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**INDIAN INSTITUTIONS OF 'FAMILY' AND 'MARRIAGE' IN
TRANSCULTURAL PROCESS: A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
NOVEL 'IN THE COUNTRY OF DECEIT'**

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ABSTRACT

'Marriage' and 'family' are the two important institutions that has maintained traditionally in Indian society. In the age of globalization, the advent of I.C.T. and increasing connectivity, these two institutions do not remain aloof from changing global culture. Shashi Deshpande is known for depiction of changing cultural values and impact of these changes on women. 'In the country of Deceit' is a more contemporary novel by the author hence it depicts the subtle changes in cultural values across the world. Marriage and Family institutions undergo transformation due to the global cultural change.

Keywords: Marriage And Family Institution In India – Globalization And Changing Cultural Values – Transcultural Process – Microcosm Of India – Novels Of Post-Independence Women Writers – Social Change -

The novel 'In the Country of Deceit' is not a novel that depicts any major instance of cultural exchange among different global communities. But this novel certainly depicts the socio-cultural and economic transformation taking place within India. The subtle changes in conventional Indian life have been depicted by the novelist. The family institution in India and human relations revolved around the family institution has been one of the important themes of Shashi Deshpande's novels. She keeps female protagonists in the centre of her plots. The complete galaxy of female characters confront against the situations within the framework of patriarchal Indian society. The heroines of her earlier novels like Indu in 'Roots and Shadows', Saru in 'The Dark Holds No Terrors', Jaya in 'That Long Silence', Sumitra in 'A Matter of Time' and Madhu in 'Small Remedies' long for their parental homes. All of them try to assert their respective individualities but none of them wish to go out of 'Family' institution. These female protagonists even oppose their male partners but none of them reject the conventional 'Marriage' institution.

But, in 'In the Country of Deceit' these two basic social institutions have been either rejected or have been transformed significantly. In Deshpande's earlier novels, she talks about the ancestral family homes. 'In the Country of Deceit' opens with the demolition of Devayani's father's house. Both the sisters Sumitra and Devayani believe that the house of their father a

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symbol of his failure and do not take any pride in their older house. Instead, Devayani calls the ground where the older house stood as 'Ground Zero' where from she wants to make a new beginning of life altogether. This ground zero is like a clean slate for her where she can write her new story. Devayani has another conviction and that is about the 'Marriage' institution. Everybody around her keeps worrying for her marriage. Her sister Savi and aunt Sindhu keep suggesting her 'a suitable boy'. Sindhu, even extends a proposal of a young Indian Catholic Alexander but Devayani is afraid of committing herself to a man who is completely stranger. In fact, after her father's death, Devayani had to look after her bedridden mother for three years and to come out of grief she accepts the job of a teacher in a school in Bangalore where her cousin Kshama works as a headmistress. Devayani gives excuse that it is too late for her to marry. But that is just an excuse since she is only twenty six and could easily get her a bridegroom.

Devayani is a young woman of our contemporary time where lifelong commitment in marriage is taken as forced burden. Ours is a time when the new social realities like 'Live-in-relationship' have become gradually acceptable to society. The modern youth living in cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore, Pune do not tie in wedlock but they simply live together without any promises to each other. The live-in partners can get out of relation when it becomes a burden for them. In *'In the Country of Deceit'* Devayani chooses to live with Ashok Chiinappa, the D.S.P. of Rajnur. Ashok is not only a married man but a father to ten year old daughter. He extends a bold proposal of love to Devayani and also refuses to make any promises about future. It is quite clear that he does not want to divorce his wife nor he wants to abandon his daughter. He simply commits Devayani of love and honesty. Devayani is a self-contained, mature young woman who does not take any decision in haste. She takes her own time and eventually accepts his love. He takes her to several secret places where she for the first time experiences the extreme heights of sexual pleasure with him. He caresses her and treats her with absolute tenderness she is intoxicated by his love his patient listening of her family stories. She is conscious that the world around her won't accept this relation and would call it as adultery. But this is a sort of 'live-in-relation' where there is no binding, restrictions, promises, deceptions and commitments as they are there in marriage.

This epiphanic love relation between Devayani and Ashok is a sign of changing Indian woman and also Indian society. Everything falls in place for them except the small town locality of Rajnur. Had it been any other cosmopolitan city, it would not have brought Madhu any social stigma of being a mistress. Hence, Devayani fears to disclose the relation to the world. Devayani achieves complete transformation through this relation from Devayani to Devi and finally Divya a non-hesitant bold beloved. But, she never submits herself neither to social ethics and values nor to Ashok and his love. She refuses to accept any gift from him which makes her feel 'cheap'. At a point of time she decides to give up the relation when she feels that she can no longer keep in this relation.

It is indeed, amazing that the heroine of Shashi Deshpande's novel explores her physical and spiritual gratification through the male body and gives up that too at her own will. Devayani certainly stands out from all Deshpande's previous female protagonist. There is a gradual progress in Deshpande's women characters where Sumitra in *'A matter of Time'* has been



deserted by her husband Gopal, Madhu in '*Small Remedies*' goes away from her husband Som for a while. Devayani advances a step further by rejecting both marriage and family institution. Devayani consciously enters in a relation and with the same consciousness comes out of it. She further chooses to live alone in a micro family of her own and does not wish to forget the memories but instead she wants to remember those happy moments of love.

Shashi Deshpande touches some important factors of Indian culture in her novel '*In the Country of Deceit*'. 'Transculturality' plays important role in this novel; it can be traced through the transformation that the most important social and cultural institution undergoes. The two most important institutions of Indian society are 'marriage' and 'family'. The speed and spread of the Information and communication technology affects almost all socio-cultural activities. The 'local' and 'national' cultures are shaped, reshaped, formed and transformed by the global transformations. 'Family' and 'Marriage' institutions are also in the whirlwind of the global cultural changes. In her earlier novels, Shashi Deshpande, has described the Old Patriarchal houses to considerable length. The individuals are shown taking them as an ultimate shelter which can comfort them in all their agonies and suffering. '*That Long Silence*' and '*A Matter of Time*' portray such parental houses. These parental houses are the symbols of male oriented, male centered and male dominated 'family' institution that confirms the subjugation of women in the patriarchal Indian society. Kalyani in '*That Long Silence*' is an example of such subjugation. Her husband Shripati does not speak to her for last thirty-five years for the reason that she was responsible for the loss of their son, the natural heir of the patriarchal house. The old patriarchal houses are the symbols of such long pauses in human relationships. '*In the Country of Deceit*', set two decades after '*That Long Silence*' opens with demolition of the old parental house. The name of the very first chapter is 'Ground Zero' symbolizing the wish of Devyani, the central figure of the novel, to lose her past and start her life with altogether new approach, positivity, freedom, individuality and her 'own' space. This is shift is not just the shift from the old house to new one but it is also the shift from patriarchal family to individual centric micro family. The old houses symbolize the celebrated joint family structure of the Indian society whereas new house symbolize micro-family of her own. The Indian society and culture has transformed through Joint family to nuclear family and now to micro family. This is an example of the influence that global transformations are making on the old orders and structures of society.

'Micro' family is the family of a single person. In conventional Indian society the women were not expected to live alone. But, over the period of time, the small town like Rajnur accepts Devyani's staying alone in her house. Nobody objects her living alone except her sister and aunt who are worried for her safety and security. The new house of Devayani represents her own space and assertion of her individuality. This is her house where nobody could object her and influence her for doing or not doing something. The second important thing that gets affected by the global transformations is the institution of 'Marriage'. The gradual change in this cultural institution of India can be traced with the examples of marriages and their status in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In '*That Long Silence*' Shripati does not speak to his wife, in '*A Matter of Time*' Gopal, the husband deserts his wife Sumitra, in '*Small Remedies*' Madhu walks out of her marriage for a while, in '*In the Country of Deceit*' Devayani rejects the marriage institution itself. She denies marrying as everybody



around us want to see her happily married. But Devayani is quite sure on her stand. The transformation in the 'Marriage' institution is again not just symbolic change; it is the symbol of changing 'power equation' in marital relation and 'marriage institution. Devayani's denial for marriage is the completion of circle in which patriarchy has been completely denied and rejected by a common, middle class woman.

There is one more layer to this discussion of 'family', and 'marriage' and that is 'female sexuality'. 'Female sexuality' in Indian culture is a kept aside topic from social and cultural debates. Sex experience without marriage has been prohibited in Indian society. 'Sexuality' has been controlled through marriage in Indian society. 'Female sexuality' is very closely monitored by society. Devayani, in this novel, breaks this convention of not indulging into pre-marital sex. She, after initial reluctance, enjoys sex experience with Ashok. She takes this sex experience as a way of self exploration. She achieves the physical fulfillment and spiritual completeness through sex. This physical relationship with Ashok, a married man, is a well thought attempt on the part of Devayani, because she sees no marital relation with Ashok in future. She enjoys his company until he is with her. When Ashok prepares to leave her finally, she shows no possessiveness or attachment with him. She believes that coming and going of a man in her life is her wish and it cannot affect her persona. In context of modern and changing society this sort of 'live-in-relations' are also getting established and getting popularized. Though, these relationships are not yet welcomed at the small towns like Rajnur, they create no social stir in the metro cities like Mumbai and Delhi. Devayani dares to enter into such relationship despite the visible threat of getting it exposed in a small place like Rajnur. Devayani, must be the first heroines of Shashi Deshpande who rejects 'marriage' and accepts 'live-in-relation' status. This change in Deshpande's heroine is in itself an evidence of 'transculturation' processes at work in Indian society. Devayani is one of Deshpande's silent but boldest heroines for one more reason that is presence of Priya Ranjan alias Rani, the former Bollywood heroine. Despite Rani's presence the focus of the novel never shifts from Devayani. The upheavals in Rani's glamorous life and marital life have become past and she has settled down in a marriage with a millionaire Kailash Navilur. Rani is more disillusioned and frustrated soul in her life whereas Devayani, even after Ashok's entry and exit in her life remains calm and patient.

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