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## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN *SULTRY DAYS* BY SHOBHA DE

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**Abstract:** The advent of new woman has been extensively discussed in the contemporary world. New woman is self-assured, aggressive, and self-reliant in every aspect of her character. She is extremely ambitious and does not rely on any man. She is well equipped and capable to deal with her issues. She competes with men in all walks of life. Women are suppressed in the patriarchal society. The need for empowerment is highlighted in the modern world. New woman desires for emancipation, upliftment, and progress. She prefers to have social, economic, and cultural liberation. She feels that it is practical only through the empowerment of women. She questions all norms and rules laid down by the male-dominated society. Shobha De, the Indian woman novelist, delineates most of her female characters based on empowerment and liberation. *Sultry Days* by Shobha De is an attempt to project various means of oppression of women in patriarchy.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Patriarchy, Suppression, Independent, Self-identity

The empowerment of women is the area, which is extensively discussed in the contemporary world. In India, especially women have been pushed to the fringes for generations. They have been denied their basic human rights and are being treated viciously. Despite innumerable amendments which are promulgated from time and again to protect the rights of women by Constitution, they are however, victims of rape, torment, domestic abuse, brutality, honour killings, female foeticide, and a long list of other crimes. The law alone will not be able to change the situation. Only awareness, education, financial freedom, and, most importantly, a shift in the mind set may lead into true empowerment.

Indian writers, particularly Indian female writers, have gone through challenges. Yet they are representing the state of women in literature, as well as their dreams and ambitions. Male writers have written on women's issues as well, but female writers write with a better understanding, highlighting women's exploitation and marginalisation. Feminist literature plays a significant role in society. They address oppression and suppression of women.

Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Markandaya, Manju Kapoor, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, and other prominent Indian women writers, write about predicaments of women in the male-dominated society. Discussing various issues of women, is crucial in the formation and shaping of contemporary social awareness.

Drastic changes are seen because of the attempts of these writers to highlight the status of women. Indian women of all classes are stepping out of their traditional positions and marching with their male counterparts down the path of progress. By questioning restrictions and humiliating social standards. They assert their individualism. The modern woman asserts that she is not a commodity for sale. Men are appreciated for their intelligence whereas women for their looks. Intelligent women are never acknowledged. They are seen as aggressive people and are oppressed.

Women have been conditioned to underrate themselves throughout history. Their opinions are given less importance, and their demands are seen as insignificant. Feminist writers have acknowledged the current position of women and the need of strengthening their writings. They project their struggle for power. Women are sufferers of injustice and mistreatment in the works of Shobha De. They accept, suffer, and compromise at first, but when they feel choked, they try to reclaim their rights.

De is one of the renowned Indian English writers. Many books have been written on her and her writings, demonstrating her popularity. In a nutshell, her novels promote a healthy man-woman relationship. Most of De's works depict the advent and transformations of new Indian women who are motivated to fight back against oppression.

De has identified flaws of women, particularly their emotional susceptibility, and is using her writings to offer them the way to empowerment. The female protagonist, Nisha in *Sultry Days* of Shobha De is a strong woman. She competes with her male counterparts for power and fame. She is keen to have authority and social status.

Shobha De also seeks to give her female characters their own sense of self-identity in society by making them assertive and confident. The novel, *Sultry Days*, reveals how all characters are drawn to politics, and it also emphasises on Indian women's active participation in becoming team leaders, managers, and other professionals in the corporate world, who struggle and eventually succeed. De has taken a stand against gender discrimination in the workplace with this novel. She attempts to demonstrate that men and women have equal economic power.

Nisha, the female protagonist of *Sultry Days* encounters Dev, the male protagonist in the campus canteen with stinking beedies and worn cloth. Others remark on Nisha's gloomy expression, but Dev compliments it alone, and Nisha quickly becomes friends with him. She is enthralled by the story. She is immediately drawn to him since he is a man of God. She addresses him as God. She is completely enamoured with his odd demeanour, intellect, and multi-skill abilities and capabilities. Nisha has aided him by paying for his trifling costs such as beedies, teas, and gifts after learning through God that he is financially strapped and lived an inharmonious and loveless life. Whenever God has demanded money for luxurious items, Nisha has remembered the denial of her father to procure various items such as red shoes, dresses, and other items, but every time she has been despaired. Eventually she feels that she must make him happy. She tries to fulfil all his desires. She is too smitten by him that she assists him financially. She says, "I loved buying things for God. It gave me a sense of belonging." (*Sultry Days* pp.22)

Nisha has entered the advertising business to better her financial situation and make more money. Even though her terrible job satisfied her, she has been disturbed and dismayed by the self-centredness of God. Despite this, she has sustained to assist him in his time of need because she loves him. With this, it is obvious that men are economically depending on women. Previously, men used to take care of financial aspects of women. The contemporary man is financially dependent on woman. Nisha represents new woman who is self-reliant and bold. New woman does not feel that a man must fulfil her needs. She is not financially dependent on him. In fact, men are dependent on women in the modern era. Nisha and other modern women are not reliant on their partners or husbands for money because they understand the

power of money and believe that every relationship can only be sustained through power, fame, and money. Women like Nisha, who desire to be independent, recognise the need for financial self-sufficiency and work hard to achieve it.

Another example in the narrative is two powerful commercial women, one named Vimala and the other named Manju. Vimala, a widow, is a "daunting individual." She is the quintessential workaholic and perfectionist, commanding the entire department, particularly the personnel, with her sharp tongue and tough demeanour. Manju is another woman. She is reasonable, impressive, and has two marriages while living with Vikki, a hotel executive manager. Manju, a careerist, oversaw projects, marketing, and negotiating. Even men are afraid of her business operations since she has been competent. She does computations and statistics without using a calculator. She has no time to care for her children or her home because she has worked round the clock. She has also despised nurturing her children and planned to enrol them at "The Divorce School." However, Vikki, her husband, has taken up the responsibility for his children.

Another example is Bindiya, a corporate lady who has exuded self-assurance. She is an unconstrained Marwari woman who has moved to Bombay five years ago from Calcutta. Bindiya is a traditional woman, who is well-qualified and well-versed. When she has stayed in Calcutta, she has married in a traditional way. However, her relocation to Bombay has transformed her dramatically, allowing her to adopt a new way of life that has allowed her to travel liberally. Bindiya's newfound freedom has led her to become the chairperson of a prestigious charitable organisation that has raised money for people who have been suffering in a variety of ways, and she has quickly become a centre of attraction.

She indulges in negative habits. She smokes, drinks, and transforms her opinion in response to the new social milieu. When people have insulted or criticised her, she has shrugged them off and proceeded on her way, her confidence soaring. Tarantula is another example. She is a gifted, professionalised individual who has achieved incredible success. Because she has been heavily commercialised, she is labelled as a "monster," "Queen Bitch," and so on. She has pushed herself to do things differently and in new ways. She has built a solid reputation in an advertising agency by transforming old fashion into new. As a result, she has employed young graduates who are daring, talented, and has a positive attitude to fit the office climate. Similarly, she has prepared every task to avoid being late and put in her best effort, which has helped her achieve success. She has been a successful woman not just in marketing companies, but also in politics.

Shobha De has depicted women's protest of present system, which limits the breadth of a woman's existence to merely day-to-day household responsibilities, in a very accurate manner. Sujata and Pratimaben, for example, do not accept their typical responsibilities in marriage in this story. They despise being confined to responsibilities at home. They proclaim loudly, acutely aware of their new role in the household. Some women are so focused in their careers that they do not feel it is necessary to start a family. Manju and Vimla are marketing experts who are focused on their careers.

They are the women of the modern age. They have gone about their professions with a seriousness that bordered on scary. Even married women have preferred to be addressed as 'Ms.' or used their maiden names. 'They weren't allowed to joke about or flirt lightly with their male colleagues.' "Workaholism for women had become really fashionable," she continues. In *Sultry Days*, these female characters have a very different perspective on family and social life.

However, just changing a female character's career without corresponding changes in her attitude and behaviour is insufficient. The modern woman seeks to wield authority and exert control over her surroundings. Feroze and Kiki can be classified as New Woman of the New Era. Feroze has always retained her identity. She has received opportunities which most people only dreamed of, because she is enterprising, manipulative, and full of a weird kind of charm. Feroze has risen to prominence in the film industry in an unusually short time. She drives her own car and smokes foreign made cigarettes. She visits many countries.

Nisha meets Anil Bhandari, a young marketing man who has recently opened his own hot shop after working at one of the best marketing agencies in America. Anil, who is in his early thirties, mockingly calls himself a "first generation yuppie." He has exemplified the polished worldwide preferences of a modern educated young guy. He uses Warren Beatty glasses and smells like Aramis or Drakkar. He puts Studio Line gel in his hair. Anil starts seeing a super model, Shona. She and Anil are a fantastic match for one other. Anil appears as a typical male from a hypocritical society once they get engaged.

He tells Nisha that he is going to ask Shona to give up her modelling after their marriage. He feels that he is earning sufficient money that she need not earn. Nisha objects at this thought and says that probably Shona loves her career. It is not mere money, but her interest and identity which he must keep in mind. He feels that a woman should take care of family rather than being bothered about her career. He assumes that Shona would accept his proposal. He feels that she is an innocent and docile girl who would easily give up her career to marry him. Anil is the representative of patriarchy. He does not feel it necessary to understand the needs of Shona but decides on her behalf.

As the story develops, there is a shift in God's attitude. Deb becomes from being a part-time poet and proof-reader to a full timer for the art magazine Plume. God's primary interest is to acquire money and power, having tasted power and money during his engagement with Plume. Nisha, on the other hand, does not agree with the new way of life of God. She has begun to sow seeds of dissension and distance between them. She feels that Deb has lost all his values. He sells his work for a peg of scotch. Deb has stopped to be a devoted partner for Nisha, not because of his association with other women, but because of their ambitious goals. Deb and Nisha's relationship has become sour after the former has begun to belittle the value his self-respect.

He has revealed himself to be a typical man from a patriarchal society. Deb has moved into his own apartment and needs someone to cook for him and take care of his belongings. He proposes Nisha, but at the same time expects her not to think of any maid servant to have her helped. He wishes her to do her work all alone. He makes a few demands in advance which he expects her to do in their marriage. He feels that through marriage he will get a maid to cook and take care of his needs. He will also get free sex, as she will be his wife. For him wife means nothing, but a replacement of maid servant who is freely available. She is an object, who can be used for sex and tend him. She is devastated with his patriarchal attitude.

Nisha has not anticipated God to change, and she has tried unsuccessfully to persuade him that he does not have to work for a political broker and that he should trust the power of his pen instead, but her attempts are in vain. Unfortunately, Deb has grown enamoured with his power and has joined Yashwant Bhai, a don. God's new way of life has begun to sow seeds of strife and alienation among them. She discovers that God has changed since she has fallen in love with him. She does her hardest to persuade Deb not to associate with a criminal like Yashwant Bhai, but Deb has already gone too far.

In her articles, Nisha begins to expose Yashwantbhai and his criminal links. Brave actions of her are backed up by her mother and a social activist named Pratimaben, who uncovers and exposes Yashwantbhai's mayhems against his former mistress, Pramila. She is an excellent example of a new woman. Pramila is from Nagpur, with three children. Her husband works in a good profession. Pramila is a gifted poet who leaves her home and relocates to Mumbai to pursue her literary profession. She becomes famous almost immediately once her poetry is published in English.

She gets separated from her husband and leaves the house with her two daughters; it is a shock for her. She ultimately meets and becomes mistress of Yashwant Bhai. She is an object for his covetousness. When she becomes pregnant with his child, Yashwant Bhai compels her to have the unborn child's sex checked because he does not want a girl child. When he discovers that the baby is a female, he abuses her, and it is God who assists her in fleeing. He is exposed by Nisha, her mother, Pratimaben, and Pramila. Knowing that the baby is a female, Yashwantbhai assaults her, and it is only God who assists her in fleeing to safety. Nisha, her mother, and Pratimaben, with the assistance of Pramila, reveal the cruelties of Yashwant bhai.

Deb pays the price for his involvement with Yashwant Bhai when he is shot by Yashwant Bhai's goons, and God breaks down after a few days in the hospital. When Dev is shot and taken to the hospital, Nisha reflects on the lives of Bombay's naive and illiterate women, who never consider larger problems such as: What are a citizen's fundamental rights? What is women's liberation movement? What is secularism, exactly? Will women be free of the kitchen's drudgery? What exactly does democratic socialism imply? Will socialism benefit women in any way? What role does L. I. C. play in the lives of a family?

She believes that because these naive and simple-hearted women do not raise their voice against the underworld Dons, they are not shot. They are not threatened since they do not interfere with politicians' work. The female characters in Shobha De's works, on the other hand, are strong and confident. They know exactly what they want out of life and how to get it. Throughout her life, Nisha's mother followed her husband's orders; finally, she has raised her voice against his hypocrisy and triumphed.

In *Sultry Days*, women demand their right to be free and autonomous, and they battle and fight against the established social order that threatens their survival. 'It may be partly due to her experience as a journalist that she is able to express things attractively and with a courage of conviction in a language entirely her own,' says Bhaskar A Shukla. [26] Women in *Sultry Days* portray a modern woman who is financially self-sufficient. These women do not demand financial stability from their male relationships.

In this novel, women demand their right to be unrestricted and independent, and they battle and fight against the established social order that impends their survival. They portray new woman who is financially self-sufficient. These women do not demand economic stability from their male counterparts.

In fact, Nisha gives her boyfriend, Deb, monetary favours for a long time. Sujata, Pramila, and Pratimaben are women who do not want to be confined to their houses. They want to be free of male supremacy in society. They demonstrate the fortitude to leave their homes, chase their aspirations, and leave their mark.

Shobha De has presented confident businesswomen. Many women, such as Nisha, Vimala, Manju, Bindiya, and Tanya, are grateful to be female and consider it as a benefit. For these women, financial independence is a path to gain empowerment, and they have thus fallen into the category of "New Women". Women, like those men, who can work and have successful professions. These women are confident to deal with several issues and problems both at work and at home. They are empowered to face and withstand predicaments of their lives. They are self-assured, independent, and bold.

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