

THE PORTRAYAL OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE POEMS OF GAURI DESHPANDE

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ABSTRACT

The present article is an attempt to trace the multiple themes projecting the human relationships in the poems of Gauri Deshpande. She throws light upon the different relationships mainly focusing on man-woman relationship. She finds herself tossed to the destiny of woman as a protector of every relationship and her poems convey a deep sense of pain and despair caused by frustration in love which is undoubtedly the base of every relationship. Her thematic canvas and subject matter includes hope, search for identity, nostalgia, death, despair, violence, historic concern, love, and solitude. She excels in her poetic creativity and the fabric of sensibility that she articulates in the portrayal of multiple relationships with their significance. She writes on the physical aspects of man-woman relationship with a sense of frankness and freedom of expression, capturing vividly the manifold dimension of gender relationship.

Keywords: carnality, Family, marriage, Parent-children conflicts, 'The Hangman Awaits'

INTRODUCTION

According to the traditional Hindu view, marriage is a sacrament. A marriage takes place after a formal social ceremony or legal protocol. In every society whatever race, community or religion it belongs to, marriage is the union of two souls, that of a man and a woman. They both play their roles to set up a family having their own importance but focused on the relationships projected by Gauri Deshpande, the whole study is centralized to the specific role and treatment of woman in the family. The woman is defined in terms of role of a wife, of a mother and above all that of a human being. She is tender and delicate in terms of love, affection, generosity and sacrifice.

Deshpande's themes in the study of relationships are the treatment of parent-child relationship, woman-woman relationship. An emotional portrayal of the relation to her pet dog is also displayed through her poems. The basis of every bonding depends on emotional aspect

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that further lays ground for the survival and stability of the relationship. The key point of her poems is the victimization of woman who is the ultimate sufferer of destiny, society, masculine persona and even the children. The concerns of her poetry are the complexities, inner conflict, social alienation and aversion. In Indian society, marriage as far as the position of woman is concerned, treats her as a commodity and property to her husband and so she is bereft of respect, identity and self. Deshpande's poem '*Man and Woman*' reflects the feeling of inferior position of woman:

*That she could with such ease
Be enslaved by your skillful hands
Beggar's heart and from Himalayan heights
Condescend to your warm your bed
Stiffen your manhood
And bear your spawn.*

Gauri Deshpande clearly reveals her experiences of family. The poem '*Still Life No.2*' reflects upon the importance of home and family:

*From creeping dismal sidewalks
We crowd into homes that disguise
Concrete with curtain a
Picture flower rug
And hopelessly clutch at each other
For we at least are flesh; (1-6)*

'*Portrait*' delineates the dismay of mother and child relationship providing the images of a Christmas day with mother and child. The poem expresses a strain of poignancy which further elaborates the experience of a woman eagerly questioning for love. The presentation of woman as a whore who is forced to take up such a disgusting path accepts qualms by shame faced "*Rustling figure*". The poem recognizes the inextricable relationship between the ideal roles of a woman and the dependents. Mother and child relationship is projected through filial identity which strengthens a woman to go beyond the limitation of morality and shame just for her child's sake.

In '*There Was a Time*', Gauri romanticizes the world of dreams and desires to show the ecstasy of Indian woman in relation to her marital life. A happy married life-ensuring harmony in marital relation as acceptance and adjustment of precious attitudes and sentiments of both the partners is what a woman asks for along with acknowledged wifehood and motherhood. But future hides the role of subjugation where she becomes conscious of meaningless existence. Gauri has revolted against the patriarchal mentality and gender-biased portrayal of man and woman. However, she never rejects the existence of man in woman's life. A woman recalls her maiden life lying dreamless during night in the stranger's arm to whom she is married in passive submission. She is to be part of completeness to his living and to find solace on any profit in her own personal efforts, she is required to continue serving him mere as a body rather than as a mind or a soul. Her agony is reflected with much seriousness and with striking melancholy:

*And days slide by meaningless
And nights remain enclosed
Dreamless in stranger's arms
And our solace
Will be: we knew
Of you and me. (15 - 20)*

Poem 'On Going Away' details woman's transformation to a woman's world. The exposure to the filial relationship the poet makes a clear expression of approach to her partner who is complementary to her world. Through poem she expresses her psychological satisfaction. The poem is a beautiful example of an amicable relationship. The image of a traditional woman is delineated here to epitomize Indian womanliness:

*And through these green fields I come
Home to my sister, waiting,
Who says, so there are you. (12 - 14)*

Echoing other contemporary poets like Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das, she feels no reservations or moral inhibitions about making confessions of her experience of carnality. The following excerpt on love-making from 'Poems on a Lost Love' shows her candid expression of the felt experience:

*I am earth, Vast deep and dark, And I receive,
The first rain, Sweet, generous,
Lashing, throbbing; Its smell forever in my blood,
Its imprint deep
Within my quirk. Yellow daisies burst out, On my breast and thigh
At its very touch.*

'In Absentia' echoes the absence of true love in a man-woman relationship. The libidinous urges liberate a woman; the reconciliatory attitude of a woman is projected in the poem:

*And from our present misery
Do yearn to believe
That that too was a reality
To be lived again,
As much as this -
Of not - you - and - I. (25-30)*

In the Indian society, woman derives her social status from her husband. The institution of marriage being a sacramental character in India, divorce is considered a taboo and is not widely put into practice. Social relationships of the divorced couple often get disrupted. Woman in particular bears the brunt of traumatic situation that arises as the aftermath effects of divorce in the form of loneliness and alienation. Gauri throws lights upon her loneliness and frustration in the poem 'The Eclipse':

*When from the good fortune of smiles
And caress we move into the Inexplicable*

*Unintelligible darkness of sorrow,
Delay, departure, suspicion.*

In addition to the trauma of divorce itself, the transition related to divorce often involves geographic moves, the addition of step-siblings and a new set of extended family members. Divorce followed by re-marriage involves the introduction of parent figures with multiple roles and overlapping relationships. The husband's relationship is marginally affected, whereas the wife's drastically changes. The wife moves out of the husband's house. If they stay in the same town, she does not enjoy same trust, confidence, and closeness as her previous counterpart does.

Gauri projects the Parent-children conflicts with regards to individual freedom and double standards giving greater freedom to sons than daughters. A girl child is allowed to remain a child only for short period of life. It is always stressed that her relationship with her parental home is temporary. Discrimination among boys and girls in terms of reinforcing speech, activity, play, food, education and other material possessions in India.

In the poems '*Marks I*' and '*Marks II*' she defines the body changes first and then delineates the state of sublimation diverting the impulse of experiencing love to a socially restricted behavior. The discovery of one's blooming with the attainment of youth is the beautiful image that echoes through '*Marks I*'. The poem points out a traditional theme. A girl is a maxim of anxiety for her family, especially parents. The anxiety relates her every day growth to the search for a perfect groom, the inane response of the society and the huge expenses of marriage ceremony. The spring of the youth is not enjoyed by the parents and the girl is left alone in new found world of ecstasy. The new experiences and tenderness of love converts into worry and their relationship suffers. The bloom of womanliness is turned into a secret pleasure creating a chaos and darkness around.

The memory of love and family owns a sensibility. Gauri Deshpande depicts how the relation of a woman to another woman unfolds when she introspects her domestic privileges. The willingness to merge one's identity with the domesticity at large is suggested with noticeable modesty and equal amount of humanity:

*My brother who held my hand at every bend,
My lover about whose neck I must fall now
Must fall on my shadow, end this duality now. (31-33)*

Man-woman relationship is the favorite theme of Gauri Deshpande which is observed in most of her poems. She expresses her feelings in her poems through her woman characters. She shares her experiences of sufferance as a woman in the male-dominated society. Her poems are the best projection of woman psyche. Her observation of the woman's mind is presented in her poems in best words. The woman is defined in terms of role of a wife, of a mother and above all that of a human being whereas woman in terms of love, tenderness, affection, generosity and sacrifice is innate and inherent in Indian tradition.

Man-Woman relationship is hinged on physicality. The first sight of man for a woman and that of a woman for a man forms the first ground of love between them. Thus, body is the medium of initial attraction for both of them. The encounter between man and woman is

purely physical which inspires a man merely to derive pleasure from woman's body without having any lasting emotion or deeper understanding or admiration for her. Here the conflict arises. In the poem 'Summer' the person's gaze is essentially the "man's gaze", which sees woman merely as a body, a desirable body, an object of sex, and nothing more. There is no desire to be expressed that seems to relate to her as a person.

Gauri Deshpande is primarily concerned with the exploration of the various intricacies and inner conflicts of man-woman relationship. Her major thrust is on the importance and impact of the corporeal on a bond of love.

*What had bound us was the thin thread of hate and fear
Not the many-stranded heavy coiling rope of desire. (10-11)*

She divulges her womanly urges, seeks out redemptive measures, and concomitantly tries to locate and secure her position in the man's world.

Her poem 'Virtue Too' also reflects upon the harassment a woman undergoes in the name of carnal ideology. She has no hesitation to admit that the hypocrisy of the righteous society threatens the growth of woman and she is perplexed at the thought of the exposure of the real face of the society. She is seen curious to bring equal rules for man and woman. She strongly believes that the patriarchal hierarchy spoils the sanctity of the righteous world:

*But to tell the truth I haven't got
The strength to let anyone else see
How sleepy faces can be
With the aid of virtue. (12-15)*

At places, she depicts woman as dismayed by the non-fulfillment of physical as well as emotional urges. She finds the lack of enlivening environment in love-making. The whole enterprise of love-making neither physically satisfies nor provides any mental fulfillment; rather she is emotionally and spiritually agonized. Her marital relationship seems to her a mere dry and dreary ritual that leaves her disenchanted as man does not penetrate into the 'plunging depths' of her 'soul and body'.

The poetic manifestations of man-woman relationship get a solid ground in the poems of Gauri Deshpande. She is deeply concerned with man-woman relationship. Her poems picture the crises of self which most probably provide a vast exposure to the fears and doubts prevalent in the psyche of woman. The projection of an identity of uncertainty and struggle of the psyche through poems in 'lost Love' she tries to find a solution for the presage existing in her relationship with man.

*When you left me lying
I hated the cold air
Drying my sweat on your hands
And driving my thought
From your tired thigh. (1, 5-8)*

The expression of love and carnal pleasure seem to be wooden as she finds no solace or even enjoyment in her marital relationship. For her, man is beyond the depth of true love that

makes all the difference between the love of soul and body. Her poem 'No more' portrays the same condition:

Plunging depth of Souls and bodies. (3-4)

'The Hangman Awaits' brings the aftermath of carnality. The physicality is the essential element of man-woman relationship which lays foundation and provide solidarity to the relation of man and woman. The woman persona is conscious of social embarrassment. The poet thinks that the society does not permit a woman to express her true identity and she treats the poem at the psychological level indicating the reaction and response of a woman in quest for self:

*I can see the noose wait, But fear to tremble,
As I may quake the house (21-23)*

Her poems talk of the indifference of the man who very proudly thinks that woman is under his supremacy and it is her duty to act upon his will. The feel is reflected from her poem 'Souvenir' which speaks of the role allotted to a woman for her contribution to domestic life nurturing of children and house-keeping along with radiating love, warmth and affection. The children and the husband are so accustomed to her role playing that her own demands and requirements are not at all noticed of. The traditional Indian womanhood is described as the preserver of home and the protector of culture. This small poem also reflects upon self-satisfaction through motherhood:

*And so meaningless is the drift of years
That the only residue is this habit of pain. (7-8)*

Gauri Deshpande's portrayal of man and woman clearly reveals the idiosyncratic traits of relationship. The dilemma between her desire to express love and her fear of being ridiculed haunts her like a cruel passion and she feels as if something is chasing her day after day. Carnality for woman is still considered as a restriction. A woman also suffers from the longing of love as her counterpart but is forced to suppress her urge and suffers from want of love in total privacy:

*A woman learns to love a little,
A man who praises her hair,
And reads her poems and knows*

Gauri Deshpande strongly opines:

"A woman has to compromise and adapt to the circumstances she is situated in, and for that reason she is compelled to have developed the 'habit of pain' and the grit of surviving in a milieu that is meaningless" (Singh 2004, p. 78).

Through the poem 'We Hadn't The Guts' she makes it comprehensive that the bitter truth of such a relationship as man and woman have is, just the hollowness and barren:

*To us is given the hollow task,
Of watching the sunset in a frame of tears
Facing a face in our eyes we can bear,
And hoping to grow a seed in sand and on rock. (5-8)*

Gauri Deshpande also shows some sort of discontent with conjugal life. She realizes the disillusioned relationship with her man persona portraying the dark side of it as:

*There is never any truth... Between them, never any rapport
For they have not in swift one look, Assessed each other's morning-after face...*

H. L. Amga's observation is worth to be mentioned in support of her realization:

"Her conceptual strategies seem to hover between two extremities of love, the one dealing with the exuberant feeling of conjugal satiety, and the other with the etiolate nausea or boredom, which comes after the surfeit of love".

The poem "The Guest" also defines the dark side of her relationship on her parting with her lover-admirer:

You are gone now...I lie empty, barren and bereft. In the moment we part. (83)

The tone is that of repentance and realization. The poet understands the worth of honest and truthful communication in love that sustains a healthy and fresh relationship. Her portrayal of family and her sense to carry out familial responsibilities find a room in her poems. Her 'Poem in winter' reflects upon her desire of having a child with 'blue eyes and golden hair' though the child takes features after her husband. That very idea is common for every woman:

*The smoky-blue eyes and golden hair, I wished upon my child
That is born with her father's face. The laughter in the face upturned. (34-37)*

Her poem 'A Child Waking' gives a picture of sweetness of love that she ever felt in her life when she experiences the beauty of love through the everlasting touch of hand that perhaps becomes one of the beautiful moments of her life:

Your hand is resting in mine, Wrapped in Cloth -of -Dream. (8-9)

Her poems present a typical womanly sensibility caught in love and portrays dejection as an adverse effect arising out of it. Her poetry depicts a woman caught in the web of relationships, her need and responsibility for love, care and fulfillment. She records the sensitive feelings of a woman who loses her identity to adjust in a family. Indian woman poets portray their love for other family members too. She finds her house as a garment that provides her solace. She conveys the feel of fulfillment through the poem 'A Sentimental Journey':

*"And the house fitted me like a garment,
Of unlamented unremembered moments,
And with every step." (4-6)*

The sight of a man approaching her fills her with a sense of rare relationship that makes her realize the humanity as a natural relationship and she is taken aback at the uncertainty of her behavior to him. She would carve out a solitary space for herself because the society has shaped her in another direction of social- role. Her poem 'Thinking Disgustedly' makes a clear perception of humanity in her:

*With this beauty in his eyes,
And sitting on his lashes. (10-11)*

'The Habit' reveals how the humanity naturally takes its color through a situational tragedy. The loss of a puppy dog drives her to cry and her heart is bent before the destiny that is merciless. The poet is consoled for the same and is assured that the phase would soon be over. Surprisingly the poet expresses her realization of the death of her puppy dog as the loss of some natural relation:

*I lost an arm, A friend, a child, a shade,
And they were right.
I got over it, I got used to it (9-13)*

Gauri Deshpande has written not only about man and woman relationships but also about filial and familial relationships. She has been frank about love- both carnal and spiritual. She deals with the other emotional and spiritual aspects such as compassion, care, concern and respect for others. Gauri Deshpande's poems reveal a sentimental outlook. In a nostalgic mode and mawkish tone, she celebrates the sweet-sour reminiscences of her lost love. The expectation of physical happiness along with mental and emotional fulfillment is the ultimate desire of woman which is well projected in the poems of Gauri Deshpande. The barrenness of married life and the dissatisfaction of marital relationship is the dominant theme of her poems.

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