

**Mirroring the Reality of The Contemporary Society, Hybrid Identity,
And Self-Discovery of Women in Shobha De's Novels**

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Abstract

The long journey from colonial to post-colonial, from imperial to democratic, and from English to Hinglish represents a noteworthy chapter in the history of world literature. Indian Writing in English has unquestionably developed its own autonomous identity; it no longer just imitates or borrows from other works. Indian English literature in the new millennium has given the human race many opportunities and offered a new vision of cultural fusion. Shobha De bravely captures the truth of today's society, when career-driven women struggle to juggle their simultaneous responsibilities at home and work. Women must look for equal positions and authority in a patriarchal society due to their economic dependence, lack of influence, and marginalization in the institutions of family and marriage. When they achieve economic independence and equality, they gain confidence and a yearning for an independent living. As a result, they start using new tactics including illicit sexual encounters, abortions, and avoiding home duties. The fundamental theme of Shobha De's works is the transformation of the woman from the conventional submissive creature to the New Woman with a yearning for "identity" and the marginalization of women, which has become the way of life for modern metropolitan aristocratic women.

Keywords: marginalization, economic dependency, powerlessness, identity, self-discovery

1. INTRODUCTION

When writing her works on women, Shobha De seeks to reflect or present her feminist views. A more thorough analysis of her art indicates that she is protesting the stereotype of women as being unable to live and act as she please. In her works, women are portrayed as sexually liberated, free-thinking individuals who have been dubbed "New Women"—so-called new mothers. All of her female protagonists, including Aparna, Karuna, Alisha, Asha Rani, and Mikki, are disobedient contemporary Indian women who defy social norms. [1]Shobha De's women dispute this traditional structure in society, which is quite contrary to most Indian male writers who believe that sex is an unpleasant subjugation to a man's desire and is required to bear children. They are distinct from the sexually clueless Indian woman. In comparison to men, her ladies are significantly more assertive, dominant, and daring. They are guilty of their relationships and are not submissive.

The socio-cultural situation in Mumbai, as well as the middle class and higher middle-class people who typically maintain a loveless marriage life, couple life without having any psychological attachments, and generally a life which is plagued by harsh reality, are mostly reflected in Shobha De's writings. [2]Mumbai is the commercial, business, film, and financial hub of India, hence its sociocultural and economic systems differ from those of the rest of India. The middle-class residents of this city are extremely logical, calculative, prudent, and hard-realistic, which has a major impact on the family structure and man-woman interaction. It is a city of commerce, trade, and finance. [3] The fact that in Mumbai the connection between men and women has been reduced to sex and is unimportant outside of sex is an open secret.

[4]Women suffer greatly in this sociocultural setting and are pressured to have extramarital affairs. Shobha De, who had a great deal of emotional pain, began creating stories in her early years that often reflected her observations of the hot-and-cold relationship she had with her husband. She is the only female author to even dare to write about the blatant realities of what a woman in Mumbai experiences. [5]Her early demands are founded on a feministic model and are in opposition to a patriarchal society where women's interests are devalued. Mumbai treats women in the manner of Western society, where they are considered dolls of sex, even if similar patriarchal modules are present throughout India.

In her works, Shobha De rebelled against this.[6] She gives her characters the freedom to break free from moral and ideal restraints, to become ultramodern, and to transgress all sociocultural norms to live free-sex life-like modern women in Europe and America. Even though some female authors, such as Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, have depicted women and their need for sex, they do not have their female protagonists crawl into the beds of men other than their husbands. De, however, dares to depict [7] Indian women in an unimaginable way. [8]She might even go so far as to describe the sex acts that women engage in during copulation. Other Indian women novelists' works do not have these kinds of descriptions. Although there are a few sexual interactions in Toni Morrison and D.H. Lawrence's books, they are few and far between compared to Shobha De's. The poetry of Kamala Das is forthright in exposing sexual longing and naked love, but she is not as precise as [9]Shobha De in exposing the Mumbai women as emotionally and physically bare. Shobha De paints a thorough and detailed image of the middle-class lady in Mumbai who experiments with the man after man for a variety of reasons, including sociocultural pressure and economic pressure. Das is constrained to writing poems about an undressed version of herself and her love.

2. PATRIARCHAL CONTROL

To advance their narrative, writers like Shobha De give their heroes the freedom to rebel against patriarchal authority. Shobha De has made a conscious effort to highlight the fact that women are silenced and marginalized if they attempt to cross the boundaries set by men. Her strength lies in the genuine projection of the glamour world, which makes it possible to unmask and expose the nefarious structure of power and money at work in the most affluent sections of Indian society.[10] Shobha De wrote about elite urbanized women, and her novels depict the luxury world of the upper middle class. According to her, the suffering and trauma experienced by urbanized aristocratic women are essentially the same as those experienced by women from rural backgrounds. She makes an effort to explain that feminism is more covert and submissive than women standing up and demanding their rights because the issues they bring up expose the subtle manner in which the patriarchal system perpetuates man's dominance in interpersonal relationships and society.

Since she works as a journalist, Shobha De is interested in the liberation of the "Second Sex," and all of her novels are centered on the victimized and marginalized women who are victims of Indian society's ingrained norms. Her books paint a vivid picture of a woman trapped between colonialism and patriarchy. Because she does not refer to her female characters as love slaves or simple house helpers, this

represents the displacement of every modern woman caught between tradition and modernity. Shobha De probably reflects her own patriarchal and feminist viewpoint in each of her novels.

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVELS

The main character of *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna, is the ideal representation of the plight of women in India. She suffers as a result of her husband's cold and uncaring behavior. Her identity is completely lost because her spouse views her as a mere item at his disposal. Anjali, a young socialite, endures a great deal of suffering as a result of her unworkable marriage and her husband's dictatorial demeanor. Shobha De is not attacking specific people in this article; rather, she is painting a picture of the marginalization and subjection of Indian women. It goes against the system that marginalizes and oppresses women while favoring men. Through the realistic depiction of Geetha Devi, Aasha Rani, Rita, and Malini in *Starry Nights*, Shobha De highlighted the destruction of human values in this glittering world of Mumbai cinema. The role that women play in the exploitation and suffering of other women is another significant topic that Shobha De emphasizes in this and previous works. Instead of loving, respecting, and knowing their sex, women in our society mistreat and exploit other women.

In *Sultry Days* (1994), Sujata is a prostitute who follows her intuition. This makes her happy. Her definition of life is based on her terms. When Asha Rani, the well-known Bollywood heroine abruptly decides to leave the industry when she is at the height of her career to live with a fellow co-star named Akshay Arora, her mother attempts to talk her out of it. Then she makes the following argument in "Money, money, money. You only think of it. I'm tired of being your go-to source of cash. I've done enough for everyone, including Sudha, and you, and now I just want to live for myself.

4. THE WOMAN AS AN OBJECT

In actuality, Shobha De highlights the psychological truth that every woman's enemy is another woman. Binny Malhotra, a true embodiment of the patriarchal society, oppresses, subjugates, and exploits Mikki Hiralal in the film *Sisters*. The lesbian connection between Amrita, the Delhi-based model, and Meenakshi Iyengar, known as "Minx," is the central theme of the book *Strange Obsession*. *Sultry Days* contains a male protagonist, God, who tells Nisha that "one bitch is as good as another". This book focuses more on how one woman dominates another woman than

how men oppress women. The phrase "use them and leave them" sums up his approach towards women.

Such male behavior towards women demonstrates the wretched situation and exclusion of women from our society. In a patriarchal culture like that shown in Snapshots, women serve as valuable playthings for men. These women become prey to male designers because of the dominant ideology, which favors men. All of the men in the narrative are oppressors, while Rashmi, Aparna, Noor, and Swati are all oppressed women. Finally, the terrible story of Maya, a mistreated wife, is told in the book *Second Thoughts*. She experiences marital discord since her husband Ranjan views her as nothing more than an item. Even though Maya is an engineer, her husband constantly reminds her of "tradition" and forbids her from taking even part-time work.

5. TUMULTUOUS WEATHER AND DESPERATION FOR PASSION

Ambition, risky situations, avarice, and lust are all elements of our life. In De's *Small Betrayal*, the lady is shown in charge. Manisha continually dissuaded Mohan's illusions in the book. In the end, we discover that Manisha was the one who decided to reject Mohan, even though Mohan fell in love with her and believed that she would feel the same way. Not only has De attempted to portray lesbianism in *Strange Obsession* in a daring and avant-garde manner. Beautiful young supermodel Amrita Aggarwal rules Mumbai's glitzy scene. She ascends to the peak without realizing her female lover Minx (Meenakshi Iyengar), who quietly assists her solely for sensual pleasures and passion-stoking. Even though she is occasionally forced to give in, Amrita experiences nightmares as a result of the stringent demands of her unwanted suitor, who even follows the couple (Amrita and Rakesh) to their honeymoon cottage in Nanital and the bridal suite of the Oberoi Hotel on the night of their wedding. De receives praise for illuminating the female-female interaction in graphic detail, with passions spanning through erratic weather and despair to the conclusion of bringing about Minx's awful demise. She may have preferred to give the book a radically feminist turn by giving Amrita, the victimized soul from the exploiter, freedom, and victory rather than delving into the specifics of psychoanalytic theory.

6. SOCIAL STANDING AND THE PRICE OF WOMEN'S PERSONALITIES

Two sisters who are not only stunning and well-off but also in conflict with one another are depicted in the story of *Shobha De Sisters*. Alisha is Seth Hiralal's daughter through a connection with Leelabhen, whilst Mikki is Seth Hiralal's

biological daughter. Initially the worst of adversaries, Mikki and Alisha later prove to be the best of friends. Mikki first consents to marry Navin in anticipation that he will help her fight to save her father's businesses. She breaks off her engagement with him without hesitation as soon as she realizes he won't be of any use to her. She marries Binny in the hopes of creating an enduring relationship and restoring her father's businesses. A week after being married Mikki realizes that she has put herself at Binny's mercy and that she has been pursuing an everlasting love marriage. To her friend Amy, she confesses, "He wants me to remain stiff and hard for his pleasure." Mikki understands that marriage represents to Binny yet another rung on the social ladder. She expresses to Amy her heart's agony:

"I desired a companion to share my life with. Is that such an unrealistic expectation? Not for us women, sweetie, Amy responds. However, guys are unique. They're looking for something else. For instance, sex".

Here, we learn that Mikki, at the expense of her uniqueness and her entire personality in the hands of her cunning husband, saved her father's businesses.

7. KALEIDOSCOPIIC PATTERNS OF LIBERATION

Six ladies join together to share private experiences in the story Even though we go through Snapshots. When a group of wise and seasoned friends gets together, all barriers fall away. We see a wide variety of kaleidoscopic patterns of emancipation during their heart-to-heart confessional sessions, which open petals to petals and disclose sorrowful and happy sequences. Ms. De imitates the desire for the experience of sex that the New woman has.

"Despite being a wealthy man, your husband didn't feel secure around you. Your icy demeanor turned him away. I believed that he truly loved you in his way, but you didn't—love him, that is. He was forced to put up with that while maintaining his ignorance.

Male superiority is simply accepted in this tale, and rejecting tradition puts one's life in danger. According to Susan Rubinow Gorsky, the idea that a woman needs a father to dominate her before her husband, who is her natural and lawful master, takes over is pervasive. Trollope mockingly compares women to ivy, a delicate parasite and creeper that wraps itself around a solid wall. Such plants weren't made to spread out

their branches by themselves. A wife must defer to her husband's preferences. However, more often than not in Shobha De's book, the woman has learned to shut off her husband's presence or unwanted explorations while also switching on her individuality for herself.

8. IDENTITY AND INDIVIDUALITY INTACT

In *Second Thoughts* (1998), Maya strikes up a relationship with her college-going neighbor Nikhil to maintain her "self," her individuality, and bring peace to her restless mind to escape the drudgery inflicted by an unfeeling, cold, and suspicious spouse. Here, Ms. De has attempted to illustrate the plight of the New Woman, who struggles to maintain her identity and uniqueness among a tangle of household duties and unwelcome attention.

Ranjan is married to Maya, a Calcutta woman from the middle class. Her ambitions include exploring Bombay and pursuing a career in textile design. But because of her husband's whimsical melancholy, suspicious, and cunning temperament, her sense and sensibility have been reduced to nothing. Anything she likes, Ranjan despises. Maya desires a true husband, not a clay model calculator preoccupied with spending and balancing. When she is with her husband, she appears to be constantly losing her identity. Nikhil, a neighbor who attends college and is introduced as a counterbalance to Ranjan, appears almost as a gift from God. Ranjan is dictating and derogatory, while Nikhil is appreciative. Maya is made to feel like she belongs by Nikhil, whereas Ranjan's romantic advances are never fulfilling. She dedicates herself to Nikhil to counteract her husband's dictatorial and depressive demeanor. She no longer feels the guilt-inducing aches and feels free to enjoy outings and craves a romantic date with Nikhil.

"I stayed up all night dreaming of a big bird coming at me with its claws extended. My body remained undiscovered territory aside from the occasional mole search."

Therefore, Maya's seething love for Nikhil's fulfillment is not a surprise. After a period of incubation, the New Woman emerges as someone brave, courageous, heartless, and forward-looking. She has a new way to live and new vows to maintain in life, which gives her hope. Maya's second thoughts may very well be the first forerunner of the initial ideas that the New Woman of the future may have when she makes choices to define her identity and demonstrate her uniqueness.

As we must preserve our culture, women have primary responsibility for doing so, just as they do for their families and the ideals they uphold. India's culture differs from that of Europe in some ways. Shobha's proposal for the freedom of women does not accord with Indian culture because it upholds this long-standing and unwavering tradition of the sanctity of marriage. De is more concerned with the struggles that women face because she is a woman. She brings to light an important reality and awakens us to the sufferings of women and the injustices perpetrated against them by males in a patriarchal society. The examination of the novels demonstrates De's concentration is mainly on the female characters, and the other minor characters are hardly mentioned, even though her novels are replete with female characters. Additionally, only urban women are featured in her works; rural women aren't represented in them. They are entirely disregarded. Shobha De limits the settings of her characters to the city while omitting the experiences of common, rural, and illiterate Indian women.

9. CONCLUSION

Shobha's opinions are unusual in rural areas and among middle-class families. They may be accurate in the context of urban areas and high-profile life. It's possible that she accurately and objectively captured the emotions of urban women—a subject that Indian women would never dare to bring up—in her writing. It involves partially reining in our instinct. Yes, we have heard of instances where a woman has left her husband because she thought he was unmanly. But leaving with your husband and maintaining an adulterous relationship is contrary to our culture and is not permitted in major schools. She can divorce her husband and get remarried based on that. It makes sense. Even though she is an idol of sacrifice, by doing this, she can strike a balance between the two. allowing her to fulfill her primal desires while maintaining her true femininity. The topic of sex is related to the marital question in Shobha De's works. All of the women in her book engage in premarital sex. For her women, having sex is no longer forbidden. Her women exhibit a huge lot of sexual liberation. Additionally, we observe that the moment their marriages end, their women leave in pursuit of more rewarding relationships, proving that even marriage does not restrict sexual freedom. De aims to prove through her works that women share the same emotions, desires, aspirations, and ideals as men and that they are willing to battle for their dreams. We may say that she attempted to show that ambition is not just a trait of men. Even women can be ambitious and get to the levels at which they choose to

make themselves known. The woman wants to be in command and find her identity, but she keeps looking for who she is as well.

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