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## THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES: AN INTER-GENRE AND INTER-GENDER VIEW

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Literature diachronically documents the happenings in a society or culture. No doubt its primary aim is to entertain the readers. Besides entertaining, it also aims to educate the readers by making them aware of the various problems in the society. Literature has various genres which are used by the wordsmiths tactfully to communicate their realization of a problem to others. Accordingly, it is possible that a subject can be realized in a similar way by different writers through different genres. The experiences of joys and miseries vary from person to person. However, there are certain qualities that can be found in all the members of a group. There are biological differences in man and woman. These differences range from physical to psychological states. In a male-dominated society woman is cultivated. She is degenerated, subordinated, exploited and ill-treated. It is believed that man is the sole companion of woman. But it can be observed that her sole companion is not man but a woman. This theme is presented, possibly with a very slight difference, in a short poem entitled, 'The Female of the Species' by GouriDeshpande and a short story entitled, 'A Season of No Return' by Gurdial Singh.

**Key words:** literature, genres, woman, companion, poem, short story

Literature is a means of sharing. It is used to share experiences, ideas, imagination, feelings, and even patterns of life. It has the ability to present every tangible and intangible facet of life, human as well as non-human. It is a depot of human knowledge in a printed and easily accessible form. Literature has various

genres such as fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, folktale and others. Each genre of literature has distinct features which enable the writers to give vent to their experiences, feelings, ideas and imaginations in unique ways which are directly or indirectly utilized to entertain or/and educate the people. These genres are used by writers as per their proficiencies. Literature can cover anything below the sky, natural and even supernatural. As literature deals with human observations and experiences, it is possible to have two genres of literature presenting the same idea or subject matter. It is possible to find two writers expounding the same idea, as it happens with William Shakespeare's 'All the world's a Stage' and Arun Kolatkar's 'Biograph'. It is also possible to get two writers of different gender expound the same theme or central idea. It means that one subject matter can be presented by different writers through different genres as per their outlooks.

A poem usually presents emotions and feelings. The word, poem is derived from the Greek word, *poiein* meaning 'to create, make or compose'. A poem is usually written in lines, stanzas and verses avoiding the details and putting words in a rhyme. Quite often words in a poem are chosen for the sake of sound and feel. Besides, a poem can also be prosaic. On the other hand, short stories are prose fiction. They are written in complete sentences and paragraphs. They are composed in the standard written language. No doubt the language of a short story can be poetic. It is mostly about an important event, a turning point, in the life of a character or characters. A short story is made of plot, characters, setting, narration and perspective. A poem may not be about a character. However, a short story has to have a character and an event in his or her life. In fact, this paper is not intended to bring out the difference in a poem and short story, but rather it is an attempt to study the status of woman as depicted in a poem 'The Female of the Species' and a short story, 'A Season of No Return' of which the former is written by the famous Indian woman writer, Gouri Deshpande and the latter is written by the famous Panjabi writer, Gurdial Singh.

The central idea of 'The Female of the Species' and 'A Season of No Return' is woman and to be particular the woman-man relationship and woman-woman relationship. These literary works offer us a chance to study woman as

presented by a female writer and a male writer. Woman is discussed by different writers across the time differently. Some portray her as a creator or preserver and some as destroyer. Some depict woman as fragile and some as forceful. Some present woman as loyal, faithful, devoted and dignified and some as disloyal, faithless and cheap. But the poem, 'The Female of the Species' and the story, 'A Season of No Return' present the similar problems of woman by putting her in contrast to man.

Gouri Deshpande is a distinguished bilingual writer. She has written in both Marathi and English. She delineates unpretentious and conversant experiences and situations in routine daily life in her poems. 'The Female of the Species' is a short poem. It is a poem about woman by a woman. Naturally it is addressed to woman:

'Sometimes you want to  
talk about love and despair' (Deshpande, 1994)

The pronoun, 'you' in the above lines refers to a woman. The title of the poem is transparent. It means the woman. It focuses the patriarchal ideology in which the masculine is considered as the norm and feminine is taken as the deviation of nature. According to Gauri, the necessity for communication and companionship sometimes grows very desperate. It is pointed out that a woman can be a true companion of a woman. A woman usually talks about love, despair and ungrateful children. When a woman wants to have an intimate and personal talk on such matters, she can do this with a woman only. Here a man has no value: 'A man is no use whatever then' (Deshpande, 1994). The woman in the poem represents the house wives who are always anxious about their children. They love their children and sacrifice their whole life for the well-being of their children. But sometimes their children are ungrateful to them. This causes despair. But she can share her experiences of love and despair with another woman and not with man. A woman can be the only suitable companion for a woman to give vent to her feelings. It does not matter if the other woman in such acts of sharing is the woman's mother, sister, or girl-school-friend.

Gauri points out that when a woman meets another woman, the intimate sharing begins. They talk about one another's first love and about their children and they release themselves. This is a completely female world.

The poem is addressed to a woman. It is a conversation between two women, the poet and probably her friend, true companions. The world of women is entirely secluded. When they come together they sit and talk. They talk while working; while sipping tea:

*'You sit with them and talk.*

*She sews and you sit and sip.'*(Deshpande, 1994)

These women, especially housewives talk about the cost of domestic necessities because it is a woman who looks after and manages the house. They use money very carefully. So they:

*'...speak of the rate of rice*

*And the price of tea*

*And the scarcity of cheese'* (Deshpande, 1994)

It means women talk about the simple needs and they rearrange them. They spend money cautiously not because they do not earn but for the better future of their children. They sacrifice their comforts and pleasures for the luxury and happiness of their children. However, they do share with one another how their children do not understand their sacrifice. But these women do not talk about their personal, might be abandoned, dreams and ambitions that have never been expressed. These are acts of silent communication. Such women are found mostly in the Indian sub-continent. They are not professional women pursuing a career. But they are experts in managing the house and rations which becomes the nature of a woman. They shoulder their responsibilities happily and successfully but they are not offered any credit. Still they keep chattering about their love, despair and ungrateful children. The act of sharing these experiences gives them a kind of relief from the never ending burden.

Gurdial Singh is a Jnanpith Award winner Punjabi writer. He has written novels, short-stories and plays. 'A Season of No Return' is Gurdial Singh's thought-provoking short story. It is about superficial human relationships and the status of woman in a male-dominated family. Kauri is the central character

of the story. The story presents the despair Kauri. She becomes a victim of her ungrateful sons. Like Gauri Deshpande, Gurdial Singh presents the estrangement of woman among her family members, especially men. The story shows how a woman is exploited by the system and she has to suffer silently all the pains of being alone and insignificant.

Kauri is middle aged woman. She is a good mother and wife. She has a good husband and two sons, Santokh and Gyana. She loves them. Santokh marries a girl of his choice. He neglects the wishes of his parents. Still Kauri and her husband forgive him. When Santokh's wife is pregnant, he wishes to take Kauri with him to help his wife through pregnancy. Kauri forgives his mistakes and goes with him reluctantly.

Kauri is a typical Indian woman. She has tolerance. She is lenient. She is obedient. As per the wish of her husband and Gyana, Kauri goes with Santokh. Nobody concerned about what Kauri thinks. The decision is binding on her. This creates an existential problem for Kauri. Santokh is an engineer and his wife is a professor. They work in the other state which is away from Punjab. Kauri stays all alone in Santokh's home, as he and his wife have jobs. Santokh's wife is modern woman. But she cannot be a proper companion for Kauri to share her feeling. And relieve her burden. This is what Kauri does not like. She needs a companion to share her 'love and despair' (Deshapande, 1994). She becomes restless. She cannot sleep soundly. No doubt, there are women, but they do not fit into Kauri's nature. There is a Gujrati woman in the neighbourhood, who is in the same state as Kauri. But Kauri needs an intimate companion. She might have some woman companions at her village.

Kauri meets several Punjabi women at the gurudwara. She develops a rapport with a woman of her age, who is from Jalandhar. 'She would often share her joys and sorrows with that woman. Like Kauri, she too had come to be with her son and daughter-in-law. But once she started bad-mouthing her 'bitch' of a daughter-in-law, Kauri would find it impossible to keep listening to her.' (Singh, 2000). That is why Kauri does not get a good companion in her too. Kauri is happy in Santokh's house. 'Sometimes Kauri would think to herself: What is

paradise? Such a wonderful son and a daughter-in-law, a grandson as bright as a moon and house with plentiful of everything. What more could paradise be' (Singh, 2000)? But Kauri's true companions are in her village in her husband's house. So –

Still, occasionally she would start feeling rather restive, apparently for no reason whatsoever. In the past two months or so, she had told Santokh several times over, "Kaka, please take me back to the village." But every time he would say the same thing, "What are you going to do there? ... .. Now what could she say; there was hardly any inconvenience she could think of. Except that she felt restless occasionally. Sometimes, she just wanted to wing her way back to the village. .... Occasionally when she had such a dream at night, she would start blubbing all to herself, waking up in the process. Drenched in perspiration, she would first glance towards the room of her son and daughter-in-law and then sitting up in her bed, start reciting 'WaheguruWaheguru' in the darkness of the night. (Singh, 2000)

Besides when the maid servant comes in the house, Kauri gets some relief with idea of sharing something with her. But the maid is very busy as she has to go about her work in a rather slipshod manner. She has to rush through her work. Subsequently, she cannot spare time for sharing matters with Kauri. This is how Kauri is separated. She is alienated and estranged. So she wants to go back to her village. But when Santokh insists her to stay with him, she does not complain.

Kauri is a good mother-in-law. She has no complaints about her daughters-in-law. Santokh's wife comes from a lower caste. Still Kauri has no grudge against her. In Santokh's house she remembers her younger daughter-in-law and grandchildren, Melu and Karmi. Kauri is simple by nature. When other women talk bad about their daughters-in-law, Kauri just keeps quiet.

Kauri is a selfless and loving village woman. All the time she remembers her village. In the new place she is not happy. But for the sake of Santokh she tolerates the loneliness. The memories of her home in the village make her

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restless and sleepless. That worsens her health and selfish Santokh sends her back to the village with his engineer friend.

In a nut shell, the feelings like love and affection are the foundation of human relationships. It is love that encourages and motivates a woman to play various roles at home as mother, daughter, sister, wife and home-maker, etc. The central theme of the poem, 'The Female of the Species' and the short story, 'A Season of No Return' is the existential difficulty of woman as an individual. The poem focuses the general truth about woman and the story exemplifies this truth. Gouri Deshpande's poem has a touch of misery happening to woman due to a sense of loss, parting and deprivation. And Gurdial Singh's short story justifies the poem by Gauri Deshpande at the individual level. The poem presents the universal truth about woman and the story proves the truth with the example of a woman. This clearly shows that there is more or less the same inter-genre and inter-gender view about woman. Gurdial Singh has to present the reality objectively and impartially. This means if literature is used objectively, impersonally and without any bias, it portrays the genuineness underlying each issue. The genre and the writer's gender cannot create any hindrances. The poem, 'The Female of the Species' and the short story, 'A Season of No Return' delineate the same view of woman.

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