

Self Learning Material
B.A. 2nd Semester
English Honours
Course Code: 20100
Indian Writing in English
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Unit title: *The Intrusion* by Shashi Deshpande

1.0 Objectives:

This unit introduces you to Shashi Deshpande, one of the prominent Indian English writers and her works that focus on the women characters. This unit is designed with the aim of introducing the author and her women centric stories. You will be able to see how Deshpande brings forth the sacrifices as well as turmoils that a middle class woman faces in the patriarchal society of India.

1.1: Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande is an important contemporary Indian English writer who has received acclaim worldwide for her realistic portrayal of the lives of middle class Indian women. In the 1960s, she began writing short stories about the societal and cultural systems which often act as hindrances in the path of individual freedom, specifically in India. Although initially she began as a short story writer, she also has to her credit four children's books and six novels. Her works of fiction show the social reality from the points of view of strong women characters. They are conscious of the unfair conditions which they have to endure. Most often her characters are women with a rich inner world which seems to be of no interest for their husband and children. However, instead of complaining or rebelling, they choose the path of self sacrifice solely with the aim of keeping the familial ties intact. It is interesting to note that although Deshpande brings forth the problems of the middle class women, she does not offer any suggestion.

1.2: Short story:

A short story is usually defined as a prose fiction which is shorter than a novel and which has only few characters. It generally takes just a single sitting for reading. As a literary genre, the short story gained critical attention in the 20th century. Some of the well known short story writers include Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allen Poe, Guy de Maupassant, O Henry, etc. It is noteworthy that a short story presents one aspect of the life of a character and the characters share their innermost thoughts and emotions. Several Indian English writers have also written short stories . Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Vikram Chandra, Shashi Deshpande, etc. have all enriched Indian English literature with their short stories.

1.2.1: Shashi Deshpande's short stories:

You have already learnt that Deshpande started her literary career by writing short stories. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy* was published in 1972. There are ten short stories in this collection. In the first story after which the title has been given, the protagonist, with her husband's permission surrenders herself to a stranger to beget a heir to inherit the family property. Another story, " A Liberated Woman" is about the agony of a wife whose professional success hurts the male ego of her husband. It is noteworthy that this collection had been prescribed for graduate students in Columbia University. Several of her short stories were published in reputed magazines. Another popular short story of Deshpande is " Why a Robin?" It deals with the theme of mother daughter relationship as well as a woman's role as a wife. The writer depicts her protagonist as a person with flaws. *It was Dark* is another collection of

short stories which comprises of seven stories. Here, the story “ The Inner Room” is about the Indian mythological princess, Amba who chooses her own fate. In the stories of this collection, Deshpande’s women characters deal with the complexities of life and the various relationships.

Shashi Deshpande’s next collection of short stories is *It was the Nightingale* comprises of eight stories each dealing with the lives of women and the dilemma which they face at every step of their lives. This collection even comprises of a short story about homosexuality, “ The Window”. Another collection, *The Miracle and Other Stories* consists of six stories whereas *Intrusion and Other stories* includes nineteen short stories. It is noteworthy that all the stories of Deshpande are narrated from the women’s point of view. In most of her works she examines patriarchy and the Indian social structure.

Check your progress:

1. What is a short story.

Ans:.....

2. Name two famous short story writers.

Ans:.....

3. From whose point of view does Shashi Deshpande write her works?

Ans:.....

1.2.2: Summary of “ The Intrusion” :

This story by Shashi Deshpande revolves around a newly married woman on her honeymoon. The story is narrated from the first person point of view. The protagonist is seen timidly awaiting the arrival of her husband. The fear of impending attack in the form of physical intimacy with a stranger makes her feel sick. The story depicts the expectations of a newly married husband and the inhibitions of the wife. The husband brings her to an isolated house on a hillock near a sleepy fishing village. According to him, it is a place where couples come to celebrate their honeymoon or men sometimes bring their mistresses to enjoy some intimate moments. However, his emphasis on complete privacy intimidates the wife. She does not like the eerie environment of the house and feels homesick.

Her discomfort is also because of her husband’s advances that she tries to resist. She believes that the husband and wife should know each other’s likes and dislikes, their thoughts and ideas before getting intimate. However, being a typical chauvinist male, her husband fails to understand her point of view. He is the opinion that their marriage is the license for them to get intimate. Therefore, he disdainfully distances himself. His behaviour makes her experience both guilt and respite. She feels guilty and embarrassed at having failed her societal expectations and duty towards her newly married husband. However, at the same time, she also feels a sense of security as it stopped his unwanted advances.

Her relief was short lived because at midnight, she wakes up to find her husband forcing himself onto her. She feels extremely humiliated and cries. However, her tears are less for her physical pain than her self respect. At that moment, the man ceased being her husband and instead he became an intruder in her privacy. While she deals with both the physical and emotional pain, her husband sleeps peacefully as if nothing had happened.

Check your progress:

1. Where does the husband take his wife on their honeymoon?

Ans:.....

2. What hurts the wife more?

Ans:.....

1.3: Themes :

One of the central themes of this story is the concept of female autonomy and selfhood which consequently relate to sexuality and identity. Here the female body is examined as a site of exploitation as well as subjugation. In the story, although the protagonist initially resists the advances of her husband, he later in the night forces upon her. In spite of her anger, she surrenders to this humiliation. It is noteworthy that Shashi Deshpande's women characters are often conscious of the unfair conditions which they have to endure. They do not rebel or protest against the injustices meted out towards them. Instead, they often choose self sacrifice so that their familiar structure remains intact. The wife learns at her own cost that the refusal to follow the set gender norms often turn violent. However, she painfully accepts her fate. The complete privacy of the house allows the husband to commit the monstrosity without an ounce of repentance, without a slight sense of consideration of his wife's feelings. Deshpande indicates that in a typical patriarchal Indian setup, privacy is as alien a concept to a woman as the control over her own body.

Another theme of the short story is the institution of marriage in the Indian context. In an Indian society, marriage becomes an important event in a girl's life where her family members choose her prospective groom. In most cases, the opinion of the girl is not taken into consideration. In the context of this story, too, the protagonist's parents fixed her alliance to a well settled groom without asking her opinion. In fact, a few days before her marriage, she confided in her father and asked him to reconsider the decision of her marriage to the man. However, her father asked her to list one flaw of him and she could not. She had no option but to give in to her parent's wish. Her parents took her for granted.

After her marriage, it is her husband who again takes her for granted. He disregards her desire to form a close friendship before getting intimate and considers it to be an attack on his male ego. He does not hesitate to force himself upon her. He believes that it is his right as a husband. Shashi Deshpande presents marriage as a trap from which liberation is difficult if not impossible. Like all of her stories, the female character here too is alienated in her own private world where the husband takes her for granted. This story too shows how the protagonist is trapped in an arranged marriage. The story shows how most often, in Indian arranged marriages, the spouses are neither acquaintances nor friends but mere husband and wife. The educated wife feels that there needs to be a bond between them before getting physical. However, she is unable to convince him and consequently feels humiliated when her husband forces himself upon her. The story ends with her submission as a typical Indian wife. The boundaries of her relationship is drawn by her husband where sex without the wife's consent is legal. However, for the wife, it's non-consensual and is nothing but marital rape, rape but with the license named marriage. The pain of the wife is more traumatic in the sense that no one sympathises with her and she cannot even question her husband. Deshpande shows that the institution of marriage provides security and identity to the wife no doubt but at the same time, the individual needs and desires become secondary in getting this primary motive

fulfilled. Here the writer realistically describes the fate of the modern educated women in a patriarchal society. She reveals the inner psyche of the women character through her private relationship.

Another important theme of this short story is the concept of intrusion/ intruder. Deshpande shows her patriarchy intrudes in the personal lives of the women. Here the term 'intrusion' has a deeper meaning. The story emphasises upon the need for privacy both in personal life and marital relationships. It also points towards the breach of this privacy. The husband in this story chooses the isolated seaside house for their honeymoon because it ensures privacy. However that same privacy is terrifying for the wife who feels a lack of security in there. She feels homesick and longs to be in the safe confines of her home. Privacy is a human right and it can be physical, psychological and sexual at the same time. The wife's privacy is violated when the husband forces himself upon her. Deshpande shows how marriage violates privacy via patriarchy. In a patriarchal setup, there is no privacy for women as they are nothing but property of the man. The husband is an intruder who intrudes upon the wife's privacy and self respect.

Feminism is an important aspect of this story. For Deshpande, feminism is using the stamina to endure the anguishes for the betterment of life and this is what she tries to bring to the fore through her short stories. She consciously tries to make her point that feminism is much more than rebellion and it is actually a realisation of the self and a respect for that self. For her feminism is the ability to endure and bring forth something positive. Therefore her focus is always on women in her writings. This story too is from the point of view of the woman.

Check your progress:

1. What is the significance of the title of the story?

Ans:.....

2. What is the significance of marriage in this story?

Ans:.....

1.4: Let us sum up:

Shashi Deshpande is a popular Indian English writer whose works are from a feminist point of view. In her works of fiction, she focuses on the trials and tribulations which a woman faces in the patriarchal Indian setup. In this short story, Deshpande's deals with the concept of marital rape. The newly married woman is terrified at the thought of the impending and inevitable physical intimacy with her husband who is none but a stranger to her. Her desire for a bond of friendship is muffled as he asserts his marital right upon her by forcing himself on her. She feels that he is an intruder whose intrusion has humiliated her beyond expression. However, she does not voice her disdain and instead submits to his monstrosity.

Suggested Readings:

1. Iyengar, K.R.S. Indian Writing in English. New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd,1994
2. Naik, M.K. A History of Indian English Literature. New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1999
3. Pandey Punam. "Women Characters in Shashi Deshpande's " The Intrusion and Other Stories: A Study in Psychological Perspective ". Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science, Vol.1 October 2016 e-ISSN:2456-5571