

Gauri Deshpande as a Feminist Writer

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Abstract

We all know Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve. He was the great social reformer who worked especially for the betterment of widows through remarriage and education. Maharshi's son, Raghunath Karve stressed on equality for men and women. He also worked for the betterment of women through family planning. Gauri Deshpande was the granddaughter of Maharshi Karve, and niece of Raghunath Karve. Like Maharshi Karve and Raghunath Karve, she also worked for the betterment of the women through literature. Feminism thinks about woman by woman from a woman's point of view. It expresses the predicament of a woman in a patriarchal world. It revolts against male domination. But Gauri Deshpande transcends this boundary of feminism. She writes for women, no doubt. But she does not express only their troubles. Moreover, she shows us the dreams of future when men and women will be equal, when they respect each other as an individual. When they accept freedom and space for each other, when they share the responsibilities together and happily- from household, filial to social- all where they will be equal. Nobody will dominate. They will love, care, trust and respect each other. In short she has exposed her dream of deconstruction of gender through her not romantic but thoughtful stories. They don't entertain but compel us to think about it seriously.

Keywords: Feminist Writer, Betterment of Women, Patriarchy, Individual Liberty, Emancipated Women etc.

➤ BACKGROUND:

We all know Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve. He was the great social reformer who worked especially for the betterment of widows through remarriage and education. Maharshi's son, Raghunath Karve stressed on equality for men and women. He also worked for the betterment of women through family planning. Gauri Deshpande was the granddaughter of Maharshi Karve, and niece of Raghunath Karve. Like Maharshi Karve and Raghunath Karve, she also worked for the betterment of the women through literature. So we can easily observe the impact of her extraordinary

family on the life and career of Gauri Deshpande.

➤ GAURI DESHPANDE AS A FEMINIST WRITER:

Gauri Deshpande was the famous novelist, short story writer, poet, translator and freelance writer too. Feminism thinks about woman by woman from a woman's point of view. It expresses the predicament of a woman in a patriarchal world. It revolts against male domination. But Gauri Deshpande transcends this boundary of feminism. *The Lackadaisical Sweeper* is the first and only collection of Gauri

Deshpande's short stories in English. It was published in 1997. It contains in all fifteen short stories. They do not seem to need any theory to vindicate them; they speak for themselves.

Pride in the girl-child is a recurring theme prevalent in Gauri's stories like 'Hello, Stranger!', 'Vervain', 'Rose Jam', 'Brand New Pink Nikes', 'Dmitri in the Afternoon' and 'A Harmless Girl'. The story of 'Dmitri in the Afternoon' takes place in beautiful, golden, perfect and friendly country of Greece. Ulka is the only child and so very dear to her parents. She is a beautiful and lucky guy to have loving parents, education, job, a husband of her choice and then two babies- a girl and a boy too. Here the narrator whole-heartedly appreciates Greece, its beauty, its magical air, nature, music and handsome Greek people too.

The protagonist, 'A Harmless Girl' thinks that it would be easier to make harmless, noiseless, unobtrusive people out of girls than boys but she proves wrong. Though Gauri spares no opportunity to celebrate the birth of the girl-child, it is used here to underline the fact that no one is 'born' a man or a woman; gender and its burdens are acquired as society thrusts us into one or the other role (209). This story, while narrating the development of the protagonist, also comments on the traditional upbringing of the girls, the protagonist's 'practically non-existent growth', experiences of a woman related to marriage, pregnancy and delivery and the adjustments they have to do.

Gauri Deshpande rarely gives names to her either male or female characters. Her

stories are particularly written in first person; and so mistaken as her own experiences. But the stories like 'Insy Winsy Spider', 'Dmitri in the Afternoon', 'Vervain', 'The Lackadaisical Sweeper' and 'The Debt' are an exception to it. In 'Insy Winsy Spider' Gauri Deshpande very minutely and accurately painted a career-oriented, intelligent, middle class woman's situation and frustration in the traditional world through Vishalakshi's character.

The story 'Brand New Pink Nikes' presents a psychological study of a middle-aged bourgeois woman who is conscious of her beauty and looks. It records her journey from reluctance to acceptance of growing old. The story 'Vervain' exposes the grief of a common woman who has to suffer because of men. She has to lose her identity for men in her life, but gets oppression, betrayal and restlessness in return. In this sense this is truly the feministic story.

Love for mother country is the theme of many stories of this collection as 'Map', 'Smile and Smile and...', 'Hello, Stranger!', 'Rose Jam', 'The Debt' etc. In 'The Debt' Anita learns that the man has to pay the debt of parents and mother country in his life. Sajan pays the debt of his father and the mother country after death through Anita. Really this is a very touching story unfolded before us from Anita's point of view.

'Map' is a fine story in which cartography is used as a metaphor for the male gaze. One of the inferences here is that gender rights are neutralized by the sexual dependence of woman on man. She realizes that this dependence must end. She has to replace the much more flattering man's map of her body with a more honest one drawn

by her. The metaphor in 'Map' becomes all the more interesting when one realizes that the 'narrator woman' is India and the cartographer the imperial power (211). Gauri Deshpande writes at the end that this story is a tribute to Edward Said, the promoter of Orientalism.

'Rose Jam' is an autobiographical story written by Gauri Deshpande informing us about Gauri's family background. It is a feminine study of the characters of Gauri's two extraordinary grandmothers- Baya and Aai. Rose jam is actually a sweet dish prepared out of 'the thorny, indigenous, deep pink, heavily fragrant roses with fleshy petals.' It is prepared especially in summer and used as a medicine on summer troubles as headstroke, sunburn, headache, nosebleed etc. At last she salutes her maternal grandmother, maker of rose jam who unknowingly imbibes in her the womanly attributes and patriotism.

In her various stories like 'Whatever Happened to...', 'Smile and Smile and...' Gauri Deshpande expresses her views about Japan. She appreciates beauty, hard work, and discipline etc. qualities of Japan but at the same time she dislikes so many things there. e.g. Japanese people give very much preference to manners and etiquettes, and hide their real emotions. In 'Smile and Smile and...' the author exposes in clear cut words the love for mother country, and disgust for the western countries who consider Indians and women inferior. Women's low self-esteem is the major concern in 'Whatever Happened to....' Lurking in the margins of many stories as 'Vervain', 'The Lackadialical Sweeper' etc. this is suggested as one reason for women's marginalization, for the retreat of even successful, strong

women into self-deprecation vis-à-vis any man (210).

'Habits' is the story told from a female protagonist's point of view in a colloquial and humorous language. She is deceived in love once. So she leads her life as she likes. She does not want to get habitual of any man in her life. She rejects to be a puppet in man's hands. She does not want to be taken for granted by any man only because she is lonely, without any man in her life.

'Hookworm, Lamprey, Tick, Fluke and Flea' is totally the women's story- educated, half-educated, dependent, independent, married, unmarried, career-oriented, housewives- all types of women we can visit in this single story. It is a 'disguised' story. 'Disguised', because under its ironical surface is the real theme: the symbiotic relationship between a parasite and its host. Gauri suggests that women are willing hosts - society has dinned it into their heads that they must sacrifice themselves. As they fall prey to this endless giving, they wake up one day in the middle of their lives to realize that not only have they been sucked dry, but that they have no other option: they can only play host to a variety of parasites. (212)

We meet the heroine, Seeta unfolding the title story 'The Lackadaisical Sweeper' from her point of view. Unlike Gauri's other heroines she is a submissive wife having a lack of confidence. Knowing-unknowingly she helps Narain, her husband in his 'business' by telling him all the private details of her friend, Sheila and Jake, her husband. Narain somehow manages to trap Jake in malpractice and grab his

property. But Seeta has no courage to revolt against him. Whether there would be Anita, an American ('The Debt') or Seeta, an Indian woman, they have no right to choose their names or to take a decision to have a baby or not.

In these fifteen stories collected here, Gauri Deshpande probes the truth about women, men, their relationships, thoughts, frustrations and absurdities. With engaging irreverence, even indignation, she satirizes not only outmoded ideas and old taboos but also the currently fashionable norms of political correctness. Be it with acid wit, wry acceptance or subtle irony, Gauri Deshpande evokes a parallel world of submerged emotions. She invites us to explore the complexities of human behaviour. In this way this collection of Gauri Deshpande's short stories in English is a significant artistic statement of feminism. (213)

Gauri's stories are actually experimental *kahanis* (Thakur and More 195) which contain the language suitable to her feminist themes. Her language is colloquial as if she is speaking to us; she wins our trust with this informal sharing

type of narration. She refers the recipes, dishes, upbringing of children, use of minimum words along with dots, idioms, nostalgia, emotional touch to narration etc. in a typical feminist way.

➤ CONCLUSION:

Feminism thinks about woman by woman from a woman's point of view. It expresses the predicament of a woman in a patriarchal world. It revolts against male domination. But Gauri Deshpande transcends this boundary of feminism. She writes for women, no doubt. But she does not express only their troubles. Moreover, she shows us the dreams of future when men and women will be equal, when they respect each other as an individual. When they accept freedom and space for each other, when they share the responsibilities together and happily- from household, filial to social- all where they will be equal. Nobody will dominate. They will love, care, trust and respect each other. In short she has exposed her dream of deconstruction of gender through her not romantic but thoughtful stories. They don't entertain but compel us to think about it seriously.

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