



Chapter VII

Summation

Shobha De is one of the most eminent and popular writers as well as a renowned writer of contemporary India, consistent by writings for the last forty years. As a reputed journalist, columnist and best-selling novelist, she undisputedly is, one among the most read Indian writers, who occupies a distinctive place in literary circles. As an accomplished writer, a maverick rooted in traditional but open to new ways of being; she discusses every sensitive feature of the Indian way of life tactfully and realistically, unfolding all kinds of human relationships in the society, and man-woman relationship in particular.

Provocative yet prim Shobha De has given a new, even if controversial, idiom to Indian writing in English. She has in fact wedded the conventional literary realism to the market pragmatism, and has, in the process fudged the boundaries between the highbrow and the popular to create an inclusive readership. Yet she is a very serious writer. (Vats162)

Shobha De burst upon the Indian literary scene with her debutant novel, *Socialite Evenings* in 1988. The commercial success of *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights* ushered in a new dawn in her life as they turned out to be India's first best sellers since independence, apparently establishing Shobha De as a one of the best women writer who writes on the plight of women fearlessly. Superficially her fiction is markedly different from the novels of other established Indian writers in the literary sense, as it elucidates the plight and despairs of the educated working class women and thereby brings to the limelight the hypocrisy in Indian society. The success of her

novels, led to a new trend of fiction writing in India, ‘the popular fiction’ that so far was lacking in Indian English literature. The literary era before the period of Shobha De, the market was available for Western novels of Mills & Boon, James Hadley Chase, Sydney Sheldon and their likes existed in India. These popular fictions captured the imagination of the Indian English readers, as there was no Indian English writer so far who wrote popular fiction set against the Indian backdrop. Shobha De availed this opportunity and became the avant-garde in the realm of popular fiction in India. Shobha De herself claims to be writing “popular fiction”, saying that she is a pioneer in this field. To follow suit is Chetan Bhagat, another self-confessed, popular fiction writer of contemporary India, whose novels have been bestsellers, consistently.

Popular culture is a broad term that includes activities related to art, music, films, literature, books, etc: relished by a vast majority of people. It stands for what is popular among the people e.g. the top hit songs, block buster movies, best-selling novels etc. Thus, popular culture, also known as 'pop culture', is regarded as something that is popular within the social context, and is popularly accepted within society. Popular culture is believed to incorporate the widespread cultural elements in a given society. It comprises the daily interactions, needs and desires and cultural moments that make up the everyday lives of the mainstream. It even incorporates day to day practices such as cooking, costumes, newspapers, magazines, TV, mass media and the other facets of entertainment, such as sports and literature. Popular culture finds its idiom from areas pertaining to fashion, music, sports and film.

Shobha De’s polemical columns and articles in the magazines like Times of India and The Week established her as a celebrity author. Without doubt Shobha De writes the liveliest columns among all other writers. These columns range from informative reports and insightful analysis to articles on landmark events. Here she

writes on serious social and political issues in a lucid manner. The humorous style adds to its appeal as mostly these are satirical columns. These columns and books display her fondness for neologism, verbal sumptuousness, and quirky spelling in its best light. Initially her books failed to get a place in academia but now Shobha De's works are being used in research and she is developing into a powerful author who can society and academia.

Shobha De stole the limelight from other writers, thanks to her novels that illustrated with candor and derision the glamour, boredom and crazy fun-saturated life of the socialites of Bombay. Shobha De's books give us a preview of life revealing several startling facts in the upper middle class and neo-rich upper class of Bombay. Not many writers are able to pen such stories with such precision, simplicity and details. Her unpleasant representation of Bombay high society regales the reader with stories of wealthy, bored women with loveless marriages and empty lives, seeking amorous adventures that eventually lead to their further humiliation.

One fierce objection levied against Shobha De's fiction is that she writes popular fiction for the market concerning mass culture. Her novels have incredible mass appeal. Critics mangled her work, and described her writings as inelegant, trite, workaday, a journalist's quotation copy; a popular seller's easy to digest mix. Her novels are alleged to be confined to a restricted or specific group of readers, particularly the youth. These novels depict the life of a small section of people belonging to the upper middle class or high society. Her fiction concerns a specific history of a particular period related to a low culture. De's ardent detractors who discard her fiction for its popular elements fail to understand the fact that popular fiction too has its own value. It doesn't remain limited to the specific history of a particular period but forms a dynamic part of history. The literary value of popular

fiction cannot be undermined, for popular fictions are not always based on trivial matters. The distinction between popular fiction and high literature seems any way arbitrary when we find that it is read by different generations differently to make meanings according to their understanding and circumstances. Sometimes popular writings maintain their popularity among different generations. This differentiation of literature into high and low, serious and popular literature seems ironical and amusing.

Although De is a popular fiction writer, yet her writings cannot be understood in just commercial terms only. Her fiction does not attempt to reform the society but presents reality in naturalistic terms along with its idiosyncrasies. As a disintegrated observer she tries to portray the life of a section of society that no doubt exists in the modern Indian metropolitans and the world of showbiz. She presents what she has observed, and leaves the job of reforming or improving to the social organizations, politicians and moral preachers. Her success has, however ensured that the literary boundaries are arbitrary and no fiction is worth its salt if it is not readable and contemporary in its appeal. A study of De's fiction is therefore likely to yield us new perspectives on the expanding literary horizon of the contemporary Indo-English fiction. It will also ascertain impact amidst the emerging formats of fiction that have caused its effect on the global literary trends.

Marriage and family are the most pervasive themes in Shobha De's novels. Although her women protagonists are non-conformists who revolt against the restrictions imposed on them by their family members, the author holds Indian family-tradition and culture in reverence. In India, the institution of marriage is considered to be of unrivalled importance in the life of a person. In the life of a woman marriage is understood to be the only objective to be achieved. The institution

of marriage has provided the need for love, security and children. On account of various factors such as sexual promiscuity, women's growing economic self dependence, the restless exacting spirit, which tends toward discontent, indiscretion and divorce, the institute of marriage however is now on the verge of breaking up. Marriages are no longer thought to be made in heaven. Educated and attractive, confident and assertive socialite women in Shobha De's novels define marriage afresh, in which mutual fidelity is replaced generally by sexual freedom.

Shobha De a solemn and somber writer. Her fiction articulates the tensions and contradictions within contemporary society giving them popular expression. The central characters in Shobha De's novels strive to gain maturation, fulfill their potentialities and achieve congruence between their self- concept and their social image. In *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna after wading through numerous absurdities of life and subsequent disappointments attains sobriety and sensibility which enables her to actualize her dreams and live her life on her own terms. In order to regain her dignity and identity, she rejects the established system of male domination. Her decision to remain single, throughout her life surprises her friends; as they find it quite unbelievable that a woman can live her life without interest in men and sex. Shobha De believes,

...if a self-sufficient woman with a roof over her chooses to marry, it is because she wants to share her life with someone in the fullest sense, not because she is looking for a lifelong meal-ticket. Divorce, too, has got to be viewed in this light. A woman of independent means is not compelled to perpetuate a bad marriage because she has nowhere else to go. (SM 113)

Shobha De has created daring and fearless women characters. She has consciously created characters and themes to draw attention to the different kinds of oppression and repression of women in India. She has exposed women's situation and has also underlined the need for recognition of the new women's power and superiority which has long repressed and denied. This is the new realism that is fast coming up in urban India's high society. Gone are the days when women were slaves of men physically and financially. These women are competitive to men in all profession because of their sharp intelligence.

Shobha De's message conveyed in her novels is that men should never undermine women's caliber. The new woman is here to stay and men have to come to terms with this new reality. Shobha De is a staunch opponent of the customs and norms of the Indian society which place woman in a position inferior to that of man-physically, politically, socially and economically. De's novels speak about the women who have decided to refuse to continue with the conventional patterns of sexuality and gender specific roles. Her novels register Shobha De's reflections of the the lives of modern women belonging to the higher class, their predicaments and apprehensions. Each one of them tries to gain control over her destiny in her own way, eventhough their endeavours may not bring a sense of total fulfillment to them.

Academicians have neglected Shobha De in the beginning, now they are concentrating on her books for attempting to analyse cultural construction. Her novels should not be considered as pastime novels because various shades of life it dictates. In recent times, scholars have considered her novel as a prototype to analyse cultural study and scholarly curiosity has expanded towards exploring the reality of life.

Shobha De belongs to the postfeminist school of thought. As a women writer, she concentrates on women's issues with a new approach, quite different from other contemporary novelists. Although De exhibits neither the traits of radical feminists nor the liberal feminists, she is more vocal and audacious than the other Indian feminist writers as she strikes upon the conventional canons of morality and decency prevalent in the conservative social system. Shobha De began to portray the Indian women in her works as protagonists, treating women's issues on priority basis and focusing the cause of Indian woman's liberation the tangles of cultural constrains.

Shobha De explores the world of urban women, mostly Mumbai based women. The Indian society in the last few decades has witnessed gigantic and extreme changes as far as its women are concerned. She presents the women characters in her novels to be on par with male character. Women have an equal amount of independence in all walks of life. As De says, "I did write with a great deal of empathy towards women, without waving the feminist flag. I feel very strongly about the women's situation." (The Hindustan Times P3). As a feminist and a working woman, she is aware of the ordeals that a woman has to go through in professional as well as domestic fronts. Her novels are not based on any fantasy world or imaginary space; a glimpse of her narratives can be seen in our own family or neighborhood. Using family and friends as her models, she presents the clash between prevailing socio-cultural values and the new generation.

The urban women have tremendous self confidence and enthusiasm to face every kind of challenge that hinders them from attaining their desired goals. She sketches her women characters as aggressive blasters of the male ego and male hierarchy. Shobha De envisages that women must be treated with equality and dignity in every sphere of life. She is of the firm belief that a day will come when women will

have a very strong hold in every aspect of social, political and cultural affairs and their voice will be reckoned and heeded universally. Shobha De possesses a deep knowledge and profound understanding of contemporary urban women's psychology; their problems and challenges.

Shobha De recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women.

Shobha De has drawn a real picture of the contemporary woman, who constantly tries to shatter the socially approved patriarchal hegemony on the basic issues of life, and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. Shobha De's novels present various aspects of changing Indian society in vivid details; her primary focus is on the status of woman within the family, and in society by implication.

The writer explores the world of urban women, who are shrewd enough to use men as a means to achieve their aim to become rich, famous and independent. These women don't want to compromise on their professional abilities. They can't imagine life without a career. Their identity comes from their career. A woman attains self-actualization by achieving her identity as a professional than being someone's wife, only then she feels like a complete woman. Working as a house wife doesn't bring a sense of achievement to these women, as they consider it as a thankless job.

De's autobiography as its title is *Selective Memory* is suggestive that a human mind always likes to retain that which is precious, poignant and painful. The autobiography reconstructs the shattered image of women in the irrevocable past. These images are not only mortal constructs of the autobiographer herself but often shaped by the society. Hence, the autobiographer is bound to select and eliminate various incidents. Human memory is sometimes unreliable, wishful and recollection of the past itself is selective.

Since patriarchal norms force women to assume preordained roles, these doctrines have negative consequences upon the maturation of the self. Women smudged their aspirations by identifying their happiness with their role as wife and mother. Women have believed that their own independence is contingent and thereby they effaced their identity on their own. Their hopes were not realized, as they were subjected to male domination and relegated to secondary position.

Realization of being stereotyped in literary production made the contemporary women to reject the path of submission and obliteration which stagnates their progress towards emancipation. They felt the need to get rid of this age old dogmas. Realizing the fact that this attempt can be made fruitful only if they refute these stereotyped images of women as ever enduring and as a person devoid of personal identity or desires.

Shobha De focuses upon understanding the real meaning of womanhood and women's subjugated position within patriarchy thus, implicitly advocates a gender neutral, egalitarian social structure which is given to accept and appreciate plurality, respect mutual differences and welcome co-existence without any gender bias.

Thus, De's ideal world is a world where man - woman relationship perpetuate with mutual understanding and harmony. This is to say that no vision or perspective is complete; no understanding can be total without perseverance. Ironically, the key virtue needed to secure personal freedom is patience, and endurance, coupled with stamina, both physical and moral. De's stress is on the need to acquire knowledge, confidence in order to gain independence from victimization.

As a Postfeminist she repudiates certain traditional beliefs and reaffirms women's adaptive survival power, their creativity amidst oppression, life affirming qualities and their capacity for survival. An ideal family set up is a situation where

men and women avail equal opportunities and privileges, where cooperation, compromises and companionship prevail there is harmonious living.

The women characters, in particular, may seem aggressive and uncontrollable yet ultimately become submissive and exhausted turning to ordinary settled family life. The recurring theme of search for happiness and the presentation of unhappy life of the people populating De's world also makes her position clear. Not even a single couple, who indulges in the explicit pursuit of leisure and pleasure, has been shown leading happy, peaceful life. De has mocked at the society ladies, their behaviour and thoughts. She is aware of the frailties and frivolous concerns of this life. Her narrative strategies exploit these weaknesses in a highly effective and subtle way.

Shobha De's writings are widely read all over the country. Theme exploring the self, psychology and feminism are the thrust areas which has been explored regarding the research works concerning Shobha De's novels. Many research works are being carried out on the fictions and non fictions by scholars who are interested to explore De. Further scope of research on Shobha De can be done on the themes like personality profiling using various psychological theories, cultural studies, narrative techniques and post-modern perspectives.

Her novels present demolition of the long established social conventions and value system. The characters have redefined the sacred bond of marriage, discarded it outright or just denied it to their advantage. The sexual perversions exhibited by certain characters endeavour to come to terms with the absurdity of their situation. De's attitude and her narrative stance can be clearly seen from the conclusion of her novels. All the characters who lead uninhibited, promiscuous life of the richie-rich industrialists, starlets and the social prowlers either finally disappear from the scene or repent and regret such a life.

De comes up with a refreshing message to reconstruct the family, which should be built on humanitarian values of understanding and trust. If emotional bonding is established between the life partners it removes loneliness and frustration. De takes her novels beyond the protest to claim the ethnicity of her characters. Through her novels De makes an attempt to show that her characters that were considered as trivial and insignificant by prejudistic critics bloom to define new identities. In their pursuit for material gains they understand that in order to be successful they must understand themselves and discover their true potential thereby highlighting the universal concerns about individual autonomy, self-reliance and self- realization through postfeminism.