

Familial Love in the Autobiography of Shobha De

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Abstract:

Shobha De the flamboyant and towering woman writer of the twentieth century broke all social taboos of the orthodox society. Perhaps for her bold writings, she is better known as the Maharani of Muck or the Princess of Porn. She is also, often called as Jackie Collins of India. In reality De is a person whose first priority is family. Her friends and near ones know her as kind and soft-hearted person who always loved to be with her close ones. Her autobiography *Selective Memories* is a list of confessions of her ups and downs of emotional appetite in life. It also includes her benevolent moment spent with her strengths, that is her family.

Keywords: towering, broke, taboos, orthodox, confession, emotional and family

Women's autobiographies revolve around their family and their identities are established through these relationships. They mainly deal with their emotional turbulence and relationships in the social setup. Writing gives inward liberty to the writer and narrating self is the best way to come out from mental conflict. George Henry Lewes writes:

A woman's literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words, a new element... woman, by her greater affectionateness, her greater range, and depth of emotional experience, is well fitted to give expression to the emotional facts of life...(Smith 8)

Shobha De, the prominent writer and pragmatic thinker is a familial person. The outshining lady infringed all conviction of society and uncovered many immoralities through her candid and controversial writing. In the autobiography *Selective Memories* she describes herself as a daring daughter, a homemaker wife, a traditional mother of six children and a professional. Her cordial relation with her family in the autobiography proves the above words of George Henry Lewes that the autobiography of women autobiographers revolve around their family and friends where they essay the role of – a daughter, sister, mother, aunt and a wife. Shobha De herself loves to surround herself

with her family as she admits in the autobiography, “My life was crowded with family and I preferred it that way.”

(De 409)

Though in her younger days she was the most mischievous child of her parents, but she shared very intact relation with her siblings. Since her parents were conservative people, De hiding her parents upgraded her elder sisters with the modern world. She writes, “I who introduced them to a life they didn’t know existed- pop music, stolen cigarettes smoked....” (21) De is very close to her elder sister Kunda, in her ups and downs Kunda was with her side. In every school tournament Kunda accompanied her, for modelling also she helped her in many terms. De always rebelled her parent's old ideologies but always paid respect to their apprehensions related theirs. During her modelling she followed her parent's virtuous teaching and had not done any such work which would bring dishonour to the family. Her photoshoot were always in stern eyes of her parents and elders and she always welcomed their decision, “we had to seek not just your mother’s sister’s permission, but also her father’s.” (44)

Since the beginning, De was apparent that she wanted to be mother of many children, “only sole ambition in life was to get married and have lots of children.” (42) Sooner or later her wish turned true, she became mother of six children. In the *Selective Memory* De shows her deep concern for the future of the children. She was worried about her parenting, but the love and assurance of Dilip De lessened her doubts. She writes, “Parenting is the single most difficult responsibility in the world- don’t let anybody tell you otherwise.” (484) Her most profound feeling is appreciable for Dilip’s children. In the prologue of the *Selective Memory* her deepest concern towards her family shows her responsibility towards her family like an ordinary household woman, “I was distractedly thinking of mundane matters- the column I had to write the next day, the clothes that were to be picked up from the laundry, my daughter Arundhati’s new gym shoes which I’d promised her before school reopened.” (5)

The other incident De expresses in the autobiography is during her divorce when she was selected for Reuters Award she did not want to receive the award because she was in a fear that if she goes to London in such crucial period for long time period for the award her family would consider her selfish and children would stop loving her:

I was restless and bored. Demoralised and depressed. The other option was to try and make another life, in another country with another man. I wasn’t convinced about that either.... I was wracked with

self-doubt and guilt I would lose the love of my children. My family would disown and despise me. (465)

When her mind was tussling with several thoughts, Dilip De entered in her life like a guardian angel and swiped all her fear. Finally, she received the award.

De always wanted a settled life. She wanted a lovable and concerned husband; however her failed first marriage shook her to the core. Marriage means a beautiful life for De, according to her efficacious marriage needs the conscientious commitment of both the partners. Dilip De and Shobha De remained committed against all storms; they were dedicated to each other. They led a happy conjugal life and became proud parents of six children. She writes, "Marriage to me connotes commitment and surrender. Merging with, blending, overlapping, combining. It is a symbolic relationship where one feeds on the other, needs the other." (De, 480) This shows her content view towards marriage and proved her as a devoted wife who is always dutiful for her family.

Sheetal Thakore in her book *Indian Women Writers' Autobiographies: A Critical Study* observes De's autobiography as; "She is at her best in depicting the ties of human relationships." (Thakore 188) Sheetal Thakore apt on her observation her relation with all the family members is quite appreciable. She is a caring daughter, loving sister, devoted wife and responsible mother. For the proper upbringing of her children, she maintained a very warm relation with the wife of her ex-husband and acted very maturely on their coincident meetings. Hence, Sheetal has indeed opined De as a new woman who maturely handles every situation.

De was blessed to experience love and commitment of her second husband. Yet, the lady states that the passage of their second marriage was not stress-free, as they both come from different beliefs and upbringings but the understanding and compassionate of both the partners made their married life pleasant, "We've had our rough moment's bumpy patches, arguments, disagreements, and fights. There have been tears, accusations, and recriminations. But no real regrets. The parameters of our relationship have been drawn by Dilip." (480) In the chapter entitled "Feeling Great" De enunciate her termination of first marriage and commencement of new life with Dilip De. She discloses that phenomenally she decided to marry Dilip on the day of her divorce. Exactly, she was a divorcee for one and a half hour, as she divorced Sudhir at 11:30 am and married Dilip at 1:00 pm.

In chapter “Taking Stock”, De expressed her feeling of being proud to be a mother of six beautiful children. She is not biological mother of Ranadip and Radhika. They both are Dilip’s first wife’s (Late Rita De) children. But she loved them and nurtured them like her other four children. She is such a graceful lady that she always kept their biological mother Rita alive in their heart and soul. She never tried to impose her authority on them; instead, she always supported their decisions and effectually guided them in their need. She fostered both the children so devotedly that they became replica of their biological mother. She is a dream mother of Ranadip and Radhika. Ranadip’s positive comments on her is a big achievement for her, “ ‘She has single-handedly ruined the lives of her children- her son’s in particular,’ ... I was surprised by the remark. All along I’d thought this particular woman was his idea of the dream mother- liberal, sporting, friendly, the kind who qualifies for ‘cool’.” (489)

In the same chapter, she shares her fond memories with her children- Aditya, Ranadip, Avantika, Radhika and her husband, Dilip De. She also shares her memories of her late pregnancies and birth of Arundhati and Avantika. She cherished her children deepest concern on her. She concluded her autobiography with the remarkable line on autobiography, “The woman you meet in *Selective Memory* may not be the woman you think you know. But it’s me all right. Dates, times, events, places ... I’ve tried to get them right. But the book is not about chronological correctness, it has more to do with perceptions and feelings.” (528)

Therefore, along with other events Shobha De’ autobiography give complete record of her familial life. in public eye she is a story and a bold figure who is always surrounded by controversies for her bold writings, and bold remarks but at heart she is a devoted lady whose world comprises of her family.

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