



The Image of Women in Shobha De's Novels

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ABSTRACT

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The Present Article seeks to provide a modest study of the novels of Shobha De, the most popular Indian Women writer in English. It attempts to make comprehensive critical comments on her fiction with an emphasis on the image of women portrayed in her novels. Shobha De believes in a very frank narration of incidents and openheartedness. Since the researcher seeks to explore and explicate overall images of women appeared in her novels, It is a fascinating study from the Indian point of view.

Shobha De has explored imaginatively the varied world of women characters in her popular fiction. She emphasizes the quest for meaning of life, identity and unfulfilled emotional life of the characters through her novels. However, it is an important assertion that though De's novels such as *Starry Nights*, *Sultry Days*, *Snapshots* etc. are crowded with female characters, the analysis of the novels clearly indicates that her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary female characters are simply mentioned. Shobha De depicts the warring pairs of women and throws a significant light on women's indulgence in individual happiness and selfish pleasures. She brings out the psychological truth that woman is the enemy of woman.

Key words : Shobha De ,Women Character ,Image of Women

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Indian is a rich treasure of narrative literature that can be traced to the Rigveda in Sanskrit. The Yama-Yamini dialogue among other serve as its evidence. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are extensive forms of narrative literature. The depiction of gallantry as a part of Indian culture has for centuries inspired and influenced the literature and the authors. The development of an appropriate relationship between man and society manifested the creation of several didactic tales such as Brahatkathas, Kathasaritsagar, Hitopadesh and Panchtantra among others.

The Present Article seeks to provide a modest study of the novels of shobha De, the most popular Indian Women writer in English. It attempts to make comprehensive critical comments on her fiction with an emphasis on the image of women portrayed in her novels. Shobha De Graduated from St. Xavier's College Mumbai, celebrity journalist, magazine editor ,columnist , wife , mother , social commentator and TV scriptwriter . most of the books are the best sellers as she realistically projects the image of the upper-class women in contemporary India. She has an extraordinary ability to discuss the very sensitive aspects of human relationship in particular. In other words, the time tested populist ingredient of sex and a tempestuous style contributed to her making as one of the most popular novelists today. Shobha De believes in a very frank narration of incidents and openheartedness. Since the researcher seeks to explore and explicate overall images of women appeared in her novels, It is a fascinating study from the Indian point of view .

Shobha De has explored imaginatively the varied world of women characters in her popular fiction. She emphasizes the quest for meaning of life, identity and unfulfilled emotional life of the characters through her novels. Being a woman De is more aware of 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. As a result, the women in her novels appear as life like human beings.

However, it is an important assertion that though De's novels such as *Starry Nights*, *Sultry Days*, *Snapshots* etc. are crowded with female characters, the analysis of the novels clearly indicates that her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary female 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. As a matter of fact, Shobha De restricts her characters to the urban area, ignoring the life of ordinary, illiterate rural Indian women. In this context, her remarks regarding the inspiration behind her novels are of considerable importance. For instance, she points out that her portrayal of fashionable life in *Socialite Evenings* is an accurate exposure of Mumbai

"High Society" (330). Similarly, she says that her second novel *Starry Nights* "is the accumulation of countless images and memories gathered during my Stardust period".

Shobha De is one of the famous feminist writers of the modern era. In her works there is a bold and frank depiction of fair sex and feminine attitude. Her novels can be termed as the 'protest' novels against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom of expression and action according to their will and cherish and fulfil their own dreams. A woman, like man, is born to be free but in reality everywhere she is controlled by many man-made norms and factors victimizing and subjugating her in many ways.

This restricts her essential free spirit and makes her ready for a rebellion. This is reflected in her portrayal of her female characters such as Karuna, Aasha Rani, Maya and Mikki Hiralal, who are the victims of marital disharmony. Karuna is a prominent Mumbai socialite, Aasha Rani is a film star – 'Sweetheart of millions', Maya is qualified as a Textile Engineer and Mikki Hiralal is the daughter of an industrialist but they all are deprived of marital joys. Their parents are indifferent to them in their childhood and their husbands ignore their emotional needs. Their miserable situations pose a great threat to their survival. In partial wish-fulfilment, some of them establish extra-marital relationships, some accept singlehood as a way of life whereas the others accept the mode of compromise. Their growth as individuals is obstructed. Maya of *Second Thoughts* is so handicapped by domestic tension that she is made incapable of reaching out to wider world due to domestic hurdles. The dark domestic atmosphere suffocates her.

Shobha De depicts the warring pairs of women and throws a significant light on women's indulgence in individual happiness and selfish pleasures. She brings out the psychological truth that woman is the enemy of woman. In *Starry Nights*, for example, Aasha Rani's sister Sudha Rani turns against her in order to snatch away her position in the world of Showbiz. Similarly, the novel *Sisters* is a story of two warring sisters Mikki and Alisha. In *Snapshots* as well the six women who get together to share their experiences finally show their distrust and fight against each other and one another.

Here the novelist also highlights the degradation and lack of moral values in the contemporary society. This is reflected in modern women's decision not to have children because they look at them as a lifelong responsibility. Their life is characterized by adultery, uninhibited sex, marital infidelity, business rivalries and lust for money. All these selfish and mean motives reveal their true mettle and emotional make-up. However, the reading of such novels makes us probe into

the fact that why these women characters follow meaningless ways of living. Furthermore, it shatters the bubble of 'standard life'.

In India the struggle for woman's equality with man has found expression in the novels written especially in the last couple of decades. The second generation Indian women Novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande have challenged the male culture that prevails in our country. But the early soft voices of protest gradually turned into an open rebellion in the art of Shobha De. Broadly speaking, Indian fiction in English depicts three kinds of women : first the poor women, belonging mostly to rural area, portrayed by the writers like Kamala Markandaya, Jai Nimbkar and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Secondly, the middle-class women, especially the educated and employed are depicted by the writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande and thirdly, the neo-rich aristocrat women depicted by the writers like Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukherjee and Shobha De. Like Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De concentrates on the problems of women and gives a new approach to them. She has recognized the sad plight, displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. However, she explores only the world of urban women in India. She claims to be among the first to explore the world of cosmopolitan women.

Shobha De's novels indicate the emergence of a new woman curious to revolt against the traditional moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels represent the new Indian Woman's Voice. A 'New Woman' is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. A comprehensive evaluation of De's novels makes clear her protest against the established image of woman as an auxiliary. She tries forcefully

to undo this distorted image of woman who cries for freedom and equality which is still an unheard melody in the patriarchal world. From this point of view, the women depicted in her novels are more powerful than men. They represent an authentic picture of the modern Indian women. They are sexually liberated. Shobha De portrays the bifurcation between "He" and the "Other". She challenges the traditional definition of morality and projects the image of the modern woman as self-reliant, free-thinking and having a new code of morality like the western women. She is a staunch supporter and an ardent follower of feminism. Hence, her woman should regard herself as the 'self' and face the challenges in life in the days of globalization.

Shobha De realistically presents in her fiction the models of different types of women. The characteristics of New Woman as defined are well justified in the fictional world of Shobha De. Her fiction has proved its worth by being authentic to the changes taking place in the society at the end of millennium. Shobha De opines that with changing scenario, there is need on the part of women to seek their identity.

Conclusion:-

Taking this into consideration, it can be asserted that one may love Shobha De or hate her but one cannot ignore her because she is the celebrity writer who has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian novel in English.

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