, Sharmishta, who had the king, Yayati's, love.' (ICD 36).

Deshpande takes liberty with the legend by supplanting the legendary Devayani from the role of the wronged wife to that of the mistress. Deshpande has rewritten the story of the unfulfilled Devayani by using the technique of feminist revisionist mythmaking. By doing so, Deshpande redeems Devayani as a queen who spent a bitter and lonely life, and as a woman who loved twice and got nothing except apathy from both the men she had loved. At the same time, Deshpande has sensitively explored the psyche of the transgressive woman. The love-triangle in Deshpande's novel has three vertices—Ashok Chinappa; his legally married wife; and Devayani, his mistress and the protagonist of the novel. The narrative focus of the novel, however, is on the illicit love-affair between Devayani and Ashok. Ashok's wife is only mentioned in Ashok and Devayani's conversations.

According to Indian context for a woman setting in life is getting married, bearing children, running home with peace though her personal desire has not be fulfilled. Devi has not yet met with such a fulfillment. After long ups and downs in her life. She waits for a proper settlement or for something exciting, or surprising that should happen for her. Devayani feels perplexed to understand the difference between right and wrong, love and the less accepted versions of love in the society.

But she gradually learns this through her experiences of life and matures largely on account of her love relationship with Ashok. When the narrative begins, Devayani has decided to live alone in a small town of Rajnur after the loss of her parents. With this objective, she engages herself whole heartedly in the task of gardening and takes up the job of teaching English to the school children which offer her immense tranquility. She prefers solitude and sustains herself despite loneliness which is occasionally defeated by memory and nostalgia. In order to preserve her privacy and hard-won independence she decides never to get married. It is ironical, however, that Devayani refuses the seemingly promising marriage proposals brought by her friends and relatives for her and unexpectedly enters into an illicit relationship with a middle aged DSP of Rajnur, Ashok Chinappa who is much older, married and father to a ten year old daughter. Devi wants to get rid of her native place where she has witnessed the death of her father, her mother's suffering and people sympathizing for her dead mother and people who constantly pester her by asking when she will get married. She likes to live in a place where nobody knows her, where she is not Devayani but "an anonymous nobody" (ICD 16). For some past two years she was along with Kshama for her work. She is the same Devayani who appears in the novel *Come Up and Be Dead*. And these two years, away from Rajnur gave her a sense of liberty to lend a life of a sort which she preferred to be, where she shed away all her past life and became a new person altogether.

In order to get out of monotonous life, Sindhu, her paternal aunt wants Devi to get married as three years have passed after the death of Devi's mother and now she is in a position for the responsibility of Devi's marriage. Sindhu insists change in life alone will give pleasant and unpleasant happening of life. Without change life will be monotony and boring without any excitement. According to Sindhu life is somewhat an unknown thing. What lies for oneself cannot be predicted, each step which is taken, is into the unknown, for that, one should not fear to step out and remain in the same place, life should be moving, moving into the unknown. Sindhu want Devi to have her own happy home with husband and children. Though she has all others in her life, a husband cannot be replaced by any other. Though Savi's children are affectionate towards her, they will not be with her for a long time unless she gets her own children. The real love and affection of a husband and children cannot be replaced by anyone. She also adds, "marriage is a gamble" (ICD 26).

All cannot be gifted enough to get a lovable husband and responsible children. According to Devi married life should be full of love and affection. She wants a good companion, good friend and care taker in the name of husband as she has been leading her life, all alone, for so many years after the death of her mother. She feels anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection. Sindhu advises Devi to step into the marital life as it is a natural and subtle way to quench the physical desire, which Devi had concealed for so many years. Marriage is the only solution according to the Indian society to quench that physical pleasure. Savi too wants Devi to get married soon as she is growing older day by day. Here one can find the culture quelling on the protagonist. The psyche of Devi is formulated in such a way that she is bold, brave and built a heart to envisage the world all alone. Though as a normal human being she has all sorts of emotions, she conceals them and leads a life of solitude.

The role of Divyani has been portrayed in alliance with the actress Rani. The life of an actress is clearly depicted in the novel. Rani, the actress, has Priya Ranjan as her screen name. The very act of possessing two names shows the duality of the actress. The personal name 'Rani' is not popular, and less important as the role she performs as a house wife whereas the screen name has a wide range of popularity and fame. She presents herself with great vigour and valour. According to Devayani, marriage is something important in one's life. That has not yet happened to her. For Rani it has happened at the very early stage for which she worries now. She says "it's a good thing, may be. I married too early a mistake" (ICD 13). The underlying meaning of the sentence is that when once a woman steps into the marital life, whether she gets happiness or not, she has to pretend as if she is happy, and all the time she has to sacrifice herself for the other's happiness and smooth running of the family. If she is rebellious her happy home will be marred and she will be branded outrageous and unfit for the familial life by the society. All these factors affect the psyche of woman. Almost all the time her psyche will be wounded or hurt.

Rani, once an active actress misses the busy life with full of people, relation and companion, when she was a starring actress. Now she too feels that something is missing in her life. Leaving behind the active part which she performed as an actress, her life now seems to be very passive and monotonous.

The part played as Divyani is not liked by Sindhu, Savi and some other members of the family. They do not want her to be friendly with Rani. But Rani takes a refuge in Devi and Devi also evades her loneliness with the company of Rani. Sindhu dislikes the friendship of Devi with Rani because she is an actress. She openly says that it is not good to work with a person relating to film world because Devi is very innocent and ignorant of dirty things and according to Sindhu, Devi does not have the instinct of self-protection. She may be easily hurt physically or emotionally and it is better to keep away from Rani and working for her. But Devi is unable to follow the advice of Sindhu. The role of Divya as it is called only by Ashok Chinnappa, the DSP, gives a new dimension in Devi's life, which she has not expected. Her family members, especially Savi, do not have the idea of thinking Devi in that way. After meeting Ashok, Devi realizes the real meaning of marital life. She says everything is allowed with the guy married even though one dislikes him but it is a great offence and a matter of dignity and character when it comes for an unmarried couple even though they like each other. At a party organised by the actress, Rani, Devayani meets the Superintendent of Police, Rajnur, Ashok Chinappa who takes a fancy to her. Ashok is a married man and has a daughter. He is a very ambitious man and has a strong presence in Rajnur.

Devayani's placid world is disturbed when Ashok suddenly proposes to her. Devayani is frightened at this rude encroachment in her life. Yet, when she analyses her feelings, she realises "I am frightened, not of the man, but of myself, of my desire to run, not away from, but into 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. The dilemma of the protagonist is depicted adroitly and realistically. The element of deceit and betrayal in the parallel love story of the glamorous, enigmatic actress Rani adds a dimension that could not have been able to be conceived by a writer of lesser skill.

Savi, stands epitomizing all the preconceived notions surrounding adultery and marriage while the indispensable character of Sindhu, the conscience keeper provides just the right blend between traditionalism and progress. Devi is totally confused by love towards Ashok. She is unable to reveal or conceal it. She is in utmost mental pressure because her age, her womanly body, her solitude, needs a companion but morality, loyalty and decency prevents her. She has been caught in the turmoil of mental torture which prevents her from taking a decision. Devi's loneliness gives room for a lot of memories and thoughts. Her loneliness is the root cause of all that happened in her life. Devi is moral, honest, dignified and with helping tendency but when Ashok proposed to her, she is confused and wants to know whether it is lust or love. She has been inspired and fascinated by his thoughts.

She argues with herself whether it is real love or mere lust for the physical union. Her mind says that it is lust and no love in the words of Ashok but her heart says it contains love. There is a conflict between her heart and mind. In order to put an end to this conflict, she wants to go back to "the time of innocent happiness" (ICD 115), but she realizes it cannot be done as the rule of life is always to move forward. Ashok's call for love stimulates Devayani in such a way that she breaks all social barriers and steps into what Shashi Deshpande calls 'the country of deceit'. The 'country of deceit' could be interpreted in various ways. Apparently it seems to be the world of love or desires. At the same time it also refers to a state of mind when an individual is conscious of some guilt. 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).

This shows that the heroine is 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. Highlighting the significance of the title Shashi Deshpande frankly says in an online interview: "It seems odd, doesn't it? But, when you think of what love does to people and the things love makes them do...My novel explores the slippery, treacherous terrain that love takes people into" (ambianny.blogspot). Initially, she was a little hesitant about this relationship as she had a clear-eyed knowledge of the wrong in this relationship. After this phase of internal conflict between her rational self and instinctive self, she surrenders to the demands of the instincts and the body. But the conflict does not end here.

In her mind, she always carries the guilt of a socially unacceptable relationship and also of wronging Ashok's wife and daughter. Through Devi's case, Deshpande presents an example of mind-body problem, according to which mind and body are two fundamentally different parts of an organism. Even though they co-exist, they remain distinct in nature. Here, Devi also encounters the mind-body debate. On one side is her enormous love for Ashok and on the other is her moral consciousness. Deshpande's interest is broadly in ordinary women who face life's vagaries, get irritated, depressed and yet at a point they reconcile with life with an improved, mature and rational outlook on life. This reconciliation gives them optimism and strength to lead life constructively. After a long mental struggle, Devi decides to do whatever happens to her like a gambler. After waiting for Ashok to pick her, she asks herself whether she has won or lost. After getting into the car with him she feels that she has committed a terrible mistake. Devi says to Ashok that she dislikes change, but it is an amazing thing how such a stubborn and strict woman of moral value loses her virginity and how she has been fascinated by such an elderly person. After that whenever she is alone, she realizes her mistake of committing the mean thing. Though, after her physical union with Ashok, Devi seems to be very happy, the moment she lies to Sindhu and Savi, she feels that she has become deceitful.

The cultural and moral constraint in her accuses that she has done a great mistake of committing adultery. Devayani in her asks her to stop everything but Divya in her wants to go for more. According to Devi adultery is something which brings disgrace and shame to the couple who has involved in it whoever it maybe. She has brought the same disgrace to herself. And the disgraced couple often asks the same question "How do we meet? And where?" (ICD 149). After the night spent with Ashok, Devi's guilty consciousness pricks her. She consoles her by arguing that her life has got used to guilt and she has borne all these things and her psyche is molded in such a way that she can live with guilt. After this first passionate meeting, the two lovers meet again and again. The desire to be with Ashok makes Devayani bold enough to break the rules of propriety. While waiting for Ashok's clandestine visit to her home at a rainy night, Devayani compares herself with the Abhisarika who is so desperate to meet her lover Krishna that she is ready to compromise her honour: And while I waited, I thought of the Abhisarika, . . . the woman going out secretly to meet her lover. A word with such a specific meaning. . . . A woman, veiled and frightened,

walking stealthily in the night, trying to silence even the bells of her anklets. A woman so in love with a man that she is willing to brave a solitary walk in the night. Would I go out to meet Ashok? Impossible thought. And yet, if there was no other way of meeting him . . .? (ICD 163).

At times she feels that “All that she had was guilt” (ICD 196) because Ashok had his own life consisting of his wife and a daughter. At the same time, Devi’s involvement in Ashok is so intense that she agrees to live even with this guilt: “I would even learn to live with guilt. You get used to everything- you learn how to live with suffering, pain, death. Why not with guilt then? Yes I would learn to cope with guilt as well” (ICD 152). Devayani and Ashok give themselves passionately to each other. In these moments of love, Devayani lets herself be ruled by emotions rather than reason. In Ashok’s company, she can envision exciting possibilities of adult love. Ashok feels drawn to Devayani due to an attraction deeper than mere bodily desire. He wants to protect and nurture her. He wants to give her love, pleasure and emotional support. He wants her to be happy. He shares his secrets with her. Devayani’s vulnerability and simplicity attract Ashok. He avers that he cannot divorce his wife, yet he loves Devayani with all his heart. He, too knows, that their relationship is wrong. Devayani, who would not give herself in marriage, responds to Ashok’s body with joy. The effortless intimacy between the two show that they have some elemental affinity with each other.

Her elemental responses to Ashok are of far greater significance than the social status of their relationship. Devayani flowers in the relationship with Ashok. Ashok becomes an emotional anchor to her. It is this emotional fulfilment Devayani had been searching all the while. Having failed to find it in her family, she turns to Ashok. Devayani, who calls her own habits spinsterish, is surprisingly bold in making physical love with a stranger. Few, but passionate, moments snatched from Ashok’s busy schedule enthrall Devayani. All the same, she is afraid at what she has done. The affair, though illicit, liberates Devayani from the weight of the grief of her mother’s death. She realises that after her mother’s death, she had refrained from living and loving. The painful memories of her mother’s last days had held Devayani back from enjoying life and also believing in love. Ashok’s love opens the doors to self fulfilment she had closed on herself. Devayani enjoys Ashok’s company but gradually, she longs to have him with her all the time. Living in society as they are, Devayani and Ashok have to live by the rules laid by it.

Getting only snatches of Ashok’s company makes Devayani realise the real value of the institution of marriage. She has experienced how and why the wife’s status is far superior to that of the mistress or Abhisarika: This is what marriage means: knowing that the years lie ahead of you, a long stretch of time waiting for you to occupy together. Taking time for granted, disjointed conversation about trifles, casual intimacies. This is what I want. I don’t want clandestine meetings, drama, constant fears. The Abhisarika can keep her romance, she can have her excitement. I’ll settle for small moments like these. This is what I want, this is what I’ll never have (ICD 191-92). Devayani would not consider marrying anyone except Ashok. Ashok, on his part, cannot divorce his wife. Their relationship, thus, has no future. Devayani knows very well that she has let herself drift into a current of joy and bliss, but she cannot drift forever. She knows that guilt, deceit and pain are an inseparable part of such an affair. For Devayani, love happens for once and if it happens for the second time it will not be true. She thinks about Rani’s love towards her lover and the second love towards her husband K.N. She fails to understand that her love towards Ashok is primary but his love towards her is secondary as his family is in the primary position and Devayani takes up the secondary part.

Devayani realizes that the relationship with Ashok will not come to day light. It remains forever in dark and is supposed to be unnoticed by everyone. If noticed it will bring disgrace to both of them. Her relationship with him is a sort which ends at dawn. She cannot get the sharing like normal husband and wife. Devayani is living a secret life by hiding many things and she thinks that it is not fit enough to reveal. Though Devayani is aware that her relationship with Ashok is immoral, illegal, uncultured, she does not want to think about these unpleasant things which will hinder her relationship with him. Devi starts to compare herself with Ashok’s wife. She says that Ashok has chosen her and his words show that his wife is not showing love and affection or care towards him. This deficiency is fulfilled by Devi. Devi is also in the matured stage, using her loneliness to quench her physical desire disregarding the fact that he is a much older and a married man with a daughter. Devi has almost spent all her days for others, especially for her mother. When she was with her, no thoughts regarding her had emerged in her and it was very peaceful and free from burden. Savi has reacted a great to Devi’s revealing about the affair with Ashok. Ashok is a person with whom Devi can reveal all her feelings and she feels very comfortable with him as a playful

and expressive woman. She does not find this companionship in else. She says that she is transformed into another person. “It was like I had unworked a self who had been bottled up inside, me, all these years, He made me feel a young girl again, clever, wise and witty” (ICD 189). Devayani feels that Ashok is the man who gives joy and bliss and not mere physical union. Perhaps sex is also one of the factors which brought this much intimacy with him. Devi feels that there is something more than sex with the relationship with Ashok. Her bodily urges alone are not fulfilled, her mind, emotion, sense, desire which she has not enjoyed with anyone so far has been fulfilled now by the relationship with Ashok. The affair with Ashok will be condemned by the outer world but in Devi’s world it is legal, lawful and enjoyable. The novel may be interpreted as a domain of deceit due to the illicit nature of the love relationship between Devi and Ashok. The author however does not seem to approve of this idea. 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. And the guilt that Devi feels in the later-half of the novel is not her own but it is generated due to the pressures of social conventions. Her mental dilemma gives us an elaborate examination and explanation of what a true love should be like.

Devayani’s relatives come to know about her illicit relationship. All of them are shocked and overwhelmed at what Devayani had done. They had thought of Devayani as an upright girl who could do no wrong. Savi berates Devayani for indulging in casual sex with a shrewd and experienced man. According to Savi, Devayani is interested only in sex and her relationship with Ashok is nothing beyond carnality. Devayani, however, is convinced that their relationship, though illegal, has the same spiritual sanctity as Savi and Shree’s marriage. She asks Savi, “Why? Male and female—it’s the same, Savi” (ICD 185). It is Ashok’s love that gives Devayani courage to question the societal norms that categorise love into moral and immoral. Deshpande probes deep into the psyche of her young heroines especially when they rebel against the traditional ways of life. The conflict in the psyche of Devayani germinates when her sister bewares her that the society would call her Ashok’s “girl” or “mistress” or a “whore” or “flossy” for her relation with a man who is already married. In this novel through the character of Devi, the author has tried to present the position of unmarried girls amidst the social and individual reality.

Devi thinks too much about herself, about Ashok, about love, sex and society. Her partial obsession with pre and post thought in a way also offers an open access to the mental mechanics of Devayani. One cannot live with one’s own world alone. He or she should give respect to the society, culture and laws of the country. Therefore Devi’s relationship according to Indian culture and law and order becomes illegal. Devi knows this fault but yields to her emotion and not reason. Devi needs somebody who will acknowledge her relationship with Ashok and say everything is well. But nobody will do and has done. Even Sindhu’s and Keshav’s planned stay in her home seems to be a big hindrance as it prevents her meeting with Ashok. And it is equally difficult for Devi to reveal the relationship to Sindhu. Devayani, in this novel is a prism like character with many potential shades which emanate only when the spark of Ashok’s love falls on her. She is many times deep inside than what she appears on the surface. Devayani’s is a highly thoughtful and self-conscious being which knows what it does. The events and incidents in her life apparently seem to be accidental or coincidental but the deeper observations inform that they are well deliberated actions. For instance, she doesn’t accept or reject Ashok’s proposal immediately, instead, she thinks over it for several days, evaluates every idea and then proceeds. She has an insightful, meditative and philosophical temperament which gives her an independent perception of life uncontrolled by social conventions. Devayani reflects in the following manner:

I had wanted to go to a place where no one would know me...I felt as if I had shed my past and become a new person altogether. I was not Devayani Mudhol, I was an anonymous Nobody. It felt good. I knew then why people walked out of their homes leaving everything behind. (ICD 15-16) These words reflect the heroine’s mood in complete dejection. Truly, Devayani in the beginning of the novel is found least influenced by the flood of marriage proposals and sex suggestions coming from her friends and relatives. Devi denies the gift offered by Ashok on her birthday. She feels that she has been paid for what she is doing with Ashok. Instantly, Ashok gets angry and goes out of the home. Devi thinks that this is the right way to put an end to her relationship with Ashok. Devi definitely knows that there is no future with Ashok, in spite of knowing that she loved Ashok and allowed him to have physical intimacy. Ultimately Devayani realises 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 fulfillment 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. She asks of herself: 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? ... The word love is too simple for the complicated emotions and responses that made me do what I had done. Ultimately I did it because he was Ashok, because we met. That's all. Our meeting—it was a miracle, a disaster (ICD 257). 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.

Deshpande's exploration of Devayani's psyche answers the question why women sometimes prefer illicit relationships over the socially accepted ones. It may be that such relationships provide them a brief glimpse of supreme happiness and fulfillment. However, as Devayani herself finds out, such joys are ephemeral, and thus, meaningless. A woman has to pay a heavy price for indulging in an act of adultery. Society does not accept such transgressive behaviour of women. Women involved with married men are called home-breakers. Men like Ashok, however, have nothing to lose in the affair. It is their lust that makes them seduce innocent and lonely women like Devayani. Further, Ashok has his family and his daughter's love to fall back upon after his break-up with Devayani. Devayani, however, has no such cushion. Society does not censure men for indulging in extra-marital affairs. The female body is viewed as a text of femininity which is culturally coded, socially constructed and inscribed as well as agentially negotiated. It is a terrain of surveillance and exploitation with many repressive socio-religious mechanisms operating against the concept of feminine freedom, personal gratification and sexual autonomy. But for the modern women writers, the female body is also the celebratory positive source of abundant energy, desire, pleasure,

agency and innovation allowing the women to tread the trajectory of resistance, rebellion, conflict, emancipation and empowerment to assert their identities as women. Devayani herself comes to know that Rani's father-in-law, and even her own grandfather had mistresses. She feels cheap when Ashok gives her a present. After this, their affair goes downhill. Devayani 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. Devayani's personal gain is at the cost of scandal and loss of social reputation. What is exemplary about Devayani is the way she cuts herself off the affair gracefully but resolutely. In the end, she has to take two giant steps: the first toward self-fulfillment, and the second, toward self-empowerment. The blurb of the book rightly highlights the following extract from the novel that gives a clear indication of the anguish as well as the dilemma of the heroine after her entrance in the country of deceit. Love undoubtedly happens to be perennial theme in Deshpande's novels but in the present novel she focuses more on the adult love between two highly mature couple. The author in an online interview explains:

“All my books are about relationships, particularly this one which is about love between an adult man and an adult woman” (dnaindia.com). Therefore, Devayani's fall in love is though unexpected but not sudden because she ruminates seriously over the pros and cons associated with her would-be relationship with Ashok. Speaking thoughtfully about adult love the author 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). The novel may be interpreted as a domain of deceit due to the illicit nature of the love relationship between Devi and Ashok. The author however doesn't seem to approve of this idea. 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. And the guilt that Devi feels in the latter half of the novel is not her own but it is generated due to the pressures of social conventions. Her mental dilemma gives us an elaborate examination and explanation of what a true love should be like.

“And then I thought of what I had done, I thought, why had I done this? I knew it was wrong; nothing could make it not wrong. And yet I had rushed into it. Why had I done it?” (ICD 142). The author conceptualizes love in high terms which has the potential of surviving on its own. According to Shashi Deshpande, love is not merely a blending of two individuals of opposite sex but a natural bond formed between two persons on the basis of mutual harmony. In her view no authority is needed to build or sustain any relationship. Devayani authenticates this view in these words: What do I want, you ask me. Marriage... I know it will never happen; though I must admit that I have secret hopes that he will come to me one day and say ‘I am free, we can be together’. futile dream. I know that. And I also know that we could be happier than most married couples, that we could have the kind of marriage very few couples can even dream of. I hunger for him, I thirst for him. How easily you ask me to give him up. Have you any idea what he means to me? (ICD 30). Her concept of love is so scared and divine that she goes to the extent of comparing it with “breath” or “pran” or “life”. That is why the idea of leaving Ashok for Devi becomes difficult.

Devayani who is transformed into Divya acts very prudently and chooses the right course of action for her life. She rejects every social certificate to be called ‘right’ and ‘innocent’ and says: “I had seen birth, death, despair and suffering, why did they call me innocent? If Ashok was doing wrong, so was I. I would not exculpate myself” (ICD 223). Therefore A. Maria Philomi and Shanti also remark in the following manner: Deshpande’s women are enlightened, culturally rooted, awakened to the realities of life and make decisions of their own. Their decisions are not out of their ignorance, inability or submissiveness. They decide making an analysis of the situation, crossing all barriers of identity crisis and subordination. (sites.google.com) Devayani worships her love like a deity even if it is “cheap” for the society. Though she knows that her relationship with Ashok would never be warmly welcomed by the society she lives in, yet she would also not like to be caged in the marriage like social institution: “I don’t want marriage. I have never thought of it. It has always been out of bounds for me. I never could” (ICD 237) because “Love was not enough, no, it was never enough” (ICD 210). The events and incidents in her life apparently seem to be accidental or coincidental but the deeper observations inform that they are well deliberated actions.

Devayani in the beginning of the novel is found least influenced by the flood of marriage proposals and sex suggestions coming from her friends and relatives. She is not even slightly moved by the advices such as “anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection” (ICD 28) or “collective experience has value, individual experience has none” (ICD 41) or “the generating organ is the centre of all pleasure” (ICD 43) but her friendship with the neighbour actress Rani opens that gate of “ananda” for her in which she enters to never return back (ICD 43). This is what the present condition of Indian woman in modern India. They fall prey to such occasions and Indian tradition does not allow such thing and struggle to have freedom in the name of modernity, according to which anything can be done. Today living together without marriage has become quite popular among the people in urban area. The culture and heritage of India is forgotten. Characters like Devi who follow that are in midway to cross the level and make their life a problematic one. Devi is accepting the fact that she should also be equally blamed for the mistake as Savi charges against Ashok. Devi is that much in love with Ashok that she wants him in next birth also even in this illegal way. She says “once again birth, once again death, but only with Ashok, only for Ashok” (ICD 224). Sex according to her is an extreme form of expressing one’s love towards another person, which cannot be done with everybody. “

It’s the desire for union, the most complete union two human beings can achieve” (ICD 226). She is worried that she cannot give up Ashok, whom she wants most in the world. “How can I give up the only thing I want in life” (ICD 226). Deshpande, in no way advocates illicit or extra-marital relationship or adultery of any kind but through the character of Devayani she certainly attempts to fight against certain orthodox conventions of the society. She bestows her heroine with so much strength that she can challenge the conservative norms of society. Due to this reason Devi does whatever she wishes to do and attacks severely on the double standards adopted by the society to judge something. She professes that one should have a second chance to correct the wrongs in marriage: “When even criminals get a second chance, why can’t we have a second chance? Why is it you can correct all mistakes, but not this one.” (ICD 199). The part of Divyani comes to an end when she meets with an accident on a drive with Rani. Rani has been treated for the wounds and injury caused by the accident. Devi purposely puts an end to the role of Divya, supported by the transfer given

to Ashok, she hears Ashok saying “I’m sorry, Divya, I’m sorry. I can’t lose my daughter; I can’t let her lose me” (ICD 254). Devi has been exposed to severe psychological trauma when she distances herself from Ashok both physically and emotionally. She tortures herself mentally by trying to forget all those happy days which she has undergone with Ashok. Socio cultural theory grew from the work of seminal psychologists Lev Vygotsky, who believe those parents, caregivers, peers and the cultural at large are responsible for the development of higher order functions. According to Vygotsky, Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice; first, on the social level, and later on the individual level. First, between people (inter psychological) and then inside the child (intra psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationship between individuals. Socio cultural theory focuses not only how adults and peers influence individual learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place. At inter- psychological level Devi is very good and cultured. Nobody gives a negative remark about her. She is much praised by Sindhu, Gundu, Savi and so many others for her kind, mature and moral behaviour, helping tendency, simple and lucid style of living, love and affection towards her mother and tireless job for her till her death etc.

According to intra psychological level also she is good. Solitude and companionless life and brimming youthfulness in her provoked her to commit adultery with Ashok in the name of love. She very well understands that a married man cannot be her lover or husband, still her body urges her for the physical union. Devayani gradually develops an insightful acumen with the passage of time. When she comes to understand that her love affair with Ashok will not ultimately be welcomed by the society. She decides to conclude it in a very intellectual and dignified manner. She however does not 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). Devi with a new hope, says, “This grief of mine would pass too. I would over it in time” (ICD 259). She is ready to face the world. Her life from now onwards will be “a constant struggle between trying to forget and wanting to remember.” (ICD 259).

Such is the condition of Indian women who fall prey to false love and physical attraction. From the point of view of Devi she is true and loyal in her love but Ashok takes a refuge or solace from Devi in the absence of his family members. Especially he uses her to satisfy his bodily urge in the name of love and buttering words of love to falsify his true nature.

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