

## A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Women Characters: Feminism in Search of Identity

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Virginia Woolf, while defining women's place in the globally prevalent patriarchal set up, voices the sentiments of millions of her sisters. She bemoans the unenviable position of women in these words:

“A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She provides poetry from cover to cover: she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.” (1999:41)

The description of a woman<sup>1</sup> goes on with the same words as it used to be in Woolf's time. Women is still of the highest importance – but only up to the extent man determines for her. So the life of a woman can constantly be monitored by the parameters of myth and reality. In reality a woman is nothing but a “womb”- her role is always determined by the male dominated society as “secondary”. Her importance can be felt only when it is the need to cook food, to rear the child, to take care of the in- laws and so on and so forth. When it becomes the question to talk about a woman's own story, everything gets blurred because there is no story of a woman's life. There can never be “her” stories. In a patriarchal society (special emphasis on India) it is very difficult to move on from “his” stories to “her” stories – at least “history”<sup>2</sup> is evident of that. If men and women are considered equal by the society then it is necessary to include women within the story.

The field of reading and writing was the domain of the male for a long time. It was absolutely unthinkable for a woman even to think of education. Vedic age bears the significance of scholarly women – characters like Ghosha, Apala, Vishwabara, Gargi, and Maitreyi established their identities in different fields through their educational expertise. After the Vedic age the status of women began to diminish. Then followed a long history – there are so many ups and downs in the field of women's reading and writing. Victorian period is significantly marked for the development of women's education. Some women started to write using male pseudonyms<sup>3</sup> so that the readers would not throw them away because they were written by a woman. So, gender politics was there from the beginning but not severely identified and focused to a great extent unlike it is done in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Still women from the very outset were trying to create a space of their own.

For the last three decades Indo- Anglian literature is greatly enriched by the literary contributions of the women writers – Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shobha De and much more. Each of these writers develops a style of her own – but they have one thing in common- all of them talk about women as a category of analysis. Down through the ages, if we study history, we hardly find “her” stories, that mean women's stories (personal narratives) have very little space in the dominant discourse. The fictional narratives composed by these writers give a chance to the readers to delve deep into the heart of women and finding out their stories. These narratives would raise a question in their minds- is feminism really in search of identity<sup>4</sup>?

Every civilization and every culture determined certain characteristics for a woman to fit into that particular set up. The process still goes on. The following sloka will define an ideal woman of Indian civilization:

Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi  
 Rupecha Lakshmi, kshamayaa dharitri  
 Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha  
 Shat karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni ( Acharya : 351)

It signifies that a woman should serve her husband as minister while counseling, by her looks she should be as goddess Lakshmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a mother like feeding and in bed, she must be like the celestial beauty. If a woman obeys all these she is supposed to be honoured by society. But this is only a myth. Women perform everything but she is regarded only as the “weaker sex”, the “other”, a child producing machine and so on and so forth. She never gets equal status as man. So the equality of man and woman is only a myth.

So many waves<sup>5</sup> have passed – feminism has undergone through a sea change. Women’s liberation movements have tried to claim equal rights for women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we find that so many women are liberated , they are educated and empowered – women’s journey from subjection to liberation has made her successful to some extent to keep her existence in the patriarchal society. If the status of women and men is supposed to be same in society then why women have to secure “a room” of her “own”? This question has always been there in spite of so many feminist movements. What is in papers is not in practice at all. So there has always been a huge gap between the mythical women and the real women. To break the myth and to include them in reality is feminisms search for identity because there is not one feminism, there are many feminisms.

Shashi Deshpande, a novelist of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has made a profound psychological journey on the minds of women. Her focus is on the Indian women – women who are urban, middle- class, educated, cultured and some of them, even empowered. Now one can raise the question if her women have so many qualities and comforts then what is the necessity of bringing their stories into the dominant discourse. The gender politics lies here. When women have so many things in their hands apparently positive then it is really difficult to find the trap of patriarchy<sup>6</sup>. Studying Deshpande’s novels help us to understand the trap. Most of the Indian societies are based on a patriarchal framework and Deshpande’s novels are set within such a framework. So placing there her women characters and trying to fit them up within it is one of the agendas of the novelist and it is often claimed by many as a “feminist” agenda. Even the writer agrees with it but in the later part of her literary career.

In her essay “Of Kitchens and Goddesses”, Deshpande experiences an epiphany and she suddenly feels that female space is rigidly confined:

“ Perhaps it was at that moment that I stepped over the threshold and into the kitchen. For, as if the focus had shifted, my vision suddenly changed. And, instead of that safe warm haven of my childhood, I saw other kitchen, where women were chained to endless, tedious labour, crouching for hours before a smoking fire.” ( 2003, 138)

Deshpande’s fiction focuses on the women characters trapped up in a conflict between tradition and modernity. She has clearly pointed out the gap between the prejudice stricken traditional women who prefers her daughter’s marriage to career and the modern, educated, empowered women who prioritizes her personal opinion and empowerment. In other words,

there is a contest between the two positions of women- private and public. It also polarizes between a traditional housewife and a modern career oriented woman. She leaves no stone unturned to focus on the relationship between a man and a woman and the tension within that relationship- the oppression of a woman's body by her own husband repeatedly gets exposed in the writings of Deshpande. At this juncture Beauvoir's expression on man- woman nexus in *The Second Sex* can be mentioned:

“ man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas women represent only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.”(534)

If Deshpande's concept of feminism can be analyzed from the post colonial perspective, we can have some findings. The very common notion about women in any colonized country like India is developed under the impression that women are “Other”, “marginalized”<sup>7</sup>. The post colonial feminist discourse is pre- dominantly political. It is concerned with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Deshpande, being a writer after the period of colonization, tries to highlight this issue through the analysis of her women characters. The discourse of her women characters is based on the gender politics – man's domination on woman. So Deshpande's women struggle ( a close reading of the novels will show that) against their oppression and injustice.

Deshpande has tried to show how her women characters reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and how they vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, been reduced to certain stereotypes and the society denies to sanction them an identity. So her women characters crave for identity – to establish a space<sup>8</sup> of their own.

One of Deshpande's women characters in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is Sarita, familiarly known as Saru. From the beginning of her life she has been constantly reminded by her mother that she is a “woman”. So there are certain do's and don'ts for her. From her childhood she was asked to take care of her complexion so that she can easily be appreciated by the groom and his mother. “ Don't go in the sun, you will get darker”- these words made a deep impact in her mind. Deshpande's women character like Saru proves her to be a rebel when her mother expresses her reluctance to pursue her career as a medical student. She finally manages to become a doctor. Again she has to show her resistance when asked by her mother not to marry Manohar, a man of lower caste in comparison to them. Deshpande is trying to concentrate on a society where most of the women are not economically and ideologically independent. So she presents such characters who want to create a space of their own to serve as a living symbol.

Saru is caught up in a dilemma between her personal and professional life. She is a successful doctor and her husband, Manohar, is an underpaid lecturer. Manohar feels jealous of her. As a result, to take revenge, he imposes physical torture- every night Saru is raped<sup>9</sup> by her husband. Saru is proved to be marginalized in terms of resistance because she could not resist her husband's brutal tortures. So the way she is silenced by the dominant ideology of her husband is prompting her to speak on behalf of herself. The patriarchal structure of our society has given the man a discretionary power to use the body of a woman in any of the ways – whether it may be love making or it may be consuming her body against her consent. So a woman is doubly marginalized- first because she is a woman and secondly, she is inferior to man.

Gayatri Spivak writes in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

“ Between patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation the figure of a woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘Third World Woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.”

Saru found herself trapped in Manohar’s frustrated sexuality. Her limitless agony, deep psychological trauma, oppression finally prompts her to leave her husband’s home and look forward to her father. Her quest for self, her desire to serve people by offering them medical treatment and her invincible will to search her identity - this trio make her a vulnerable being. Saru’s character can be understood in terms of psychological precepts. From the early childhood she had the clear idea of gender discrimination – her mother emphasized that boys are “assets” whereas girls are burdens. This is the very stereotypical notion of gender discrimination and Saru’s feminism is a manifestation of this discrimination. Her idea of being an unwanted daughter to her parents developed from her mother who emphasized that her birth created lot of calamities – “it was terrible” (169)

Saru’s idea to make herself an autonomous being proves her potential. She is constantly suffering from some dilemma – which way to go- what to do. In a country like India (the setting of Deshpande’s novels is Indian) where marriage is the best alternative for most of the women Deshpande makes her women characters slightly different. They also value marriage but that is not the only choice for them. This gives a different dimension to Saru’s life. When she walked out of her husband’s place, she selects an alternative – she pursues her career. Critics like S. Prasanna Sree have pointed out some specific comments of Saru after analyzing the novel. “My life is my own” (220) – this becomes the motto of Saru’s life from then onwards.

Deshpande’s women characters do not confine themselves to one particular man- in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* we find the same strategy. After leaving Manohar, Saru has affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao. Deshpande talks explicitly about female sexuality. She liberates her women characters from sticking to one particular partner. This is also seen in her other novels like *Roots and Shadows*, *Small Remedies*, *That Long Silence*, *Moving On* where women characters like Indu, Madhu, Jaya leaves the idea of living and loving one particular man. This is a bold attempt made by Deshpande to leave the traditional ideas and going beyond the “norms”. Our society is full of paradoxes. A man can do everything – he can develop several extramarital affairs but when it becomes the question of a woman the idea gets reversed. So whatever the term equality denotes, in case of a woman it is actually a myth.

In Deshpande’s novel *Moving On* Manjari’s sexuality is explicitly portrayed. Manjari, like Deshpande’s other women characters, is bold and steadfast. She decides to marry Shyam against her parents’ wishes and she even gives up studying medicine. But very soon the novelist problematizes the situation. Manjari’s sister Malu is made pregnant by Shyam. Malu dies after delivery, followed by Shyam’s suicide. One can understand the amount of mental agony Manjari went through. She tried to come out of the trauma. What makes Manjari’s sexuality explicit is the betrayal of her body. Her husband’s betrayal and his illicit relationship with her sister have already made her a frustrated being. On the other hand, her long detachment with a male body arouses her desire. As a result, she sleeps with her tenant who is much younger than her. It is absolutely her physical desire; the mind has nothing to do with it. “Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations.”(257)

The problem of being a female has always been focused by Deshpande in her novels. It is clear from almost all of her novels that there is a tremendous “feminine” consciousness working within her. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* feels the pain of being a woman because the society makes her feel like that. Right from the childhood Indu was reminded by the women members of the family that she is a “female”. So her behavioural pattern will not be alike a male. She has certain restrictions which she is bound to follow:

“ As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said , for a female to live and survive.” (158)

The meek and submissive nature of a woman is actually a patriarchal manifestation. If it is not so then the prescribed norms of a woman cannot be different from a man. The man made society determines the behavioral pattern of a woman. Following the trend of post colonial feminism and the mode of third world<sup>10</sup> fiction Deshpande has tried to merge these two concepts to introduce a single concept – to clear space for multiple voices. Who are these multiple voices may raise questions but woman – rather women are to be included within the discourse of the multiple voices. Deshpande’s women – modern, educated, empowered, questions man’s lack of concern about women’s likings and dis likings.

Indu went against her family as a mode of resistance to marry a man against her aunt’s wishes. Here Deshpande again shows that her women characters can go against their family to fulfill their wishes – if it be the case of marriage or career selection. Every individual being should have the right to take decision in life. So what Indu has done is not unjustified in that sense. She married Jayant because she loved him from the bottom of her heart. But the crucial point is Indu walks out of her relationship when she felt that her identity is at stake. At the initial stage of her marriage she could not trace the increasing complexes in their relationship. But later on she realized everything. She is caught up in the marital tension. So, to liberate herself from the tensions she left Jayant.

Deshpande creates a turning point in Indu’s character. She walks out of Jayant’s life. But that does not end everything. That same Indu is involved both physically and mentally with Naren, her cousin. But it was not love; it was an engagement with the body of Naren. Deshpande makes Indu an individual in several ways. She has rebelled against her aunts so that they cannot “fit” her within their circle – she makes herself free from all prejudices. Her inner self has tried to convince her family as well as the world that first and foremost she is an individual. “I would be most emphatically myself. Indu.”(143). She wanted to uproot the fearful shadows of the ruthless, patriarchal world which has reduced her “self” into a marginalized being. This marginalization is both physical and mental. Indu’s search for identity reminds us of Saru – she was also trying to establish a separate identity of her own. Siddhartha Sharma, in his analysis of Indu agrees with Deshpande.

One of the bold attempts made by Deshpande is to touch the private domain of her women characters. She explicitly talks about women’s sexuality, physical relations, extramarital affairs, sex without marriage. These are not exceptional thoughts but in Indian society these words are still taboos. It is almost unthinkable for an Indian unmarried girl to make a relation with a man who is married – as Devyani did in *The Country of Deceit*. Her culture cannot permit her to do that. After the death of her parents she lives alone and suddenly she meets Ashoke Chinappa who is married and has children. But that is not the limitation of Deshpande’s women

characters. In spite of knowing the restrictions in their relation, Devyani still violates the law of being a virgin without marriage and indulges in sexual relationship with Ashoke. She is guided by the pleasure principle and fulfills the desire of her body. Whether it is a man or a woman sexuality is the main driving force of a body's expression. It is agreed by all – whether it may be the Freudian psychoanalysis or in may be the analysis of Foucault – body is everywhere. Both the mind and the body constitute the self. But in a country like India overt sexuality of a woman is considered a shame. Finally it often leads to the silencing of a woman. Deshpande has never tried to conceal the sexual needs of a woman. It is a very basic instinct but mostly the Indian women are supposed to be presented as a model of chastity. Responding to the body is not a very good idea for a woman. She will have to wait for her partner's response – if he agrees then her desire will be fulfilled otherwise no option left for her. She will have to suppress her desire.

Deshpande's creative self makes her women characters creative also. But their creativity does not get ample scope to flourish. That is why they have an endless search for their identity. Jaya, in *That Long Silence* is a creative writer. She gets pleasure to write. At the beginning of the novel she is encouraged by Mohan, her husband, to write but later on the encouragement was transformed into a mental complexity. Jaya, on Mohan's advice, was writing about "light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle class housewife" (148-149) but that does not give her satisfaction. Her intense desire to do something of her "own" is to some extent fulfilled only when she confronts life through her fiction. She writes the story about a man "...who could not reach out to his wife except through her body" (144) but Mohan takes it to be the truth of their life. This creates tension in their relationship.

Jaya's self is torn between her identity as a wife and her autonomy as a creative writer. One remarkable factor about Deshpande's women characters is the silent co-operation. Jaya remains silent and it is considered by her husband to be her protest. It is actually her silent protest. Jaya gets support from Kamat, a man living in the apartment near Jaya. Kamat encourages her to write good piece of literature. Here Kamat's role is sounder than the role of Jayant. Deshpande always leaves an open ended way for her heroines – if she cannot adjust with her husband she could think of another man. That must not be considered as a sin in case of a woman. Her women are subject to sexual liberation. But that also cannot make them wholly detached from her husband. So finally Deshpande's women characters think of returning to their husbands. Although this is their silent submission to patriarchy but the novelist never ignores the value of marriage. Coming back to the husband does not mean defeat of a woman. But it should be remembered first that women must not forget their "self".

One of the goals of post colonial feminism is to clear space for multiple voices. Jaya raises her voice when Mohan wants to change her name from Jaya to Suhasini. This can also be considered as a mode of resistance. Deshpande's women characters, in most cases, come to the level of consciousness after some crisis. When Jaya finds out that her identity is getting blurred for the mental complexities of her husband, she becomes a rebel. But this is not rebellion in the physical sense; rather it is a mental rebellion. Jaya could only recover herself after her long silence – here silence plays the role of a weapon. It signifies that everything cannot be altered only through active protest; sometimes the unspoken words bear much strength than the spoken ones. At least Jaya's silence is expressive of that.

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande we can locate extreme forms of love which ranges from sexual abuse and cruelty to the love that transcends sex. Sexism is often expressed through male domination – that is probably the root cause of the subjugation and oppression of women. Bell Hooks, in her essay *Sisterhood* makes it clear that it is not necessary for women "to share

common oppression to fight equally to end oppression” (2000: 43) nor do they require “anti male sentiments to bond them together” (2000:67). The best thing is to share their problems and experiences. As in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru is sexually abused by her husband. In *The Binding Vine* Urmi comes to know from the diaries of her late mother in law, Mira, that she was the victim of an incompatible marriage. Her husband never asked for her consent. This prompts Mira to have an aversion to physical intimacy with her husband but still she has to put up with his obsession for her. So it is clear that even a forced violation of a woman’s body can ultimately lead to rape.

From the study of Deshpande’s women characters in search of their identity both the implicit and explicit forms of patriarchy have been critiqued in her novels. In the novel *A Matter of Time* the novelist shows how Sumi becomes the victim of the implicit patriarchal domination. Her husband Gopal leaves her after long years of marriage without explaining anything. She lives in utter desolation without knowing her fault. Deshpande focuses on another factor – it is amply evident that every time the woman tries to find her own fault – it takes a lot of time to recognize that one cannot be solely responsible for anything. Here patriarchy plays an implicit part – it is not clear for a long time why Gopal leaves Sumi. Another point of focus is that always we hear of a man leaving a woman – the opposite never happens. Deshpande is not partial about her women – she follows the pattern of society that it is a man who leaves a woman. Following the societal norm she creates a problem for her women and then, unlike the characters of Doris Lessing – Mary Tusner, Molly, Marian and Anna in *The Golden Note Book* or Martha and Maise of *A Ripple From The Storm*, makes her women characters strong enough to fight and make a space for their own. Sumi gets herself prepared for future:

“... re tracing my steps, picking up things, thinking- is this it? But she has turned resolutely away from even their immediate past; she is preparing herself for the future....” (122)

Another dimension in *A Matter of Time* is the long silence between Kalyani and Shripati. Jaya’s silence in *That Long Silence* is imposed on her in one way but Kalyani’s silence is like an exile for her from life. She had a mentally retarded son named Madhav. Madhav is lost at the railway station while Kalyani is to board the train to Bangalore. Her husband does not talk to her for the next thirty years and soon after the incident Shripati sends her back to her parent’s home with their two daughters. So woman is constantly being made silent as if they are responsible for everything. Madhav’s loss cannot make Kalyani entirely responsible because a child is not only a mother’s responsibility, the father must be equally responsible. But, especially in Indian society a mother is supposed to be the “Dashabhuja”<sup>11</sup> – she with her ten hands will manage the entire universe.

An analysis of the women characters of Deshpande highlights another point. Following P.G Joshi’s observation we find in her novels an extensive range of women characters – belonging to different classes, castes and educational levels. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Sumi in *A Matter of Time*, Manjari in *Moving On* – they belong to the same class, caste and educational level. But characters like Shakutai and Kalpana in the *Binding Vine* indicate the marginalized woman. Shakutai is a working class woman, she is poor and above all she is explicitly dominated by patriarchy. Her only daughter Kalpana is raped and she makes Kalpana solely responsible for that. The demands of the post colonial terminology rely on the constructs such as the centre/margin, dominant/ hegemonic, silenced/subaltern. Deshpande, once again, through her

placement of the women characters in the post colonial scenario tries to prove the validity of the above construct. Some critics read her work as “position of Third World” women in an influentially male reading of post colonial theories”.

Deshpande makes an attempt to contest various ideologically encoded binaries like speech/ silence, tradition/ modernity, male/ female, oppressor/ victim, dominant/ resistant, central/ marginal, majority/ minority. This is evident from her attempt to move on to “her stories”. Women’s stories are most of the time “silent”. Women have become the minorities. They are supposed to be traditional. So, at first Deshpande warns her women characters by her mothers not to go against the so called “norms” and then prompts them to break the barriers. Otherwise the position of women can never be changed. Our societal construct has always made the male an oppressor and the female a victim. In Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* Tess was not responsible for her rape, the way Kalpana is not responsible for hers. Deshpande attempts to locate her women characters from the margin to the centre.

One of the very significant findings of Deshpande’s women is she always liberates her women characters from all sorts of problems through the means of writing. Jaya’s entity as a creative writer helps her to find a space of her own. Mira’s diary writing liberates her from her conjugal tensions. It also gives the readers a scope to restore her identity. In *The Country of Deceit* Devyani translates books and she writes also. Words can best express anyone. Without the sound image the world is dumb. Through words they can communicate with thousands of women who share the same fate. It is also a means of autonomy. Deshpande has always tried to establish this autonomous self of a woman in the male dominated world. The female subjugation is mostly rooted from man’s domination of a woman. But women are responsible to some extent. Their socialization prompts them to consider their husbands as “gods”.

In *A Matter of Time* Sumi liberates herself by such an action which de colonizes the patriarchy. She starts creative writing to resist her marginality and liberate herself. There is a question in front of her- whether she is Gopal’s wife only or the mother of her children or an individual being. Definitely her heart has selected the third one from the multiple choice question because it is not the question set in her exams – it is the question of her identity – it is a question related to her life. Her mode of liberation is writing.

Madhu, in Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Small Remedies* adopts the same means of liberation. She is appointed by a publishing house to write a biography of a famous classical singer, Savitribai Indorekar. She wanted to get rid of her marital tension. Writing gives her a scope to escape from the tension in her marriage and to identify her self. Typical of Deshpande’s women characters, Madhu was once involved in a physical relation with someone and when she reveals it to her husband Som, the tension begins. If the same would have been done by Som then it was not that serious because a man’s act of adultery is not at all a crime. Whereas if the same act is performed by a woman then it is the violation of the “sacramental”<sup>12</sup> union called marriage. In a country like India women are still expected to be a mother goddess like Sita or Savitri<sup>13</sup>.

Deshpande’s women characters also signify the changing time with the change in their private lives. It has been significantly pointed out that marital tension and adjustment problem of a woman within marriage is one of the notable features in Deshpande’s novels. So many obligations were imposed on them by their mothers and aunts – as a result they were disgusted. They needed some private space – a space of their own. Their constant deprivation by the patriarchal society made them bound to walk out from home and to search a world of their own. But surprisingly the fathers of these women characters do not impose anything on them in the

true sense of the term. But the husbands played the leading role. Their private lives were altered to a great extent. Deshpande questions the adequacy of the accepted social norms. She questions the conceptual construct of a woman and tries to de-construct that image of the same woman.

Motherhood is not a compulsory requirement for Deshpande's women characters. This is a revolutionary thought of the novelist to liberate her women from the "burden" of motherhood. Often we say that a woman cannot be a woman in the proper sense until and unless she is a mother. But we never find that Saru is enjoying her motherhood, nor does Jaya feel that motherhood is mandatory. But surprisingly all of them have experienced the pain of childbirth.

The changing world is significant of the changing faces of women. They cannot restrict their role in enjoying motherhood or doing the domestic chores. Both the home and the outer world are equally important to them. Sometimes the outer world is prioritized. Deshpande's women are autonomous, iconoclastic<sup>14</sup> beings. Trying to view it from the post colonial dimension Deshpande tries to concentrate on the autonomy of women irrespective of their class, caste, and race. Not that she creates scope only for the women who are privileged – the working class; poor, underprivileged women have also occupied space in her novels. That is definitely a fair judgement otherwise Deshpande would have been labeled as a writer of the elites. So her attempt to bring all kinds of women from margin to the centre is very significant. Deshpande is a third world woman writer although her position is different. But it has to be admitted that somehow she may also have faced the dilemma of a woman writer.

The study of the women characters of Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly placed the question in front of the readers – is feminism in search of identity? In answer to this question it can be said that feminism is really trying to search its identity through the multiplicity of voices. But some may argue at the point of "feminism". For them it can be said that the question of analyzing women's voices through a feminist theoretical method is necessary as the society is not ready to give women their due respect. Equality of women is nothing but a myth and it is proved from many sources. Deshpande's novels are one of those sources. So everyone can look forward to the universalization of woman. Only then women can be entirely brought into the dominant discourse and feminisms' search for identity will be possible.

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