

The Intrusion by Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande's short story *The Intrusion* reflects the trauma and humiliation of a young bride who finds herself victimized by patriarchal demands. The story represents how patriarchy treats women as objects of carnal pleasures and not as humans with their own set of rights, needs, likes and dislikes.

The story opens with a man and woman walking across the sea beach to a hill top cottage for their honeymoon. The woman looks askance at the sea which appeared inviting but also seemed to hold certain hidden horrors. The man however walked on with an air of satisfaction with a newly acquired possession. The woman refers to her husband as 'the man', implying that the person she is conjoined to in wedlock is a stranger, about whom she is entirely ignorant. She dreaded to be 'with a strange man in a strange room'. She is unaware of his likes, dislikes, personality, habits, mannerisms, aspirations or ideals. But she could fathom from his slight irritations, constricting grips and sardonically gleaming eyes that he was preoccupied with a certain desire. The raging waves from the 'immense and fascinating sea' which offered solace to the woman, had no effect on the man. He simply appeared to be in a hurry to reach the cottage where there would be 'complete privacy'. His walking ahead of her implied that she should follow him and cater to his every need and desire. Her wishes to walk down to the sea or to linger in the verandah to feel the refreshing sea air, were turned down by him. Though he is well educated, works in a multi-national company and moves around in a sophisticated environment, with foreigners, he considers women as objects and not as humans, whose consents, likes, wishes and preferences are to be brushed aside. When she meekly pleads "We scarcely know each other", his blatant reply is "How will we start getting to know each other if you put on such a touch-me-not air?"

The woman feels sickened and disgusted to be treated as an object over which the man is entitled to take liberties, because of a marriage, which to her is simply a ritual or a contract, rather than the unity of two minds. She held no inhibitions towards marriage---she considered it sacred, where love, respect and mutual understanding should be the hallmarks. She even fantasized that over the years, they would be taking a vacation on the sea-side, where he would be swimming and she would be wading over the waves to join him. She also wished she could leap over this crucial period of her marital life and become a matured woman, devoid of inhibitions. Guilt, shame and a sense of inadequacy gripped her for being unable to comply with his demands. She recalls her father's helpless face eager to marry her off because he had two other daughters. Her consent in this marriage was never asked by a father, who was only eager to carry out his duties. She is therefore treated as a commodity which is handed down from one man to another.

She was aware of the expectations which the patriarchal society held from women. Their chief function in the marital set-up are procreation, preservation, devotion and servitude, in return for the economic and physical security which the husband would provide. Women

are expected to follow their husband's footsteps and cater to his every need, desire and keep him happy and contented. The protagonist in the story is torn between her own need for privacy and individuality on the one hand and her guilt, shame and vulnerability on the other hand. Her individuality and self-respect forbade herself to surrender to a complete stranger.

The story ends with the image of the young woman falling a victim to brute male strength and dominance. Her protests were not strong enough to protect herself. The combat was between the woman's right to her own body and the man's right to his wife's body. Until the Domestic Violence Act of 2005, in India, marital rape was not considered to be a crime. The woman is left vanquished and victimized; hurt and humiliated.

The story abounds with Nature imagery –of the sea, the roaring waves, the beautiful shell with a snail coiled inside. Through these imageries, Shashi Deshpande tries to say that though Nature beckons to the young bride and wanted to offer her solace, it also seemed to threaten her with hidden horrors. Marriage for a woman is supposed to offer security and stability—both physical and emotional; but for the woman in the story , marriage with a stranger held horrors and revulsion. The image of the the drumsticks hanging limply from a tree were weak like her but did have to endure her trauma. The sea waves appeared violent and threatening. She feared they might hurt her but she was certain the sea would not humiliate her, as the man snoring beside her did.

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