



'A SYNOPTIC VIEW' OF THE WOMEN PROTAGONISTS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHOBHA DE

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ABSTRACT

Shobha De holds an elevated position among the distinguished literary writers of South Asia. Being a novelist and columnist, she contributed profusely to South Asian literature. Shobha De through her works always portray modern educated and career oriented women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Her women are aware of cultural shortcomings to which they are subjected to in this patriarchal society. Their female protagonists reveal a remarkable insight into the nature of women's mind as they are depicted in myriad roles wife, mother, daughter, career oriented. Most of them are financially independent women who are right in their own way. Their women are always concerned with themselves in their search for their own needs and identities. Most of their women protagonists endeavor to establish themselves as individuals who breaks loose from the traditional constrains that grub them with fears of patriarchy and at times they shun to allow themselves to be socially, psychologically, emotionally be ostracized. Their women protagonists attempt to refine their identities in tune with the changed social ambiance of the modern times. Shobha De made her women very powerful and her women characters are working for liberation of women. She has brought those women of the society on the surface that is ready to transgress the existing one sided moral values to establish her own identity in the society.

Key Words: Elevated, Sensitive, Patriarchal, Independent, Protagonists, Constrains, Identities, and Liberation

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Shobha De being a prominent post-colonial woman novelist writing in English, she has inched a special identity for herself in the galaxy of Indian English literature. Shobha De is one who has created absolutely different patterns of female characters. Their female protagonists are fighting hard for their rights in a patriarchal society. Their women protagonists at times are struck between tradition and modernity they often reflect the changing paradigms of the society. Tradition has a very strong hold over the Indian society and even a stronger

hold over its women folk. Traditional rules and norms bind the Indian women in nearly every quarter. Woman is the preserver of the family and so she makes all kind of sacrifices for the welfare of the family. However the narrow outlook of patriarchy towards women has greatly changed with the passage of time. Education played an important role in bringing Indian women into the mainstream of development.

Sobha De's novels portray the suffering of women from predestined fate that of being a

daughter, a sister, a wife, a daughter in law and even mother, it is pity to be living among one's own people on one's own land; therefore problems in their life arise out of sense of oneness and being self-possessive. Although, both women writers do not disown their traditional roles and life, they are found being disowned by their own people and own society. The issues of disowning and always being at the receiving end as far as the plight of disowning are concerned, they portray through their women characters. The women protagonists of Shobha De do not depend on men and emerge them with a new identity coupled with matured thought process. They do not hesitate to knock at the doors of modernity, and are willing to emerge themselves as New Women who seek unhesitatingly a new world of theirs, for their own self and identity.

Karuna (*Socialite Evenings*) is an ambitious woman turned hallow in the modern wasteland in search identity. She is a weary socialite divorcee allows herself to play different roles at different times to quench her emotional and psychic thrust. Being a model, house wife, a society lady and an actor, writer and paramour, she has independent thought and unhesitatingly chooses her ways and means. She unveils and unfurls herself to activate the creative urge stifled within her and this act of unburdening herself is a compromise with her Self. She emerges from the panic and scary yester year's self into a rebellious who learn to break out herself from the bonds of matrimony and steps herself into a profession of her own choice. This deviation of Karuna from traditional norms is pawned at the cost of loss of her individuality. Karuna's resistance and her refusal of accepting and institutionalizing of her personality makes her appear as a strong willed woman.

Aasha Rani (*Starry Nights*) the dream girl and the heart-throb of millions of cinema lovers suffered and humiliated much in her childhood agonized by childhood scars and pangs of hers parents unsuccessful marriage makes her to be a passive character. But she always learned to act upon. Her irresistible sexual desire is not inherent but it is the manifestation of the suppressed scents of vengeance of the male world since her childhood. Though her career as a film actress gives her glory, fame, name and luxury and wealth, she seems to be

missing her inner peace of genuine love. Her unfortunate association with the underworld though pulls her strings of glory away she ascertains her lost self by her marriage and she learns to take control of herself by once again looking for her lost treasure where she lost the film world. Representing the modern woman Aasha Rani etches her own independent self in the male dominated society.

In *Sisters*, the two leading female characters Alisha and Mikki Hiralal, though of daughters of the same father but by different mothers spare no opportunity to re-assert their identities as an empowered business women. Mikki's journey from her soft sympathetic and deeply human nature on sets allowing her to grow fearless, self-respecting and sympathetic individual. Failure of her marriage with a person who uses her as a status symbol makes her disillusioned. On the other hand Mikki realizes that male dominated world is aggressive and cheating. She feels that blood relations are more important than material world. She turns to be sympathetic and apologetic to Alisha her step sister who attempted suicide by donating her blood and assuring of sisterly love. Mikki grows to be a strong woman who learns to establish her own methods of surviving, when Binny her husband deserts her on false charge of adultery. Mikki fights against the ruthless world waiting for her true love after a night in marriage. Though she is a modern, strong willed woman, Mikki is sure of her roots that are firmed in the cultures and tradition of Indian society. Unlike Mikki, life of Alisha is different, for her wealth and material pursuits are more valuable than human relationships. Alisha is rough abusive and curt towards Mikki. Being a victim of her own illusions she rises from rags to riches and seeks sarcastic pleasure when her sister Mikki is in trouble. Finally she realizes that family bonds are more important than material pursuits which make her realize to have better understanding towards life. Through these two women protagonists, Shobha De gives a true picture of the fiercely ambitious modern women who pierce the age-old traditional values for their identity and emerge as an individual-self.

Nisha (*Sultry Days*) discovers herself through the character of Deb. She is very different and is not one who wastes her life in glamour and sex. Nisha's character and psyche as a single women, and

girlfriend, her affair with Deb though does not result in marriage. However their prolonged affair that makes her stronger in understanding other disturbed women in her life. She along with her mother typify the courage that they muster to live in the male dominated society. Nisha remains indifferent to the happening around her though she is not different from some heroines in the other novels by Shobha De. *Sultry Days* accommodates several female characters but finds no scope for the development of them. However, De's concern is with a presentation of their plight in this novel. All the women enjoy their economic independence and try to build up their personality in their own ways. Even if they are married they are married they do not add social or moral values to the institution. These women are no longer imposters as they feel proud in such a way that they represent truth in their identity, what they have to do is to substantiate with demonstration.

Maya (*Second Thoughts*) truly imbibes in her dream of becoming a journalist who intends reform the patriarchal societal system. She is portrayed as a confident, talented and attractive young woman. As a young wife she expects to seek her husband's attention and confide in her by satisfying her physical and emotional needs. Disappointed and depressed by her husband's non-chivalrous attitude she brings disaster to her life by associating herself with extra-marital relationships with Nikhil. Very soon her breezy dreams shattered with the end of their affair. Maya comes back to her own world that she learns to spend the rest of the life dancing to the chants of her husband and mother-in-law. It is her emotional state of affairs and psychological vacuum's that makes her feel sorrow that encapsulates self-pity that nobody and nothing belongs to her. As a traditional woman, she suffers a series of serious blows that make her feel resent about her status as traditional-modern woman who conforms and accepts traditional norms of the society but secretly breaks them when she finds them unacceptable and seeks for her individual identity.

The writings of Indian women writers are significant in making the society aware of women's demands which are not exactly the demands but are the rights of women, which they deserve, and in

providing a medium for self-expression to re-write the History of patriarchal India. Shobha De is essentially a feminist writer. Like Nayanara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande, she concentrates on women's problems and gives a new approach to them. She is a modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance.

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