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## Depiction of Disability in Garden of Spice

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### ABSTRACT

This research paper explores disability while analyzing its intersections with gender, class, sex, and society in Shubhangi Bhadbhade's short story, "Garden of Spice". It attempts to showcase the correct degree of parents' concern about their disabled children like what and how much parents expect from their special children. The paper also deliberates on how to handle the questions of societal reactions i.e. treating or responding to disabled children with pity rather than self-esteem or dignity. It emphasizes the crucial role of parents in covering up the disability while paying special attention to other factors of personality like social, mental, physical, emotional, cultural, psychological, etc. besides aiming at making the children independent merely through education and art. Moreover, the writer appeals to the parents to be emotionally intelligent, good critical thinkers, and to understand the value of soft skills for the harmonious growth of their special children amidst societal expectations.

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Lennard J. Davis writes in *The Disability Studies Reader* that People with disabilities have been isolated, imprisoned, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. One would never know this to be the case by examining the literature on minorities and discrimination. Now the impetus to recognize the level of oppression, both explicit and by

marginalization is being organized by people with disabilities and other interested parties. The exciting thing about disability studies is that it is both an academic field of inquiry and political activity. (Davis xv)

On the other hand, Feminist disability studies make the body, bodily variety, and normalization central to analyses of all forms of oppression. Feminist disability studies expose the role of gender norms in the rationalization of oppression of disabled people, and the role of assumptions of gendered bodily norms in the oppression of gender-variant and inter-sexed people. In addition to this, feminist disability studies propose ways of rethinking and reimagining the body and embodiment, the sort of reconceptualization that Judith Butler contends is vital for making lives that have been excluded from the realm of the human and threatened with annihilation visible as lives at all. (Hall 6)

Rosemarie Garland Thomson writes that disability is an identity category that anyone can enter at any time, and we will all join it if we live long enough. As such, disability reveals the essential dynamism of identity. Thus, disability weakens the cherished cultural belief that the body is the unchanging anchor of identity. Moreover, it undermines our fantasies of stable, enduring identities in ways that may illuminate the fluidity of all identities.

Whereas Chris Bell presents White Disability Studies while not wholeheartedly excluding people of color from its critique, by and large focuses on the work of white individuals and is itself largely produced by a corps of white scholars and activists. White Disability Studies envisions nothing ill-advised with this learning because it is innocently done and far too difficult to remedy. (Bell 275)

The Writer portrays how disabled children and their parents think about disability through the character of Sayali, a disabled girl, and her parents Jaidev and Rupa. After the stage performance of singing as the crowd of the audience rushes towards Sayali to congratulate her, her father Jaidev notices her becoming uncomfortable reaches the stage to pick her up, and leaves with her in a taxi. Rupa considers this act of her husband inappropriate as besides the audience, the organizer had also wished to congratulate her, but Jaidev did not like the approach of the audience. In the taxi, Sayali says:

“Aai, how was my song?”

“Ask your Baba!” she snapped. Turning to Jaidev she murmured, “How very moody of you! One can never be sure what may upset you. At least tell her how her performance was.”

“It was good, Sayali,” Jaidev said looking remote.



“Aai, I know they applauded the songs. But Aai, my legs!

“What would they have thought about them?”

“What’s there to think about, Sayali, besides pain? Truth can’t be ignored darling,” Rupa sighed.

“Yes, Aai, they must have thought what a girl who can’t even stand.”

“Oh, shut up, Sayali. Will you” Jaidev snapped.

Sayali fell silent. (Bhadbhade 126)

Rupa, Sayali’s mother does not approve of her husband's behaviour that exhibited heartlessness towards the kid star's fans, the audience who wished to encourage the little singer for her talent, and complete ingratitude towards the organizer of the programme, Mr. Desai who was coming to meet Jaidev to share happiness on the success of the event. The reason for Jaidev’s unexpected reaction was his realization of the fact that the people gave a standing ovation to the little star as she performed on the stage just out of pity and sympathy which Jaidev disliked the most for his daughter. He wishes that his daughter should be given respect for innate talent not for her disability as she has no legs. Therefore, Jaidev’s situational behavioural response seems the most inapt as per the codes of conduct or etiquettes. After reaching home as they are having dinner, Sayali says, “Baba, my legs, did they embarrass you today? But Baba, you are fit; Aai is also fit than me” (Bhadbhade 126-127). Before sleeping she again starts the matter by asking her mother to confirm whether her father is annoyed with her legs or not. She asks her mother why God created girls with whole legs. Perceiving the state of Sayali’s mind, her mother attempts to console her by saying "You are beautiful like a star, you are our fairy, you are an artist, aren't you, Sayali? Nothing matters to an artist besides art. How beautifully you sang today! God! It was divine. The audience was so moved. They showed so much respect. They applauded wholeheartedly, didn't they? We are proud of you, dear, very proud" (Bhadbhade 127). Whenever Rupa consoles her daughter, Jaidev generally remains quiet. After Sayali falls asleep Jaidev shares with Rupa that he felt infuriated seeing the pity and sympathy in the eyes of the people for Sayali during the event. He says that human beings generally rationalize such ill luck by blaming destiny and accordingly say that humans reap the fruit of their previous karma [deeds]. He questions his wife whether has she observed him harming, robbing, or cheating on anyone as she has known him since their marriage. At this, Rupa finds her unable to bring words of consolation for her husband.

Thereafter, the writer presents a father’s wish to have a son through the character of Jaidev after experiencing emotional turmoil from having a disabled child. Although initially, Jaidev had no issues with the sex of the child, as he undergoes the emotional crises merely due to the physical disability of his child, he starts craving a son who can liberate his life. Jaidev shares this wish with his wife Rupa as

she imagines Sayali shining in the field of music. He pleads, “But can’t we have a baby boy with strong feet to stand on. Our child fits like other children”(Bhadbhade 130). Rupa expresses her unwillingness to think about what will happen to Sayali and tries to convince Jaidev to live with the present. She says, “Rupa is in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard. Would it look good to have a baby at this stage” (Bhadbhade 131). She presents a social concern to support her point of view, but her husband does not give up and says, “Well, Rupa, fulfill my desire. Bloom, Rupa! Bloom! Blossom like jasmine. Days are spent worrying about Sayali, at least let the nights be pleasant. Let our nights pay for days labor” (Bhadbhade 131). Ultimately, Rupa gives way to Jaidev’s desire and she becomes pregnant hoping for a new life to begin with.

The writer presents the state of mind of disabled children through the character of Sayali as she has no legs she is unable to move out of the home independently. Her dependence on her parents brings some questions to her mind about her deformity bringing humiliation to her parents, considering herself as a burden on her parents, and desire to roam under the open sky like other children of her age, and befriending other children.

The writer brings out the issue of parents' over-expectations from a disabled child while ignoring children's hormonal, emotional, psychological, and physical growth. Jaidev expects his daughter to be as normal as other children and under this expectation, he starts considering his daughter a burden for him to the extent that once he says to Rupa, “Give her [Sayali] away to an orphanage. I don’t want this girl” (Bhadbhade 129). It is altogether a different matter that Rupa did not tolerate what her husband said and retorted, “I have given birth to Sayali. I’m her mother. I will not let her be an orphan. I am not annoyed with you nor do I deny your passion. My Sayali is like a cankerous vine-green at the top but lifeless below. She is just fine as she is. I shall tend her, nurse her myself if you can't” (Bhadbhade 129). Rupa takes Sayali with her and moves to her parental home. Such a reaction of a mother shows the self-sacrificing nature of a mother’s love for her children. This resistance of Rupa to her disabled daughter shakes Jaidev from within to the extent that he becomes more determined to train her in music by providing the best trainers, and facilities and empowers her through good education. Despite everything the parents do not pay proper attention to her physical growth, hormonal changes, and the needs of society for her. Once Rupa noticed Sayali intently watching outside the window from her room Rupa was startled when she saw outside the window on the public tap a boy was having a bath on seeing Sayali, he made an obscene gesture and Sayali too responded to him with laughter. The next day, Jaidev also notices her repeating the same and becomes angry and tells Rupa to move her from the window.

When Rupa encourages Sayali to share her feelings, she says, “Aai, every day some dogs come here to drink water. There is a dog with his hind leg broken. When he limps near, the others just drive him away. Aai, he too sits like me in the corner, alone. Looking wistfully at others” (Bhadbjade 133-34). In this way, one can see how Sayali accepts her physical deformity which leads to her marginalization and compels her to compare her with animals for sharing certain common features. Besides, watching the crowds of school-going children intently showcases her desire to accompany them and to roam freely outside the home.

“The Garden of Spice” presents the intersection of disability with sex, gender, class, and society. The disabled child in this context is a girl who is undesirable at a point in time for the father Jaidev who becomes desperate for a son in the hope of recovering the daughter's deformity. As Sayali is a female she is supposed to adhere to the gender roles e.g. she is snubbed by her mother for watching the people bathing at the public tap through the window of her room and when her father notices her doing the same, he expresses his anger by saying to leave her in some orphanage. The class concern comes to the fore when Rupa suggests Jaidev take Sayali out to the park for a change, at this he retorts and terms his daughter as a showpiece that will bring humiliation to him if he encounters his colleagues. In addition to this, the father feels humiliation and anger at the same time as the audience and the people show pity for the disabled child singer. It is the mother who stands by her deformed daughter alone during the time of emotional crisis and consoles her whenever she feels except not noticing her daughter's sexual orientation timely. These factors club to deprive marginalize and isolate the deformed child, Sayali. As a result, the disabled child undergoes through emotional crisis, experiences alienation, pines for companionship, and desires a normal life like other school-going children.

Through “Garden of Spice” Shubhangi Bhadbhade appeals to parents and society at large to accept the disabled children as they are and recover their deficiency by empowering them through art and education. She emphasizes that education is the only tool to make this world a better place to live in with dignity. The writer emphasizes that the parents must be emotionally intelligence and good critical thinkers so that they can better know how to handle their special children in a balanced manner and how to handle the societal pressure for the harmonious growth of their wards. Besides, the writer also emphasizes the role of soft skills that enable a person to behave, respond, or tackle certain situations in a more socially accepted manner without hurting anyone.

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