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WOMEN REINFORCEMENT FOR LIBERATION IN SHOBHA DE'S "STARRY NIGHTS"

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ABSTRACT

Shobha De is one of the modern Indian women novelists. She probes into the fathoms of the psyche of the modern woman and her cares and worries in her fiction. She explores the world of the modern urban woman as her novels are the slice of urban life. Shobha De novel focuses on the marginalization of women in Indian society.

Keywords: marginalization, commodification, cohabitation

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Women are an integral part of human civilization. No nation or society can ever progress without active participation of women in its overall development. Although the place of woman in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, one fact common to almost all societies is that the woman has never been considered as equal to man. Shobha De is one of the modern Indian women novelists. She probes into the fathoms of the psyche of the modern woman and her cares and worries in her fiction. She explores the world of the modern urban woman as her novels are the slice of urban life. They deal with the contemporary issues related to subjugated and marginalized women. She realistically presents an intimate side of urban woman's life in her novels and at the same time reveals her plight in the present day society.

Shobha De novel focuses on the marginalization of women in Indian society. She draws one's 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.

In *Starry Night*, the protagonist, Aasha Rani who is at shooting for her first multi-starrer. Linda, who is a journalist and become friend of Aasha Rani, calls from 'Showbiz' magazine asking for an interview. Aasha responds that she should ask her mother for which Linda laughs at her. Aasha Rani is terribly impressed by Linda's casual smartness. Linda declares: "You are so young, so beautiful and successful. Had I been a man I would have wanted to marry you" (SN 75). Aasha Rani is nervous and looks around for Amma. When asked by Aasha, Linda replies that she has been a film journalist for seven years. Aasha Rani is flattered and privileged by Linda's interest in her. Amma hates Linda on sight but Aasha Rani dismisses the warnings. Linda tells stories about the interviews with Akshay. It is through these stories that Aasha Rani knows more and more about the industry.

The night Aasha Rani and Linda reach Manali, it is bitterly cold. Once outside, Linda suddenly grabs Aasha Rani, hugs her close and kisses her saying: "You are a real iceberg, yaar" (SN 78). There is no resistance

left any more for Aasha. Aasha Rani's entire body is floating and mind is adrift. Then Linda says: "I've been dying for you all these months. And you are mine at last" (SN 80). In lesbian relationship there is mutuality as Simone de Beauvoir observes:

Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to recreate the self through her; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat, in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality.(155)

In *Starry Nights*. Shobha De has projected the shattering of human values in this glittering world of Mumbai cinema through the realistic portrayal of Aasha Rani, Geetha Devi, Malini and Rita. In our society, women ill-treat and exploit women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. As a matter of fact, Shobha De brings out the universal psychological truth that the woman is the enemy of the woman. The woman is a victim everywhere of the prevalent social norms. She gets trapped within the set moral codes and social norms of the society and consequently leads an unhappy life. The woman of urban life is no exception to it. She draws our attention to women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. It is very apparent that women in this male dominated society are treated with double standard. Virginia Woolf says:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant ... some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of her husband (45-46).

The women in *Starry Nights*, in one way or the other, are related to the world of films. Aasha Rani, 'Sweetheart of the millions', breaks all sexual mores 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.

As a writer of the woman-centred fiction De has worked for the complete emancipation of woman. She projects the ideas of liberating woman through self-realization. *Starry Nights* Aasha Rani 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. Shobha De also reinforces her plea for liberation through the example of Sudha, Aasha Rani's sister. Sudha lives with Amar without marriage. Here cohabitation and not marriage seems to be the watchword for her.

She is in the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of woman's freedom and liberation. She conceives the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the tradition and moral values in society. De's women characters are daring and courageous with openly establish that reversal of roles are indeed possible for women in the present day society. De's women are different from the ordinary traditional rural women. They belong to city-life and of high status. They have own way of living their life free from all kinds of clutches of patriarchal rules prevalent in the rural society. The Novels of Shobha De: *A Feminist Study* states:

Shobha De has raised sexuality as a weapon and as a problem for the women in the traditional Indian society. She feels that most of the problems of women are sex-oriented and sex-centred in the male dominated society. Her women characters are free from the chains of husband and society, reactionary and rebel, and 'new woman' and 'a liberated human being (192).

Although the traditional Indian society controls women to express their opinions about sex, De's women have courage to raise their voice against the conventions of society.

Shobha De is one of the famous feminist writers 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 of expression and action according to their will and cherish and fulfil their own dreams. A woman, like man, is born to be free but in reality everywhere she is controlled by many man-made norms and factors victimizing and subjugating her in many ways. This restricts her essential free spirit and makes her ready for a rebellion.

Hence, Women are compassionate enough towards the tragedy of men though they become victims to the love game played by men. Shobha De attempts to unveil the crystals of reality hidden under the fog of glamour world on par with the trends observed in the Mumbai society.

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