

*They were in their own sunshine,
basking in the golden glow of the Ocean*



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AMALGAMATION OF POSTMODERNISM AND FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *IN THE COUNTRY OF DECEIT*

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Indian society is a highly conventional one when it comes to the idea of marriage especially for women. The society will never accept if a girl decides to live without a husband. For the sake of security and social status she is expected and at times forced to enter into the marital contract. But in the postmodern era, with rapid globalization, views on marriage are exceedingly influenced by the Western culture. This facilitates women all over the world to evolve as postmodern feminists who decentralize the conventional beliefs about marriage and the Indian society is also not an exception. Though not all the women tend to decentralize those conventional notions, there are few who boldly shatter them. Shashi Deshpande's Devayani who is the protagonist of the novel *In the Country of Deceit* is one among them. This article entitled, "**Amalgamation of Postmodernism and Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's *In the Country of Deceit***" analyzes how Devayani decentralized the conventional notions of the Indian society about marriage. She chose her own path and lived by her own set of principles that constituted the typical postmodern trend. The choice that she made in the matter of marriage was quiet challenging, though she made it out of the circumstances and her own personal trauma.

Postmodernism is the reflection of the Western culture in the latter half of the twentieth century across the countries. It is a theory, a contemporary practice and a condition of the contemporary era. As Waugh puts it, "postmodern thought may now be seen as a symptom of wider cultural changes: either complicate with what is viewed as a change for the worst, or a possible mode of liberation from or insight into blindness of modernity and Modernism" (3). It is also concerned with all the variety of multiplicities and emphasizes plurality of ethnicities, cultures, genders, truths, realities, and sexualities; at the same it seeks a more equal representation for class, gender, race, ethnicity and culture. It also talks about contemporary issues like democratic decentralization of

power, social and economic justice, ecology, women liberation, free sex, human rights and rights of the minorities. It also shares concern to provide platform for those who because of class, race and gender have been marginalized by the dominant tradition.

The postmodern concepts that evolved at the end of the twentieth century came up with a more genial idea. It has brought about reform in all spheres of life including philosophy, commerce, art and literature. The word 'postmodernism' itself came to be identified as a contrast to traditional methods and established rules. It can be considered as a "new beginning, as a break with old modes of living and thinking" (Zima 65). So, the combination of postmodern and feminism in any work of art provide a strong standpoint that question and reject the traditional notion on the feminine concepts including marriage and sex that are practiced in the society concerned. It is contemporary and constitutes of conflicted set of concepts and practices about the feminine in the society. This mishmash of postmodernism and feminism in the novel *In the Country of Deceit* allows several questioning of approaches within and outside of feminism, an expansion of feminist study and other issues inherent to feminism to the body of postmodern scholarship.

In the writings of women writers like Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others exposes how women are weighed down by social order in terms of marriage to face the society which is highly patriarchal. The women protagonists in their works question the customs and conventions set for women. They unflinchingly confront the oppositions strongly and find out a new path out of the age old traditions and customs. They find their own identities and emerge as empowered with conviction bound. Thus, the writings of women have made an impact the very existence of women in the socio-cultural setting.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent writers and has created a place for herself in the Indian women novelists catalog. She projects a realistic picture of Indian middle-class educated women, who though financially independent confronts the predicament of existence. She always questions the traditional images by probing into the meaning of

the each female experience and sometimes with an attitude of rebellion but never attempted a total break away from the society and its norms.

In the novel, *In the Country of Deceit* Devayani decides to live alone in Rajnur after her parents' death. Deshpande's major concern lies on to depict the distress and conflict of Devayani, a well educated and financially self-sufficient woman. She was caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and the other between individuality and independence towards other relationships as the novelist's usual theme of the exploration of a woman's search to fulfill herself as a individual being, independent of her traditional role as a daughter, wife and mother. She was in a constant pursuit of defining herself.

Devayani, the young unmarried woman, after the death of her mother began a new life in her newly built modern house. The demolition of her old house is a symbolic representation of the extermination of her old way of living. For long she was nursing her ailing mother. She has also been a source of comfort to the people especially her relatives at the time of their distress. She adds:

All these years I had been the accompanist to other people's lives. First I had been a follower of my spirited, beautiful older sister, then in charge of my parents' lives, the observer of their tragedy. For a brief while I had acted as my Cousin Kshama's helper and later I had been Sindhu's attendant after her surgery. Now for the first time, I had to play solo. I had no one else to look after, no one to think about. I felt as I was waiting for the curtain to go up, waiting for something to happen" (8).

Now that she has decided to live her life on her own terms and conditions she identifies this period as a "fresh start" and a "clean slate." (1)

Also, by this time she was also convinced that marriage is not going to pave way for happiness. According to her, "marriage is a gamble. One has to take chances" (26). But she was not ready to take her chance for she was afraid of getting married. The reason why she decides not to get married is that, for long, she was frustrated by the unhappy marriage of her parents. All she withholds is, as she says, "memories of my father's

despair, memories of my mother's suffering" (5). So, she tried to emerge from the trauma of those heartbreaking memories by staying away from people around her and created a space for herself. It is obvious that her unwillingness to marriage is purely out of the pain she suffered out of her parents' frustrated relationship with each other. Though she says that she refuses to get married because her space will be intruded by a stranger, the real reason is as she affirms in her own words that "I'm still a coward about pain and suffering" (20).

Devayani finds it difficult to commit herself to a man she knew nothing about, especially after finding a home and identity for herself. Sindhu points out that, "You are afraid of committing yourself to a man you know nothing about, afraid of living with a stranger in another country, a different world altogether- specially when you are finding your own place at home" (25). So the concern is that she has adopted a way of living for herself and thinks that marriage is not a valid identity but other prospects like education, intelligence and money. She felt extremely triumphant and contented when she was called by her students as "Devayani Ma'am" (17). And, felt awfully irritated whenever her family members open up her marriage topic as a matter for discussion. She was so sure that she should never get married for the sake of getting married. She believed that there are other things in life beyond marriage that can help living a worthy life. She strongly alleged to the idea that if a woman possesses the prospects of education and money she can lead an independent life. Though it is possible, the society detested this notion saying that a woman should fit into the traditional norms that are reserved for her. But, Devayani has made a decision to decentralize this notion by staying alone in her new house and remain a spinster, despite the queries of her family members and the uncertainty of her future. Regardless of the disapprovals, Devayani has made her own choice between getting married and remaining a spinster.

Thus, the novel *In the Country of Deceit* proved that "a woman's text will suggest an alternative picture of the conditions, desires, psychology of the woman" (Nayar 94). Women should never be forced to fit into the role of a mother, daughter and wife but should be given a freedom to choose by looking beyond the restraints. She should never be

constrained by traditional images of honor or sacrifice and she should be idealized beyond these images. She is neither a symbol of honour or sacrifice, she is what she is.

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