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## **An Inquisitive Study into the Peripheral Castigation and Unrelenting Societal Exasperation as Represented in Ashapura Devi's "Izzat" and Shashi Despande's "The Intrusion".**

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### **Abstract:**

Literature is an arena which reflects the socio-political perturbations mixed with realism and fantasy. Since time immemorial, representation of women through different lens of art and expression is a common practice that categorizes the manacles women are steeped into, or the nonessential 'otherization' that chastises them into accepting their status as the negative counterpart of the masculine virility. The pioneering authors and social activists like Mahasweta Devi, Ashapura Devi, Anita Desai, Rokeya Begum, Shashi Despande, Amrita Pritam, Arundhati Roy or Chitra Banerjee, have depicted their chores through various gazes of domestic rampage, marital despoilment, enforced prostitution, financial debasement, human trafficking and so on. In this paper, I have selected two short stories, one by Shashi Despande, titled as "The Intrusion" and another by Ashapura Devi, titled as "Izzat" for a detailed analysis into the perfunctory naïve obligations women are tirelessly subjected to. I wish to portray as well as make critical enquiry on the unprecedented cataclysm altering and transmuting the destiny of the women protagonists diminishing their aspiring desire for congenial cohabitation and venerable status as living individuals.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, patriarchy, rape, subjugation, trauma etc.

### **1. Introduction:**

Traditionally, the work of the women authors was undervalued because they strictly restrain their themes to the traditional rituals and norms, domestic surveillance and mostly limited to the regional languages. Proficiency in English was only found in educated, affluent and elite class women of society. The *Manu Samhita*, which is also considered the Hindu moral code of conduct, has portrayed virtuous women as devoted to their husbands or children. Their long-suffering for motherhood or womanhood was never cared for by the patriarchy. Ramabai, born in a learned but diligent Brahmin family, has studied Sanskrit with profound eagerness and raised her voice against the *sanatani* tortuous lives of the Hindu women, the child brides and child widows who are

considered as 'ill-luck' much before they are born. In an essay, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" she quotes from Manu and cites,

How the wife is classed with cows, mares, female camels, slave-girls, buffalo-cows, she-goats and ewes. The rights of a husband over a wife are so complete that the yearly epidemics that carry away women are not unwelcome to women who are persecuted by social, religious, and state laws. The courts provide no relief for women as the right of the husband upon the wife is recognised by the law. Thus the wife is hemmed in on all sides. (Sangari and Vaid 93)

## 2. Discussion:

The literary portrayal of women as Savitri, Sita, or other Hindu virtuous wives was considered the ideal representation of women in the home and the world. Therefore, till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, domesticity was their only arena of manifestation. With the advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women started participating in the Indian freedom fighting movement, which led to the flourish of women's literature. In 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, after various feminist reformist movements across the globe, women have got the literary space to describe how they perceive their lives and their numerous problems in social, political and cultural affairs.

Ashapura Devi, the renowned activist of the Bengal Feminist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as well as the winning soul of the coveted Gnanpith and Padma Shree Award, was born in 8<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1909 and hailed from an orthodox, tradition Bengali Baidya family where little care was allowed for women's education. She was given no formal education, yet her passion for books and zeal for raising the subjugated voiced of the subservient women-folk in that contemporary political upheaval, made her self-educated and explore the vast world through the windows of books and magazines. Thus, the sensitizing freedom fighting movements under the deserving leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the decisions and its repercussions were well known to her, which enkindled in her soft core a zealous penchant for patriotic fervor. She sent her first poem, 'Bairer Dak' for publication in *Sishu Sathi* magazine, when she was only 13; after her marriage, she published her first novel, *Prem O Prayojan*. In her lifetime, she has produced thirty novels, ten volumes of collected works and numerous fiction and non-fiction for the children and young adult. Her magnum opus, her trilogy including *Pratham Protisruti*, *Subarnalata*, and *Bokul Katha* portray the courageous participation of the women-folk in freedom-struggle against the British Raj under Colonial rule.

Ashapura Devi primarily chose to portray the female characters as representatives of their class and creed, culture and custom. She describes their docility, submissiveness pertaining to the prevalent patriarchal dominion of the obnoxious orthodoxy. But her protagonists do not succumb to ruthless victimization; they fall, but stand up against unavoidable precariousness by protesting against their volatile brutality. For example, our present short story, titled as "Izzat", the unnamed daughter of maid Basanti is the prototype of that unabated new virility that knows to raise voice against maltreatment, disgrace and abhorrence. The maid's daughter's only fault was her unparallel beauty, which was quite astonishing and unacceptable in a basti. Basanti was the only provider in the family, and after her husband died of snake-bite, she has only her daughter left in the world. She dreams of marrying her daughter off to a respectable family, a deserving; but the earnestness of the mother could not change the aggressive authoritativeness of Mahitosh. The wife of Mahitosh, Sumitra, was keen to the suffering of the mother who desperately needed a safer place for the daughter because the

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beauty of her girl would not let her live among the living beasts of basti. Sumitra kind enough, she agreed to shelter the daughter, she even plans to offer some old saris to the girl, who is helplessly awaiting danger from human cannibal, who sing filthy songs, whistle at her and even make erotic signs when she passes them. Sumitra's heart was overburdened with sympathy for the girl, who was there at her refuge; she could help her from getting violated by those aggressive rogues. But Mohitosh did care nothing for her sentiments. He passes rude comments about the character and parenthood of the girl, and also announces that it might be a trap to put scandalous charges against respective males. He even did not let Sumitra meet Basanti and her daughter when they came next day. So many imploring, persuasion and request went in vain. Finally, the daughter said that the mistress herself has no control in the house, how can she provide for another? The respectable 'babus' in the society have no regard for the 'izzat' or honour of the lower class girls. Therefore, if they if to sell their body for earning livelihood, it's the fashionable males of the society who are to blame. Sumitra was torn into pieces out of shame because neither she could hold her esteem in her own house, nor could she offer the poor girl a little refuse from those butchers. This story ends with a pertinent moral that a woman can never have a home, unless she builds it with her own money. This story depicts the helpless struggle of the women folk to seek security and crave safety for their future days.

Shashi Despande, one of the most widely acclaimed Indian woman writers in English, delves deep into woman's issues in her novels and short stories and showed how they cater to different socio-personal turmoil with defined subtlety and tranquil composure. Born in Dharwad, in Karnataka, got her primary and secondary education in her native place; after that she went to Mumbai and Bangalore for higher education and got degree in Education and Law. She studied Journalism too and worked as a Journalist for a period of time working for a popular magazine called, "On Looker". She has taken the socio-realistic stance in her writings which basically focalized on the conviction of women suppressed in both home and outside domestic places. She was first awarded for her first novel *That Long Silence* in 1990. She also had written books for children came under the names like "The Binding Vine" and "A Matter of Time" which were published in 1996. She was awarded with the renowned *Padmasree Award* in 2009. Of her notable works we must mention "I Die Today" (1982), "Come Up and Be Dead" (1983), "Intrusion and Other Stories" (1993), "Small Remedies" (2000), "Moving on" (2004), "Shadow Play" (2004) and so on.

The present story of discussion, "The Intrusion" was included in the anthology called "The Intrusion and Other Stories". Published in 1993, it reflected the condition of women crushed under the institution called 'marriage', more specifically, 'arranged marriage'. It pathetically narrates how an innocent girl, recently married, with full of dreams in eyes, gets violated and shattered both physically and mentally by her own husband. Based on the concept of marital rape, this story projects the vulnerability of those hapless girls whose colourful imagination of a happy life never materialises for their patriarch husbands.

Shashi Despande, in her present story has beautifully depicted the condition of the innocent girl, victimised under the social norm called arranged marriage, and how pathetically she undergoes the torture of marital rape that destroys her perspicuous dreams of conjugal alliance. The story begins with the first person narrative of a young girl, newlywed, with full of hope and expectations for a new life after marriage, as well as having pangs and longings for her long adored home. The tug

between her homesickness and the newer expectation about prospective marriage brought upon her a convulsed effect of rigidity and denial. The very first line describes, “We looked blatantly out of place there”,(L.1) which, at the very first moment, prepares the readers to mentally accept something unacceptable yet unquestionable, questions on ‘will’, ‘resistance’ and ‘denial’. The girl, along with her newlywed husband went to a seaside village stinky with the smell of dried fishes and fishing nets, with men and women with fishing elements and reached to a shabby hotel where they were supposed to spend their private time with each other and create moments of eternity. The room was shabby, bed sheets and pillow covers untidy. The husband tried to be intimate with the girl. The girls’ homesickness and feeling for knowing each other before physical activities were hardly tolerable for the husband. A sort of animal zeal was distinctly visible in him. After refusing several times, the husband overpowered the female body like a carnivorous when she was asleep, she could feel the heavy pain which was devastating her body and shattering her soul, but she tolerated. Her world of delusion and fancy for a happy married life along with a cooperative husband had gone forever.

Shashi Deshpande, very analytically, thus have portrayed the carnal desire of the pervert husbands, who basically consider themselves superior for their physical attributes, and think women are born for their entertainment, their only job is to worship their husbands and provide all sort of service they demand. Physical consummation is one of the most sensitive activities which needs the will of both, otherwise, the forceful act is no better than rape. The husband brutally raped his wife because he thinks it normal, as with the sect of marriage the body of the wife comes under the rule of the man. But the man literally forgets about the mind of the girl, the innocence, the virtuosity she possesses. With brutal animosity he pounded upon her body: and abused her spirit, reticence, and self esteem.

The expression, ‘intrusion’ means violent or forcefully entering into something where someone is not allowed to go. Here, the husband is the intruder, he intrudes into the private space, the right, the will of the woman, and he not only tortures her mentally, but also dishonours and disrespects her character. Here, Deshpande has represented the wife as a prototype of all those hapless female-folk who accepts that brutal treatment and domestic violence with stoic submissiveness thinking about the shame it will cause to her parents, family members and gets pinned down under the gaze of patriarchy.

Shashi Deshpande’s “The Intrusion” thus makes her a renowned figure among those Indian English writers who endeavoured to write for the peripheral sex who never raises their voices against anything. They suffer silently, accepts what destiny makes them to follow, do not create any imprint in the societal reform, and die thankless deaths. Deshpande blames those male counterparts who take undue advantages of those women, enjoy carnal pleasures being heedless to their pain and hurdles. Marriage is a sanctified unison of two hearts, two souls, two mortal beings that get selflessly attached to each other and promised to be with each other both in ease and adversity; prosperity and misery, but in most of the cases, men take excessive benefits over this weaker sex. G. B. Shaw once mentioned marriage to be a ‘legal prostitution’, where the physical act does not happen naturally for both the parties. Same thing follows here. The institution called marriage indicates a new beginning of life, both personal and societal; where both sexes surrender their bodies, wishes, sincerity, loyalty, love and desire to each other to be moulded into one unified entity. But this idealised category of conjugal relationship cannot get formed most of the cases because of the noncooperation of the male

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partner. "The Intrusion", thus focuses on the dire male insensitivity, where men are least bothered about mutual cohesion and wish to be brutally satisfied with corporeal rule and collective supremacy. The woman was only left with a sense of insult as her very expression towards the end of the narrative:

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. (p.09)

### 3. Conclusion:

Through generations, women have been considered to be the 'weaker sex' in the male-dominated society. Whatever contribution they make to the community or their domestic sphere, their peripheral minority always dissuades them from raising voices for their individuality. The gaze of the patriarchy crucifies them everywhere, smashing their confidence and oscillating their determination. Therefore, they exist, but only as a shadow of the male, as a provider of menial labour in the family instead of nothing, not even owed reverence. It is a kind of silent acceptance of the role of 'angel in the house' that they mitigate, feel mentally shattered and emotionally vulnerable getting more dependent on the stronger sex. Beauvoir has rightly marked that, "For men she is a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object, an Other through whom he seeks himself" (Beauvoir 68). Therefore, in these stories, I have tried to depict the helplessness of the women-folk on one hand, where they are purposefully subjugated under male dominance only to perpetuate their slavery. Though, in 'Izzat' the beautiful daughter of the maid Basanti bala sarcastically teases those dependent souls like the mistress who herself doesn't have any esteem in her own house to provide shelter for others, the newly married wife in 'The Intrusion' is a muted victim who does not even have that little courage to speak for herself. Hence, written in different places and times, both narratives recur the same repetitive suffering that castigates them as perennial peripherals.

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