

**INHABITING ENCLOSURES AND CREATING SPACES:
EXISTENTIAL STATE OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF
SHASHI DESHPANDE AND ALICE WALKER**

A
THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

Supervisor:
Dr. Meena Pydah

Submitted by:
Aditi Singh

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF ARTS
DAYALBAGH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)
DAYALBAGH, AGRA-282005**

2020

CONCLUSION

“Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of existence, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, IT IS! , heedless in the moment whether it were a man before thee or a flower or a grain of sand? Without reference in short to this or that mode or form of existence? If thou has attained to this thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder.”

—ST. Coleridge

This thesis presents a close study of the questions of human existence; the place of an individual being in a world that has no predetermined essence; and the mechanics of several enclosures that accentuate the existential pangs of the individual with reference to the selected novels of ShashiDeshpande and Alice Walker. Through their novels, these two writers successfully confront the hegemonic structures existing in their respective societies, thus, helping the women to exist beyond the prevalent enclosures.

An in-depth study of the female characters especially that of the protagonists in the previous chapters reveal their existential dilemma, its causes and the solutions they adopt to overpower it and emerge as emancipated individuals. A detailed study of the voyage of the major and minor female characters of the selected works, clearly reflects the depiction of tenets of the philosophy of Existentialism, especially that of Sartre. Although Deshpande and Walker are not known as existentialists, this study shows that their works are loaded with recurring tenets and ideas of Existentialism and their heroines experience “an existential crisis” that “includes the inner conflicts and anxieties that accompany important human issues of purpose, responsibility, independence, freedom and commitment” (James 13).

Both Deshpande and Walker have drawn similar themes in their selected works with regard to oppression, alienation, angst, guilt, death, and identity which have been linked to the quest of the protagonists. While investigating the internal and external turmoil faced by women in the Indian and the African American societies, Deshpande and Walker respectively bring out a similar pattern of the existential crisis these women go through. The previous chapters reveal that while most of the enclosures like marriage, motherhood, pregnancy, sexism, etc. are common in their novels, Walker also deals with slavery, female genital mutilation, penury, and

colour racism as unpleasant and appalling aspects of the African American woman's life that work against her freedom.

This thesis sketches a study of the internal and external landscapes in the novels of Deshpande and that of Walker. Walker draws such strong interconnectivity between the interior landscape and the exterior landscape in the selected works that the reader cannot clearly grasp the inner workings of the character's psyche without referring to the external situations and vice versa. On the other hand, there is not much external action in the novels of Deshpande and most of the activity takes place in the mind of the protagonist. The analysis of her fictional canvas in this study reveals that as she focused on a limited space, the external landscape in her selected novels is narrow. In order to remunerate for the attenuation of external narrative structure and bring depth to the story, she induces several powerful symbols and images. Her protagonists are middle class women of Maharashtra and Kannada families stuck in their everyday monotonous routine. Once they face a major crisis, unable to relate with the traditional image of an ideal woman, they start questioning their existence. The already existing enclosures make it harder for them to attain harmony and they turn inward for answers to their existential dilemma.

It can be said that unlike the existential dilemma of the protagonists of Deshpande that is caused by their suffering in psychological terms, Walker's female characters live with a multifarious dilemma that is a result of equally burdening physical and psychological scars. Unlike Deshpande, the setting of the selected novels of Walker is a rural setting. Her fictional locale is mostly her own town Georgia which justifies her realistic and intense descriptions of the setting, encoded with images of desolation and despondency. The daily tedious schedule of the African American woman, along with, its recurrent images of adversity exudes a sense of dejection and marginalisation. Thus, Walker's novels depict the massive subjugation of the black woman that leads to her tormenting internal and external wounds, making the attainment of her existential freedom more challenging.

Apart from the interior and exterior landscapes, this study further reveals the similarities and dissimilarities between their art of narration which renders an existential dimension to their works. Both the novelists make use of fragmented sentences in order to display the frustrations,

negations and chaotic inner world of the female. Deshpande employs more than one voice narration in a single novel. Her use of double narrative imparts authentic delineation of a character. For example, Sarita's inner self is authentically portrayed with the help of this kind of narrative. Unlike Deshpande, Walker sticks to either the first person or the third person narration in a single work of fiction. Deshpande uses much more refined English with Hindi and Sanskrit words and phrases, whereas Walker uses Black Folks English to give a realistic touch to their works and bring authenticity to the world of their respective protagonists. Walker also makes use of explicit and unrefined words to depict the appalling condition of African American women in her novels. Both the novelists adopt the stream of consciousness technique to effectively depict the existential pangs of the female unable to enunciate her inner conflicts.

Both the writers let the reader decipher the confusions of the mind of the individual by exemplifying the abstract notions with suitable images and symbols. Most of Deshpande's images are carefully chosen to induce a sense of alienation and emptiness. Both the novelists delineate a sense of continuity in terms of certain images that can be traced repeatedly in different works, evoking the same sense in all the works. Image of home, silence, writing, and darkness are recurrent ones used by Deshpande, whereas, colors, clothing, quilting, wounded eye, songs and music are some of the most frequently used images and symbols in Walker's selected work of fiction. All these symbols have been wisely chosen by the novelists to display the different facets of the Indian and the African American woman's life. The imagery used by Walker can be differentiated from that of Deshpande on the ground that Walker's images are comparatively more condensed and brief, while Deshpande's images are more descriptive and are sometimes elaborated for many paragraphs. Unlike Deshpande, Walker's selected novels showcase her skill of striking an explicit link or connection among the different plots of her fictional works, by letting the characters of one novel reappear in other novels. The perfect example of this connection can be seen in *The Temple of My Familiar*, in which the two main characters, Celie and Shug from *The Color Purple* reappear.

Women characters in all the eight selected novels are painted from two different perspectives which make the portrayal more realistic in nature. One group of women like Akka,

Shakuntai, Vanna, Mira, Margaret, Josie, Lynne, etc, fail to attain an authentic existence and seem to be guided by a kind of self deceit or what can be termed as ‘bad faith’ in Sartre’s terminology. These women inertly compromise with the predicaments and conform to the ‘facticity’ and instead make excuses for not trying to transcend their situation. The other group, on the other hand, breaks the silence and successfully overcomes the existential predicament by taking full accountability for the choices they make. The female protagonists fall in the second category. Although they see their lives as meaningless, they make rigorous efforts to make sense out of it. The conscious awareness of their freedom awakens their sense of responsibility as individual beings and they begin to reflect on the purpose of their existence.

In all the selected novels of both Deshpande and Walker, there is a long period of questioning regarding the position of self when the protagonists find themselves stuck between the quest to attain authenticity and the restrictive boundaries of their situation. This study also takes into consideration the harsh reality of the female existence driven by the forces of guilt, shame, despair, anguish (which are described as ‘moods’ by Heidegger), that puts them into a state of nothingness, dread of death and alienation. This study extensively analyses the role of these burdensome ‘moods’ in the transition of the protagonists, thus, qualifying them as ‘existential subjects’. As these women assert their choice and free will, they begin to craft their own essence. Eventually Sarita, Jaya, Urmila, Manjari, Meridian, Ruth, Celie, and Lissierealise that the only way of defining oneself is through the act of living a life of their own, and by inhabiting some enclosures and at the same time breaking away from the others.

Deshpande and Walker consider freedom as the most valuable aspect of the human condition. They echo the mantra of existential humanism as declared by Sartre and further approved by Beauvoir and Camus that “you can always make something out of what you’ve been made into” (Flynn 49). Like true existentialists, Deshpande and Walker give foremost importance to the protagonist’s defiance or revolt against any system that objectifies her by hampering her ‘subjectivity’. The female characters of Walker’s selected novels are depicted as women who deal with the horrors of racial prejudice, verbal and sexual abuse, exploitation, male dominance, and monetary dearth. The novelist portrays an intense struggle on their part; a

struggle to reclaim their ‘subjectivity’ in an unfavorable, crushing and bizarre situation, at large. Walker’s women are mostly positioned under the threefold identity of an inferior worker, a woman, and always black.

On the other hand, Deshpande’s protagonists who belong to the middle class section of the society come from a comparatively privileged background. Although these women are not victims of racism and classism, they struggle due to gender bias and marital discord. Unlike Saru, Jaya, Urmī and Manjari, most of the women of Walker’s selected novels are deprived of getting the privilege of education. In the case of the women in Walker’s novels, it is mostly the knowledge of the ancestral history, culture and traditions of the black women that awakens a sense of ‘consciousness’ to their present state of condition as a ‘being-in-itself’. Thus, it can be stated that education in Deshpande’s novels, whereas, the knowledge of the folk traditions and culture in Walker’s, acts as a catalyst to the evolving consciousness of the female characters that ultimately leads them to the path of a renewed emancipated existence.

Both the novelists give importance to mythical stories and history of the ancestors but Deshpande, unlike Walker, tries to clearly suggest that these folktales and myths should be modified and altered befitting the life of the ‘new woman’. With this intention, in *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande paints the character of Mira as an altered version of the mythical poet, Mirabai who is regarded as a staunch believer of mysticism by many. By modifying the character, Deshpande casts her as someone dealing with the real world in her poetical works. These Myths can be seen as one of the structures of ‘facticity’ which Sartre talks about in *Being and Nothingness* for they showcase the history of Indian women. Deshpande fills her novels with such references to the Indian myths to work out the interior landscape of the Indian woman’s psyche. On the other hand, Walker’s purpose of using several mythical legends and folktales is mostly to honor the black sensibility. *The Temple of My Familiar* is the best example of Walker’s belief in the power of oral traditions and myths to bring transformation in the contemporary black woman’s chaotic world. However, a few mythical references like “the monumental myth of black motherhood” in *Meridian* are also used for their notions which need

to be changed because they heighten the existential dilemma of the African American woman (qtd. in Gomez 258).

In order to reflect the incidents and experiences that bring consistent changes in the protagonist's interior landscape, and assist her continuously evolving consciousness, Deshpande employs flashbacks and nostalgia and then she works through the protagonist's dialogues and monologues. The back and forth shift of the narration between past and present helps to maintain the existential fervor of the novels, and mirrors Deshpande's knowledge of the inner workings of the Indian woman's mind. Both the novelists draw on subjective impressions established by a wide range of individuals to illustrate not just the exterior proceedings but also the interior process of recalling, assessing, brooding, etc. By bringing the past in the forefront, the reader gets a glance into the present state of confusion of the character. For Walker, it is the non linear structure of *Meridian* and *The Temple of My Familiar* that assists her in juxtaposing the past and the present.

It is the remembrance of their past life in all the selected novels that becomes a source of self assessment, assisting the protagonists to get hold of their present situation. Memories are also used as a narrative device by Deshpande and Walker to evaluate the individual's relationship with 'self' as well as with 'other'. The past of the protagonists like Josie, Meridian, Jaya, Manjari and Saru are also reflected through recurring dreams and nightmares which further reflect their pain, anxiety, dread and hopelessness. Thus, a common pattern of reminiscing or recalling the past in all the novels can be drawn as the protagonists face their guilt, shame and despair by tracing their roots in the past experiences. Both the novelists illustrate that the female can overcome the existential agony or the state of existential crisis and instill some meaning in nothingness by reconnecting with the past.

The return of the protagonist to her old residence or natal or ancestral home at a critical point of time in her life results in a series of retrospective nostalgia in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *That Long Silence* and *Moving On*. This step acts as a catalyst that leads to the recognition of the meaningless life that the protagonist has been living which gives rise to her existential dilemma. However in Walker's novels, the house of the protagonist is used as a

device of entrapment; a place where women's individuality is denied. Celie, Meridian, and Ruth transform their existential agony into self sufficiency only when they move away from their natal place of living.

Walker gives priority to sisterhood in order to understand one's role as an individual in the world; a role beyond the traditional roles of a dutiful daughter, wife and mother. Female bonding helps the protagonists find hope amidst the enclosures, and amidst the mayhem of anguish and despair. The novelist interconnects individual consciousness and collective consciousness to give a better understanding of one's own freedom along with that of other beings, sufficing Sartre's existential vision of 'being-for-other'. This type of bonding among women or the role of a community of women in equipping an individual with support in Deshpande's selected oeuvre of fiction is not as strongly projected as in the selected works of Walker.

Although the other three novels do not touch this theme of sisterhood, the power of female bonding and support can be witnessed in Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* where Urmila makes sense of her present situation, and gives a purpose to her life by becoming a voice to the agony of other less privileged women. Urmila attains her authenticity by using her freedom to speak about the despair and fears of the women around her. Thus, she chooses for the society as a whole while choosing for herself, supporting Sartre's view "In choosing, I choose for all people" (Flynn 46). Thus, it can be concluded that an individual consciousness stimulates the collective consciousness in only one novel of Deshpande. Her other protagonists, namely, Saru, Jaya, and Manjari after much brooding and confrontation of reality, decide to live with authenticity, leaving behind their existential situation. On the other hand, Celie, Meridian, Ruth, Carlotta and Zede after discovering their own possibilities at an individual level, continue to bond with other black women, thus, keep influencing the collective consciousness of the people of their society.

Both Deshpande and Walker seek marriage and motherhood as entrapments of a woman's freedom and individuality, to use existential terminology, demanding her to live in 'relation to the other'. They are projected as constrained spaces or enclosures that confine the

growth of the female as an individual ‘being-for-itself’, threatening her authentic existence. Deshpande’s protagonists at first seek marriage as an escape from the bondage of gender bias at home. Ironically, the marriage itself becomes a source of greater psychological wreck. It can be stated that the husband becomes ‘the other’ and leads to the alienation of the female from her own possibilities. For Walker’s female characters like Margaret, Mem, Celie, Meridian, etc, marriage results in their alienation, shame, agony, and pain. Motherhood becomes a major source of existential dilemma as the society demands the mother to abandon her individuality.

The discussions in the previous chapters highlight death as a more prominent motif in the novels of Deshpande than in the selected novels of Walker. Deshpande’s women treat one’s death as a dreadful “inexorable given of the human condition” (Pollman 117) but death of the ‘other’ brings the ‘self’ closer to one’s authenticity. The knowledge of death as the end point of one’s existence, for Deshpande’s protagonists like for Sartre, generates both hope and dread, thus, triggering an internal conflict. Death of Urmī’s daughter, Dhruva’s death, death of her family members, and death of Kamat are important incidents that alter the lives of Urmī, Saru, Manjari and Jaya, respectively. Death as a ‘non-being’ brings the women closer to ‘being’. Once they realize the inevitability of death, and overcome its dread, they start recognising the multiple possibilities or ways in which life can be directed. The motif of journey is the most significant common motif found in the works of both the novelists. Although it can be concluded from the careful analysis of the novels that Deshpande primarily focuses on the protagonist’s inner journey towards self assertion which entails an extensive process of retrospection and introspection, whereas, Walker depicts both psychological and literal journey of the protagonist.

This study highlights that although silence is used as a more frequent and dominant metaphor by Deshpande, both the novelists shun the use of silence as a defense mechanism towards one’s inner conflicts, and rather project it as a symbol of powerlessness; an excuse to “to avoid the discomfort which arises from anguish” (qtd in Roy 28). The protagonist who finds refuge in silence seems to be carrying ‘bad faith’. In all selected novels, silence denotes the alienation, the subjugation of women, and manifests Sartre’s idea of ‘nothingness’. The novels

clearly indicate that “...silence is the condition of one who has been dominated, made an object; talk is the mark of freeing, of making one subject” (Hooks 129). But it is in this silence, in this state of emptiness that Saru, Jaya, Celie, Mem and Meridian mutter the will to break the cycle of their meaningless existence. It is the breaking of this silence which marks the transition of the protagonists like Jaya and Celie, from an object to a subject, from ‘being-in-itself’ to ‘being-for-itself’.

Instead of silence, articulation as a tool to enunciate one’s inner turbulence is advocated by Deshpande and Walker. Walker uses the epistolary format in *The Purple Purple* to report Celie’s dismal state of inner landscape in her own words; her mental anguish, her crisis and her complete estrangement. The novelist uses this form of articulation as a significant way to develop Celie’s own values or essence. Deshpande’s women use articulation as a creative device in the form of writing, giving a voice to their state of nothingness, alienation and sometimes dread of death. Writing as the most recurrent and significant symbol of the estrangement and the unfulfilled desires is projected in the case of Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*; Mira, the mother-in-law of *The Binding Vine*; and Mai, the mother of the protagonist of *Moving On*. Thus, writing for Deshpande, and quilting and engaging oneself in other forms of creative art for Walker, are endorsed as ways of overcoming alienation, incorporating a meaning to one’s life, and “to gain freedom through creativity” (*Being and Nothingness* 118).

Both Deshpande and Walker celebrate female sexuality in the selected works and do not hesitate in using sexual connotations. This study reveals the assertion of one’s subjectivity by asserting one’s sexuality. The novels of Deshpande give voice to the sexual dissatisfaction, suppression and exploitation of the protagonist trapped in a loveless marriage. While driving Jaya, Saru, Manjari and Urmi towards emancipation, Deshpande gives space to their sexual emancipation, and neither disregards the body of the woman nor its demands. They take resort to freedom both, intellectually and sexually. This sexual emancipation signifies their liberation from their long drawn existential dilemma. Walker goes a step further by bringing in lesbianism as another tool to break away from the traditional bondages of patriarchy. By engaging herself

in a lesbian relationship with Shug, Celie takes charge of her body, thus recognising her own subjectivity by overcoming ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘bad faith’.

Deshpande not only talks about the external and internal conflicts but also prescribes a middle path of striking a balance between tradition and modernity. In one of her interviews she clearly states her stance when she says, "self-assertion and conforming to one's given role are not necessarily contradictory but can even be complimentary if one defines freedom within certain regulations" ("An interview" 236). She supports the idea of achieving autonomy and authenticity within the framework of the society. This idea has been implemented in all her selected novels. When the heroines of her novels find their voice and still decide to stick to their respective families, they do not reflect defeat. Instead, it can be considered a victory of the inner self. While Deshpande gives importance to family, Walker focuses on community. Alice Walker has written all the four selected novels with an underlying will to restore black womanhood through reconciliation and oneness. Walker, like Meridian, withdrew her support from the Civil Rights Movement and substituted her idea of revolution with the idea of transformation. All the four novels advocate hope and forgiveness for the ‘survival whole’ of her people.

Walker, unlike Deshpande, depicts man as a progressive being, who sacrifices his phallic superiority and shows that he is capable of transformation and helps to restore the female to her rightful position as a strong individual entity. Men like Albert, Grange, and Suwelo undergo inner transformation and help black women in their journey towards emancipation. Therefore, it is believed that while the female protagonists of Walker “achieve psychological wholeness when they are able to fight oppression,” her male characters “achieve psychological health and wholeness only when they are able to acknowledge women’s pain and their role in it” (Winchell).

Reverberating Sartre’s foremost existential belief of ‘existence precedes essence’, this study delivers that the protagonists of all the selected novels are projected as women who are not victims but fighters who make every possible effort to overcome their existential crisis and emerge as self assertive beings. At first, they exist, then they acknowledge their responsibility

and with that realization, they endeavor to create an essence amidst anguish, isolation, chaos, absurdity and nothingness, therefore, relating to Sartre's opinion that "man makes himself" (*Being and Nothingness* 97).

All the eight selected works prove that the enclosures not only hinder the growth of a woman as an individual being but also accentuate her existential predicament. Both Walker and Deshpande portray the sense of negation that is instilled in a woman when she is subjected to rape or sexual abuse. The society, the family and the male counterpart play a vital role in driving a woman towards not just social but also existential alienation. Therefore, this study examines the selected works in the light of Sartre's concept of the 'look of the Other'. Sartre's notions of 'sadism', 'masochism', and 'hatred' are also traced while depicting the effect of patriarchy on a woman's life. Both the novelists provide insights into what Sartre calls 'intersubjectivity' while depicting the role of society in bringing complexity in the world of the protagonist. The previous chapters reveal that both the novelists believed that the 'look of the Other' sometimes becomes a threat to the authentic existence of that individual being, and leads to a kind of psychic disintegration. This threat is multifaceted in the novels of Walker.

The heavy sense of responsibility, in existential terms, that accompanies freedom is also given substantial significance in this study as both the novelists illustrate that the realisation of being responsible for one's own life, gives way to the process of attaining an authentic existence. They advocate the message of existentialism that "everyone of us, as an individual, is responsible- responsible for who he is, responsible for the way he faces and deals with the world and responsible ultimately for the way the world is" (Helaly 4). As harbingers of freedom and equality, the two novelists suggest several ways to put an end to the existential dilemma, alienation and feelings of anguish, guilt and dread, thus, asking women to look for an individual identity and strive for emancipation. Amidst the repugnant aspects of life that make it adverse, these two bring in hope and exultation, reminding the reader of Camus' words: "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 140).

Both Deshpande and Walker expect women to recognise the possibilities of their respective lives, and to use their freedom to choose even in a setup that constraints their freedom. This study also determines that the difficulties and existing enclosures can be used as chances to renew the ‘self’ by asserting one’s individuality and subjectivity. All the female protagonists succeed in transcending their existential situation and turning it into an opportunity to attain emancipation and authenticity. The novelists reiterate the existential idea of ‘nonconformity’ by advocating against passivity and compromise with one’s agony and making a transit through compliance. Deshpande and Walker want women to exercise their freedom to make choices in a way that they do not lose sight of their existence. They do not believe in the concept of revolution or violent protest and provide a substitute in the form of self transformation. Unlike many of their respective contemporaries, both the novelists project that the answer to all the conflicts lies within one self and does not depend on outwardly societal changes.

The relevance of the study in today’s world can be seen in the modern woman’s predicament and failure to find a meaning and purpose of her existence in the modern world of science and rationalism, which can be very well reflected in the words Jean Baptiste Clement, the protagonist of Albert Camus’ *The Fall*, who tries to reclaim wholeness in life:

He who clings to a law does not fear the judgement that puts him in his place within an order he believes in. But the keenest of human torments is to be judged without law. Yet we are in that torment. Deprived of their natural curb, the judges, loosed at random, are racing through their job, Hence we have to try to go faster than they, don't we? And it's a real mad house. (86-87)

The crisis of life in the face of meaninglessness is so menacing that it carries a threat to crumble every realm of an individual’s life. The unsettling angst faced by a woman in today’s world arises “not only from persecution, famine, ruin, but also from inner problems...a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence” (3).

This study provides a better understanding of the rootlessness and isolation of the modern woman who is still striving hard to create an equal space for herself. The selected novels that have been analysed from an existential outlook, pave the way to the renewal of a woman to help her create the essence of life. This study reveals the importance of questioning

not just the surroundings that negate their freedom but also to question and arouse one's own consciousness to achieve a true authentic existence.

**INHABITING ENCLOSURES AND CREATING SPACES:
EXISTENTIAL STATE OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF
SHASHI DESHPANDE AND ALICE WALKER**

A
SUMMARY OF THE THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

Supervisor:

Dr. Meena Pydah

Submitted by:

Aditi Singh

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF ARTS
DAYALBAGH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)
DAYALBAGH, AGRA-282005
2020**

This thesis presents a close study of the questions of human existence; the place of an individual being in a meaningless world; and the mechanics of several enclosures that accentuate the existential pangs of the individual with reference to the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande and Alice Walker. Through their novels, these two renowned writers coming from two different backgrounds, successfully confront the hegemonic structures existing in their respective societies, thus, helping the women to exist beyond the enclosures of patriarchy, sexism, racism, marriage, motherhood, etc.

A detailed study of the voyage of the major and minor female characters of the selected works, clearly, reflects the unconsciously depicted tenets of the philosophy of Existentialism. As Existentialism is a very broad term which deals with different concepts of many philosophers, this study is primarily based on the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, who has given the term its definitive expression. This study deals with some of the important features of Sartrean Existentialism like existence precedes essence, existential humanism, man as a subject rather than an object, freedom of choice, responsibility, ‘authenticity’, ‘nothingness’, ‘transcendence’ and ‘facticity’, ‘bad faith’, quest for identity and meaning, guilt, alienation, dread of death, anxiety, despair, etc.

While investigating the internal and external turmoil faced by women in the Indian and in the African-American societies, Deshpande and Walker respectively bring out the existential crisis these women go through. The stories of violence and discrimination faced by women, in their day to day lives, provided these two writers with the required theoretical frameworks to develop their views.

Women in all the eight selected novels, especially the female protagonists see their lives as meaningless, and make rigorous efforts to make sense out of it. The conscious awareness of their suppression awakens their sense of responsibility as individual selves. Eventually Sarita, Jaya, Urmila, Manjari, Meridian, Ruth, Celie, and Lissie realize that the only way of defining oneself is through the act of living a life of their own, and by inhabiting some enclosures and at the same time breaking away from the others. They echo the mantra of existential humanism as declared by Sartre and further approved by Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus.

Both the novelists, Deshpande and Walker, being products of their societies, and being exuberant observers of their surroundings, truly project their experiences and those of the women they encounter through their fictional stories. Deshpande, through her selected novels, reveals the existence of great discrepancy between the expectations of a middle class Indian woman from her individual self and that of the society she lives in. Although the novelist grew up in a liberal environment at home, she was not blind to the sufferings of the women around her. Deshpande started writing in the post independent era which accompanied many transitions in the Indian society like the emergence of the middle class along with industrialisation. Being an avid observer, Deshpande understands that the several enclosures that bound a woman lead to her predicaments. Even the educated, financially independent women with all the civil and political rights, are expected to follow the examples of Sita, Gandhari and Savitri.

The protagonists of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* and *Moving On* are ordinary middle class women of Maharashtra and Kannada families stuck in their everyday monotonous routine. Once they face a major crisis, unable to relate with the traditional image of an ideal woman, they start questioning their existence. The already existing enclosures make it harder for them to attain harmony and they turn inward for answers to their existential predicaments. In such a situation, these women feel isolated. With this alienation, begin their quest for meaning in life. Thus, each novel depicts the revolt of the modern woman; revolt against her secondary status; revolt against her silent subjugation; revolt against the mythical concept of ideal womanhood; revolt against any kind of injustice or enclosure she has been facing in the name of tradition. She looks for autonomy and strives hard to come out of her existential state, and she breaks free from the conventional shackles while remaining a part of their society and family.

The disconcerting memories of gender discrimination, the guilt of her younger brother's death and an unhappy married life proliferates Sarita's alienation in *The Dark Holds No Terror*. She does not oppose to her husband's sadistic treatment of her, thus, accepting her secondary position by not speaking up against the injustice that she suffers at the hands of her husband. When Sarita recognizes her 'inauthentic' existence, she experiences a colossal wave of anxiety,

which becomes the beginning of her changed life. The period of separation and isolation from her husband which she spends at her natal home, gives Saru the opportunity to focus on her inner turbulences. She revolts against her own sense of guilt and takes the responsibility of her choices. Once she decides to take the reins of her life in her own hands, she realizes that she is her own refuge. As the story concludes, she affirms her identity as an individual without breaking her marriage. She makes an unbendable resolution of never compromising her individuality at any cost, thus, moving away from darkness towards light. Therefore, it can be stated that Saru reverberates the existential concept of ‘individuality’ and ‘authenticity’.

Like Saru, Jaya of *That Long Silence* is another nonconformist protagonist of Deshpande. While Saru fails to recognize her authentic self in the beginning of the story due to her guilt, Jaya fails at it because of her silence. As she moves back in her old Dadar flat where she gets the time to analyse the meaning of her existence, she starts questioning her identity. As she struggles with the crisis alone, she is overpowered by ‘anguish’. She takes responsibility to assert her individual identity by readjusting her life and breaking her silence. Thus, it can be said that Jaya finally understands the need to claim one’s own individual freedom and use it to add meaning to one’s own existence. However meaningless life seems to be, she understands that life has always to be made possible.

Although both Saru and Jaya emerge as individualists, it is Urmila of *The Binding Vine* who can be called the boldest of all as she is the one who channelises her own despair to help the other women and acts as an anchor to project their agony. She encounters several problems and conflicts while fighting for other women but she does not diverge from her chosen path due to those enclosures, thus, finding the essence of her life. Urmila attains her authenticity by using her freedom to speak about the despair and fears of the women around her who remain silent victims. Thus, she chooses for the society as a whole while choosing for herself, supporting Sartre’s view- “In choosing, I choose for all people”. Through this novel, Deshpande seems to give an important message to women that sisterhood is one of the ways of overcoming the existential predicaments.

Unlike Saru, Jaya and Urmi, one protagonist who emerges as an exceptionally autonomous being as the novel opens is Manjari of *Moving On*. She lives as a subject who possesses ‘pure and total freedom’ because she is guided by none other than herself. It is Manjari who justifies that existential ‘individuality’ and ‘authenticity’ are two sides of the same coin. The novelist does not depict her as a silent victim of patriarchy but as one reads further about her past, one realizes that her quest for autonomy has never been an easy one. She too like any other modern educated Indian woman has grappled against the grip of several enclosures but she has always been self reliant and has taken full responsibility of her choices. Deshpande through the character of Manjari seems to be advocating Sartre’s idea that of freedom of choice. Like Saru, Manjari too puts an end to her existential agony by overcoming her guilt of leaving behind her family. Through the story of Manjari, Deshpande once again brings in the theme of death and the role it plays in one’s existence. The novel ends abruptly which signifies that the quest for emancipation and wholeness is a never ending struggle. Deshpande wants to convey that this fact should not stop an individual from making a nisus to attain ‘authenticity’ by exercising one’s freedom and taking responsibility of one’s actions.

Therefore, this study reveals the journey of Deshpande’s four protagonists as a transition from inauthentic beings carrying ‘bad faith’ to authentic individuals who emerge as ‘new women’. By portraying a middle-class female protagonist who eventually transforms from a silent sufferer to a self assertive being, Deshpande showcases a pattern of moving in and out of the existential state of the middle class women of her contemporary world. She supports the idea of achieving autonomy and ‘authenticity’ within the framework of the society. Her protagonists use education, career, creativity, sisterhood, and self determination as weapons to fight against all the injustice they face as a woman.

Deshpande clearly thinks like an existentialist when she focuses on the importance of individuality and existential acceptance of oneself. The study reveals the stress that is laid by her on the inner journey of self awareness that necessitates the recognition of personal responsibility for one’s life. Through her selected works, she also propagates Sartre’s idea of ‘bad faith’. Her protagonists live under the smothering clutches of patriarchal oppression for a

long time but by the end of the novel, they decide to assert their individuality, thus, rejecting ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘bad faith’.

Unlike Shashi Deshpande who was born and brought up in a liberal environment, the twentieth century African American writer, Alice Walker had a firsthand experience of discrimination in the form of racism and sexism. She grew up in a world of poverty, slavery and apartheid. Her ancestors were brought in chains to the white world and her generation was affected by the aftermath of slave culture. The agonising reality of their lives which was a result of slavery had put them in an indefinite and painful position. The African lives, including that of Walker were scarred by violence inflicted upon them by the whites who treated them as heathens and uncivilized species.

The African men were robbed of basic human rights and were treated as breeding animals. The African women, on the other hand, were doubly jeopardised at the hands of the white supremacy as well as their own male counterparts. The African American female was positioned under the threefold identity of an inferior worker, a woman, and always black. They became victims of not only slavery and poverty but also rape, domestic violence, incest, circumcision, mutilation, prejudice, etc.

Walker like any other black female living in the white world witnessed all kinds of injustice and miseries in all walks of life. The gender bias that she faced at her home, her active participation in the Civil Rights Movement, a failed marriage, etc, were some of her own life-changing experiences that invigorated her empathy with the pain of other contemporary black women and gave her a better understanding of their existential dilemma. The bitter experiences of Walker encouraged her to fight for the wholeness of the black woman.

All the female characters of Walker’s selected novels live under the burden of discrimination and those who realise the need to have an individual identity transform their silence into speech, thus, moving on the path of emancipation. The protagonists make efforts to take full responsibility of their lives.

With her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker traces the roots of the existential angst of the black woman. She reveals the major causes behind the black woman’s

agonising state- color discrimination, slave culture, poverty, lack of education, gender bias and mental and physical abuse inflicted by the black male. Walker covers three generations of the Copeland family, starting with the struggles and suicide of Margaret, the powerlessness and murder of Mem and ending with the autonomy and liberation of Ruth. Like Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* which reveals the alienation of Holden, Walker's novel exposes the alienation of Mem, and quite similar to Holden's death, Mem's death can be depicted from an existential point of view. It is through the story of Ruth (who with the help of her grandfather, Grange, transcends above meaninglessness and 'facticity') that the novelist shows the true meaning of emancipation. Unlike Margaret and Mem, she successfully becomes the 'survival whole', gracefully accepting herself as a combination of bad and good. Thus, Ruth emerges as a perfect example of Sartre's concept of 'being-for-itself'.

Carrying forward her idea of becoming a 'survival whole' inspite of all the odds existing within oneself and within the community one lives in, Walker wrote *Meridian*. The novel projects not only the evolving consciousness of Meridian but also that of the novelist. Through the story of a free-spirited, young black woman who becomes a mother at an early age, Walker not only exposes the myth attached to motherhood but also expresses her disappointment with the Civil Rights Movement that failed to profess liberation to the black people. This failure brings in the feeling of dread. The novel reveals Walker's replacement of the idea of revolution with her concept of transformation. The trials and tribulations perpetuates Meridian's existential crisis. All the enclosures and discords make her question her identity, thus, manifesting her existential dilemma. In this process, she eventually attains 'authenticity' when she overcomes her guilt of abandoning her child and starts asserting her individuality. Once the protagonist begins to understand the importance of individual freedom and choice, she not only takes full responsibility of creating an individual identity but also the responsibility of bringing a social change.

While the individual transformation in *Meridian* perpetuates social change, the individual emancipation in *The Color Purple* commences with the uniting of a group of black women. This *magnum opus* of Walker depicts the mutual feeling of sisterhood among black

women that motivates the young victim of rape, Celie to redeem herself and surpass her existential angst. She breaks the chains of silence and entrapment that she was living under since her childhood. In the beginning of the novel, she is introduced as an inauthentic being or as Sartre's 'being-in-itself'. She eventually reincarnates from a voiceless object to a vocal subject; from a 'being-in-itself' to a 'being-for-itself'; from an inauthentic being to an authentic being. While depicting Celie's existential fight for individualism, Walker brings in the theme of lesbianism in this particular novel to empower Celie which assists her to reinstate some meaning in her life. The novelist while depicting the fact that Celie faces innumerable horrors since a young age and still chooses to create an identity of her own, promotes Sartre's idea of 'transcendence' of one's 'facticity'.

With each and every novel, Walker has shown immense progress as a writer and tries to project a new aspect to the reader. Unlike the other three novels, *The Temple of My Familiar* focuses on not just one gender or race. While dealing with the whole mankind, she establishes a link between all the races, genders, classes, eras, thus, drawing a union of the entire universe. In the novel, the writer gives foremost importance to history and the remembrance of the past for the emancipation of the humankind. The novelist highlights that the superior status of woman was destabilised by man who eventually took away her freedom and treated her like chattel by using cultural beliefs and customs in his favor. She once again depicts patriarchy and marriage as enclosures that work against women. She paints the character of Lissie, to give an important message to the reader that an individual, especially the female can overcome the state of existential crisis and instill some meaning in 'nothingness' by reconnecting with the past. Thus, according to Walker, the knowledge of one's history and past is one of the ways of attaining an understanding of one's place in the world. It is Lissie Lyles who permeates the 'Womanist' concept of Walker in the novel as she is the one character who has suffered in the form of racism, sexism and classism and still carries love and hope for all, thus, keeping her ever brightening soul intact.

The novel maintains the emphasis on an individual's past experiences, present decisions and assertion of freedom. The characters realise their responsibility for existence, and move

from fragmentation to wholeness or unity despite the sufferings and the enclosures which bring pain, agony, dread and alienation.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Alice Walker has written all the four selected novels with an underlying will to restore black womanhood through reconciliation and oneness. She gives priority to sisterhood in order to inhabit the existing enclosures and understand one's role as an individual in the world; a role beyond the traditional roles of a dutiful daughter, wife and mother.

Through their novels, these two writers, Deshpande and Walker, demonstrate their awareness and understanding of the existential predicament of women. However, they also recommend several mechanisms like sisterhood, female bonding, forgiveness and love that can make the path towards freedom and emancipation, easier. Home, silence, writing, and darkness are recurrent symbols and metaphors used by Deshpande, whereas, colors, clothing, quilting, wounded eye, songs and music are some of the most frequently used symbols in Walker's work of fiction. All these symbols have been wisely chosen by the novelists to display the different facets of the Indian and the African American woman's life.

It can be said that the protagonists of all the selected novels are projected as women who are not victims but fighters who make every possible effort to overcome their existential crisis and emerge as self assertive beings. At first, they exist, then they acknowledge their responsibility and with that realization, they endeavor to create an essence amidst anguish, isolation, chaos, absurdity and nothingness, therefore, relating to Sartre's opinion that "man makes himself".

It can be concluded that this thesis projects that both the writers, Deshpande and Walker expect women to understand their freedom to choose for themselves and to take their own decisions in a world that constantly restrains them from being free and from living as 'being-for-itself'. Although Deshpande and Walker are not known as existentialists, their works are loaded with recurring tenets and ideas of existentialism and their heroines experience an existential crisis that includes the inner conflicts and anxieties that accompany important human issues of purpose, responsibility, independence, freedom and commitment.

All the eight selected works prove that the enclosures not only hinder the growth of a woman as an individual being but also accentuate her existential predicament. They depict that the realisation of being responsible for one's own life, gives way to the process of attaining an authentic existence. Therefore, they advocate the message of Existentialism. As harbingers of freedom and equality, the two novelists suggest several ways to put an end to the existential dilemma, alienation and feelings of anguish, guilt and dread, thus, asking women to look for an individual identity and strive for emancipation. Amidst the repugnant aspects of life that makes it adverse, these two writers bring in hope and exultation.

The relevance of the study in today's world can be seen in the modern woman's predicament and failure to find a meaning and purpose of his existence in the modern world of science and rationalism. This thesis provides a better understanding to the predicament and isolation of the individual, especially that of the modern woman who is still striving hard to create an equal space for herself. The selected novels that have been analysed from an existential outlook, pave the way to the emancipation of a woman to help her create the essence of life. Both the novelists reveal not just the importance of questioning the surroundings that negate their freedom but also give credence to question and arouse one's own consciousness in order to achieve a true authentic existence.