

The concept of new woman in “Snapshots” of shobha de

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Abstract

In the contemporary literary studies, Feminism is one of the hot topics of research and discourse. The writings of Indian Women Novelists project and persuade the social meaning of gender that designs a sine qua non direction of contemporary society which is preoccupied with the emergence of the New Woman and her struggle for identity. The struggle for identity and quest for self-trespass the boundaries of home and tradition outside the family to empower women to remain alive. The novels of the twenty-first century Indian women writers are the proven instances of whole range perspective of the family structure as the pivotal component of patriarchal social institutions. Shobha De holds the voice of women endeavours to transfiguration in society which is in clutches of patriarchy. Her women renounce the age-old traditions and locate their own identity by asserting themselves not as mere ‘commodity’ but an ‘identity’ of their own at the end.

Keywords: patriarchy, identity, quest, new woman and extra- marital relationship etc

Introduction

In the contemporary literary studies Feminism is one of the hot topics for writing research and discourse. The seeds of feminism were sown centuries before in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of Right of Women* followed by J. S. Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women* in 1896. In 1929 Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One’s Own*, Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* later Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Elain Showalter’s *The Feminist Poetics* and so on and so forth. In the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, radical feminism, psychological feminism, women of colour and postmodern feminism are some remarkable experiments to advance the scrutiny of women’s position in society from women’s frame of reference. All these approaches got down to brass tacks how gender is fabricated and cultivated as one of the fundamental structures of society. Today, feminism as a super power structure interprets the social meaning of gender that designs a sine qua non direction of contemporary society.

Recent writers illustrate both the heterogeneity of women's nature and heterogeneity of an individual woman who is rather curbed to lead an ideal life. The novels of the twenty-first century are the instances of whole range of perspectives of family structure which sets as the pivotal component of patriarchal social institutions. The writings of Indian English novels are preoccupied with the emergence of the New Woman and her struggle for identity. The struggle for identity and quest for self-desires an encouraged structure outside the family to empower the new woman.

Shobha De is a well-acknowledged novelist among the Indian writers in English and a torch bearer to the generations to come, especially to the female. She is also popularly known as ‘Jackie Collins of India’. Through her characters she holds the voice of women endeavours to transfiguration in society which is in clutches of patriarchy. Her women renounce the age-old traditions and locate their own identity. Her women characters understand that they are not a mere ‘commodity’ but an ‘identity’.

Shobha De disposes the so-called standards of Indian society imposes only on women. De makes an attempt to accommodate them with a platform which strengthens them to rub shoulders with men. She unfurls the conflicting facts of existence of upper middle class and middle class societies. Even though she has been dubbed as a pornographer by her critics, she demonstrates the reality before us. She is not an imposter, rather one of the boldest and rarest novelists who have the courage to paint the crude and cruel reality of our age. The dark side of our society is that most of us in our sub conscious level want to have an extra-marital affair. Our conservative Indian society always subdues women, or even they are not allowed to raise their eyes and look at other men. But De’s new women gather courage and do all those things which are prohibited for women in Indian society.

The question arises who is a *new woman*. Can a modern educated emancipated woman be called a ‘new woman’? Everyone has a different definition of ‘a new woman’. In the words of Vijay Laxmi Seshadri, “The new woman is assertive and self-willed searching to discover her true self”. So a new woman is one who has or knows the value system and knows the score she has to remit in fixing these values in patriarchal society. Not every modern woman is called ‘a new woman’. It is rather painstaking to be a new woman because she vindicates her own self and demands her rights. She fights against the schemes of things like social, moral and cultural norms. She even retaliates the use of thought patterns nourished under the influence of male-dominated order. She derives pleasures from insisting her own self, her thoughts, her norms, and the way of her own behaviour. A New Woman is an enterprising ambitious and individualistic personality in thought and action who in De’s novels finally demands attention equality and peace on par not with women but with men.

The purpose of this paper is to study new women in the novel of Shobha De. Women under patriarchy are the victims of too much oppression and suppression. They are discriminated and bruised in lieu of their sex. The lives

women live are demonstrated in the writings of Shobha De. On the surface level her work *Snapshots* is a story of six friends Aparna, Swati, Reema, Rashmi, Surekha and Noor who decide to get together to think back their old day's memories. On the deeper level these characters go against the current of society and challenge the social conventional beliefs and practices and indulge in illicit sexual relationships without any regret. From the beginning, De has portrayed Swati as a 'tigress' and others although submissive and meek turn as 'wolves' when they are mishandled roughly by men. De plans "to write, direct and produce a bold, meaty, series on the exciting world of nineties Indian Woman" (222).

Swati attracts the focus of the readers in the novel and she plays an important role dominating the story of the novel. She has the south Indian father and the north-eastern mother. She inherited dark colour from her father and oriental exotic eyes from her mother (122). Her existence is being sensed in the minds of her buddies before she is introduced. Swati works as a catalyst for the discharge of feelings of hatred, grudge, uncertainty, vulnerability, admiration etc. She has the calibre to embezzle the show. She is now known as Swati Bridges (London based divorcee of an Englishman). She can screw any male Indian or a foreigner. She says, "You must have a great sex in life to look so contended" (81). In most part of her novel, Shobha De talks about sex and sensuous pleasure in life. In *Snapshots* Swati gets excited:

"Swati's face was swathed in smiles as she pretended, she was a catwalk mannequin parting up and down, humming an MTV hit, 'I am too sexy'. Everybody laughed. Within seconds the atmosphere altered. Swati announced, 'I am breaking all the rules today. Summons a slave. Its champagne time. Come on gals, drinks up. This is an occasion. The best. I haven't felt this exhilarated since I lost my virginity and all you know how, when, where and with whom that happened. Let's drink to innocence. Let's drink to fun. Fuck it! Let's just drink. I mean drink'" (84).

Aparna is also a divorcee. She had an illicit relationship with her subordinate. Aparna holds opposite views of 'husband' contrast to that of her mother's. Her mother says that a woman is 'nothing' without her husband. But for Aparna, a husband is good for nothing. She gets irritated whenever she hears the word 'husband'. She says:

"Remember, a woman in our society is nothing without a husband. Study as much as you wish. Win prizes, get a good job. But let all these things affect you, give you a big head, you may be Prime Minister of India tomorrow, but when you come home, you automatically become your husband's wife. If you forget that, you are finished. Your marriage is finished" (24-25).

Shobha De's heroines don't want to be the dolls for others to handle as they like? They assert their individuality, self-esteem by the agency of knowledge. They develop the desire of self-supporting and governing their lives as they want. They are not restrained traitors but fearless, vocal, stubborn and action-oriented.

Reema before marriage indulged in a sexual relationship with her school boyfriend Raju. After marrying Ravi, who is a rich businessman, her desire for intense sexual love was never understood by him and so she led to an extra marital affair with her brother-in-law Randhir. The plot of *Snapshots* is woven around Reema's house. Swati chooses her house because she is rich enough to afford the expenses

and Reema accepts the chance to flaunt her richness before her school-mates. She confidently says, "My husband is lost without me—feed them well. Fuck them regularly and sit tight" (151). She crosses her benchmarks of society when she pressurizes her only daughter Shonali to involve in an affair which leads Shonali to abortion and traps into an early loveless marriage.

Surekha is married to Harsh. She is comfortable and happy in her married life except she has some differences with her mother-in-law. Her married life seems to be calm but at the bottom level the marriage is with disturbance. She finds more solace in Dolly's company and Shobha De does not compromise to present the lesbian relationship between Surekha and Dolly and their intense love. She explains, "Dolly and Surekha were like a well-adjusted happily married couple, there was no passion to deal with any longer. Just enough physical familiarity to provide regular comfort" (159).

Their relation is strong that Surekha prevents Dolly to go to Germany.

Rashmi and Parminder (Pip) are living together for nearly six months in a live-in relationship. Pip is a love-boy of Filmiland. The duration of their live-in surprises everyone. Because in modern age the definition of love has been altered and the people are afraid to any serious commitment and they always look for open-relationship. Rashmi and Pip are also the victims of such modern love. Rashmi is living with Pip but she is waiting for a man with whom she can share her life. She says that today men are not interested in honest woman. They like flatterers, flirts and manipulators. They find comfort only with them.

The last but not the least character is Noor. She is an artistic and dreamy girl. Her upbringing is different from the traditional upbringing. Her parents indulge in extra-marital affairs and she spent her childhood with maid. The behaviour of her parents leads her to destruction. She develops an illicit relationship with her boyfriend Nawaz and that too makes her life miserable. Her relationship with Nawaz turns her into a mentally handicapped lady. And later in an incident she becomes physically handicapped. Her life gradually shifts from the central room to the corner of darkness. In reunion party Swati kicks her out and abuses her when she blackmails Swati by disclosing her plans. After the rejection from friends and so many tortures, she commits suicide.

Through her writings, Shobha De has altered the concept of a New Woman. She has given the complete freedom to her women protagonists, 'to live the way they like'. De has discovered women on sexually potential wife not by her husband's by other men. To conclude in the words of Swati: "There is nothing unnatural about it. Come on, you can tell us. It is done thing in Delhi society to sleep with your husband's brother..." This might be the nature of the new woman in Shobha De's definition.

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