

Human Predicament and Emotional Suffocation in Shashi Deshpande's Short Story "The Intrusion"

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Abstract

Human civilization is divided into two parts – Man and Woman. Women who constitute half of the world's population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. Women's issues have gained international importance in last few decades. Shashi Deshpande, the most widely acclaimed Indian woman writer in English limelight woman's issues through her novels and short stories. The aim of the paper is about the unpleasant situation of a woman (wife) who felt that she did not have the freedom to be her authentic selves through the short story "The Intrusion" from Collected short stories Volume – I by Shashi Desh Pande. The story is about the predicament of a newly married wife whose self – respect is dishonoured by the unfriendly treatment of her husband. She thinks of him as an intruder of his freedom, thoughts etc. The Variation of thought between the husband and wife and the suppression of her husband create emotional suffocation to her. The married woman is the narrator of the story explains the turmoil on the day of her honeymoon is made aware of her sexual role with which she is forced to identify herself. She feels sickened with the fear of awaiting disaster in the form of 'sex' with a man whom she hardly knows. Like every woman she silently accepts the marriage proposal. She expects a healthy relationship of friendship between husband and wife, but it is lacking here. Her husband is an intruder to her thoughts.

Women who constitute half of the world's population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. Women's issues have gained international importance in the last few decades as it is becoming increasingly clear that in spite of being granted legal and theoretical equality in most modern societies, women suffer discrimination, exploitation and subjugation all over the world. Gender justice is a dream which remains unfulfilled.

The patriarchal consciousness gives only a relegated, painful awareness of a woman's inferior, secondary status in the society. Sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are supposed to be her inherent qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. As a woman grows, she is inculcated with the ideas of self-abnegation, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status as exemplified

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through the mystical modes of Sita, Savithri and Gandhari. Often the Indian woman is passive and accepts the given role in shaping her destiny. At every stage of her life, she is dependent for her status and survival only upon man – her father, her husband, her sons.

This disturbing picture of woman is not something new or unique only to India. This is the predicament of women all over the world. In England, right from the renaissance, male-authors devised elaborate anti romances to show paradoxical self of woman as “female angel” was really a “female fiend”, the lady like paragon really an unlady like “monster”.

With the advent of the twenty first century a tremendous transformation is identified in women’s position, employment, economic, political, social and in gender equality and gender justice. So the feminist critics as well as writer reassure, revalue and adjudge women’s experience with a deep insight.

So Indian women writers through their art of writing articulate the marginalized, neglected, ignored status of Indian woman’s intellectual tradition and then to fight the menace that almost obliterate the worthiness of their quest, experience, their contribution to ensure and preserve the rich, variegated culture and tradition of their race. They voice forth their opinions in various forms of genre.

Shashi Deshpande holds great worth as an Indian English woman novelist. She began her career as a short story writer. She is one of the Indian authors who have made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist at first.

The form of the short story provides, excellent training ground for Shashi Deshpande. The choice of the short story as a form allows the author to explore and probe issues that would have been out of place in the narrative or the plot of the novel. Shashi Deshpande talks to Lakshmi Holmstorm which was published in a journal Wasafiri. Shashi Deshpande says, “And then I think that in the short stories I hit on most of the themes that I later wanted to work out in my novels. They are all actually there” (22).

Shashi Deshpande, a sensitive and woman conscious writer unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male oriented society. Woman is the central object of her stories. Her women characters are born out of a typically Indian situation. They represent middle-class society. They are caught between tradition and modernity, between family and profession, between culture and nature, between freedom and loneliness. The problems and conflicts faced by woman in her stories are existential in nature.



Shashi Deshpande in her works, define freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian Socio – cultural value system and institutions. G.S. Amur rightly comments in his preface to The Legacy,

Woman’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer, and this appears in all her stories.” (10)

In the story “The Intrusion” the predicament of a newly married wife whose self – respect is dishonoured by the unfriendly treatment of her husband. She thinks of him as an intruder of his freedom, thoughts etc. The Variation of thought between the husband and wife and the suppression of her husband create emotional suffocation to her. The married woman is the narrator of the story explains the turmoil on the day of her honeymoon is made aware of her sexual role with which she is forced to identify herself. She feels sickened with the fear of awaiting disaster in the form of ‘sex’ with a man whom she hardly knows. Like every woman she silently accepts the marriage proposal. She expects a healthy relationship of friendship between husband and wife, but it is lacking here. Her husband is an intruder to her thoughts.

The woman in the society is a silent damsel as she accepts the marriage proposal quite mutely. The narrator remembers her husband’s mother’s words while seeking bride for her son. She asked,” We are looking for a girl, simple but sophisticated” (203). The narrator is in a position to accept the proposal without any refusal. She worries that no one has asked for her acceptance. She says, “No one had asked me if I had agreed; it had been taken for granted” (203).

If the daughter is the first girl child of the family, parents think that she is the hindrance to the next children. The narrator’s father forces her to accept the proposal by saying that “What’s wrong with him? ... I have two more daughters to be married. Why are you so silent?” (203). Being an obedient daughter, a devoted wife and a caring and loving mother are the three ideals of womanhood in Hindu society. Being an obedient daughter she prepares herself to be a devoted wife. As a devoted wife she has to satisfy her husband’s wish.

Like Sita who followed her husband in the forest, the narrator follows her husband to a ‘fishing village’ which is unknown to her. The place they visited was not a planned one. The narrator’s husband tells in a boastful manner that, “how fortunate he was to get this place for our honeymoon. What luck, he said, that one of the top executives, who was to have come here, had

cancelled his visit at the last minute, so that we were here all by ourselves” (202). The narrator wonders about the place that it is suitable to come and stay with the family.

In the male dominated society women are oppressed and have no scope for identity. The story has a number of instances that she is oppressed. She says they are looking like two marionettes. She wants to create a cordial relationship. She finds him as an intruder. She narrates, “I had a great longing to go down, to scuff my bare toes in the sand, to pick up shells and sit on the rocks,……. He would swim, I thought, and call out to me in a lazy and friendly way and I would respond with a wave and a smile” (204). But she finds him as a ‘nameless stranger.’

The narrator gets suffocated with the fear of impending disaster in the form of ‘sex’ with a man who hardly knows each other. Her thought is that, “I want to know all about you, I wanted to say. What you think, What you feel and why you agreed to marry me?” (207) But he says, “Know each other? What has that to do with it? Aren’t we married now? And how will we start getting to know each other if you put on such a touch – me – not air?” (207) She tries her best to separate herself from her husband in order to create a cordial relationship. But the man proves his dominance and fulfills the reason for their visit to that place. The narrator worries that she lost her privacy. She narrates, “At last, mercifully, it was over, my body having helped him by some strange instinct beyond and outside me. And the cry I gave was not the physical pain, but for the intrusion into my privacy, the violation of my right to myself” (208).

The story clearly depicts the means of a devoted wife submitting to the wishes of a husband who is very often, a total stranger for her and who will take her regardless of her fears and emotions.

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