

FEMINIST CONCERNS IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVELS

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One of the primal and seminal concerns of Feminism is to declare that a woman is a being, not an appendage but an autonomous being, capable of finding her own self. In its early stages feminism thought of Amazon – Utopias, an all-female world, but the recent trends are an indication that it's possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live. The deeper most concerns of the novelists in India have been the human relationships, especially men-women relationships, and the functioning of female psyche. The contemporary novelists are entangled in the complexities of men-women relationships and subtleties of feminine consciousness.

The early image of woman in Indian English Novel as a silent sufferer, an incarnation of patience and endurance has gradually been eroded. The woman portrayed by the Indian Feminist writers is a picture of an independent, free-thinking individual. Women writers like Shobha De are conscious of the marginal status of woman in society. The study incorporated

here includes major novels of Shobha De. The endeavour here undertaken is an analysis of her novels from feminist point of view.

Shobha De's novels have title beginning with *S* as does her first name. Certainly it's not a coincidence. According to Pushpinder Syal, "*S* is for senses and sex and self. And these, it seems, are the chief concerns of Shobha De's writing."¹ Shobha De's first novel *Socialite Evenings* is a story of middle class girl, Karuna. Her life begins in Bombay with Anjali, her mentor, dreaming of a career in modeling and films. Karuna hates her middle class origin; and to emerge out of it she neglects her boyfriend and marries "the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time."² Anjali prescribes Karuna an antidote of the extramarital affair, that proves fatal to her married life. She is divorced without the alimony.

She rejects the hierarchization of male values for the affirmation of her feminine self. Pramod Nayar finds, "The first real expression of her sexuality makes her feel

unworthy of respect because she has imbibed the phallogocentric notions of sexuality." ³

In fact, to be liberated is not a sinful act at all. It's an effort to fulfill her emotional need and to attend the wholeness of personality. Unfortunately she gets aborted never to be a mother again. At last she returns to her parents rejecting an offer from a gentleman, she prefers to be single. She earns on her own and is contented. Though she can't get herself rid of the desire to flirt, she realizes that it has no future at all. Finally she discovers herself but has to pay heavy price for it. In fact, no moralist would like Karuna to fall in love with Krish but Shobha De, a modern feminist does not find anything immoral and disgusting. Here she captures the dichotomy of values in a very interesting manner. We don't mind her frankness for concentrating on the dissatisfaction of woman's mind and body. The descriptions sometimes get filthy but there is nothing good or bad. Shobha De proves herself an iconoclast to shatter our idea that the nuptial tie is holistic and never to be broken at any cost.

The sexo feminist writer has set a stir to the feminist literature in India by choosing a nympho maniac as a central character of her second novel *Starry Nights*. Asha Rani is sexually exploited at

the age of fifteen by her parents. She is forced to enact in the porno films, and offer herself to the producers and distributors. Even her uncle assaults her chastity. "Holding her hand. Soon her hand had been slyly slipped into his mundu. And his hand had been replaced by what felt like a firm hard stick." ⁴ She has to pacify an M.L.A. of her father's age. Asha Rani falls in love with a top hero, Akshay but he is not ready to be a Muslim. Her journalist friend, Linda initiates her in pleasures of lesbianism but she too betrays her by revealing Asha's secrets for her own benefits. May be Shobha De hints at the bonding of sisterhood negatively. Asha Rani's affair with Abhijit also proves futile, who comes to her only for sex. As Abhijit is married, his father gives Asha ample of money. At last she marries Jamie Philips in New Zealand.

Her daughter Sasha also hates her for she doesn't like being called a bloody Indian. Shobha De concludes the story of Asha Rani dreaming of Sasha to be a film heroine in India. Through a degenerated society, De depicts woman's search for identity in a male world.

Through her novels De has tried to shatter patriarchal hegemony. Any sensible analysis of her literary works from feminist point of view will do well to bear this fact in mind. It's this factor that lends

authenticity to Shobha De, though her fictional world has aroused curiosity and interest on one hand and denunciation on the other. Her explosive novel *Sisters* is unique for dealing with the psychic conflicts in its liberated woman protagonist. The novel focuses on the seamy side of business world as well as inner world of the protagonist, Mallika nicknamed Mikki. After the demise of her parents she takes charge of her father's industries that deprives her colourful life in America. Mikki feels obliged to make her step-sister Alisha her business partner. She breaks her engagement with Navin when she finds him a mere puppet in his mother's hands. Surprisingly she hooks herself in wedlock, though she has been enamoured of the life of freedom. She pleads him "I can look after you --- we could work together ---- I won't have to wait hours to see you." ⁵

In fact, she is not averse to being a wife but she hates the inhumane subordination of the woman. As usual her husband proves a womanizer married already. He transfers all her property to himself and denies her motherhood to keep her always ready for him. As usual Shobha De's women search for personal freedom, denied which later rebellious by resorting

to the unethical acts. Fortunately she gets rid of her husband after his accidental death. Her experience with him matures her from a mere social butterfly to a mature woman. Alisha serves as a foil to Mikki, both the sisters are different from each other. At last Mikki and Alisha get united. The novel comes to an end with both the sisters realizing the need to live together. Here Shobha De weaves bond of sisterhood in protest of the patriarchal setup.

Thus Shobha De's novels indicate the arrival of a New Indian woman. Her women protagonists defy rebelliously against the orthodoxy of patriarchy. They show the novelist's intimate understanding of the psyche of woman and her problems.

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