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EVOLUTION OF NEW WOMAN IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Shobha De's novels characterize the new Indian woman's voice. 'New woman' wants to explore self-identity, seeks freedom in all phases of her life, reinstates the conventional representation of Indian woman. The need for women to seek their individuality is the message in her novels.

However, De also exposes the women's misunderstanding regarding their freedom and mocks at their way of asserting their individuality by posing to be men without concentrating on female empowerment as a whole. Her main female character fails to comprehend that their sexual freedom is being used and badly treated by men. The novelist also suggests that, whenever women, whether circumstantially or ambitiously disregard morality, they cannot escape disaster and consequent suffering.

Though De has presented women who indulge in free sex, live fashionable and wealthy life, she in no way seems to support the way of life adopted by these so called modern women. On the opposing, she shows her contempt and dislike for their unethical and socially unacceptable behavior. This can be presumed from the ultimate fate her heroines are destined to as a result of their immoderation in bizarre activities and abnormal behavior.

In fact, Shoba De advises her women to analyze their behavior and stop posing to be men. Finally, though her novels are criticized for pornographic element, De is definitely a writer with a purpose. One cannot ignore her because she is the celebrity writer and has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian Novel in English. In the present scenario of gender discrimination, a study of these novels helps to widen and direct our thoughts to relevant problems affecting women in Indian society

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INTRODUCTION

Fiction is the corpulent fruit which bloom instinctively and inexorably in the fast paced all encircling, infringing and evergreen hierarchy of life. *English* Indian fiction has been enriched by several talented women novelists including Anita Desai, Attain Hosain Santharamarau, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, etc. Their writings were women centric.

The study is an abstemious endeavor to study the fruition of the concept "new women" in India after partition. The term "New Woman" was coined by writer Sarah Grand in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," published in the North American Review in March 1894. The term was further popularized by British-American writer Henry James, to describe the growth in the number of feminist, educated, independent career women in Europe and the United States.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the human race, deity worship was extensively practiced and families and worship of the male divinity was widely followed. In social set up, males are the dominant figures and have power in all fields of social activities such as ritualistic performance, political affairs, religious convictions and literary norms which in turn presented women as a figure of subordination, substandard stratum; the superfluous!

Women of privileged conditions and concerns revealed a free spirit and were familiarized to acting on their own. The socio opinionated and monetary forces brought about consciousness in women who took up the new tasks in these varying patterns of life.

In the post world war, the jargon flapper was applied to a new class of women who took over the Victorian conservative pattern and tacit new stylish modern roles as Charlotte Perkins Gilman described her as "Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman."<sup>2</sup>

In India, the circumstances are entirely different from the West. Indian woman was dominated since ages. She was under the influence of man. Medieval India was perhaps the "Dark Age" for them. The Hindu moral code known as "The Laws of Manu" denies woman to have a separate identity apart from that of her husband. Since the publication of Bankim Chander Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864, a major number of authors have represented Indian women as selfless obedient spouses and mothers silence by patriarchy: When looking at these narratives, one can say that silence and patience were the main tools with women to live under patriarchal supremacy.

In Indian patriarchal society, Indian woman has always *considered* their *husbands* as *Pati Parmeshwar* and it is her state of mind that she must take a good care of him. She had been taught since her early days that she has to follow her spouse and family. Her parents offered her no option to think about her own individuality. Different aspects were accountable for woman suppression. They can be categorized as societal, edifying, conventional, and so on. Culture and society had forced many kinds of norm on her and she was supposed to follow them unflinchingly, she did not have the right to cross the "Laxaman Rekha". Many foreign conquests resulted in the decline in women's status. The Muslim invaders brought with them their own culture. For them, woman was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she did not have any will of her own. This type of thinking also crept into the minds of Indian people and they also began to treat their own women like this. The Indians wanted to shield their women folk from the barbarous Muslim invaders. Polygamy was a norm for these invaders and they picked up any women they wanted and kept her in their "harems". So, in order to protect themselves, Indian women started using 'Purdah', (a veil), which covers body. Due to this reason their freedom was lost. They were not allowed to move freely and this led to the further worsening of their status. These tribulations related with women resulted in changed the whole outlook of people.

Now they began to consider a young woman as a product of desolation and a burden, which has to be cosseted from the eyes of impostor and needs some extra care. Sexism is the major factor responsible for female subjugation in the society. In Indian culture, the birth of a girl child is never receives a welcoming response nor from the parents nor from the society. Sexual mistreatment and flesh trade are mounting tribulations which intimidates the existence of women.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

<sup>2</sup> Mahajan Priyanka, Evolution of New Woman: A New Façade of Indian Culture in the Select Novels of Manju Kapur and Shobha De, International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, Vol. 5, No. 2, February 2015

The birth of "new woman" in India is a reality as the idea and state of womanhood has changed in the contemporary scenario. This new woman is an integration of western manipulations as well as her native culture. She is a hybrid who despite of all kinds of turmoil's, is able to hit a balance among diverse areas of her life. The post-colonial contemporary novelists portray a "new woman" in their fiction, the woman who belongs to modern commercial society, one who rebels against the customary social set up. There is a steady growth in her performance and approach. Thus, the journey of such woman becomes a case study of feminism. The researcher here has discovered the new women presented in the select novels of Shobha Dee. All spheres of her growth, societal, political and psychosomatic remain the focus of research. The new image of women portrayed by novelists under study is determined, licentious, power famished and daring.

They use sex as bludgeon to succeed and mould men to their point of view. This sprouting new picture of women has shaped a crisis in family and society and has dazed the nitty-gritty's of age-old traditions like marriage and motherhood. Pre-marital sex, extra-marital relations or separation are no longer considered to be a taboo. The concept of idyllic Indian woman has turn out to be out-dated. Contemporary woman is career-oriented because she knows that it is her financial dependence which authorizes a male to dominate his wife and subject her to physical and psychological pain.

Surfacing of New Urban Woman in Shobha De's Fiction Shobha De, (1989- present), a model cum journalist, is considered as the super modern writer in Indian illusory world. Majority of her books are best sellers as she rationally projects the image of the aristocratic woman in present-day India. She has an atypical ability to converse the very susceptibility aspects of human relations in general and man-woman relationship in particular. In other words, the time tested populist component of sex and a touching style add to her making as one of the admired novelists today.

Shobha De considers in a very honest recitation of incidents and openheartedness. Nothing is held in reserve in her fiction. It is in this respect Shobha De fluctuates considerably from other Indian Women Novelists in English. Since the researcher inquires to explore and explicate images of women emerged in her novels, it is an enthralling study from the Indian point of view. As the present study is limited only to her novels published up to 1996, more emphasis is on the image of woman with serious comments regarding the new up-and-coming woman of modern multi-ethnic India. She represents a variety of women from the conventional, dominated and marginalized to the enormously current and open-minded women.

Apart from being the author of numerous novels like *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Spouse: the truth about marriage*, *Uncertain Liaisons* and *Strange Obsession*, she has also been the writer of many well-liked soaps on television, including India's second daily serial, *Swabhimaan*. Shobha De portrays for the first time a new urban woman. Her novels and essays splinter patriarchal supremacy.

The following novels of Shobha De are analyzed in the thesis, which are thematically categorized into three groups: Novels like *Socialite Evenings* and *Second Thoughts*. *Starry Nights*, *Sisters* and *Strange Obsession* move around the life in film industry, Bollywood and ponder mainly on lust and sex. And finally, the novels *Sultry Days* and *Snapshots*.

#### **Analysis of New Woman in Shobha De's Novels**

*Socialite Evenings*, is perhaps the first novel of Shobha De, is about the expedition of a well-known Bombay socialite Karuna, from a clumsy middle class girl to a self-reliant woman. Karuna is born in a filthy clinic in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra and does not remember much of her childhood except for the strict caution of her father. Her mother, who was preoccupied with domestic chores, does not devote much time to "know" her daughter. Karuna's life starts only when they travel to Bombay because of her father's transfer. She meets Anjali, a prominent socialite and the wife of a well-off playboy. Karuna's world changes and she starts tracing a career in films and holidays abroad. When she gets married to Bunty, a rich business man, the family acknowledges him because of his community status. But Karuna soon discovers that he is a perfect "husband material". She gets jaded. Shobha De's excellent and sophisticated women of the upper class family gets fascinated by the social institution of the marriage and family for the sake of money and admiration as seen in "*Socialite Evenings*". As the story unfurls the life of these women, we find the sexual

independence of Anjali who at last seeks comfort in religious conviction after her second marriage with Kumar, an incapable and mismatched man; the dazzling and energetic Ritu who leaves her second husband for a smuggler. Karuna's frustration with her husband cultivates her castle in the sky of an unconventional woman.

Second Thoughts are an astringent saccharine love chronicle of the nineties representing middle class society. In Second Thoughts, with regard to projecting the consciousness of a married Indian woman who is wedged and trampled between the nature-culture wheels on the one hand, and pulled apart on one side by the centrifugal acts of Ranjan, her husband and on another side by the centrifugal acts of Nikhil, her lover. Some of us may undergo that if we take a serious view of neglect meted out to women, Maya's affair with Nikhil may be acceptable. When Ranjan is of no use for her, she left with no other way out. Even the title Second Thoughts is also quite evocative as far as the protagonist's affair with Nikhil is concerned. The novel also reveals Shobha De's examination of new prospects.

De's Starry Nights is the story of the struggle and survival of a woman in a sex-starved society. It focused on women's struggle for recognition and survival and made them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. She has a spectacular psyche of women. There are chiefly three women characters, Geetha Devi, Malini, Aasha. All these women resist for their immoderate dreams with all their power in male subjugated society. They hit back, rebel and contour their fate by living for themselves. They "don't believe in suffering passively, they leave no stone unturned to attain the climax of joy and success. Overflowing with prospects and enthusiasm, they lay hands on hope in starry nights of their life. Their struggle against slavery, tyranny and mistreatment is disturbing.

*De's Sisters portray the image of two corporate half-sisters: Mallika and Alisha, who find it very difficult to create their individuality in the world of business after the death of their father, Hiralal. Mallika marries Binny, a businessman to combine her status in the society. Her half-sister, Alisha looks for the company of Amar and Dr. Kurien to please herself. They extend rivalry to get camaraderie in the society. Sex for De's women is obvious, vivacious and undeniable actuality. Ironically, in the novel, Mikki and Alisha are unified only after the death of the latter's mother. With her caring warmth, Mikki attempts to appease the wounded self of her sister. She assists her to get over all the touching barriers in her life. The novel comes to an end with Mikki and Alisha realizes the importance to live as one. De's Sisters has all the peppery components that go into the cooking of the hot American bestseller. De's women are more confident, bossy and valiant in contrast to their male foils. They are not guilty about their affairs and advances.*

Strange Obsession is an account of gorgeous young super-model, Amrita Aggarwal. Her exquisiteness fluff up envy in the posh world of modeling on her very incursion in Bombay. One day, she draws the interest of a mystifying woman called, Meenakshi Iyengar (Minx). As the time passes and the demands of her uninvited suitors grow, Amrita's life turns lurid. The novel spins around the life and licentious relationship of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi. Fundamentally, it seems to be psychosomatic citations of sexual fascination of inexplicable woman Meenakshi, also known as minx and her catastrophic end. According to him, both of them symbolize the different kinds of topology of contemporary urban set up. They seem to be barely better than school girls playing adult games. It is through their actions and dialogues that Shobha De throws momentous light on the quandary of these two young women-Minx and Amrita.

In the novel Sultry Days, Shobha De returns to the mainstream of 'new woman' Nisha, the main character is the raconteur of the novel. She can be grouped among the bunch of other women protagonists of De – Karuna and Mikki who are occupied in healthy striving because they picket the core of the 'real self' from the loss caused by the apprehensions of life. Only the fringes of their persona get pretentious. They are brawny willed, competent of making choice and express their lives towards self actualization.

Snapshot demonstrates a metropolitan society where men rest on the outer periphery and women compete for power. It is a message of Shobha De to typify the cunning friendship prevailing in Urban India. It is a plot of reprisal to Swati the protagonist because she lies and deceit her friends due to her facetious nature. She took life as a game and always thought to win and if the game goes astray she plans to take revenge from the winner. This instinctive emotion arose in her due to restlessness and discontentment in life. The novelist

Shobhaa De has portrayed Swati the protagonist as an example to all Oriental women who avoids all ways and abject adopted by her to lead a nice and admirable life. In this novel Swati is a rival of her Fallacious Friendship and she takes revenge from each of them. It is difficult to categorize her physically, her unusual looks captivates everybody. She had inherited her nutmeg complexion from her Malayali father and rather exotic features with tip-tilted oriental eyes from her mother. She is jealous of Aparna and considers her a rival, for Reema a trophy guest, for Rashmi a supercilious bitch, for Noor a high-class whore, while for Surekha; she is an erratic, egoistic and manipulative.

#### **Conclusion**

She believes in very straightforward narration of events and absolute open-heartedness. We don't find anything snobby in her narrative from story point of view. The conventional people in India condemn her for her open arguments on sexual matters. Despite of all disparagements, her fiction has got wonderful reaction not only from various European countries but all over the world.

Shobha De has become 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 traditional and moral values in society. This is one of the most important aspects of her feminism.

Her women are daring and courageous in establishing extra-marital affairs to satisfy their natural urge. These women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to get social and financial benefit. Marriage for them is an insurance against social values. Her novels can be thematically classified into three groups: firstly, *Socialite Evenings* and *Second Thoughts* are the novels that deal with the themes such as Family, Marriage, Patriarchy, quest for Identity, struggle for survival and marginality. Secondly, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters* and *Strange Obsession* (1992) move around the life in film industry, Bollywood and concentrate basically on lust and sex.

All these women move violently for their overgenerous aspirations with all their strength in a male subjugated society. In their efforts to assert themselves, sometimes they turn the patriarchal order upside down. They get revenge, rebel and shape their fortune by living for themselves. They "don't believe in suffering submissively, they leave no stone unturned to reach the crest of joy and accomplishment. Packed with anticipation and ardor, they lay hands on hope in starry nights of their life. Their continuous struggle against slavery, subjugation and exploitation is disquieting.

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