

THE INTRUDED FEMALE BODY AND MIND: A STUDY OF MARITAL RAPE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S 'INTRUSION'

Sneha Thakur

Assistant professor

Department of English and Soft skills

Faculty of Science and Humanities

Poornima University, Jaipur

Abstract:

In patrilineal societies, a woman's normative behaviors, life choices are closely linked with her family's morals and honour. However these society defined and driven norms are somehow a bondage for the female . The current paper will aim at a study of Intrusion of the female mind and body with help of the incident of an act of sexual transgression , i.e Marital rape in Shashi Deshpande's short story '*The Intrusion*' . The researcher , applying the qualitative method of research will try to discern the causes of rape , or the deep rooted misogynistic violent behavior prevalent in the patriarchal society. The central incident of the story , the rape will be dissected with the theories of female space, subjectivity and objectification. The psychology of male on the entire issue will also be presented.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Misogyny, Female Space, Subjectivity, Objectification.

Honour codes, which are originally a social ideological construct, exist to guide both men and women of their theoretical duties, which is again linked to not just theirs's, but also their families reputation. For men, the ability to protect, being virile and holding the position of authority are prime duties of men, whereas the women's role is more on the submissive side; she is supposed to obey, nurture and follow the instructions that are given to her.

The feminine honour code upholds the values of conformity, obedience and chastity. According to this code, a woman should be sexually 'pure', modest, dignified dressing style and discretion in social relations, particularly their dealings with men or hesitant choice in finding a marriage partner. The masculine honour code benefits men by giving them room to behave in whatever way they feel suitable, simultaneously also stripping women away from their minimal power. The feminine code is a close indicator of a family's honour. interestingly, men are made the stakeholders of preserving honour of the family , so the range of their duties also encompasses the female sexual behavior.

Failing to control means they didn't fulfil their responsibility, which immediately translates into loss of masculinity. even in this case the woman bears the brunt of the wounded

pride of men, and results in punishments. Threatening the honour of the family is an unacceptable behavior on part of females. To restore the honour of the family calls for extreme measures; which are often violent, like social isolation, psychological and physical mistreatment, domestic violence, forced suicide, marital rapes and murders. These acts of violence come under 'honour violence', which the UN states represents a systematic, institutionalised misogyny that has a full spectrum of discrimination and violence against women and an attempt to preserve patriarchy.

The body of a woman is conditioned to be seen and believed as biologically weak, and an item of consumption by the men, rightfully or forcefully. Female body, more often than not is used to torture women. Ever since her birth, a girl's body is shown to be weaker. As she hits puberty, she is limited to lesser options onto how to use the body. She is discouraged at sports or any activity that can be physically straining. Only physical activity that she is allowed to have is household chores. Moving forward in life, her sexuality is controlled till the time she reaches her nuptial bed; only to be inaugurated by her rightful owner, her husband. She is prohibited to show any obvious signs of sexual pleasure, not to look very desperate. Sex, is not an act of love; it is an act of child bearing, preferably male. *Manusmriti* has always remained the backbone of Indian patriarchal and caste structure.

A woman is not encouraged to have sex before marriage, outside marriage or initiate sex. She is supposed to remain coy and let the man do his deed. She is not supposed to oppose it either, if it is her husband. In India, a woman after marriage is taught to believe that her husband is not her equal, but is superior: 'Pati Parmeshawar' which translates to Husband being the ultimate god. Gods aren't supposed to be disobeyed, they are supposed to be pleased, feared and obeyed. As Manu postulates: "*In season and out of season, in this world and in the next, the husband who performed the marriage consecration with ritual formulas always gives happiness to his woman. Though he may be bereft of virtue, given to lust and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god.*"

*For a woman, there is no independent sacrifice, vow or fast; a woman will be exalted in heaven by the mere fact that she has obediently served her husband. A **good woman**, desiring to go to the same world as her husband, should never do anything displeasing to the man who took her hand, whether he is alive or dead.*" (146)

The body was also a source of vulnerability. For men, A female body is a site of conquest; something that they own and deserve like a reward. As female body is a site of vulnerability, most men see it as an instrument of hurting or 'controlling' the woman. This absence of control over her body found its most extreme example in the case of the bodies of slave women, where the body became literally the property of another, disciplined in a way that bore a marked contrast to that articulated by Wollstonecraft.

Her back and her muscle ... pressed into field labour where she was forced to ... work like men. Her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family ... Her vagina used for his sexual pleasure ... the womb ... the place of capital investment ... the resulting child the ... surplus worth money on the slave market. (Omolade 1983: 354)

To assault a body, is to assault a being, to scar a mind, and that becomes an ultimate aim of a manly man. Men seek to dishonour the women by attacking their bodies; sexually or physically. This comes from the inherent belief that women are supposed to submit and be modest and obedient to men; when they are not, they should be punished. Even in a marriage these power dynamics don't change. The husband feels that the wife is supposed to surrender to him with all Tan (Body), Man (Mind) and Dhan (Money) as he is the Pati Parmeshwar. When the woman doesn't comply, the man chooses to belittle her or show her the place, by violating her; either beating her or 'raping' her.

In her book, *Why Men Rape ?* Tara Kaushal speaks to eight men (rapists) to know their side of the story. These men had no sex education. They are ignorant about the women's bodies and minds. They don't even consider their act of sexual transgression as rape; A resisting woman, according to them is not a non-consenting woman, rather she is just being shy. This attitude is a result of internalisation of the mindset popularised by the mainstream media '*Ladkikenaa ka matlabhihaanhotahai*'. The men, from a very impressionable age, grow up to believe that a woman resisting physical or sexual advances is just being modest and a man can chase his way up to the woman. The complete picture is painted wrong; this passive aggressive and violent chase is romanticised and traded as a fool proof way to win over a woman. These things might look harmless but sadly it encourages a behaviour of wanting to establish proprietorial control over women becomes a basis of most crime against women.

Violence against women or gender-based violence is defined by the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately". Omitting marital rape from the category of sexual offences questions the intent of rape as crime; doesn't it hurt the integrity of the female body or her honour? In India, marital rapes are not yet criminalised. The judicial meandering into the realm of honour adds to the malaise. The ambiguous response of the judiciary towards rape like trading a sexual assault with marriage is worrying and plays around with the gravity of the situation. The recent remarks by a Supreme Court (SC) bench holding out the promise of "help" to a person accused of rape if he wanted to marry the girl, in this context, are worrying. It shows how marriage provides a 'legal' access and right to a woman's body, in countries like India.

Rape and marriage are incomprehensible to the Indian or South Asian audience. This again comes from the belief that a husband is a rightful owner of his wife's assets, her body, her

mind and her money. So if everything is his , how is it Rape ? Rape is defined by Britannica as an unlawful sexual activity, most often involving sexual intercourse, against the will of the victim through force or the threat of force or with an individual who is incapable of giving legal consent because of minor status, mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception. As per Indian laws “Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape.”

Mens rea’ denotes a person’s intent to commit a crime, or knowledge that one’s act might subsequently lead to a crime . Legally, in cases of rape, presence of *mensrea* is established only by determining that the man was aware of the woman not consenting to the act. Where he reasonably believes that the woman consented, he lacks the *mensrea* required to constitute rape . (*DPP v. Morgan*, 1975, House of Lords). In case of marital rape , however, it is an absent element.

Shashi Deshpande’s stories explain the crisis and dilemmas of urban upper middle class educated women. Dealing with women of different age groups ranging from a fourteen year old girl to a sixty year old lady and different types of women like single, married, divorcee, widows and spinsters, The common thread that runs in all these stories is the problems faced by the women and their response. In the stories “A Man and a Woman”, “The Cruelty Game” and “And Then” the focus is on the issues of divorce. Infidelity of the husbands is the major problem of the female protagonists in “Travel Plans” and “A Day like Any Other”. “I Want” deals with the problem of marriage. Abortion is centred on in “Death of a Child”, rape is the issue in “It Was Dark” and marital rape is the issue of “The Intrusion”. “It Was a Nightingale” and “A Wall is Safer” concentrate on the dilemma between one’s career and marital life. “A Liberated Woman” talks about the traditional mindset of the wife that makes her endure the cruelty inflicted by her husband. In her stories, she shows how families , relationships become an imposition on women, often curbing their autonomy . She asserts that women too have the right to enjoy the benefits of relationships like men do , not to always become the ‘unhappy one’. She shows hoe in Indian marriages , women do not get the respect that is promised to :them .Shashi Deshpande’s feminism , much like Beauvoir , is humanistic in nature : “The fact that they are human is much more important than their being men and women.” The success of Deshpande as a writer lies in the fact that she is not just a champion of her protagonists’ predicaments but as their articulator. Indian women have been suffering silently. The times and ways of oppression have changed; there are new imbalances and areas of trouble for them now. Woman , no matter how qualified they are , how successful they are , they haven’t yet escaped the feminine code of conduct , instead , they are overburdened now.

The eponymous story,the intrusion opens with a newly married couple, who has come on their honeymoon. Throughout the story, we do not find much of a conversation between the couple, hence making it very obvious that something is not right between them. The couple lacks the chirpiness , mushiness of two individuals who have come together through a sacred union ,

that too , on a honeymoon. The protagonist, unnamed , is almost voiding the presence of her husband . husband however, tries to make attempts to talk, which is averted by the wife. Thus , the very basis of a relationship , in fact, any relationship is communication . the couple doesn't communicate at all. The different expectations the couple has from the marriage are stated in these lines:

“I want to know all about you, I wanted to say. What you think, what you feel and why you agreed to marry me? And what did you think of as we went through all those ceremonies together, and do you like the things I do and will we laugh together at the same jokes, enjoy the same books? And there were all those fears crouching in me-would his breath smell, and were his feet huge and dirty with uncut toenails, and did he chew his food noisily and belch after meals? I wanted to tell him how shy and frightened I was about exposing the mysteries of my body to him and how homesick I was for my mother's face, my father's laughter and my sisters' chatter. But I could say none of these things to him. Even if I did, I thought, looking at his face, he would not hear me. He was all keyed up for a different experience and for him other things would come later. While I wished to talk now, sitting up the whole night, so that in the morning we could smile at each other like old friends.” (40)

Most of the story is a rumination of how the space and agency of the female protagonist has been 'intruded'. She was not given any choice in marriage, her life has been turned upside down and now she is supposed to play wife to a man, although her husband, but is technically a complete stranger to her. In *Intrusion* the vulnerability of a girl and a married woman in the face of father and husband correspondingly are presented. We are looking for a girl, simple but sophisticated,' his mother had said. 'My son is working in a foreign company. His wife must be able to entertain and mix with foreigners.' She had made the word foreigners sound like 'martians'. Simple and sophisticated-was I that, I wondered? It had seemed I was, for my mother had joyfully told me that they had agreed to our proposal. No one had asked me if I had agreed; it had been taken for granted. I had taken it for granted myself, when suddenly, a few days before the wedding, I had to go to my father, stricken by doubts. Why?' he had asked me, again and again. And, 'What will you do then?' In a panic I had asked myself 'What will I do?' And I had thought of a thousand answers, but none to the question 'What's wrong with him?' I had nothing to say, either, when my father said quietly, 'I have two more daughters to be married.'"(37) . She had no answers to what , why and how, she can't decide for herself , so the decision is made by others for her.

The fact that she is on a honeymoon with a stranger , a man with whom she is supposed to consume her marriage , whom she doesn't love , and is not even friends with, makes her sick and scared to the core. She finds it almost disgusting to see herself 'with a strange man in strange room.' (P-39) It becomes quite convincing when she narrates, 'And at present we were not friends, not acquaintances even, but only a husband and wife.' (P-38) Her husband's

emphasizing 'complete privacy'(36) deadens her almost with 'Fears, Tremors.' Consequently, she averts her face from the beds. She avoids going to the hotel room, she doesn't want to be left alone with him. She walks in different directions, fears being approached by him. The hotel room setting is dreadful to her; as it might act as a trigger for any sexual advancement by her husband. In her narration, it is quite perceptible to sense her withdrawal feeling at the moment she admits her denial 'to hear the intimate sounds that were seeping through the thin walls and flimsy door.' (38). She equates the touch of her husband and which 'those furtive touches and glances from faceless, nameless men in the crowd. My mind shied like a frightened horse from those words, from the thought.' (38) When the dreaded moment arrives, she has a meltdown. She denies any sexual authority to her husband; much to his displeasure. It brings 'a light-hearted sense of escape.' (P-40) She feels like she has committed a crime; she equates herself with the 'frigid woman incapable of love'(40), but little does she know that her husband is not going to take no for an answer. She wakes up to his 'pounding' and is completely helpless, devastated and permanently scarred by her husband's heinous deed:

And then I woke up to realize that the sound of the sea was real, but I was on a bed, not on the beach. And it was not the sea that was pounding my body but he, my husband, who was forcing his body on mine. I was too frightened to speak, my voice was strangled in my throat. I put my hands on his chest to push him away, but it was like trying to move a rock; I could do nothing. He put his hands, his lips on mine and this time I could not move away. There was no talk, no word between us just this relentless pounding. His movements had the same rhythm, the same violence as the movements of the sea; yet, I could have borne the battering of the sea better, for that would hurt but not humiliate like this.

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 for the physical pain, but for the intrusion into my privacy, the violation of my right to myself.

Establishing control over women's body and feeling 'manly' and 'victorious' afterwards stems deeply in the behaviour and conditioning of males since early childhood. Men are made to believe that the way to channelise their emotions of anger and distress is violence and aggression. He must assert himself, even if it is violently, to establish his masculinity. These supposed Masculine 'ideals; that pressurise them to conform to dominance and aggression and restricting a same flow of channelised emotions Makes them engage in casual violence, which later turn into serious offences like assaults (Verbal, Physical, and sexual).

Joseph Pleck (1995) devised the Masculine Gender Role Strain Paradigm, which identifies three strains resulting from current culture, discrepancy, dysfunction and trauma (Richmond &Levant, 2003). A man goes through aggressive strains of behaviour after a feeling

of self perceived failure or even conformance to the prevalent masculine ideals which he has idealized. (Berke et al., 2016). (Pleck, 1995; Richmond & Levant, 2003).

Marriage as depicted by Shashi Deshpande is an important social and economic institution in which a woman finds her security and identity; but at the same time, the irony of the situation is that her individual needs and desires become secondary in getting this primary motive fulfilled. It is important to note the very concept of honeymoon. Honeymoon is a first travel taken together by a couple after marriage. In this, they don't just travel, but the main purpose that has been paraded over the years, is consummation of marriage. The couple in the story is also of the same mindset. The protagonist thinks to herself : "What a way to spend our honeymoon, I thought, imagining him sulking the whole time, and I, moving around with a load of guilt, shame and fear. What will we tell the others when we go back?". She, although clearly uncomfortable with whatever that is going to transpire between them in the hotel room in privacy, also subconsciously accepts the idea that she would be sexually available to her husband on their honeymoon. The woman in the story, after denying sex to her husband is now afraid that she might be abandoned: "I imagined myself returning to my parents' home, shamed and rejected, and the consternation and grief it would cause there, my sisters' marriages held up forever, my parents disgraced-all because of me" (41)

Marriage which is supposed to be a pious and loveful union of two souls , often becomes a source of bondage for women . One may turn to Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote, in *Second Sex*: 'It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates women' (Beauvoir-24).

The husband, on the other hand, He sees nothing wrong in expecting, rather demanding, later forcing sex from his wife, whom he has legally married. In fact, it is incomprehensible to him what why would a wife deny her husband sex? He doesn't make any effort to understand what she is going through, her sensibilities, fears, insecurities, or merely respecting the fact that she has said 'No' and give this relationship some time to build on.

Rather , the 'No' triggers the beast in him . He, in an attempt to assert his masculinity and power, rapes his wife. Men grow up with the belief system that they are to be served by the women in their household . Every woman around them is supposed to serve them . Men aren't supposed to be acceptable of the fact that they might not get it , rather they see it as a shame to spurned around by women . They assert their power by manifesting physical harm on them, like the husband in this story. Furthermore, one may also note that this act of sexual transgression is completely legal and natural progression in a marriage , but for a woman , it is rape.

Shashi Deshpande penned down an open letter to the rapists after the Nirbhaya rape case: "The girl and her death haunted me for long; it still does. But do you know what haunted me

more? It was the cruelty with which the men had dealt with the girl. I asked myself: where does this cruelty come from? Agreed that rape comes out of lust, out of looking at women as possessions; but cruelty? It can only come out of hatred. So where does the hatred come from?"

Intrusion as described by Macmillan dictionary is Something that *interrupts a peaceful situation or a private event*. The 'Intrusion' of the female space is worth studying. The protagonist is denied the right over her life, when she is stripped off the right to choose. The choice of what she is going to do in her life, whether or whom she is going to marry was not hers. After being forced into her marriage, she is forced to give away her body in marriage. Her personal space is intruded by her family and later her husband. She is not given any space make choices, let alone assert them. A woman seeks safety and free will at her 'home' but she doesn't receive it in her parent's house or at her husband's. Thus, Intrusion becomes a trespassing not just of the victim's body, but also her mind and a blatant denial of her right over her own self.

One may as well interpret the story with the help of the notion of objectification. It can be roughly defined as the seeing or treatment of a person, usually female (body) as a n object. The nature of objectification is mostly sexual, but trickles down to physical, mental and societal level as well. Martha Nussbaum (257) has identified seven features of objectification as instrumentality (the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes), Denial of autonomy (the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination), Inertness (the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity), fungibility (the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects), violability (the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity), ownership (the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another), Denial of subjectivity (the treatment of a person whose experiences and feeling need not be taken into account).

Rae Langton(228-229) adds three more to the list: reduction to body (the treatment of a person as identified with their body, body parts), reduction to appearance (The treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses) Silencing (the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak). Thus looking back at the story, one may conclude that the protagonist was thoroughly objectified and 'intruded', stripped off her agency and authority.

References:

- Barstow, Anne L. "rape". Encyclopedia Britannica, 29 Oct. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>. Accessed 19 May 2022.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2018.

- DeshwalVagheshwari, “Marital rape: Demystifying ‘Consent’ within Marriage” Legally Speaking, Times of India , 12 feb 2022<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/legally-speaking/marital-rape-demystifying-consent-within-marriage/> , Accessed on 5 may 22
- DPP V Morgan , Parliamemntary Archives HL/PO/JU/ 04/ /3 / 1268 <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff8ca60d03e7f57ecd7a3> accessed on 8 May 2022.
- Kaushal, Tara. *Why Men Rape: An Indian Undercover Investigation*. Harper Collins, 2020.
- Langton, Rae, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009.
- Levant, R., Richmond, K., Majors, R., Inclan, J., Rossello, J., et al. A multicultural investigation of masculinity ideology and alexithymia. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 4, 91-99 , 2003, doi:dx.doi.org.ezproxy.rit.edu/10.1037/1524-9220.4.2.91. accessed on 12-5-22
- Makkar, Sarthak. “Marital Rape A Non Criminalized Crime In India” Harvard Human rights journal, *Volume 34, Issue 1, Spring 2021*<https://harvardhrj.com/2019/01/marital-rape-a-non-criminalized-crime-in-india/> accessed on 5 may 2022
- Monica Christianson, ÅsaTeiler& Carola Eriksson (2021) “A woman’s honor tumbles down on all of us in the family, but a man’s honor is only his”: young women’s experiences of patriarchal chastity norms, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 16:1, DOI: 10.1080/17482631.2020.1862480
- Nussbaum, Martha, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24(4): 249–291.1995.
- Nussbaum, Martha, *Sex and Social Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999
- Olivelle, Patrick, and Suman Olivelle. *Manu's code of law*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Omolade, Barbara, “Hearts of Darkness”, in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (eds), New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 350–367, 1983.
- Papadaki, Evangelia (Lina), "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/feminism-objectification/>>. Accessed on 7 may 2022
- Pleck, J.H. “The gender role strain paradigm: An update.” *A New Psychology of Men*. Eds. Ronald F. Levant and William S. Pollack. Basic Books, New York., 11-32 ,1995, Chapter xiv, 402 Page .
- Punj, Amita ‘A misplaced idea of honour enables violence against women’, *Hindustan times*, 8-3-2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/a-misplaced-idea-of-honour-enables-violence-against-women-101615128193230.html> Accessed on 4-3-22