

Portrayal of Women Characters in Shobha De's Novels

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Abstract : Shobha De is one of the most famous Indian women writers in English. Her fiction always tries to reveal the character of women. She is a great supporter of open-ended narration of incidents and episodes. She has portrayed the women characters of variety imaginatively in her novels, trying to find their existence, meaning of life, their identity and their unfulfilled love and emotional self. The important point to be acknowledged about her novels is that her novels particularly *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights* are full of women characters. The novels seem dominated by female characters having full of crowd. After analyzing her novels, it is indicated that her main concern is on female characters as protagonists. Less is mentioned about secondary female characters. She has depicted the women in pairs and their concerns on their individual happiness and selfhood pleasures. Her novels are based on women psychology revealing the accepted norm that women are jealous and enemy of other women.

Keywords : Feminist, Perception, New Woman, Fulfillment, Fidelity.

Shobha De is the first feminist writer to probe into the realities and psyche of modern Indian Urban women. She has clearly understood the changing scenario of the contemporary social life and urban women's position there in. The traditional life style has been changed in the modern times. In early days man has been the bread earner of the house and woman, the care taker of household and the hearth. But, with the changing time and circumstance woman has demanded equal status with man or even more than that. Now they are no more dependent on man. Rather they have emerged as the dominant force in the family and society. They are no more ruled but rulers; sub-ordinates but masters, controlled but controllers. They have achieved this status due to their independence of economy. This transformation has affected life greatly to all spheres. Shobha De has focused on this issue of contemporary women. She develops her character as no more mere helpmates at home, but competent ones to demolish the dominance of man changing the traditional age old scenario. Her women have emerged as "New women". They are in participating in the fields in which men were dominant over years long.

Mikki in *Sisters* started handling the business empire of her father and proving herself in no way less than the man folk in the business and industrial circle. Mikki agrees to marry Navin not for love but to achieve a husband, a marriage and not an affair. But she cancels it as Navin tries to sexually assault her before engagement. She gets united with Binny, an ardent lover and enthusiastic suitor. Shobha De mentions that women can make men give them what they want. Women can be seekers of pleasure. The man who gives them using different tricks is very much admired by them. After Mikki got the sexual satisfaction from her husband out of pre-marital sex, she immediately got married to him without giving second thought to her decision.

The new perception of life for the new women is unrestrained and full of options; they have no hassles in choosing even women as their sex partners. This is evident in *Starry Nights* with Linda and Aasharani in the centre. Liberal ideas sweep their minds so much that whatever fulfillments they demand they get. Nisha Trivedi observes; "The glittering world of cinema is in reality so ruthless, so miserable that it can shatter the moral values and innocence of any human being. But Aasha survives and achieves success."²

Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* opts for a single status of her own. The novel presents a girl-guy relationship between Karuna and Bunt. Karuna, a conspicuous Bombay socialite is the protagonist of the novel which is presented in the form of her memories.

Obsessions are different in people of different category. They have obsessions for particular things and persons. When these obsessions become strong, they affect the behaviour of a person greatly. Some of such obsessions seem to be natural but some others unnatural and unethical. Amrita in *Strange Obsession* steps out with a bold decision to choose modelling as her career. Naresh K Vats views "Shobha De has concentrated more on the psychopathological aspect of Mimes personality which has prevented the balanced development of her character."³ Thus, the age old man-woman relationship has been changed though they depend on each other for their biological need. However, as this relationship has become hollow and ineffectual in most of the cases, De's women seem to be inclined towards extra-marital affairs to fulfill their need. Even they go to an extent of using sex as the means of bargain to achieve their social and financial targets. Thus her characters protest against age old image of women to turn it upside down with a cry for freedom, equality and identity.

Shobha De's candidness has brought her defame as she is often labelled as a pornographic writer. She treats the taboo subject like sex with open-heartedness. However, she is a novelist with a serious purpose. Though she is neglected as a major fiction writer for her free, frank and bold descriptions of battles of sex, yet her novels prove to be representatives of liberty, equality and identity for women in the modern Indian urban system. They are the moral guidelines that alert the ultra-modern society and neo-rich women about their recklessness and misuse of liberty in the name of ultra-modern civilization and society. The weaknesses of ultra modern women are authentically exposed by her through her women characters which make them life like portraits. Through her treatment of sex, she proves sex to be a perfect bliss in case of marital happiness and a curse in case of pre-marital and post-marital relationships. Though her women are found to be indulged in free sexual activities in the name of modernity, she never seems to support this psychology. Rather she condemns such unusual practices and behaviour. This thought of condemnation is reflected in the consequences the characters meet at the end.

She is regarded as Jackie Collins of India. De's women are found to be sensuous, attractive, powerful, clever and shrewd. They plan and even conspire to succeed to fulfil their ambition in life. On the other hand the males in her works are found to be mechanical, dull and drab to understand the emotional and psychological need of the women. This creates conflict and martial rifts in their lives ultimately encouraging the women to get themselves involved in sensuous affairs. Such affairs, very often, results into communication difficulties, sexual hesitancies, lack of trust, faith and respect.

Marriage is redefined by De's women in her novels. De's women being educated and attractive, confident and assertive, smart and dynamic, give a new dimension to the age old institution of marriage. She projects the picture of conjugal relationship affected by various phenomena of the modern age such as 'industrial advancement', 'capitalistic attitude', 'technological progress' and so on. The bond of marriage is no more permanent and the causes are different at different stages. According to Priya Wanjari, "De depicts lives of young men and women, particularly rich upper class people who no longer considered faithfulness and constancy in love a virtue."⁴ Hence, she depicts people in their true colours, i.e. what they are rather than what they should have been. However majority of De's women do not have reverence for their marital and familial bonds and marriage is for convenience and for status and not the source of ultimate happiness. They are not serious about marriage and have no hesitation to be involved in extra marital affairs.

The mutual fidelity in marriage is replaced by sexual freedom in case of these New Woman. The age old patriarchy of man who used to play the dominant and key role has come to an end. De's women have rejected their supremacy and decided their own course of action. Their longing and will power has diverted them to maintain heterosexual extra-marital relationships. In *Socialite Evenings* Karuna no more accepts the supremacy of her husband who fails to understand her needs and proves their marital relationship a failure. So, she chooses her own way. Anjali, the Air hostess do not feel her relationship secure with Abe and lets herself free after the divorce and joins man to man in search of true love. Finally she marries Kumar Bhandari, a man of riches. But, he was found to be a homosexual having relationship with Murty, a young boy. This makes Anjali take a turn towards spiritualism. Rita uses her sexuality to control her husband and conditions

her husband through 'reward and punishment', similarly the other female characters of Shobha De like Aasharani, Malini, Rita, Mikki, Apparna, Surekha etc. have been betrayed in marriage. Marriage has proved for them something which is hollow, ineffectual, deception, loveless, joyless and cheerless.

Shobha De explores the unexplored world of lesbianism in *Strange Obsession*. This sort of relationship is found to be exciting but terrifying. The relationship of Firoz and Kiki in *Sultry Days* as well as Surekha and Dolly in *Snap Shots* explores a new horizon in the chapter of man woman relationship. The New woman considers herself in no way beyond man even in the field of sexuality. Lind the Journalist proves her supremacy over man in providing sexual satisfaction to Aasha and assures her that a woman can provide more pleasure to another woman as she knows her body better.

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