



EXPLORATION OF SHOBHA DE'S THOUGHTS REGARDING MAN, WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN HER NOVELS

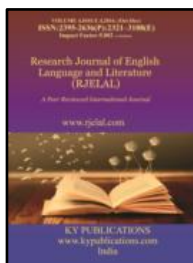
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ABSTRACT

Shobha De as a writer tries to mirror or portray her feminist mindset while portraying women in her novels. A broader evaluation of her work reveals her protest against the good old image of women who can't live the way she wants to and do things the way she wants to. Women in her novels are represented as sexually liberated and free thinkers who have been termed as "New Woman" These so called new women are much more physically active and athletically strong than their mothers. All her heroines, be it Karuna, Aparna, Mikki, Alisha or Asha Rani are rebellious modern Indian women who challenge the orthodoxy of social taboos. They are different from the sexually ignorant Indian woman which is quite contradictory to most Indian male writers who feel that sex is as unpleasant subjection to man's desire- necessary in order to have offspring. Shobha De's women challenge this traditional set up in the society. Her women are far more assertive, domineering and bold in comparison to men. They are not submissive, and guilty of their affairs.

Key words: women, emancipation, culture, male domination subjugation victimized



Introduction

Secondary status in a male-dominated Indian society, that is conservative. The central theme, therefore, is the emergence of 'new woman' in the fast changing social milieu.

Shobha De's novels are a slice of urban life. In her novels she realistically presents an intimate side of urban woman's life and also reveals her plight in the present day society. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the male community everywhere. She has been the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards. In most of her novels, Shobha De has focused on marginalization of women in Indian society. She draws our attention to women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. The women are treated with double standard. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors

in their lives. They are never regarded as autonomous beings.

Women In Shobha De's Novels

Karuna, the protagonist of *Socialite Evenings*, is the perfect example of the misery of women in India. She suffers due to the callous and non-responsive attitude of her husband. Her husband treats her as a mere object subjected to his will as a result there is a complete loss of her identity. Similarly, Anjali, a young socialite, also suffers much because of her incompatible marriage and her husband's oppressive attitude. Here, in presenting the picture of subordination and marginalization of Indian women, Shobha De's attack is not against the individuals, it is against the system that favours men and causes women's subjugation and marginalization. In *Starry Nights* Shobha De has projected the shattering of human

values in this glittering world of Mumbai cinema through the realistic portrayal of Aasha Rani, Geetha Devi, Malini and Rita. The other important aspect which Shobha De highlights in this and other novels is a woman's role in the oppression and suffering of her fellow woman. In our society, women ill-treat and exploit women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex.

Sujata, in *Sultry Days* (1994) is a prostitute, who does what her mind says. This gives her pleasure. Life is defined on her own her own terms. When Asha Rani, in *Starry Nights* (1991) the famous heroine of Bollywood decides to quit films all of a sudden when she is at the peak of her career just to live with a fellow co star, Akshay Arora, her mother tries to dissuade her from doing it. Then she argues in this way in "Money, money, money. That's all you think of. Well, I'm fed up being your money machine. I've done enough for everybody- you, Sudha and others- now I want to live for myself. (106) Asha Rani designs herself a code of conduct for herself which is free from the prescribed gender rules and sexual constraints. This shows clearly that women in Shobha De's novels can't be always taken for granted that they will be dutiful and self sacrificing daughter to their parents. They will certainly revolt when their self interest is at stake. They may face hurdles but they are smart enough to ignore them and break these hurdles very skillfully and tactfully and emerge out of it comfortably. The novelist has portrayed her women characters in such a way that the readers get a clear picture of her intentions. She has tried her best to expose the normal and spiritual break down of the society which she thinks is in helpless state. Therefore she has understood the human psyche which has made her take a thorough look at the age old customs which bars a woman from doing certain things which she likes to do but is unable to because of the rigid bonds she is bounded with. Women in upper class society have no concern about public. The concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is considered to be outdated. The women in Shobha De's novels believe in Pleasure of enjoying life with pre- marital affairs and extra-marital affairs and breaking the age old traditions.

As a matter of fact, Shobha De brings out the universal psychological truth that the woman is the enemy of the woman. In *Sisters* Mikki Hiralal is oppressed, subjugated and exploited by Binny Malhotra, a true representative of patriarchal system.

The novel *Strange Obsession* revolves around the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyengar called 'Minx' and Amrita, the model from Delhi.

This novel deals more with how one woman subjugates the other woman than the subjugation of women by men. **Sultry Days** has a male protagonist, God who says to Nisha that "one bitch is as good as another" (252). His attitude towards girls is- "use them and leave them". Such attitude of men towards women clearly shows the miserable plight and marginalization of women in our society. In *Snapshots* the women turn into useful plaything for men in patriarchal society. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts these women to fall prey to the designs of men. All the men presented in the novel are tyrants whereas the women – Aparna, Rashmi, Swati and Noor are all victims of male tyranny. Finally, the novel *Second Thoughts* is a sad tale of Maya, an oppressed wife. She suffers from marital disharmony because her husband Ranjan considers woman as a mere object. Though an engineer, Maya is not allowed to take up even a part-time job. Instead, her husband again and again reminds her of 'tradition'. It is due to Ranjan's traditional attitude and feeling of superiority, Maya feels herself trapped in a neglected and meaningless life.

In *Sultry Days*, the novelist presents a group of modern women who, when ill-treated, turn rebellious and protest. Nisha's mother protests against her husband's affair with his Sindhi Secretary. Sujata is another woman who does not lead a life which is defined by her husband. She makes her own rules. She has both male and female lovers. Further, the get-together of six former school friends at Reema's house in *Snapshots* also reveals how the women are obsessed with sex and sensual enjoyment. They express their grievances against men in general and husbands in particular. They break the social norms and moral codes. Most of the

women in the novel, bored with their husbands, seek new relationships outside marriage and challenge the patriarchal system. In fact, *Snapshots* is the world of Shobha De's Women where men stand on periphery and women fight for power and supremacy. Finally, it is through the story of love and betrayal in *Second Thoughts* that Shobha De exposes the hollowness and hypocrisy of Indian marriage system. Maya, the central character is so depressed and frustrated by the traditional attitude of her husband Ranjan that soon she establishes an extra-marital relationship with Nikhil and at last breaks the long silence. As a writer of the woman-centred fiction De has worked for the complete emancipation of woman. She projects the ideas of liberating woman through self-realization.

As a self-realized person, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* opts for singlehood as a way of life. She refuses the offer of Girish and Ranbir and gets ready to live her life on her own

terms by rejecting the idea of getting married second time. She is emancipated against the orthodox role of women and dominates her male counterparts. Karuna is the modern New Woman, who is independent in every way. She breaks out of the bonds of marriage and lands her feet firm into the profession of her choice that is modelling.

Anjali and Ritu are also presented as liberated and emancipated New Women. In fields such as familial, social, sexual and business, De's women revolt against the traditional image of Indian woman. They are sexually liberated and free thinking women. Similarly, Aasha Rani of *Starry Nights* is a liberated woman who lives for her own pleasures and knows no moral codes and value system. Her lesbian experience with

friend Linda implies independence from man. Shobha De also reinforces her plea for liberation through the example of Sudha, Aasha Rani's sister. Sudha lives with Amar without marriage. Here cohabitation, and not marriage seems to be the watchword for her.

In the Indian tradition marriage is glorified as a holy union of man and woman. It is the turning point and the beginning of a new way of life. However, in Shobha De's novels all these ideas

regarding marriage are shattered by her modern liberated women. With marriage the other important issue that De's novels deal with is sex. Sex to her women is no longer a dreaded and despised thing. Her women enjoy a great deal of sexual freedom.

Conclusion

But whatever Shobha's views may be true in the context of urban area and in high profile life but it is unusual in rural area and the middle class families. It may be true that she has depicted the feelings of urban women authentically and open mindedly, the subject on which Indian woman does not dare even to speak. It's a matter of controlling our instinct in some extent. Yes, in some cases we herd that women leave her husband if she found him not manly. But leaving with husband and keeping extramarital relationship is not allowed in majority of classes and against our culture. Yes, she can leave her husband on that basis and remarry. It is justified. She is an idol of sacrifice after all. But by doing so she can make balance between two, satisfying her natural instincts and remain sacred and maintain her real womanhood.

As we have to maintain our culture and in that case also again it is the responsibility of women just as family and maintaining its values is her responsibility. India is different from European country in case of its culture. Maintaining this age old and everlasting culture of sanctity of marriage, Shobha's solution to the emancipation of women does not reconcile with Indian Culture.

Being a woman, De is more interested in the predicaments of women. She presents the vital reality and makes us aware of the miseries of women and injustices done to them by their counterparts in the patriarchal society. However, it is an important fact that though De's novels are crowded with female characters, the analysis of the novels reveals her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary characters are simply mentioned. Furthermore, her novels move around only the metropolitan women whereas rural women do not find place in her novels. They are totally ignored. Shobha De, restricts her characters to the urban area, ignoring the life of ordinary, illiterate and rural Indian women.

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