

Shobha De-The Female Hero in Making of A More Expressive and Explosive Indian Women

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Abstract:

In the wake of the realist novels, there appeared a number of Indian women writers like Kamla Markendey, Ruth Praver Jhabevala, Naintara Sehgal, Anita Desai & Shashi Deshpande as well as the younger generation of writers like Geeta Hariharan, Nina Sibal, Namita Gokhle and Shobha De who contributed to the Indian novel and helped its development. The thematic concern of these writers have been centering round the issues pertaining to the lives of the Indian urban women. These issues are feminism, alienation, identity crisis, free sex, individual struggle for freedom and man-woman relation. These Women writers depict the contradiction of the so called second sex. In their works, we see the heroines are caught in whirlpool of tradition, convention, heritage, exploitation, violence and subjugation. Shobha De among these writers of new generation exposes the bare truth in the lives of metropolitan men and women. She is a devoted antagonist of the tradition and customs of the Indian Society that remains as clutches for women in a position substandard to that of man physically, politically, socially and economically.

Shobha De is a super model, celebrity, journalist, magazine editor, columnist, wife, mother, social Commentator, TV personality and a controversial writer of Indian English Literature who discusses the very sensitive aspects of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular and is known as the Jackie Collins of India. She portrays a variety of women from the traditional, subjugated and marginalised to the extremely modern and liberated women in her novels. The purpose of the present research paper is to study the depiction of women characters in the Shobha De's novels from a woman's angle where the sole emphasis of the writer is from the external world to the internal world. In her novels she raises a strong protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are deprived of freedom to act and live according to their will. Shobha De reacts against the male culture and strongly detests the marginalisation of women. Her novels present the mirror image of the modern women of the high class society their difficulties and sufferings. Her protagonists try to take control over their situations in their own way. However their accomplishments do not get a sense of total contentment to them.

Shobha De does not believe in describing her women characters as love slaves or mere helpmates at home. Women in her novels are represented as sexually liberated and free thinking who have been termed as New Women. She talks about the self-realisation of women. These high class educated sensible women are not infested by the problems of dowry and poverty. These Indian women live a

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blessed life as far as material standards are concerned, but there was something wanting some vacuum in their lives. These women are facing the problems of identity. On a wide ranging canvas, these women are found to be discriminated, burdened and victimised in various ways of various levels of society. These rebellious women in De's novels restore their lost fortunes put all efforts to make themselves survival of the fittest and at times struggle for existence.

The Heroines in Ms De's novels make all efforts to look glamorous by losing weight and spending money in massage parlours. It gives them immense pleasure when people fall head to heel in love with them and they are least concerned about it. All her heroines be it Karuna, Aparna, Mikki, Alisha or Asha Rani, are rebellious modern Indian women who challenge the orthodoxy of social taboos. The heroines of De challenge the state and traditional set of the society and raise their voice for equal rights. They are much more assertive, dominating and bold in comparison to men. De never portrays the image of Indian women as weak or docile persons who depend on their husband or father for any financial or social obligations. They are dashing and daring to face any type of challenge that hampers them for achieving their goals. In **Sultry Days (1994)** Sujata is a prostitute who feels good with her profession as this gives her pleasure and money. She sets her rules and is comfortable with whatever she does. She speaks her mind and does not compromise with her professional skills. The writer explores through her the world of urban women who is shrewd enough to use men as means to achieve her aim to become rich, famous and independent. In **Second Thoughts 1996**), Maya, the protagonist is pretty girl who is anxious to escape her middle class home in Calcutta. She is fed up with dull and routine life. Her husband Ranjan a degree holder from America is handsome and ambitious man. Maya finds herself trapped in a conservative life style. To overcome this loneliness in Mumbai, she clings in the friendship with Nikhil, a college going neighbour towards love and betrayal and at last she breaks the long silence. She accepts the offer of Nikhil's friendship even knowing that it would be an act of violation of social and moral code. One day when Ranjan her husband was on a ten day official tour, Maya got the opportunity to go on an outing with Nikhil to Malabar hills. She allowed herself to enjoy and be loved. She admits, "I was ready to jump on Nikhil's motorbike and say good bye to my uninspiring life without the slightest of regret. The choice was frighteningly mine". (241).

The first novel of Shobha De, **Socialite Evening (1989)** is about the journey of a prominent Bombay Socialite Karuna, from middle class girl to self-sufficient women. The novel presents the institution of family and marriage existing in the wealthy class of the Indian Society. The main theme of this novel is search for identity and selfhood. Karuna after marriage establishes extra marital relationship with Krish, revolts against her insensitive husband and finally divorces him. She also rejects the idea of second marriage. She liberates herself from clutches of unjust taboos and customs imposed on her by the male dominated society. As a self-realised person, Karuna opts for singlehood as a way of life. She refuses the offer of Krish and Ranbir and gets ready to live her life of her own terms. Karuna is the modern new Woman who does not depend on her father or husband or son for her survival. She is financially independent and has required the strength to face life with ups and downs. Here Shobha De's attack is not against the individual, it is against the system that favours man and causes women's subjugation and marginalization.

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In the Indian tradition, marriage is glorified as a holy union of man and woman, a new way of life. However in Shobha De's novels all these ideas degrading marriage are shattered by her modern liberated women. In **Sisters**, through Mikki and Alisha, Shobha De shows how the concept of marriage and consistency in love has undergone a tremendous change. Sex to her women is no longer a dreaded and despised thing. Thus this three letter word contributes a lot in providing pleasure to these women. Alisha expresses the novelist's desire for liberation for women in sexual matters. In **Starry Nights (1992)**, the heart throb of million, queen of Bollywood, Asha Rani tries to deprive pleasure in destroying men and the most dreaded weapon that she uses is 'Bed'. Men are unable to forget her, once she goes to bed with them. Shobha De's women who are married also appear to be expressing their needs for sexual liberation. Shobha De highlights men's indifference to women's individuality. Sensitivity and feelings. The women are in search of personal freedom. They express their anger by resorting in unethical acts like indulging in extra marital affairs. Lesbianism is a counter revolution against the foundation of male privileged society. Her **Strange Obsession (1992)** highlights the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyenger (Minx) and Amrita Aggarwal. Lesbian itself is a threat to heterosexuality. In sexual arena, Shobha De's woman does not want to be dominated as an object as a subordinate person. She can find her alternatives where she can discard men out of her life as she has successfully done while seeking economic independence and marriage. Pleasure may be the source of happiness for a women but it is not the man who is the only alternative rather a women can also prove to be seeker as well as a provider of pleasure.

Sometimes Shobha De has been charged of commercialising women while expressing sex in a much elaborated details but what is felt after reading her novels is that she has always fought for the cause of the women and has brought out the aspect of sex because she feels that women are marginalised even in terms of sex, Husbands have made them slaves for satisfying their demands whenever they need it. Many a times they become cruel and rude in love making and torture them even physically. Therefore De has portrayed her women in such a way that they are sexually liberated and use sex on their own terms and conditions.

The other important aspect in Shobha De's novels is woman's role in the oppression and suffering of her fellow women. In our society, women ill-treat and exploit women in place of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. As a result of this Shobha De brings out the universal psychological truth that the women are the enemy of women. Her novel **Strange Obsession** deals more with how are women subjugate the other women than subjugation of women by man. De differs comprehensively for her frank expression of instances and open heartedness. She speaks the bitter reality and makes us aware of the miserable condition of women and discrimination to them by their counterparts in the patriarchal society. She is well known for her exuberant and uncontrollable personality. Her novels are full of enthusiasm for challenge of women characters and also a good motivation for readers.

In **Snapshots**, Shobha De portrays about many forbidden relationships which were established just for pleasure. she discusses the women who feel happy when their husbands aren't around and come late from office. Reema, in **Snapshots** says, yes it rather suits me. We have hardly anything to talk

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about. This way I have the whole day free for myself. I go to Priyadarshni Park every evening for long walk. Then I come home, chat on phone. He is so tired at night. He finishes his dinner in ten minutes and goes to sleep. On days when I want watch movie or read, I sleep in next room (228-9)

Shobha De feels if a woman is seeker of pleasure she should shun predicament, female ideas, the purity, morality and chastity as mentioned in the following paragraph of this novel, "Aparna has grown up with shame, Shame about her body, Shame about her adolescent looks, Shame about her background Shame, practically about every aspect of her life. It was the environment she was raised in. Guilt was a defining feature (9)". Shobha De beautifully and very skilfully discusses father daughter relationship in her novels they reveal. They reveal how farther crush girl's the sense of individuality in order to impose their male authority on them. The resentment of these heroines against their father's patriarchal attitude creates a tense atmosphere in their lives. The discriminatory attitude of their father and father like figure makes them react irrationally and violently. But when their sense of survival takes responsible turn they begin to revise their opinion about this relationship. Towards the end these heroines endeavour to review this relationship with different prospective which brings the melodious tone in the lives of both the parent and daughter. In this context the character of Karuna and Anjali in **Socialite Evenings**, Aasha in **Starry Nights**, Mikki and Alisha in **Sisters**, Alisha in **Sultry Days** and Noor in Snapshots worth notable who are suffocated or affected due to their father's dominating nature or his indifference.

Shobha De has a great concern for woman's need to be acknowledged as human being and her aspiration to have an autonomous social image. Her novels uncover how social norms and male regulated rules complicate the achievement of self-worth and pride in women. And how women break the moral and social barriers in making them independent creatures of self-actualised soul. In fact these women's are not totally against conventional rules. They abide by these rules when they are essential. And don't impede their self-actualisation. Rather her novels illustrate how through self actualisation the women learn to survive in their lives with sense of self pride.

In the end we find that Shobha De in her novels portrays the special traits and qualities that contribute to the emergence of New women in her novels. They depicts various circumstances that make the women rebellious initially and finally show how they develop a mature outlook by taking decisions based on their individual feelings. She has best displayed the traits of the women from conventionally male prejudiced society to a satisfied individual being. Her women character discard the idea of living a life of dejection and declare themselves a self-governing entity To summarise, we can say that Shobha De presents the vital reality and makes us aware of the miseries of women and injustice done to them by their counterpart in their patriarchal society. In her novels she mostly discusses only the metropolitan women whereas rural ones do not find place in her novels. They are totally ignored. All her novels are protest novels where the women are denied freedom of expression and action in that male dominated Indian society. As a result of their expression, exploitation and marginalisation they turn rebellions. Thus Shobha De presents the new Indian women's voice who is in search of identity seek liberation in all walks of life replacing the traditional image of Indian women. The need for women to seek their identity is the message in her novels. At the same time De

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as a writer, exposes the women's misunderstanding regarding their freedom and mocks at their way of asserting their individuality by posing to be men without concentrating on female empowerment as a whole.

Sometimes her novels are criticised for pornographic elements which is not correct. De is definitely a writer with a purpose. She has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian novel in English. In the present scenario of gender discrimination, a study of her novels and other works helps to widens and direct our thoughts to relevant problems effecting women in Indian society because, in spite of her substantial contribution to Indian novel in English, her novels have not been fully explored in terms of research. She has remained completely neglected. The purpose of this research is to fill this lacuna and highlight her contribution to modern English novels.

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