



## Metaphors of Women in the Fiction of Shobhaa De

**Dr. Shivali Singh**

Assistant Professor Department of English SOS, IFTM University, Moradabad

**Ms. Shipra Singh**

Assistant Professor Department of English SOS, IFTM University, Moradabad

### Abstract

*Shobhaa De, a modern novelist, renowned for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world in a very frank and straight forward way, shot into literary limelight by writing her first novel, Socialite Evenings which is lawrentian in expression. She, a journalist since 1970, founder and editor of three famous publications Stardust, Society and Celebrity and consulting editor to Sunday and Megacity discards the early image of woman- a silent, an incarnation of patience and endurance in Indian English novel and creates an image of new woman, an assimilation of western influences and her native culture. She is the author of twelve books. Her works generally start with the letter 'S'. The woman in her fiction is go-getting, lustful, power hungry and bold. In spite of having all kinds of cataclysms, her woman character is able to balance herself among diverse spheres of the life. Her modern women do not have moral and spiritual advocate for camaraderie. They are more prone to personal freedom and glamour. Through her characters she reveals the existence of glamour and modernity at the core. The objective of the present paper is to delineate the image of marginalized, dominated, defiant, unconventional and boundless new woman.*

### Introduction

Shobhaa De is one of the famous feminist writers and columnist 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. She has explored imaginatively the vital world of women characters in the fiction. She emphasizes the quest for meaning of life, identity and unfulfilled emotional life of the characters through her fiction. She is aware of the predicament of women as 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 the result, the women in her novels appear as life like human beings.

### Subjugated and Marginalized Women

Shobhaa De realistically presents an intimate side of urban woman's life and also reveals her plight in the present day society in her novels. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the male community everywhere. She has been the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards. In her novels, she has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. She draws our attention to women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. The women are treated with double standard. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives. They are never regarded as autonomous beings. Karuna, the protagonists of *Socialite Evenings*, is the perfect example of the misery of women in India. She suffers due to the callous and non-responsive attitude of her husband. Her husband treats her as a mere object subjected to his will as a result there is a complete loss of her identity.

Papers presented in NCRET-2K16 Conference can be accessed from

<http://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/view/NSGPWAIS>



Similarly, Anjali, a young socialite, also suffers much because of her incompatible marriage and her husband's oppressive attitude. Here, in presenting the picture of subordination and marginalization of Indian women, Shobhaa De's attack is not against the individuals, it is against the system that favours men and causes women's subjugation and marginalization. In *Starry Nights* Shobhaa De has projected the shattering of human values in this glittering world of Mumbai cinema through the realistic portrayal of Asha Rani, Geetha Devi, Malini and Rita. The other important aspect which Shobhaa De highlights in this and other novels is a woman's role in the oppression and suffering of her fellow woman. In our society, women ill-treat and exploit women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. Through this she brings out the universal psychological truth that the woman is the enemy of the woman.

In *Sisters* Mikki Hiralal is oppressed, subjugated and exploited by Binny Malhotra, a true representative of patriarchal system. The novel *Strange Obsession* revolves around the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyengar called 'Minx' and Amrita, the model from Delhi. This novel deals more with how one woman subjugates the other woman than the subjugation of women by men. *Sultry Days* has a male protagonist who says that leave the girls after using them. Such attitude of men towards women clearly shows the miserable plight and marginalization of women in our society. In *Snapshots* the women turn into useful plaything for men in patriarchal society. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts these women to fall prey to men. All the men presented in the novel are tyrants whereas the women- Aparna,

Rashmi, Swati and Noor are all victims of male tyranny. Finally, the novel *Second Thoughts* is a sad tale of Maya who is not allowed to take up even a part-time-job. Instead, her husband again and again reminds her of tradition. It is due to Rajan's traditional attitude and feeling of superiority, Maya feels herself strapped in a neglected and meaningless life.

### Rebellious Women

As a feminist writer, Shobhaa De's novels raise a strong protest against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom to act and live according to their will. She reacts against the male culture and strongly detests the marginalization of women. She is the first to explore the world of urban women of higher social strata. In urban area male hegemony is no longer acceptable as women have started thinking for themselves. De's novels reveal her protest against the image of woman as an auxiliary. She destroys this distorted image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. The journey of Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* is a journey from a middle-class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Her entry in the glamorous world of modeling and friendship with Bunty proves rebellious. After marriage she establishes extra-marital relationship with Krish and revolts against her insensitive husband and finally divorces him. She also rejects the ideas of her second marriage. She does not want to confirm to the traditional image of woman anymore. Thus Karuna attempts to destroy the gender discrimination-the real source of women's oppression.

The women in *Starry Nights*, in one way or the other, are related to the world of films. Aasha

Papers presented in NCRET-2K16 Conference can be accessed from

<http://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/view/NSGPWAIS>



Rani, sweetheart of the millions, breaks all sexual ethnicity and social norms by her unusual and deviant behaviour. Nothing controls her desire to live a life of her own. Her sexual encounters with different men point out her sexual aggression. She defeats men at their own game, and demolishes the mythical image of woman imposed by patriarchy. According to De 'sex is the bedrock of all relationships'. Her Women frankly discuss and practice sex. They are bold and rebellious who protest against their exploitation and strive to assert their identity. The concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is out-dated. This is well illustrated by Shobhaa De's *Sister*. The protagonists Mikki in her journey from a silent sufferer to a hard rebel, breaks all the age-old moral codes of the male-dominated world. She does not appear emotional or sentimental even on the death of her parents like the traditional Indian woman. Both Mikki and Alisha are not weak ladies. On the contrary, they are realistic and as strong and efficient as man. They are not passive in nature. The protest is strongly against the forces in male-dominated world, which threaten their very individuality. Next, *Strange Obsession* is Shobhaa De's rebellious novel. It highlights the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyengar (Minx) and Amrita. Lesbianism itself is a threat to heterosexuality.

In *Sultry Days*, the novelist presents a group of modern women who, when ill-treated, turn rebellious and protest. Nisha's mother protests against her husband's affairs with his Sindh Secretary. Sujata is another woman who does not lead a life which is defined by her husband. She makes her own rules. She has both male and female lovers. Further, the get-together of six

former school friends at Reema's house in *Snapshots* also reveals how the women are obsessed with sex and sensual enjoyment. They express their grievances against men in general and husbands in particular. They break the social norms and moral codes. Most of the women in the novel, bored with their husbands, seek new relationship outside marriage and challenge the patriarchal system. Finally the hollowness and hypocrisy of Indian marriage system is exposed. Maya, the central character is so depressed and frustrated by the traditional attitude of her husband Ranjan that soon she establishes an extra-marital relationship with Nikhil and at last breaks the long silence.

#### **Liberated and Emancipated New Women**

Henry James coined the phrase 'new woman' first time and characterizes American expatriates living in Europe. The socio-political and economic forces brought about awareness in women who took up the new roles in the social, political and economic life. In the post-colonial era, the portrayal of women in Indian novel in English underwent a radical change. The conventional ideal woman who meekly tolerated traditional, domestic and sexual oppression and whose mouth was muzzled, voice arrested and movements fettered by patriarchal norms and control, was replaced by the "new woman" who started resisting traditions, orthodox concepts and values. The birth of "new woman" in India is a reality as the concept and position of womanhood has changed in the modern context. Attitudinal shift can be seen in the woman. Though this new change in thought has its variables, the results are relatively depending upon the individual. This woman is an assimilation of western influences as well her

Papers presented in NCRET-2K16 Conference can be accessed from

<http://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/view/NSGPWAIS>



native culture. She is hybrid who despite of all kinds of upheavals, is able to strike a balance among diverse spheres of her life.

The term liberated and emancipated new women throws a light on how the subjugated and marginalized women, through their rebel achieve liberation and emancipation. In fact, the fictional world of Shobhaa De, is dominated by the women characters whereas the male characters are pushed into the margin. It is the woman who holds all the trump cards. She is a manipulator whose clever strategy looks beyond the male comprehension. Her woman is New Indian Woman. In 1960s, with the rise of feminism, there emerged the New Woman, completely different from her traditional counterparts. This New Woman is conscious, confident and sometimes even aggressive. She is now aware of her destination, that is, to liberate herself from the clutches of unjust taboos and customs imposed on her by the male-dominated society. The Modern women of Shobhaa De are not dependent for their survival on the men. They are financially strong and able to face all the upheavals in life. They have practical approach toward life and solve their problems themselves.

As a writer of the woman-centered fiction De has worked for the complete emancipation of woman. She projects the ideas of liberating woman through self-realization. As a self-realized person, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* opts for singlehood as a way of life. She refuses the offer of Girish and Ranbir and gets ready to live her life on her own terms by rejecting the idea of getting married second time. She is emancipated against the orthodox role of women and dominates her male counterparts. Kaurna is the modern New Woman, who is independent in

every way. She breaks out all the bonds of marriage and lands her feet firm into the profession of her choice that is modeling. Anjali and Ritu are also presented as liberated and emancipated New Women. They are sexually liberated and free thinking women. Similarly, Aasha Rani of *Starry Nights* is a liberated woman who lives for her own pleasures and knows no moral codes and value system. Her lesbian experience with friend Linda implies independence from man. Shobhaa De also reinforces her plea for liberation through the example of Sudha, Aasha Rani's sister. Sudha lives with Amar without marriage.

In the India traditional marriage is glorified as a holy union of man and woman. It is the turning point and the beginning of a new way of life. All these ideas regarding marriage are shattered by her modern liberated women in the fiction of Shobhaa De. Sex to her women is no longer a despised thing. Her women enjoy a great deal of sexual freedom. In *Sisters*, through Mikki and Alisha, Shobhaa De shows how the concept of marriage and constancy in love has undergone a tremendous change. Mikki's encounters with different men help her to develop into an independent woman who at the cost of her individuality finally saves the Hiralal's Industries. Shobhaa De's women who are unmarried also appear to be expressing their need for sexual liberation. Next, a middle-class working woman Taarini asserts her love for Shashi, despite her husband and children. Her women break all sorts of taboos and feel liberated. In *Strange Obsession*, an effort to free themselves completely from dependence on men, women like Minakshi Iyengar indulge in lesbianism. Here, through the portrayal of Minx,

Papers presented in NCRET-2K16 Conference can be accessed from

<http://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/view/NSGPWAIS>





De deconstructs the traditional concepts of love and sex. *Sultry Days* presents a group of modern women and throws a significant light on the change in the perspective of women. The women such as Vimala, Manju, Chandni, Shona, Tanya, Zainab etc. break the established patriarchal norms by their deviant behaviour. Their action and assertions reveals that they are highly liberated young modern women. The world of *Snapshots* is a world entirely dominated by women. It is a world full of adventures of powerful, emancipated new women. The Women presented in the novel are empowered by their sexuality. They are urban, self-sufficient, economically independent and confident women who transform themselves from 'commodities' to 'identities'. Marriage can no longer hold them down. Such women are Aparna, Rashmi and Reema. The novel *Second Thoughts* depicts Maya who is caught in a dilemma between her husband's conservatism and her desire for liberation and finally gets freedom.

### Conclusion

Thus, the novels of Shobhaa De are the protest against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom of expression and action. Her fiction represents the new Indian woman's voice. A 'New woman' is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation by replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. In the present scenario of gender discrimination, these novels wide and direct our thoughts to relevant problems affecting women in Indian society. Everywhere they are curbed by man-made norms and factors victimizing and subjugating them in several ways. As a result of their oppression, exploitation and marginalization, they turn rebellious and emerge as new women.

Papers presented in NCRET-2K16 Conference can be accessed from

<http://edupediapublications.org/journals/index.php/IJR/issue/view/NSGPWAIS>

### Bibliography

- [1] De, Shobhaa. *Socialite Evenings*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.
- [2] De, Shobhaa. *Starry Nights*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992.
- [3] De, Shobhaa. *Sisters*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992.
- [4] De, Shobhaa. *Strange Obsession*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992.
- [5] De, Shobhaa. *Sultry Day*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994.
- [6] De, Shobhaa. *Snapshots*. New Delhi: Penguin Books 1995.
- [7] De, Shobhaa. *Second Thoughts*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996.
- [8] Krishnaswamy, Shantha. *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1984.
- [9] Srivastava, Poonam. *A Study of Psycho pathetic Sexual Relationship in Shobhaa De's Strange Obsession and Simone de Behaviour's the Second Sex*. Dialogue, vol. 1, No. 1, June 2005.