

Role of Women in Shobha De's Novels

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1. Introduction

In India, struggle for woman's equality with man has been described very effectively in literature. During the last few decades many writers have tried to give voice to the woman's struggle to parallel man. Particularly the novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta and Bharti Mukherjee who represent the second generation of novelists who rebelled against the set standards. They all challenged the patriarchal culture which is dominant in India. Indian women novelists have focused their attention on the problems faced by women and this has been reflected in their work. Not only this, they have succeeded in giving a vent to a complete new approach to the consciousness of the emerging idea. In our society, the role of women goes on changing every decade. This role changed according to the struggle based on social and ideological aspects. Earlier their protest was very mild and soft. But gradually a strong and intense anger was added to it. As a result, there was a revolt. This voice of protest was quite mild when it started in writers like Anita Desai but later it became stronger and more intense in writers like Shobha De and Some Others.

Shobha De came into limelight in the field of literature in 1988 when her best seller *Socialite Evenings* was published. Shobha De is a versatile figure who played various roles of life. She was a highly successful author and she also wrote scripts for television soaps. Shobha De can be considered pioneer in the area of 'Popular Fiction'. Besides the world of Urban Indian women she has also described women from the middle class. She has enjoyed the highest peak of success. Shobha De's works are amusing. Her boldness gets reflected everywhere. Her writing is shocking and thought provoking too. That is why she has often remained a controversial figure. De appears to be highly appealing and charming. Her novels reflect her deep understanding of women's psychology and their problems. De attracts readers attention towards the new morality that has entered in the new generation does not recognize any scruples. They are free from all the traditional bonds on their behavior. They are busy with the mad race with the west. De's treatment of the contemporary Indian Women's Challenges, predicament, their values and lifestyle presented in her fiction is highly significant. Her style of telling things is very interesting. She describes things in a very interesting manner. She describes things with great courage in her unique language. There has been not much research work done on De's fiction but my efforts will be to present the study of her women characters from critic's point of view.

Shobha De has gifted Indian English literature with various novels and many of them have been the best sellers. She entered the field of fiction in 1988 with her novel *Socialite*

Evenings. This novel was followed by *Starry Nights* in 1990. De's first publications received hostile reviews e.g. Her novel *Socialite Evenings* was criticized as a "high society potpourri, bland and bond" one of the reviewer said that it was the work choked with listless lust and criticizing it, he said that her dialogues were witless. In *Socialite Evenings* Shobha De describes the journey of a girl belonging to middle-class. She was a Maharashtrian girl whose name was Karuna. It is the story of a girl who is in search of selfhood. While in *Starry Nights*, De talks about a film star named Asha Rani. Asha emerges from a small town and a very ordinary background. But with hard work and great struggle, she achieves stardom. After a long struggle, she becomes the sweet-heart of millions of film-lovers. Shobha De has faithfully described the glamorous world of film. There is also the portrayal of crimes, lies, deceits and sexual exploitation which has been always a part of filmy world. Here, we are talking about two struggling women-Karuna and Asha Rani. Both are trying to find out their identity and selfhood. *Starry Night* has been described as "Confession of a man-eater" by one critic. In both the novels we can see the new Indian woman who revolts against the moral orthodoxy found in the patriarchal social system.

Snapshots is considered to be an explosive novel written by Shobha De. It has been rightly titled as it describes snapshots from the Life of six women. They were friends from their school days. They studied together at Santa Maria High School. De depicts them leading a predictable, mundane domestic life. In this novel, De has nicely depicted life and experiences of these six girls named Swati, Aparna, Reema, Noor, Surekha and Rashmi who are passing their domestic life happily. In the novel, Shobha De describes an urban society with men at periphery and women struggling for power and supremacy. Six friends get drifted away and now they are not able to share their feelings or interests. Here I want to discuss various aspects of relationship between man and woman. There are different dimensions of male – female relationships. Their relations are often torturing and tormenting. The experience of self hood for man as well as woman is very traumatic. Here, we can observe and analyze not only persons but events also. In the lives of these women, there are infidelity, incest, lies and even death and the evil. All of these six women represent various kinds of urban Indian women. But they appear to be like schoolgirls playing adult games. They have to share dark secrets of their lives when they meet at a party. Here they start turning against one another. This disturbs the whole party and with one of the girls' suicide, there comes an end. Shobha De's world here is full of hypocrisy. The change is seen in the society but men shun at it.

A prostitute tells Roshni that woman must not give herself to any man free because they don't value anything they

get easily. Women can not talk of independence without self sufficiency. Aparna is the representative of corporate Indian women. Roshmi and Swati are able to live freely because of their economic condition. Six friends described in Snapshots have different marital status. Reema and Surekha are married housewives. Roshni is an unwanted mother. Swati and Aparna are divorcees.

In *Sultry Days* man plays the central role. Of course, a woman is the protagonist but she discovers herself through the male character Deb. In this novel also, Shobha De treats marriage not as essential. Deb says that he is happy without marriage. Even when he agrees to marry Nisha it is just to get ready made food and a warm bed and twice-a-week Maalish. He had prolonged love affair with Nisha but does not find marriage relevant. There is lack of faith in such relationship. There is lack of care and emotional warmth. When there is no mutual faithfulness and understanding, such marriages do not last long. Such marriages end into suicide or separation. Shobha De treats various facts of the life of an urban woman and her plight. Her voice is very striking.

In her novel *Second Thoughts*, Shobha De is different in her treatment of the characters. Being different from her earlier novels, in *Second Thoughts*, She does not describe the high society but she takes up characters from the middle class

society. In *Second Thought* also Shobha De depicts an extra marital affair.

Sisters and Strange Obsession

In the novel titled *Sisters*, Shobha De describes an interesting story of two rich Socialite women, Mallika and Alisha. The Story has been set in the world of business which is full of corruption. The two women are very ambitious and full of lustful feelings. These traits lead them to unending rivalry. In another novel *Strange Obsession*, Shobha De describes lesbian relationship. Her boldness is reflected in this novel. This novel is a rebellious novel. Shobha De depicts a mysterious woman Meenakshi and how her life comes to a calamitous end. Actually, this novel is a psychological documentation of sexual observation of Meenakshi. Here, De describes women who have been trapped in very complex human situations.

2. Conclusion:

Looking at all the women characters described by De in various novels, we can say that in the depiction of almost all her female characters, De's boldness can be reflected. It is because of De's understanding of women's psychology and her problems that De's fiction has always been best-sellers and she has been considered as a highly popular writer.

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