

Reading Female Desire and Shame in Donna Deitch's *Desert Hearts* (1985)

Dr. Partha Sarathi Guha

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Berhampore Girls' College
(parthasarathi.english@berhamporegirlscollege.ac.in)

Abstract :

Read against the poststructuralist questioning of the integrity of defined entities, the paper is an attempt to explore the representation of different identities in the film *Desert Hearts* (1985) and to find out the extent to which the lesbian consciousness of its protagonists helps them to come out of the stereo typical *order* and embrace love, innocence, friendship, sex and desire. However, the film attempts to manifest ambivalence and not an absolute lesbian psyche through the protagonists Vivian and Cay and thereby foregrounds a *mixed* and *hybrid consciousness*. The film, in this respect, focuses upon identity as comprising something which is mysterious and unstable. In the course of representing the *problem-in-identity* in the characters, the film also critiques through the lesbian consciousness of its protagonist the cultural representations which take place through literary texts wherein identities are produced, reproduced, maintained and transformed. It is seen in the film that Vivian Bell is a Professor of English Literature at Columbia University. She confronts and challenges the pre-existing value system and attempts to create an inner world different from the outside world. In this respect, I have tried to read the images in the film which shows the characters operating in this double space. No doubt this helps to bring out the duality and indeterminacy of their identities. Desire, in this regard comes out or rather seeks to come out through the protagonists as a simple innocent category which comes into conflict with the dynamics of identity politics. The paper would therefore argue the political aspect of the lesbian consciousness of the protagonists and attempt to show desire as something still enjoying a de-politicised and at the same time a political space from primarily the vantage point of Judith Butler's seminal text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) beside the queer film theory and feminist theory of critics like Adrienne Rich, Laura Mulvey, Liza Johnson and John Nguyet Erni.

Keywords: Identity, desire, queer, shame.