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GAURI DESHPANDE - THE SIGNATURE IN MAKING
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Indian English Women Poetry resounds with a noticeable contribution made by Gauri Deshpande. As a poet and as a short story teller Gauri Deshpande carved a niche in the body of Indian Literature both in the realm of poetry and fiction. Her creativity has won the immortality, which she is blessed with after death. Born of illustrious parents, Gauri Deshpande was a gifted child with sharpened aesthetic pulse and innovative mind. Her creative output, substantiate to the fact that even in small life, she contributed enough to share her aesthetic impulses with the world.

The salutary poet Gauri Deshpande was born in February 1942 in Pune to Principal G.D. Karve and Professor Iravati Karve. Gauri Deshpande’s mother was an eminent lady of adorable stature. She was born in Burma in 1905 and educated in Pune with a master degree in Sociology and a doctorate degree in Anthropology from Berlin. She took to writing both in Marathi as well as in English. Because of Scholarly pursuits, she developed a white circle of friends and acquaintances whereby intellectual sessions were carried out with enough vigour to give a taste of knowledge to the little Gauri. Iravati Karve has to her credit Mahabharata in Marathi as Yuganta in which she makes a probe into the historical characters in terms of attitudes and perspectives. This
book well documents the legendary characters as men of substance and how they construct social values for the foundation of the ages to come alive with virtues and integrity. The book won her Sahitya Academy Award in 1968.

Equally illustrious was Gauri Deshpande’s maternal grandmother who allowed her daughter to enjoy complete freedom, so that she could attain a multidimensional development. Her paternal grandmother was a remarried child widow, married to Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve—the initiator of women emancipation in Maharashtra. As an arduous social reformer he not only supported education for women but also organised association for the remarriage of Hindu widows. Acknowledging his pains-taking services he was fondly called as ‘Anna Saheb’. He was equally well read and did his college education from Elphinstone College for a graduate degree of B.A. in Mathematics. Even though he was married at the age of fourteen to Radha Bai aged eight, he did not enter into marital relationship until the age of twenty. Unfortunately Radha Bai died early living behind a son. In 1893 at the age of twenty-three he married again but this time with an exemplary purpose. He initiated widow remarriage by marrying Godu Bai Karve who had widowed at the age of eight and thereby negated the norms of conservative Maharashtrian family. This did not stop here and he continued to spend his hours and energy for the upliftment of women. He initiated value education for women and founded a college for the same purpose. In
addition to this he started a women’s shelter along with a school for widows in 1896. His earnestness even rewarded his sister-in-law Parvati Bai Athavale who joined him as the first lady superintendent of his Shikshan Sanstha after having education with his effort.

Equally outstanding is the contribution made by Gauri Deshpande’s uncle Raghunath Dhondo Karve. He was the first one to start a movement about sexuality in India. ‘Sex’ being a tabooed subject during those days Raghunath Karve received virulent opposition. The opposition was intelligently suppressed when Gauri Deshpande’s aunt – the essayist Shakuntala Paranjape became his ‘shield figure’. Shakuntala Paranjape as an armour to Raghunath Karve made him hit the nail at the required point. Shakuntala Paranjape is still esteemed by the innovative contributions made by her daughter Sai Paranjape in the filmmaking. She celebrated glory of heart when bollywood was basking in grandeur and luxury. The sophistication of men of letters brought recognisable fame to Sai Paranjape in her experiment in filmmaking. With such luminaries in family Gauri Deshpande has intelligence, creativity and devotion as familial heritage.

Gauri Deshpande was equally well read with a M.A degree in English Literature from Fergusson College Pune. After her M.A in 1969 she was self-motivated for the coveted degree- a Ph.D in English from the same university in 1972. She entered into marital relationship with Avinash Deshpande soon after her graduation but the relationship split after a decade. Gauri Deshpande
remained single for three more years and finally married with Surinder Singh. She got children from both the husbands and proved to be an equally devoted mother.

As a creative writer Gauri Deshpande started her career much late at the age of twenty-two. She discovered her poetic skill first in Marathi and much later in English. Nevertheless as a multilingual writer she made a striking identity with her original thinking. In Marathi she wrote short stories also, whereby she became a much sort after writer for her readers. One of her first stories in Marathi was given a room in prestigious Satya Katha in 1972. Much of her creative works reveal her personal experiences as well as her own observations about the state of women and the quality of living.

Gauri Deshpande made an equally noticeable identity as a translator. To her credit is the translation of Yuganta in English and Sunita Deshpande’s autobiography And pine for what is not.

Gauri Deshpande, as a creative writer, is a voice for the upper class women and concerns nagging the poor women folk are a no way in her thematic cover. On questioned about the same, she replied

“...for those who don’t have question of food-shelter-clothing even they also have their own problems in their lives. So why should I write only for poor/middle class women who talk on the path decided”.

What Murli Das Melwani talks about the features of Indian women poetry concurs with Gauri Deshpande’s belief:

... their themes are few in number. Thwarted desires the frustrations of living in a male dominated society sex and off course love are the commoner ones – contemporary situations are finding more frequent mentions in their poems.

To assert the perspectives of women Gauri Deshpande worked for Illustrated Weekly of India for a considerable period of life and simultaneously took to writing poetry in English. With three major contributions in English, Gauri Deshpande stands equally recognisable next to Kamala Das and Suniti Namjoshi. She is also acknowledged for the mighty task of translating Richard Burton’s Arabian Nights in Marathi. Gauri Deshpande had frequent travels to United State and Yugoslavia where she carried herself as an epitome of Indian Culture and Sensibility. As a writer with a vision, she is to this date highly acknowledged for creating her woman protagonist. Karavastun Patre uninhibitedly talks about Gauri’s physical relationship with several boy friends. Later she discovered that the vagaries of life still continue to stare at her face making her lead a ‘hollow’ living. She rejects all carnal pleasures and determines to start a new life of her own. She tells her boy friend “If we meet again, I will say sorry, thanks, hallo, goodbye.”
Gauri Deshpande’s women are commonly married or nubile whereby the oscillation of psyche for concern of future is minutely worked out. Her protagonists are not only well-read and alert, intellect but are deficient in confidence. They are plain beauties with no desire of well makeup face or gaudy clothes. But her indifferent attitude to rigid man folk makes them strikingly intelligent. They are non-conformist to patriarchal authority and are striking embodiment of clarity. They are not only aware of what they want but also how to attain it.

Her aesthetic contributions in the field of poetry and short story reflect the autobiographical elements because all her writings are based on her own experiences and observations. *Between Births*, the first collection in 1968 by Writers Workshop, Calcutta has twenty-six poems. In these poems she talks about female sexuality, female gaze, ideological perspectives, and politics of patriarchy, disharmony and discord in marital life, individuality, mutual co-ordination, quest for spiritual love and the bloom of womanliness. ‘The Hangman Awaits’, ‘The Guest’, ‘The Air Feels’, ‘I wanted to weep’, ‘Thinking Disgustedly’, ‘In Winter’, ‘Habit’, ‘Change of Season’ are the poems of collection that compliment Gauri Deshpande’s efforts in delineating women in multifaceted shades.

*Lost Love* the second collection was published in 1970 and has thirty-two poems. It reveals Gauri Deshpande’s discourse of desire, which in few verses appear as carnal pleasure. The subtle elevated love that
characterised *Between Births* as surrender and submission now takes a colour of body demand, the irrepressible urge to accommodate the demands of the other party. Here the feminine urge for realisation of self through body is made explicit and sexuality in terms of reciprocity is well defined. Once again the mood of heaviness, uncertainty despair and nostalgia with sweeping minutes of happiness and momentary hope is visible.

*Beyond the Slaughter House* the third collection of poems is not yet published. Here her poetic journey into the realm of femininity continues but this time it aims to reach the aesthetics of that nobility which makes woman idolatry in her own special way. The collection depicts the various forms of harassments, a woman has to endure in order to make her emotional relationship in any survives,

Gauri Deshpande does not picturise women as reduced to the level of physical slavery, starving for food, moaning against cruel destiny or groaning under the bondage of severity causing blue and gashes. She is rightly admitted as a feminist exploring the higher society. She fathoms the quality life of the urban woman; may be this is what she had been observing being a product of metropolis environment.

*The Lackadaisical Sweeper* the first collection of short stories in English by Gauri Deshpande was published in 1997, has fifteen stories followed by an afterword by Raja Rao. Her short stories are an expression of feminism; her anger against the power politics that
exists in gender relation. It is a work of immense significance as a prose and highlights the truth about the women, their discord in marital life and frustrations along with absurdities in not finding a fitful place next to a man. All the stories are focused on upper class of Indian society where western influence is in friction with the Indian culture. The Lackadaisical Sweeper therefore evokes a world of Feminity and puts to strict observance, the complexities of human behaviour in relation to feminine world. The feminine self articulated by Gauri Deshpande is certainly determined by "the psychodynamics of a lonely voice" to borrow a Frank Connor's expression yet her effective articulations add to same awareness of the marginalised status of women in society. Gauri Deshpande's The Lackadaisical Sweeper is a satisfactory answer to the questions debated by Ranjana Harish in her contemplative essay "Male culture, Female Strategy".

Most of her protagonists are introspective and her poems as well as stories detail the mind more than the situations. The stories are therefore reflective exploring ways to combat their distaste with life and also to find notes whereby self-actualization can be attained. Gauri Deshpande's protagonists are victims of boredom at times, dissatisfied with touch of a man, they search for new meanings in relationship and the desire for contentment is their inherent demand. Getting emotionally involved is a momentary weakness. To her protagonists sexuality is not a taboo. They get easily interested in other man and have
no repressions about it. They are also the victims of boredom, unhappiness anxiety and insecurity if their marriage develops a discord. Therefore most of her protagonists keep on making fresh attempts and rediscovery their self worth. Gauri Deshpande attentively explores the subtle nuances at change in the path to rediscovery. This purging experience adds to their newness redefining the quality of life.

Hence her poems and stories are effective peeps into the attitude of modern woman whereby a woman as a subjective self is explored. It is not the social psychological, familial or moral self which is given a plausible delineation but the private self of a woman. It is through this slot that the inherent womanliness of a woman is identified which in modern terms behold the dignity of a woman.
Gauri Deshpande

Abooj Subash. Fairwell....
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