
The Politics of Silence: Reading Feminist Confrontations with Marital Authority in Shashant Shah's *Chiraiya*, Kamala Das' *My Story*, and Shashi Deshpande's "*The Intrusion*"

Ushmita Yadav¹

Research Scholar, Centre for Language Learning, The NorthCap University, Gurugram

Dr. Chetna Karnani²

Assistant Professor, Centre for Language Learning, The NorthCap University, Gurugram

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Abstract:

This paper aims to provide a comparative feminist reading of Kamala Das's autobiographical work *My Story*, Shashi Deshpande's short story *The Intrusion* and web series *Chiraiya* which through different timelines presents same preoccupation with themes like marital rape, deeply rooted patriarchy, and marriage as an institution. Reading across different genres of confessional autobiography, realist short story and domestic fictional drama- this paper views marriage not just as a personal bond but as an institution that disregards consent and exposes man's desires hidden as "rights" and "authority". These works expose society's thought process where marriage is seen as a lifetime's contract for a woman's body whether she wants or not. It argues that collectively, these works dismantle the ideological equation of marriage with unquestionable consent by emphasizing women's experiences of the wedding night and early marital sex as scenes of fear, coercion, and psychological disruption. Das representation of her wedding night as "rape", Deshpande's honeymoon night as "intrusion" and *Chiraiya's* foregrounding of consent and speaking against the institution highlights shifts in voice, form and address regarding the same issue in the contemporary time where people refuses its normalization by voicing out these issues in public. By placing these works together in dialogue, the paper demonstrates how there is movement from silencing to speaking, from metaphors of opposition to outright naming and confrontation, while also arguing that literature's job in this context is not only one of illustrating personal trauma but of examining the institution of marriage.

Keywords: Marital Rape, patriarchy, marriage, institution, consent, *Chiraiya*, normalized violence

Violence within marriage is one of the most recurrent themes of Indian cultural narratives, though present, it is rarely openly acknowledged or provided with a resolution. It often remains hidden beneath the constraints and euphemisms of “duty,” “adjustment,” and “patni dharm,” ideas that are instilled in women from a very young age regarding how they are expected to behave, react, tolerate, remain silent, obey, and never go against the family. What happens “inside” the conjugal bedroom is treated as something off-limits, even when a woman experiences coercion, violence, and psychic shattering there. Until recently, such acts were rarely identified as rape because society institutionalized marriage and marital traditions, particularly within middle-class settings.

This paper lays its foundation in feminist literary criticism and analyzes the selected works by highlighting how they do more than merely raise an issue; they unsettle the narrative foundations of heterosexual marriage by demonstrating how marital rituals often coincide with violation. The paper examines *My Story* (1973) by Kamala Das, *The Intrusion* (1993) by Shashi Deshpande, and *Chiraiya* (2026), directed by Shashant Shah and streamed on JioHotstar, as three significant works dealing with the issue of marital rape. All three narratives portray sexual initiation within marriage as an experience of assault rather than emotional intimacy. They collectively engage with themes such as institutionalized patriarchy, familial honour, wifely duties, misogyny, and male dominance, all of which deny importance to female agency, consent, and personal desire.

Reading these works comparatively provides two important perspectives. The first reflects the traditional patriarchal marriage regime, where women silently endure suffering, remain submissive, and accept violence as part of married life. The second perspective demonstrates a gradual shift toward resistance, where women begin voicing their opinions, breaking the silence surrounding the injustices committed against them, and exposing these patterns publicly.

This paper intends to understand “marital rape” not merely as a legal category but as a literary and ideological one, where a woman’s “no” constantly collides with a marriage institution that interprets it as “yes.” Patriarchy is central to all three narratives, representing conservative mindsets and deeply rooted social conditioning. These stories collectively highlight how forced intimacy is normalized, causing emotional trauma and psychological distress to the female protagonists. Patriarchy operates through everyday language, rituals, and social narratives that repeatedly instruct women to “adjust.” Importantly, this system is perpetuated not only by men but also by women who actively participate in and advocate for

it. The narratives reveal how marriage is often perceived as granting husbands unrestricted sexual access to women's bodies, where refusal itself becomes unimaginable.

Taken together, these three texts concretely demonstrate what feminist theory has argued for decades: once a woman is married, society behaves as though her body has been permanently transferred to her husband. This idea closely aligns with what Carole Pateman describes as the "sexual contract," the hidden dimension of marriage that grants men sexual rights while erasing the necessity of consent. In *My Story*, this logic explains why a fifteen-year-old Kamala Das can endure repeated pain on her wedding night and afterwards without anyone questioning whether she desired it; the fact of marriage itself is considered sufficient justification. In "The Intrusion," the husband assumes that taking his wife to a hotel during their honeymoon automatically entitles him to sex, completely disregarding her discomfort and fear. Similarly, in *Chiraiya*, Arun repeatedly invokes his status as a husband, believing that being a "pati" alone grants him unquestioned rights over Pooja's body, regardless of how many times she refuses him.

Radical feminists such as Kate Millett and Catharine MacKinnon would argue that this is precisely how sexual politics functions under patriarchy: what is socially labelled as "normal married life" may, from the woman's perspective, be experienced as rape because the entire structure is built upon male dominance and female submission. However, these texts are equally sharp in demonstrating how women themselves are conditioned into sustaining this system. Kamala Das's younger self believes that a good daughter marries where she is told and that a good wife does not complain. Similarly, Shashi Deshpande's bride blames herself for her fear instead of recognizing her husband's violence. In *Chiraiya*, Kamlesh and Pooja's mother initially scold Pooja and ask her to "adjust," because they too have internalized the belief that a wife's duty is to endure suffering silently.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity becomes particularly relevant here. Butler argues that gender is not innate but a role repeatedly performed through social conditioning. These women have learned to perform the roles of the shy bride, ideal bahu, and self-sacrificing pativrata so completely that it requires profound psychological shock for them to even begin questioning these expectations. Their identities are shaped through repetition of patriarchal norms until resistance itself appears unnatural.

That psychological shock manifests intensely within the body. Das's later description of her genitals as "only a wound," Deshpande's sleepless and emotionally numb heroine, and

Pooja's self-harm and dissociation all demonstrate how the body remembers what society refuses to acknowledge. Trauma theory provides a language for understanding this experience. These women are unable to fully process the violence at the moment it occurs, and therefore the trauma resurfaces later through revulsion, insomnia, alienation, fear, and desperate attempts to avoid physical intimacy.

Finally, echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", each text becomes an attempt to allow women to speak from positions where they were historically denied voice and authority. Das writes the word "rape" into autobiography, transforming personal memory into public testimony. Deshpande centres the inner consciousness of the bride, making silence itself meaningful. *Chiraiya* goes further by placing on screen a wife who openly insists that consent continues to matter after marriage and that what was done to her must be identified as rape rather than duty.

The paper is divided into three major segments. The first segment analyses the works of Das, Deshpande, and Shashant Shah separately, highlighting how each narrative portrays marital rape through plot, focalisation, symbolism, and metaphor. The second segment examines the transformation in the portrayal of female subjectivity over time, tracing a movement from silent endurance and confessional writing toward more explicit confrontation and resistance. The final segment reflects upon how these texts encourage readers to rethink marriage itself as a social institution shaped by patriarchal conditioning and male dominance.

The paper further questions how female subjectivity and resistance evolve across time—from Das's confessional "I" and Deshpande's silent, traumatised bride to the women in *Chiraiya* who openly articulate the language of consent and challenge the expectation that women must perform "wifely duties" irrespective of their desires. Through her autobiography *My Story*, Kamala Das addresses the concept of marital rape through a confessional mode of writing long before the term gained wider recognition in public discourse. Das explicitly refers to her wedding night as "rape" and describes her husband's first attempt at intercourse as "an unsuccessful rape." At merely fifteen years of age, married to a significantly older man chosen by her family, Das repeatedly emphasizes her lack of agency, stating that "my life had been planned and its course charted by my parents."

In the autobiography, Das devotes an entire chapter to this experience—Chapter 22, significantly titled "Again and again he hurt me and all the while the Kathakali drums throbbed dully." She portrays her husband's forced sexual initiation as an "unsuccessful

rape” that continued for nearly a fortnight, emphasizing its loveless and emotionless nature. Her expectations of emotional companionship, tenderness, and intimacy are shattered as her husband prioritizes his own gratification over her consent, comfort, or emotional wellbeing.

The phrase “unsuccessful rape” becomes particularly significant because it asserts that rape is not defined by legal status or marital identity, but by force and absence of consent. Her husband approaches the body of his teenage wife as though it were a sexual property guaranteed through marriage. This reflects the deeply embedded patriarchal belief that marriage grants men unquestioned autonomy over women’s bodies. By writing about marital rape within her autobiography and transforming personal wounds into speech, Das moves beyond individual suffering toward a larger structural critique of patriarchy, exposing the oppressive social institutions and normalized injustices embedded within society.

Shashi Deshpande’s “The Intrusion” deals with the same theme through the first-person inner consciousness of a newly married unnamed woman during her honeymoon. The story depicts how her body becomes a site upon which familial duty and patriarchal entitlement are violently imposed. It emphasizes that her consent holds no value, neither within her father’s house nor after marriage. The narrative highlights power relations operating within a patriarchal framework where women’s emotions and desires are disregarded, and women themselves are treated as objects through which male power and dominance are asserted.

The story portrays how the protagonist is married off without her consent truly mattering, even after she attempts to confide in her father regarding her doubts and anxieties. As she reflects, “No one had asked me if I had agreed; it had been taken for granted.” Her father responds not with understanding but with helplessness, worrying instead about the marriage prospects of his other daughters if she refuses the proposal: “I have two more daughters to be married.” This reaction reflects society’s fear of judgment and further exposes how women are denied agency and the freedom to make decisions for themselves within traditional patriarchal structures.

The title *The Intrusion* itself becomes deeply symbolic, suggesting a forceful entry into another person’s private space without permission. The title directly aligns with the central concept of the story. After marriage, during what is culturally imagined as a romantic and emotionally intimate honeymoon, the protagonist instead experiences discomfort, estrangement, and fear. Her husband remains emotionally unfamiliar to her, and the prospect of being alone with him generates anxiety rather than intimacy. She repeatedly tries to delay

returning to the hotel room in an attempt to avoid the physical relationship she knows society expects from her.

Initially, the protagonist's emotions appear as uneasiness and discomfort. She finds herself in an unfamiliar place with a man she barely knows, expected to perform the role of "wife," despite having been prepared for it only through vague cultural expectations rather than genuine emotional understanding. Her husband insists upon intercourse on the very first night, treating it as his unquestioned marital right. Deshpande's representation of marital rape becomes particularly devastating because the protagonist experiences it not merely as physical violation but as an "intrusion" into her emotional, psychological, and personal space.

Through graphic metaphoric descriptions such as "relentless pounding" and comparisons between his movements and the "violent rhythms of the sea," Deshpande portrays the act as deeply humiliating and traumatic. The protagonist's suffering is expressed in her realization: "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." This statement becomes central to understanding the story's critique of patriarchal marriage, as the violence lies not only in bodily pain but in the destruction of autonomy and selfhood.

Significantly, the story never directly uses the term "rape." Instead, the word "intrusion" functions both literally and metaphorically, emphasizing not only physical penetration but also the invasion of the woman's bodily autonomy, privacy, and identity. The absence of the word "rape" reflects the social context of the period, during which marital intercourse was rarely recognized or discussed as sexual violence. Critics often argue that this silence also reflects the protagonist's own lack of language and conceptual vocabulary to name her experience.

The trauma of the experience becomes even more evident in the aftermath. While the husband sleeps peacefully after the act, the protagonist remains awake in darkness, emotionally shattered and deeply alienated from her own body. The intrusion, therefore, extends beyond the physical act and penetrates her entire sense of self. The story powerfully demonstrates how the protagonist's inability to voice discomfort or refuse her husband's advances stems from lifelong social conditioning that teaches women to remain submissive, obedient, and accommodating—especially toward their husbands. Through this psychological portrayal, Deshpande exposes how patriarchy functions not only through

physical domination but also through the internalized conditioning that silences women even in moments of profound violation.

Chiraiya, a 2026 web series directed by Shashant Shah, traces the arranged marriage of Arun and Pooja, a young, educated, and politically aware woman. The narrative highlights the dynamics of marital rape through Arun's assault on Pooja during their first night together, despite her reluctance, refusal, and repeated pleas that she is unwell. Arun justifies his actions under the guise of marital rights, believing that sexual access to his wife is an unquestionable entitlement granted through marriage itself.

When Pooja later confronts him and identifies his actions as rape, Arun attempts to legitimize himself by invoking traditional marital vows such as "Tann, Mann, Dhan" and asserting, "Pati hu tumhara, haq hai mera." These statements reveal the deeply patriarchal belief that a husband possesses complete authority over his wife's body and sexuality. The series exposes how marriage is socially constructed as a system that grants men ownership over women while simultaneously denying women bodily autonomy and consent.

This patriarchal entitlement becomes even more evident in the second episode of the series. When Pooja repeatedly insists that she had said "No," Arun dismisses her protest by replying, "Jis baat ka koi matlab hi nahi hai usse baar baar bolne ka kya point hai." Through this response, he invalidates the very meaning of refusal and undermines the concept of consent itself. His statement reflects the larger societal mindset that considers a wife's refusal insignificant within marriage because consent is presumed to be permanently granted once a woman enters the institution of marriage.

The series thereby critiques the normalization of forced intimacy within marital relationships and demonstrates how patriarchal structures erase the importance of women's voices, desires, and personal boundaries. By centering Pooja's experience and explicitly naming the act as rape, *Chiraiya* challenges long-standing cultural assumptions that marital relationships automatically justify sexual access, regardless of a woman's willingness or emotional state.

The narrative not only depicts the sexual assault committed by the husband against his wife, but also foregrounds the reactions of the family members after discovering it. The series portrays how the family attempts to normalize the assault by calling it "patni dharm," thereby exposing the deeply internalized patriarchy rooted within society that denies women autonomy over their bodies, minds, and souls. The story explicitly brings attention to marital

rape, a subject that continues to remain a social taboo and lacks legal recognition in India, often being dismissed as a “private issue” between spouses. By doing so, the narrative interrogates deeply ingrained patriarchy, selective feminism, notions of sexual entitlement within marriage, misogyny, and the normalization of gendered violence.

Arun’s violence is not presented as a momentary lapse but as the outcome of a patriarchal upbringing and a social conditioning that permits boys to do anything without consequences. This attitude is reinforced through his pampering by Kamlesh, his sister-in-law, who treats him like her own son. She indulges all his tantrums and consistently supports him during conflicts without questioning whether he is right or wrong. Her unwavering belief is repeatedly highlighted through the statement, “Hamara Arun kabhi galat ho hi nahi sakta,” reflecting her blind faith in him because she essentially raised him herself.

Gender stereotypes are further revealed through the ideological clashes between Pooja and Kamlesh. While Pooja is educated, opinionated, and aware of concepts like consent, Kamlesh initially represents the traditional housewife who firmly believes that women belong in the domestic sphere and must fulfil conventional household duties. Although Arun’s family is portrayed outwardly as progressive, educated, and liberal, the structure of the household still centres on male dominance and the preservation of family reputation.

The series highlights not only the husband’s sexual assault but also the disturbing social acceptance surrounding it. Pooja’s mother dismisses her pain by saying, “No ka kya matlab hai? Shaadi hui hai tumhari. Patni ho tum,” implying that marriage grants complete ownership over a woman’s body. Similarly, Kamlesh initially refuses to believe Pooja’s accusations and insists that fulfilling the husband’s desires is a wife’s duty. She questions Pooja about her understanding of “patni dharm,” only for Pooja to counter by asking whether Kamlesh understands the meaning of “consent.” Through such instances, the series exposes how women are socially conditioned to obey men unquestioningly and to believe that men are always right.

The hypocrisy of patriarchy becomes even more visible through the character of Arun’s father. Publicly, he is celebrated as a progressive poet and intellectual who advocates for justice and women’s empowerment. However, when the accusation emerges within his own household, his concern shifts toward protecting family honour and his son’s reputation. Rather than supporting Pooja, he attempts to suppress the issue by suggesting that Arun apologize and “settle” the matter privately. His statements such as “Asli daag toh badnami

ka lagta hai” and “Tum kya chahti ho main apne hi bete ko jail bhej du?” reveal the contradiction between his public image and private beliefs.

His patriarchal mindset becomes clearer when Kamlesh questions why he encouraged her education if he would not support her independent thinking. He dismisses her by saying that he never imagined she would use her education “within the house itself.” He further asserts his authority by forcing her to choose between supporting Pooja and remaining loyal to the family, declaring, “Ghar mein toh ghar ke hisaab se rehna hoga!” His behaviour reflects what Nanaji later calls a “cavemen mentality,” where women are treated as property belonging to men. His obsession with maintaining authority and reputation becomes so extreme that he manipulates Pooja’s father into taking medication so that Pooja may willingly return home and preserve the family’s honour.

Papaji’s character demonstrates how modern patriarchy often survives not only through openly sexist men but also through educated and cultured individuals who publicly advocate equality while privately protecting their own power structures. Thus, Chiraiya does not merely discuss marital rape in isolation; it portrays the entire social environment that normalizes violence through male dominance, familial honour, conservative thinking, and the preferential treatment of boys over girls. The narrative represents not just one family, but an entire social system that shields men from accountability in order to preserve honour while disregarding women’s suffering.

At the same time, the series emphasizes resistance and solidarity. It highlights the courage required to fight back, speak against injustice, and support one another, as seen through the eventual alliance between Pooja and Kamlesh. The title *Chiraiya* itself functions as a powerful metaphor. Meaning “bird,” it symbolizes caged freedom, fragility, and restricted movement, reflecting Pooja’s condition as a woman trapped within marriage. Her helplessness is visually reinforced through scenes such as her standing on the terrace in bridal attire after the assault, emotionally vacant after her mother refuses to support her, and her desperate act of harming herself to induce a “fake period” in order to avoid further sexual violence. These moments visually inscribe her entrapment and lack of bodily autonomy.

Through a close examination of *My Story*, “The Intrusion,” and *Chiraiya*, this discussion shifts toward questions of female subjectivity, ingrained patriarchy, and social conditioning, while also tracing how these representations evolve over time. The analysis reveals a movement from silence, to confession, and eventually toward open confrontation. In *My*

Story, autobiography becomes the space through which Kamala Das finally articulates a truth that remained unspeakable within the confines of the bridal bedroom. Collectively, these texts suggest that female subjectivity in Indian narratives of marital rape has gradually shifted from silent victimhood toward forms of witnessing, testimony, and resistance, particularly through the assertive actions of Pooja and Kamlesh.

In all three works, women are not merely victims of violence but also interpreters and challengers of that violence. Marriage is redefined not as a sacred institution immune from scrutiny, but as a social structure deeply implicated in patriarchal oppression. Across all three texts, marriage functions not as an excuse for rape but as the institutional framework that enables and conceals sexual violence. Each narrative demonstrates how the institution of marriage assumes perpetual consent at both personal and societal levels.

In Das's autobiographical narrative, the arranged marriage sanctioned by parents and society renders the bride's willingness irrelevant. Her body becomes accessible to her husband irrespective of her fear or pain. In "The Intrusion," the honeymoon setting creates a cultural expectation of sexual intimacy, allowing the husband to proceed without hesitation. Similarly, in *Chiraiya*, Arun explicitly dismisses Pooja's refusal because legal marriage, in his view, entitles him to her body.

Although legal and contractual dimensions of marriage remain implicit within these texts, the discourse of love dominates the narrative surface. Patriarchy frequently uses the language of love to perpetuate oppression. In all three works, women are socialized to believe that men, parents, and society are always right. Das's teenage self internalizes the belief that a daughter must marry according to her parents' wishes and remain obedient regardless of suffering. In "The Intrusion," the protagonist is similarly conditioned to believe that fear and discomfort are natural aspects of becoming a wife. In *Chiraiya*, this conditioning is made explicit when Pooja's mother insists that "adjustment" is simply part of marriage, thereby invalidating her daughter's bodily autonomy for the sake of marital continuity.

Throughout the series, women are repeatedly taught to prioritize honour, silence, and adjustment. Kamlesh's early responses emerge from her internalization of the ideal bahu and bhabhi, whose responsibility is to protect the men of the household and maintain family honour. However, through education and exposure to the idea of consent, she gradually begins to confront and unlearn patriarchal conditioning. By the end of the series, she becomes a key figure in exposing the truth and challenging Papaji's hypocrisy.

This transformation reflects the broader evolution of women's voices across the three texts—from Das's confessional mode, to Deshpande's interior monologue, and finally to the open challenge articulated in *Chiraiya*. Together, these narratives reveal not only the violence itself but also the slow process of unlearning the patriarchal ideologies that initially make such violence appear unnameable.

Das's young protagonist lacks the vocabulary to identify her traumatic experiences as "rape" and only later, through writing, reinterprets her wedding night as an "unsuccessful rape." Writing becomes her means of unlearning inherited social scripts. Similarly, Deshpande's anonymous bride understands that society expects her submission, and though she experiences fear and alienation, she remains unable to articulate resistance openly. In *Chiraiya*, both Pooja and Kamlesh undergo similar conditioning. Kamlesh initially sides with Arun due to her upbringing and emotional attachment to him, but gradually learns to recognize his actions as violence rather than marital entitlement. The insistence on consent and the reclaiming of personal narratives signify the beginning of resistance not only against individual men but against the institution that renders women's refusal impossible.

The three texts examined in this article—Kamala Das's *My Story*, Shashi Deshpande's "The Intrusion," and Shashant Shah's *Chiraiya*—span different decades, genres, and audiences, yet they share a common understanding that sexual violence within marriage is deeply connected to patriarchy and social conditioning. Each text interprets marital rape differently: Das employs autobiographical confession to explore psychological trauma; Deshpande transforms the short story into a psychological exploration of intrusion and fear; and *Chiraiya* uses visual storytelling to expose the normalization of violence within family structures.

While none of these works resolves the problem of marital rape, each expands the space in which such violence may be discussed, criticized, and resisted. Together, these narratives compel readers to reconsider marriage not merely as a sacred institution, but as a social structure shaped by parental control, wifely duties, myths of eternal consent, and the burden of honour imposed upon women.

Despite the decades separating these works, the patriarchal structure they portray remains strikingly similar. Parents arrange marriages, rituals legitimize them, the wedding night becomes a duty for the wife, and consent is presumed within the institution itself. Simultaneously, these narratives depict a slow but significant process of unlearning. Das's adult narrator revisits and reclaims her past through writing. Deshpande's protagonist may

not openly voice resistance, but her inner alienation prevents the normalization of violence. In *Chiraiya*, both Pooja and Kamlesh move further by openly asserting the importance of consent and choosing justice over family honour.

Ultimately, these narratives expose the wounds inflicted by patriarchy while simultaneously suggesting that through writing, reflection, solidarity, and dialogue, women can begin to separate “what marriage is” from “what it should be.” In conclusion, autobiography, short story, and serial drama emerge as powerful narrative forms for exposing patriarchal violence. These texts may not dismantle patriarchy entirely, but they transform what can be thought, spoken, and understood about marriage. Silence has long been mistaken for the absence of voice, but through the works of writers and creators like Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, and Shashant Shah, the layered meanings of silence are gradually unveiled, allowing readers to reinterpret and challenge the structures of patriarchal oppression.

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