

DEPICTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN GAURI DESHPANDE'S STORIES

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Abstract

Gauri Deshpande was the granddaughter of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve and the niece of Raghunath Karve, the great social reformers. She has written a number of stories, poems and novellas in Marathi. She has translated some books from Marathi into English and vice versa. She has written three collections of poems in English too. But The Lackadaisical Sweeper is the only collection of short stories written in English by Gauri Deshpande. It was published in 1997. It contains in all fifteen short stories. These stories do not just entertain but compel us to think about international relations and gender issues seriously. International relations mean the various relations among the different nations in the world. International relations as a distinct field of study began in Britain in 1919. Feminist International Relations Scholars have not only concerned itself with the traditional focus of International Relations on states, wars, diplomacy and security, but Feminist International Relations Scholars have also emphasized the importance of looking at how gender shapes the current global political economy. Due to globalization and migration now "Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam" means the earth becomes a family. It creates international relations and conflict too which reflect in literature of Gauri Deshpande like writers. Gauri Deshpande's English short story collection The Lackadaisical Sweeper deals with the various themes. But the leit-motif in her anthology is the travails faced by migrant Indians living abroad which are expressed in the stories like 'Hello, Stranger', 'Rose Jam', 'The Debt' and so on. Moreover Gauri Deshpande has strongly and consistently expressed her anger at the power politics that exist in gender relations. Here the stories like 'Vervain', 'Whatever Happened to...', 'Smile and Smile and ...' etc. explain clearly the international gender discrimination. In this way this collection of Gauri Deshpande's short stories in English is a significant depiction of international relations.

Keywords: *International Relations, Gender Discrimination, Feminist International Relations Scholars, globalization and migration etc.*

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Gauri Deshpande was the granddaughter of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve and the niece of Raghunath Karve, the great social reformers. She has written a number of stories, poems and novellas in Marathi. She has translated some books from Marathi into English and vice versa. She has written three collections of poems in English too. But *The Lackadaisical Sweeper* is the only collection of short stories written in English by Gauri Deshpande. It was published in 1997. It contains in all fifteen short stories. These stories do not just entertain but compel us to think about international relations and gender issues seriously.

Gauri Deshpande's stories are gynocentric. She has portrayed the educated woman of the modern age in different images here. These women belong to the bourgeois class. They frequently visit and stay in foreign countries. So we can observe modernity in their attire, lifestyle and thoughts. They have lots of native as well as foreign friends whom they respect more than other relatives. They are not under pressure of in-laws or children. They are free from such common tensions. But they have to struggle for their own independent existence.

Man-woman relationship, man's relationship with his mother country, celebration of the birth of a girl-child, modern woman's experiences, woman's low self-esteem, gender-relations etc. are the major themes observed in *The Lackadaisical Sweeper*. Gauri Deshpande's fiction deals with a woman and turns towards man-woman relationship again and again. Man-woman relationship is the basic relationship in the world. Other relations come after and are related to that basic relation. Around this relationship there is a social system of gender produced out of other relationships. And the rules and regulations are also related to it. From the birth different social and cultural atmosphere created for girls and boys is termed as 'gender'. It is a cultural construct which causes gender discrimination (Abrams 102). Gauri has revolted against the patriarchal mentality and gender-biased portrayal of men and women in fiction too. However, she never rejects the existence of man in woman's life. The protagonist of almost all stories here is a married woman, exploring her relationships with her husband, parents, children, friends and

with other countries too. So the topic of this paper is the depiction of international relations in Gauri Deshpande's stories.

International relations mean the various relations among the different nations in the world. International relations as a distinct field of study began in Britain in 1919. The contemporary international system was finally established through decolonization during Cold War. Contemporary international relations discourse explains a way of looking at the international system which includes the individual level, the domestic state a unit, the international level of transnational and intergovernmental affairs and the global level. Religion, war, power are the tools of international relations. Liberalism, Marxism, realism, idealism, globalization, feminism, political constructivism etc. theories have been the foundation of international relations in 20th century. Feminist International Relations Scholars have not only concerned itself with the traditional focus of International Relations on states, wars, diplomacy and security, but Feminist International Relations Scholars have also emphasized the importance of looking at how gender shapes the current global political economy. According to liberalism, individuals are basically good and capable of meaningful cooperation to promote positive change. In short, current international system is characterized by growing interdependence, mutual responsibility, dependency on others and growing globalization.

Due to globalization and migration now "Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam" means the earth becomes a family. It creates international relations and conflict too which reflect in literature of Gauri Deshpande like writers. In her various stories like 'Whatever Happened to...', 'Smile and Smile and...' Gauri Deshpande chooses Japan as a setting. She appreciates Japanese beauty, hard work, and discipline but at the same time she is critical about Japan. e.g. Japanese people give too much importance to manners and etiquettes, and hide their real emotions. 'The Japanese face is not built for smiling.' But they learn from foreigners to smile to express goodwill. The Japanese are disinclined to create 'situations'. However bad they feel, they behave and work as required. They, particularly males, do feel superior or perhaps they hide an inferiority complex under a show of superiority. They never deal with women as equals and prefer to marginalize women. According to the protagonist of 'Smile and Smile and...' the Japanese are formal, traditional, rude and patriarchal by nature. They don't show their real emotions and are very practical also. She meets such a representative of Japanese, Mr. Miyura in their Japanese office. He keeps on smiling hiding his real emotions behind his fake smile. Through the protagonist here

the author expresses in clear cut terms her love for mother country, and disgust for the developed countries like Japan who marginalize Indians and women especially.

The protagonist in 'Whatever Happened to...' is a divorcee, living all alone and working in Japan. She feels lonely there. She tries to get some joy by meeting her schoolmates and revising old memories. The narrator presents the two different attitudes of looking towards her – first her Indian gentleman schoolmate who appreciates her for her courage to live and manage all alone in Japan and secondly a girl schoolmate who is now a smart and worldly career-oriented journalist. She looks down upon the protagonist for living and working in Japan like 'out of the way place'. The protagonist feels little hurt and replies curtly. But again she feels sorry and apologizes her friend who leaves hurriedly. On the other hand, her gentleman friend lures this insecure lonely woman by flattering her, enjoys her hospitality by overdrinking late at night, then sleeps and caresses her in her house and never repents for what happens further. He never apologizes to the host whose loneliness he has taken disadvantage of. She feels that it is all her mistake and apologizes him for that. Women's low self-esteem is the major concern here. Lurking in the margins of many stories as 'Vervain', 'The Lackadiasical Sweeper', 'Whatever Happened to...' this is suggested as one reason for women's marginalization everywhere in the world, for the retreat of even successful, strong women into self-deprecation vis-à-vis any man.

'Hookworm, Lamprey, Tick, Fluke and Flea' is a 'disguised' story because under its ironical surface is the 'real' theme: the symbiotic relationship between a parasite and its host' (TLS 212). Gauri suggests that women are willing hosts – society has dinned 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 they have no other option: they can only play host to a variety of parasites. The title, containing the names of such troublesome parasites, is an apt one. Here the narrator's friend Jenny suffers because of her drunkard husband, Tony, and her destructive sons. Such men are always defied by Gauri Deshpande in her fiction. After marriage generally women forget friends but Gauri Deshpande's women are extraordinary who cherish their friendship until their last breath. One of Jenny's friend Aysha's Canadian cousin at last comes for her help. He takes Jenny's family to 'labour-short Canada' which changes their life completely. Jenny leaves her husband and becomes a 'lady of leisure' when her sons get lucrative jobs there. At last the narrator observes that Jenny was in no trouble, had not given up 'her boys', did not want a job, nor liberation. She was happy

to be an unpaid slave to her sons. The narrator refers to her as 'the Stupid Samaritans' who is happy to be a parasite, dependent and unpaid slave in the male-dominating world.

'Vervain' is the story which makes us aware of the fact that a woman is taken for granted, and treated in inferior manner by the men and so the condition of a woman is the same everywhere in the world. Germany is the locale and Li-Ta is the protagonist of this story. Hans-Joachim is Li-Ta's adored father. He gives this unique name to his special daughter born a long time after three sons. But war, death of his wife and eldest son make him numb and insensitive to think about Li-Ta. He snatches the school-going, playful girl's childhood from her and entrusts the hard responsibility of household on her immature shoulders. She sacrifices her childhood for these three men – her father and two brothers. Brothers get educated and settle in Canada and Australia leaving their sister all alone after the death of their father. Though they are her elder brothers they don't care for her future, education and marriage. Further when she comes to know that her husband is faithless she gets mentally disturbed. Her brothers neither provide her emotional support nor a female friend in the form of their wives. Her sons also never care for her emotions. All these traditional men always take her for granted. 'Boys will be boys' but she has to always adjust, sacrifice and sustain them. She has to care for them but nobody cares for her. Such patriarchal, traditional men bring grief in the life of devoted Li-Ta. We feel at the beginning that there is the celebration of the birth of the girl-child. Li-Ta is very proud of her unique name. But in the course of time she discovers that she is just a housemaid for her male relatives, that actually she is just a common woman,

Who had suffered war, famine, oppression, betrayal; and suffered because boys will be boys, after all. 'They' wanted to 'make important' and play with their toys while 'we' were nothing but the little Li-Ta left at home; the little one with the special name that they could remember while they blew each other up. (TLS 138)

Thus this story brings out the grief of a common woman who has to suffer because of men; she has to lose her identity but gets oppression, betrayal and restlessness in return. Due to horrible war memories and insensitive male relatives she has to take a therapy and vervain tea to smooth her nerves and for sound sleep at night. One day her Indian friend DT makes her aware of her situation and advices to establish her own identity. After DT's meeting she becomes so restless with the awareness of her marginalization that she has to take a strong pill for sleep. In

this sense this is truly the feministic story of war effects, gender discrimination and international relations.

In the story 'The Debt' Anita is an American emancipated lady. She proposes and marries Sajan Singh, a submissive but intelligent Indian. His father opposes their marriage and Anita is surprised by the strange pride of Sajan's relatives to disown a daughter-in-law like her who is well-educated, pretty, well-to-do and blond. On the other hand, all her friends and relatives are so liberal to accept Sajan Singh in spite of his strangeness. After marriage, Anita is quite satisfied with her job, research and with a co-operative husband. When she becomes pregnant she takes a decision of abortion not to interrupt her career. Sajan, an otherwise submissive man, strongly opposes her. Surprisingly she retorts in a tone of contempt:

In your country they may think of women as just baby-making machines, but don't forget that I am an American. I don't want to live simply as a female animal, sacrificing my intellect, my personality. I will decide when to have a child if I decide to have a child at all. (TLS 91)

Unfortunately on the same day Sajan meets with an accident and in a coma dies after four weeks. Anita gets no time for abortion. What Sajan could not have achieved while living, he had achieved by dying. After the birth of her son she realizes the absence of Sajan in her life. Here Sajan represents an Indian who cuts the bonds of home to gain material happiness in a foreign country. But at last he has to pay the debt of his father and the mother country after death through Anita. Gauri Deshpande thus stresses here that the man has to pay the debt of parents and mother country in his life.

The relationship between Indian migrant man and American native woman is clearly focused in one more story 'Hello Stranger'. It is written from a man's point of view. The male protagonist is an immigrant; he has migrated from India and settled in America. He marries an American lady whom he loves so much. In America he senses that his 'foreignness' is neither understood nor accepted; it is merely tolerated, at times corrected. Anita also realises it after Sajan's death. He experiences alienation in that foreign country, culture, people and atmosphere. He knows very well that nobody is interested in anybody's past there. His past is also not interesting for them, not even to his loving wife. He is happy to see his own new-born son but

then he feels disappointed to know that his wife has given birth to a son and not a daughter because he thinks that daughters demand less from their parents and have a perfectly workable relationship with the parents. He knows that this is a boy with American background. He will not be able to share the dark burden of his father's loneliness. He addresses him as 'Hello, Stranger' thinking that:

This child, this son of mine, would never know... what it was to face sorrow and loneliness and rejection and humiliation in an alien country. This son, who would forever be an alien to the father as the father was an alien to these shores; this son was the final goodbye and the first link (TLS 42).

Narain is the representative of traditional husbands in 'The Lackadaisical Sweeper'. Narain wants his wife Seeta to be no more than a domestic slave and a goddess, a mythical-allegorical being devoid of female sexuality and humanness. And Seeta is in no position to do anything about it. She was bound to try and excel at wifely virtues'. He looks unsympathetically at Seeta's friendship with Sheila, who is a Jew and wife of an ordinary airline steward. He is a selfish Indian man who looks down upon women and the downtrodden people even in Hongkong. He takes disadvantage of Seeta's innocent faith and friendship for his own economic benefit. He does not care for even his wife's emotions. Thus Narain is a selfish, unsympathetic and domineering husband who represents global patriarchy here.

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 her growing age. Here Gauri highlights the role of an American tourist and a daughter in bringing out transformation in the mother. Denzil is a Greek modern life partner of Indian Ulka in 'Dmitri in the Afternoon'. For job's sake he has to go to Greece for some months. Ulka also goes with him leaving their children behind with her parents and he never opposes her. He loves her more than before in the romantic atmosphere of Greece. He allows her to wander in Greece and when she tells him about her visit to Dmitri, he accepts it playfully. Thus Gauri presents a foreign, handsome, broad-minded, friendly, considerate, loving and modern life partner in the character of Denzil here.

In 'Rose Jam', Gauri narrates her experiences of youth. Her parents accepted visiting professorships at Berkeley. They took Gauri with them to California. There she felt disgusted with the social prejudice against Indians. Abandoning traditional saris and appearance, she, however, took happily to 'jeans, tees, keds, chopped-off hair, boyfriends...sneaked smokes...'. Americans disliked her breaking of invisible rules decreed for humble foreigners. She was 'just a foreign nobody with a peculiar accent'. So instead of staying on and marrying one of their golden boys she returned to India. And the credit goes to her grandmother, Aai who has introduced Gauri to the culture, traditions and recipes of India.

'Map' is a fine story of only two characters – 'he' and 'she', and 'she' is the protagonist here. The female narrator narrates how he enters, sees and wins her. This story can be compared with Gabriel Okara's metaphorical poem 'The Mystic Drum'. In both of these works the theme of love attains its height with the theme of colonialism. Here he is shrewd enough to win her trust as a cartographer, disinterested man. Then he flatters her and enjoys her beauty, youth and property. When he feels satisfied he pretended to be exhausted of doing cartographical, cultivating, protective services for her, and at last leaves her at 50. He is selfish enough to remind her to be grateful and available for him whenever he wishes. Thus this story paints a domineering patriarchal man here. It is a tribute to Edward Said, the promoter of Orientalism; so we can conclude that it is a metaphorical story where 'he' stands for an oppressive colonizer who wins the trust, obscures the wealth and leaves the host countries in forlorn condition. The metaphor in 'Map' becomes all the more interesting when one realizes that the 'narrator woman' is India and the cartographer the imperial power. Then this woman does not remain a common emancipated woman but a nation free from colonial rule. The history of women's marginalisation and double colonisation is portrayed by Gauri Deshpande fantastically in this allegorical story 'Map'.

In short, Gauri Deshpande's English short story collection deals with the various themes. But the leit-motif in her anthology is the travails faced by Indians living abroad which are expressed in the stories like 'Hello, Stranger', 'Rose Jam', 'The Debt' and so on. Here we can observe the minute study of gender too. The stories like 'Vervain', 'Smile and Smile and ...', 'Map' etc. explain clearly the international gender discrimination. We have to salute Gauri Deshpande for writing a fine metaphorical story 'Map' where gender relations theme is expanded on a wider scale. Thus these stories uncover the layers of various relationships of India

with other countries as America, Japan, Hongkong, Germany, Britain, Greece, Canada and so on. Migration, colonisation, marriage, travelling in foreign countries, education, international jobs in international companies create international relations and conflicts too which are depicted significantly in Gauri Deshpande's English collection of short stories *The Lackadaisical Sweeper*.

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