

**The Intrusion and Other Stories: Deconstructing Feminism**

Dr. Richa Bijalwan  
Assistant Professor English  
THDC-Institute of Hydropower Engineering & Technology  
Tehri(Uttarakhand)

**Abstract**

*Feminism is defined by various people in different ways but when it comes to Indian English women writers, they have a different perspective to delineate feminism. The new woman portrayed in the literature of these women writers rejects to submit before the conventional forces of fatalism and subjugation and tries to create her own independent path which could eventually help her to lead a self confident and independent life. It is basically a representation of contemporary woman who declines to be submissive in the conventional society and yearning instead to declare her independence by demanding the defined social and family norms and structures, be it marriage, wifehood, motherhood or the major issues associated to her emancipation, freedom and acknowledgment of her social and intellectual pursuits. Most of the Indian English women writers reveal the subaltern voices as well as marginalized psyche of women in their works and consider their attempt of breaking the societal norms and patriarchy as an act of feminism whereas some feminist writers like Shashi Deshpande while presenting their women protagonist do not create them revolutionary but a continuous quest for identity and interrogation of self is the prominent feature of her writing as a feminist writer. Writers like Deshpande also believe that Western feminism is completely different from Indian feminism. The present paper will deconstruct the feminism and throw light upon the feminism as portrayed by Shashi Deshpande in her short stories.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, subaltern voices, marginalized psyche, patriarchy.

Contemporary Indian English writings by women endeavour to connect and struggle with living realities of women of different strata of society and try to project life in all its prosperity and difficulties. The works of some of the recent well known Indian English women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sehgal, Geetha Hariharan, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapoor, Bharati Mukherji and others present variety of experience of the rising Indian woman who although rooted in customs, is strongly dedicated to re-defining her position and her relatedness to diverse institutions of the society in view of modern thought and

awareness. The short story narrations of Shashi Deshpande exhibit the socio literary themes and institutions such as society, home, and culture of Indian middle class families. A change is required in such a conventional society where women remain in margin and the hegemony of patriarchal society prevails always but the power of formerly established culture seems to be never rejecting any social structure or institutions. Deshpande makes gender essential to her works. Her works deal not only with usual, urban circumstances, but grow from a definite faith that our lives are to an immense amount ruled by gender. A required change is desired in her works, with the change of interests and security of women along with men. The revolution is not critical every time, but it is certainly noticeable; the tendency of her stories emerges to be reestablishment of the broken relations. She writes about women and the reality of their lives. She does not overstate feminism but make it real in Indian perspective.

In the opinion of Shashi Deshpande Western feminism is entirely different from that of Indian feminism. For her, Feminism is not a matter of theory. She feels that the Western Feminist theories cannot be applied to the real life situation in India. It is because the societal set up, the way of life and the traditions of the Western lands are very different from that of Indian subcontinent. Feminism in fact is more of a misnomer in the context of narratives of women. The reason for the same is that, it is a representative of a specific ideology which presumes a change in existing system and at the same time formulates politically alternative structures of equality and autonomy. Deshpande believes in the fact that Indians have a wrong notion of feminism, and clearly argues that walking away from tradition, and throwing tantrums do not constitute feminism in the real sense of the term. She says that many women have feminism in their lives without knowing that they actually possess it. Hence they should have a clear idea of what feminism is in their lives and what it is not. For Deshpande, feminism is using the stamina to endure the anguishes for the betterment of life and this is what she tries bringing out through her short stories ( Shukla 211).

Postmodern studies show that Indian English Women writers have understood the possibility of this appearance and with the command of their knowledge they are portraying the diversity of Indian life, with all its different shades. This structure is appropriate for them since it was less meticulous like the novels, and this allowed them to write and articulate their thought developments during their free time from the household chores. Her stories can be considered as those which imitate the actuality investigating the submissive position of woman in Indian culture. Her stories make an effort to improve the condition of woman but in all the short stories, Deshpande barely shows her women to break the customary norms of the society.

*The Intrusion*, a title story deals with a newly married woman, whose self-respect is ruined by the terrible action by her husband, whom she thinks as an intruder. The story is states the

turmoil of a newly married woman on the day of her honeymoon where she is compelled for her sexual role which is imposed on her by her husband and she is upset with the horror of awaiting ruin in the form of 'sex' with a man with whom she is barely familiar. Woman in the story is shown as a silent submissive, as she accepts the marriage proposal without any objection. The submission of women is expected by first of all by parents and then rest of the world in which the husband has all the rights to hurt the woman who is realistically portrayed in the stories of Shashi Deshpande "for my mother had joyfully told me that they had agreed to our proposal. No one had asked me if I had agreed." (p. 37). When retaliated by a girl, the family pressure makes them succumb before the hegemony of patriarchy "I have two more daughters to be married" (p. 37). The title story reveals such psychology of a female who is dominated by hegemonic societal strain and compels the daughter to get married with the person of her parents' choice. Familiarity, which is the foundation of husband-wife relationship, is found absent here. 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" (P-38). 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). The acceptance of her husband-wife relationship intensifies her denial for her autonomous being as friend, woman or an individual.

Woman protagonist in the story appears to be a victim of 'body-mind' conflict. Woman in the story reads out her husband's eyes and narrates her understanding, "how unaware he was of everything but of what was to happen between us, making us truly husband and wife" (P-38). She finds it to be awfully shocking and disapproving to see him, 'a nameless stranger' calling out her name with so ease. She is hesitant to acknowledge his effort of maintaining the routine concern of husband-wife association which is still under process. Owing to fright of refusal that torments in her, she eats all her fears of mysteries of her "exposing the mysteries of her body to him" (P-40). But, her stammering attempt to express their little acquaintance with each other gets a bitter, little aggressive response by her husband, while for her it conveys "a light-hearted sense of escape" (P-40). Her reassured condition of existence fades away only to throw her into a daylight embarrassing reality of his cruel physical attack on her. Females have complete right on their own body but in this story the way husband treats his wife is appalling:

First and foremost feminist movement urged females to no longer see ourselves and our bodies as the property of men. To demand control of our sexuality, effective birth control and reproductive rights, an end to rape and sexual harassment, we needed to stand in solidarity (Hooks 15).

In our society the husband draws the limitations of her sphere even within marriage, where the sexual action for man is lawful but for woman it is rape. The protagonist of this story after the arranged marriage is in an expectation from her husband to be friendly and amicable while the husband has only one expectation of being physical with her. She is lost in her constant thoughts of protecting her individuality and self respect whereas the husband wants to make physical relation with her at the earliest. The protagonist of *The Intrusion* describes her husband as “a nameless stranger” (39) and when she told that they both do not know each other her husband says “Know each other? What has to do with it? Aren’t we married now?” (40). Here writer represents that in our society arranged marriage means for a woman is submitting herself before male counterpart and male has all the supremacy and domination to intrude over the personal space and pride of a woman. She cries out “And the cry I gave was not for physical pain, but for the intrusion into my privacy, the violation of my right to myself” (41). Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* indeed describes the exact position of women in this patriarchal society:

It is men’s society that allows each of its members to accomplish himself as husband and father; woman, integrated as slave or vassal into the family group dominated by fathers and brothers, has always been given in marriage to males by other males (452).

Deshpande’s stories are primarily centred on family relationships and these relationships are mainly between husband and wife, mother and daughter. The clashes faced by a woman as a wife, a mother and a daughter are given importance. Talking about the importance of human relationships, she says that being a wife or a mother is not a burden. According to her it becomes a burden simply when the woman is instructed by the patriarchal society that how she should behave. Through her stories she reveals her notion on women emancipation and expresses that it becomes necessary for a woman to live along with relationships and respect them also yet if the rules are rigidly imposed on her, as a wife or a mother then she should contemplate seriously further. On the other hand, she also conveys this message that misery and discomfort is faced by a woman, who finds herself in a new atmosphere after marriage. This is what she has attempted to express through her narration. Through her writings, Shashi Deshpande has been capable to illustrate women characters creating their own individuality and emerge as an essential and equal gender and create their own identity. Through her stories Deshpande displays a feminist attitude in a new unnoticed light. This attempt is noticeable since it provides a new perspective for woman as a human being and not merely a second sex in Indian milieu. The western feminist views are different from Indian perspective and feminist beliefs which are expressed by Deshpande to be discovered and established in a fresh approach.

In another story, *Why a Robin?* Deshpande describes the poignant situation of a woman who is a house wife and is considered to be of low understanding and value. She is in continuous dilemma “I am full of guilt these days. I am a failure- as a wife, as a companion, as a mother. Between my husband and myself there is a blankness- we never even quarrel” (12). One additional notable thing is found in the short stories of Deshpande is that she has revealed patriarchy is working not only through males but also through the financial conditions, which compel the women characters to tolerate it. There is a sense of monotony and although the female characters stay in the system trying not to make things collapse, still they are capable to raise the questions concerning to their status of being submissive and dependent which society has imposed on them:

Her stories can be categorized as those which mirror the reality examining the subjugated position of woman in Indian society. They are an attempt to mend the situation depicting the woman’s positive reaffirmation of herself. But in all the short stories, Deshpande hardly allows her women to move away from the traditional norms of the society (Shukla 210)

Through her stories Deshpande makes us aware regarding the roles of women as an individual, and not under the societal tags which are compulsorily given to a woman in Indian society. “Her stories are primarily centred on family relationships— the relationship between husband and wife, mother and daughter. The conflicts faced by a woman as a wife, a mother and a daughter are given importance” ( Shukla 210). But while performing her duties as a wife, a mother and a daughter she has a constant search for self.

The first story *The First Lady* that represents a story of a woman, who is ready with her husband’s choice to accept a celibate way of life realizing that the purpose of sex which is reproduction is served. Being a wife of a political leader, she feel herself constrained and chained as well as she is tired of an artificial life which has been imposed on her. The story starts with woman protagonist’s refusal to the praise given by her servant. In its place, while in self-consoling mode she analyse her own physical look. Afterwards she refuses the beauty of mind and says, ‘... what can you expect when you’re nearly seventy?’ (P-1) Regardless of her disappointment with the “austere atmosphere of her husband’s home” (P-1), she appears to be a satisfied receptive of public award of ‘gracious and dignified first lady’ which is rather mechanical. She views their life “too exalted, too uplifted for too long a time” (P-5). Therefore, she finds everything around futile and meaningless. She denies life that “has lost its meaning because it relates to nothing but one’s own petty concerns” (P-4). in this story the woman protagonist easily gets agreed and allows her husband “a kind of perverse satisfaction in denying oneself pleasure, a kind of hysterical urge for self-denial” (P-7). The desires of a wife are restrained by the husband which is a reality of our

society and this story exposes the actuality of husband wife relationship in our society. Shashi Deshpande communicates the voice of female protagonists of her stories:

The conflict between duty to the family and personal fulfilment will always resolve itself through self- sacrifice and submission to the patterns of society. The author does not intend to suggest any solutions. She prefers to act like a camera, recording emotions and situations with realism and sensitivity. The picture shows the fact that tradition is deeply engrained in the society, and for those women who have a mind of their own and a clear perception of the disadvantages of their position, one way to come to terms with the surrounding reality is the acceptance of loneliness, as a factual part of their existence ( Shukla 214).

Unlike other females of *The Intrusion* and *Other Stories*, The female protagonist of the story *Death of a Child* appears to be little different comparing to the others. The story commences with the decision of a woman who is determined not to bear another child and she is emerging with disturbed mind because of undesired pregnancy. She shows a strong hatred at for pregnancy this time whereas her husband thinks it nothing more than an issue to be handled as he says “We’ll manage somehow” (44) and she is furious on the response of her husband “An angry exclamation is wrenched out of me at the word. Manage! Good God! What a week, what an ineffectual word!”(44). She is asked, “Your life is that matters to you? How can a mother be so selfish? What about that life?” (P-45) She denies determining the concrete significance of motherhood for woman, as she says emphatically, “Children stifle your personality. You become just a mother- nothing more” (P-45). Shashi Deshpande exhibits the woman protagonist in *Death of a Child* with a different kind of perspective. She is revealed furious in the notion of carrying the burden of pregnancy third time in less than four years. She thinks about herself, her health and mental level and does not become the goddess of sacrifice this time like other women of the stories. She expresses her thought as “Now I want to reserve some part of myself, my life” (P-47). This story also raises an issue of a woman where she is considered only a symbol of motherhood and sacrifice and nothing more

There are three major characters in the story *It Was Dark*, mother, daughter and father. The fourteen years girl is kidnapped and raped by an unknown man. When she comes back to home the whole situation is changed for her and her parents as well. Due to the mishappening the girl is shocked as well as upset. She faced psychological pressure on the social and psychological level. The incident is a set back to the mother. She is so much afraid about the future of her daughter especially when the doctor tells them about the risk of pregnancy. This unpleasant incident is painful for mother and she is incapable to face this reality. The mother thinks about her past while relating this incident of her daughter with her own unpleasant

memory when she was eleven years old and a follower of her tormented her. Since then she has “the fear of such violence” (32) which continued even after marriage. Even after the marriage sometimes sex can be a rape. But women are instructed in our society to submit before such violence as the mother of victim was told at the time of her marriage by her mother that “You must submit” (32). In this story mother and daughter share the same unpleasant incident. However, the only difference between the experiences of the both is that in daughter’s case it comes previous to marriage. But the awful feelings of humiliation, physical and psychological violence are the similar.

The daughter after this incident is in shock and not able to communicate to anyone. This episode has psychologically traumatized her and while seeing the miserable condition of her daughter the mother is fearful. In fear mother suddenly goes to the daughter’s room where she lays frozen, watching the ceiling. She asks questions to daughter about that man that what did he do? The only frozen response to all these questions is, “It Was Dark.”(33). The Mother then tries to fight from this depressing situation and she for a while looks at her daughter and rapidly pulls back the curtains from the window and sunlight is poured into the room and the room is filled with brightness. This light makes the daughter to see the light and brightness. It represents that the negativity and depression of the girl goes away and she will soon be filled with brightness and cheerfulness. When she moves her eyes from there to her mother the mother feels contented and pleased as eventually she has made her daughter to look at her. The strong attempt and willpower of mother makes her daughter alive again. There is a hopeful sign at the end where mother assures her daughter that all will become normal again. Feminism projected by Shashi Deshpande in these stories is different from other women writers. Her women reject wearing the mask and even while remaining in the four walls of a house also they have their strong inner voice. Woman depicted in the stories of Shashi Deshpande seem to be different and transformed who are taking place in the society due to various struggles for women’s autonomy and empowerment and new consciousness arising out of modern learning, knowledge and awareness.

### **Works Cited:**

- Beauvoir de Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde ans Sheila Malovany Chevallier. London: Vintage Books, 2009.
- Hooks, B. 2000. *Feminism for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- Scratching the Labels: Manjari Shukla A Feminist Reading of Shashi Deshpande’s Select Short Stories Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ) Vol.4 / NO.1 /Spring 2014

[www.raco.cat/index.php/LinksLetters/article/download/49894/87853](http://www.raco.cat/index.php/LinksLetters/article/download/49894/87853)

[pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Manjari-Shukla-19.pdf](http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Manjari-Shukla-19.pdf)

[www.hrpub.org/download/20140902/LLS3-19390087.pdf](http://www.hrpub.org/download/20140902/LLS3-19390087.pdf)

[www.the-criterion.com/V5/n1/Rana.pdf](http://www.the-criterion.com/V5/n1/Rana.pdf)

[www.viewofspace.org/may2013/23.pd](http://www.viewofspace.org/may2013/23.pd)

[www.newmanpublication.com/admin/issue/br/08%20JULY%202014.pdf](http://www.newmanpublication.com/admin/issue/br/08%20JULY%202014.pdf)

[www.ijelr.in/2.3.15/93-102%20Dr.%20G.%20KIRAN%20KUMAR.pdf](http://www.ijelr.in/2.3.15/93-102%20Dr.%20G.%20KIRAN%20KUMAR.pdf)