

## Feminist Sensibility in the Poetry of Gauri Deshpande and Mamta Kalia

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**Abstract :** There are number of women poets hailing from different corners of our country namely, Kamala Das, Sujata Bhatta, Eunice de Souza, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Deshpande, Mamata Kalia, etc. who represent female problems in their verses. Gauri Deshpande is a minor poet with three collections of poems- Between Births (1968), Lost Love (1970) and Beyond the Slaughter House. She presents various aspects like love, sex and marital relationship. She explores intricacies and conflict of man woman relationship in her poems. Like Deshpande, Mamata Kalia is very frank and straightforward in expressing the feelings and complaints regarding love, sex, family and man woman relationship. For instance, she delineates the problems faced by women in the tedious life in household chores in her poem titled “I feel Like Crying All the Time”. In another poem titled “I am a Great Fool” she presents the poet’s sense of boredom in her matrimonial relationship. Other poems like “Love Made Housewife out of Me”, “I Must write Nicely, Now”, “Matrimonial Bliss”, etc. show Mamta Kalia’s concerns regarding women’s predicaments in male dominated society. This research paper attempts to explore and analyze women’s problems represented in the poems of Gauri Deshpande and Mamta Kalia.

**Keywords :** Confessional, Frustration, Man-woman relationship, Predicament, Pain and suffering, Patriarchal society.

### Introduction

Indian Literature in English is abundantly enriched by women writers in general and fiction in particular. Women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sehgal, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, etc. have won international name and fame. Through their novels they have depicted the pains and predicaments of women, oppression inflicted upon them in patriarchal society, quest for identity, etc. So far as poetry is concerned, there are number of women poets hailing from different corners of our country namely, Sujata Bhatta, Eunice de Souza, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Meena Kandasamy, Kamala Das etc. who represent female problems in their verses. This research paper attempts to explore and analyze women’s problems represented in the poems of Gauri Deshpande and Mamta Kalia. Lisa Ee Jia Lau mentions how the women poets in Indian English call upon the young girls to rise from slumber: “due to the fact you’re girls human beings will pressure their questioning on you. They will inform you how to get dressed, how to behave, who you can meet and where you can pass. Don’t live inside the shadow of human’s judgment. Make your own alternatives in the mild of

your personal understanding.( Lau,159-171)) Women poets writes consciously as women. Their poetry is confessional and autobiographical in nature, and exhibit frank and bold realistic experiences.

Born in Pune, Gauri Deshpande was a professor of English at Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune and Fergusson College in Pune. No critic or reader of Indian English poetry can bypass without recognizing her contribution to Indian English poetry. She is a fiction writer and a poet of Marathi, her first language, and her poetry in English includes only three collections- *Between Births* (1968), *Lost Love* (1970), and *Beyond the Slaughter House* (1972). Although she has three collections of poems to her credit, she occupies an important position in Indian English poetry. She is regarded as a trend breaker in Indian English poetry by breaking conventional attitudes. Her poetry deals with various aspects like love and sex in the light of marital relationship, sense of alienation and frustration, identity crisis, recognition, and urge for feminine sensibility. She highlights man-woman relations of an urban life. She is frank and outspoken in raising the women's issues, and has a distinct strong feminist voice.

In Indian family and society, girls and boys are treated differently. Girls grow up in different familial and social milieu compared to that of boys. There are different values and norms for them. A girl has to play different roles in her life. In her parent's home she is raised in patriarchal set up. After marriage, she has to compromise at every step. Despite this she is deprived of happiness and mental peace in her life. Gauri Deshpande expresses her anger and anguish over gender differentiations in her poems.

Gauri Deshpande explores conflicts and complexities in the relationship of men and women. She is deeply grieved to find that women are treated as objects of sexual gratification for men. In Indian society, marriage is considered as a holy institution for the unification of two souls.. A girl believes marriage as a means to achieve long cherished desires and aspirations, but after marriage she finds herself enslaved by her husband. She loses her self and identity, and becomes the suffix of her husband. She has to the dictates of her husband, and satisfy his whims and desires be it pleasing or unpleasing to her. Marriage becomes a man's legal right to treat woman as sexual object. In her poem "Man and Woman" Deshpande writes about a woman's position in marital relationship:

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

In her poem "The Guest" she talks about the gloomy fate of a woman in Indian society since ages. She recalls her lover who has deserted her leaving empty although he has lived with her happily earlier. The poem encompasses the agony of the deserted woman, and lack of harmony in her marital life:

You are gone now, The perfect mouth that kissed my words no longer by And as the clouds head and heap upon the west I lie empty, barren and bereft.

In the poem "I Wanted to Weep" the poet presents a woman's pain and suffering, and her failure in improving her worsened relationship with her husband. She is unable to remake her broken relationship because her husband, who is the oppressor also, determines her fate in the repressive patriarchal society, and this situation aggravates her miseries. Gauri Deshpande calls upon women to come forward and change the age old secondary position in patriarchal society. Aprna Mahajan in her essay on "The Portrayal of relationship in Gauri Deshpande's "The Lackadaisical Sweeper" points out how Gauri Deshpande seeks to

make her readers aware of the fact that “women’s suppression and subjectivity should not be looked upon as her destiny for she believed that it was up to the woman alone think and to create her own distinctive path in her circumstances.”(Mahajan, 59-64)

Deshpande depicts women’s isolated world and their feminine feelings in her poem “The Female of the Species.” Here she mentions how a woman needs the company other women for intimate talk about love, despair or about the ungratefulness of her children. Certainly, a man has no value in this kind of talk. Women talk about prices of things of daily use such as rice, tea and scarcity of kerosene etc. with other women be it mother, sister or best friend, thus unburden their heart, and try to console themselves by sharing their repressed emotions and frustrations:

Sometimes you want to talk

About love and despair And the ungratefulness of children. A man is no use whatever then.

Born in 1940 in Brindavan, Uttar Pradesh Mamta Kalia received M.A in English from University of Delhi and took up lectureship first at SNDT University, Mumbai. One of the pioneer post independent poets she is a bilingual poet who started her literary career at the age of eighteen. She primarily writes in Hindi. As a poet of English, she has left in edible mark in the field of Indian English poetry. She has two collections of poems published from Writers Workshop, Calcutta- *Tribute to Papa and Other Poems* (1970).and *Poems* 1978, (1979). Like Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia is frank and straightforward in expressing her feelings and complaints regarding love, sex, family and society. Her poetry is confessional in nature. She focuses on the lived experience of women from Indian middle-class families. In one of her poems she mentions social etiquettes imposed on women, and her desire to live natural life.

Mamta Kalia portrays the plight of women they undergo in their parents’ house in-laws’ house, society and profession. In her poems she depicts agonies of a woman’s life in and outside of house, her frustrations in marital life and degeneration of human values. She advocates for a world where evils like gender discrimination, hypocrisy and male hegemony have no place. In her poetry, she pleads for women’s individuality, freedom and liberation from patriarchal operations to ensure women’s equitable life

Love is one of the themes in her poetry. In her poem “On a Love Lost” she frankly expresses her experience:

I am earth Vast deep and black

And I receive /the first rain

Sweet, generous,/ lashing, throbbing;

Its smell forever my blood

Its imprint deep/ within my quirk.

Yellow daisies burst upon my breast and thigh

At its very touch.

In Indian patriarchal society, girls have to live a restricted life in their parents’ home. They are prohibited from making intimacy with opposite sex. The poet sincerely pleads for their individuality, autonomy and independence. In the poem “Tribute to Papa” she mentions the conservative temperament of her father as he suspects her love affairs:

Everything about you clashes with

Nearly everything about me.

You suspect I am having a love affair these days,

But you’re too shy to have it confirmed

What if my tummy starts showing gradually

And I refuse to have it curetted?

But I'll be careful, Papa,

Or I know you'll at once think of suicide.

The poet's ideas and views are opposite to those of her father, "Everything about you clashes with/ nearly everything about me." Defying her father's attitude she discloses her love in unconventional way, "What if tummy starts showing gradually and I refuse to have it curetted?" She believes in free sex and defies traditional morality. Her father respects traditions and customs and sticks to them. Contrary to her father, the poet is liberal in her views. Despite this she unwillingly surrenders before her father's wish and sentiments in the end of the poem: "But I'll be careful, Papa/ Or I know you'll at once think of suicide." Thus we find a shift from woman's opposition to man's dominance to woman's acceptance of man's domination. Undoubtedly, it is very painful. This sudden change of mood reflects her personality split between "two worlds of tradition and modernity, freedom and bondage, domesticity and professionalism..." ( Vashishtha, 57)

In the beginning of the same poem she is critical of her father's attitudes towards traditions. The poet opines that these are irrelevant in the modern times:

Who cares you, Papa?

Who cares for your clean thoughts, clear words, and clean teeth?

Who wants be the angel like you?

Who wants it?

She questions her father, why should his traditional values determine the fate of his daughter? She rebels against middle class patriarchal respectability. She is not bound to follow her father's ideals and it is difficult to adjust in his world. She wants to dismantle his lessons taught to her and follow her independent path. She rejects her father's life of limited dreams, Following her own ideals, she desires to lead an independent life.

In her poem "I Must Write Nicely Now" she raises her voice against male chauvinism in patriarchal society where a husband holds superior position and wife secondary status. Here she discloses her anguish against her arrogant husband who is indifferent towards the family. She expresses her helplessness that she cannot adjust with her children as they have their own individuality. In this poem the poet pleads for women's liberation from male subjugation.

Rejection, Dejection, Erection.

You can't adjust with your own children.

You feel the world is full of whores

Knocking hard at your bedroom doors.

You sleep with a headache.

Except yourself

You feel everything is fake.

In Indian family, women are devoted to domesticity and childcare. Chained with household chores from early morning to late night, they have no time to think of their own well-being. In her poem, "I Feel Like Crying All the Time" the poet expresses her tiresome experience in her in laws' house where she has to obey all the family members. The following lines reveal her anger and revolt against traditional confinement:

I feel like crying all the time

Or running on the roads with an unwashed face

I want to smash a glass early in the morning

And wake up everybody with a start.

I hate these people around,  
Related to me.

After independence women are getting equal opportunities in almost all fields at par with men be it in administration, education, politics, banking sector etc. But it is also true that they have to shoulder two fold responsibilities: a homemaker in the family and a working woman outside home. Thus they manage household responsibilities and also bear the drudgery of their working place. Addition to these they are clamped with social constraints, too. Kalia wishes to defy them in her poem "Compulsions":

Mamta Kalia expresses her anger against patriarchal society where she loses her identity and individuality after marriage. In her poem "Anonymous", she reflects on her identity crisis: "I no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia. /I'm Vimla/or Kanta or Shanta./I cook, I wash,/I bear, I rear,/ I nag, I wag,/ I sulk, I sag. / see worthless movies at reduced rates../I put on weight every month/like Kamla or Vimla/or Kanta or Shanta,/and feel happy./ I am no longer Mamta Kalia." It is the voice of the poet as well as the voice of an average Indian woman. It depicts the status of a middle class woman who does not have any specific name. The title of the poem "Anonymous" literally means without any name. It can be any name. It denotes whole feminine world. Here the poet discloses that before marriage everyone knew her by her name but after marriage she has become a normal house wife. The very first line, "I no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia" reveals this. She does not have any particular name. In fact, she has lost her name after marriage. She expresses her agony, "I am no longer Mamta Kalia." She has become the part of her husband's family and she has to adjust there. Destined assignment is to manage home and keep vigil on saving to meet the expenses properly. She underlines that middle class women are merely unpaid servants who care everybody but nobody cares them. In this introspective poem she talks about various facets of life, societal roles and place of woman in family and society, She discloses her understanding of complexities of human relationships..

Mamta Kalia believes that women are often trapped in loveless the institution of marriage. .In number of her poems she underlines how marriage has been the cause of women's sufferings. They feel deceived that marriage is bliss. In the poem " I Am A Great Fool " the poet discloses that marriage proves to be a curse as it has snatched away love, peace and identity from her life, and thus has no trust in marital relationship., "I am a great fool to think/ That marriage is a bliss/ Was it last month or last year//That we exchanged a kiss..". Mitchell Juliet in her essay titled "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis" aptly talks about the marginalized and repressed condition of women in male dominated society. She enquires, "What are our lives to be about? Who are we?" and concludes "how woman's life consists of domesticity, personal relations and personal intimacies..."( Mitchell 407)

In another poem "Matrimonial Bliss" Mamta Kalia mentions through her protagonist that she is like an appendix of a book or a small tube shaped part which is joined to the intestine on the right side of the body and has no use in humans.. She compares herself with the last page of a book. Her husband is a book and she is an appendix. A wife's life has little worth, no identity and individuality under the shadow of the life her husband. In this poem the poet stresses that there is no emotional bonding between wife and husband.

In another poem "Oh I'm fed up of being a woman" the poet reveals through the protagonist that a woman always wants to look beautiful. She is cautious of her body whether she is fat or thin, and also careful of her dress. In fact, a woman is a show-piece and meant for pleasure but no one bother for her feelings and dignity. She receives only hatred and tortures for her sacrifice but no respect.

To conclude, the poetry of both poets is confessional in tone and they express many personal experiences as women with feminine sensibility. Gauri Deshpande and Mamta Kalia raise women's problems through their poems. Gauri Deshpande is a feminist voice who emphasizes individual identity and freedom. She reveals the discontentment of women in traditional society where they have no self of their own. Before and after marriage they have to compromise throughout their life. Mamta too represents various conflicts and complexities between man woman relationships. She shows her deep concern with regard to treatment of woman as sex object and women are deprived of their identity and individuality in this man dominated society. Smt. B. Shubhashini aptly comments that Mamta Kalia, "delineates the social predicament, religious barriers, and its restrictions on women" (Subhashini, 85) As a representative of Indian women Mamta Kalia boldly advocates for their emancipation and calls upon to strive hard to achieve their rights.

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