CHAPTER IV

ELEMENTS OF POSTMODERNISM IN SECOND THOUGHTS, STRANGE OBSESSION AND SNAPSHOTs

Section-I

4.1 SECOND THOUGHTS

4.1.1 Redefining Postmodernism:

Whenever a thorough and well woven literary work reflects the elements of upright postmodernism, it is essential to keep into consideration that the novelist does not place his/her philosophy in a defined box or category. Another major point to be kept in mind is that these writers are not atrocious social reformers. It is a mere echo of their personal opinions and observations. The following principles appear elemental to postmodernists.

There is no absolute truth or factual representation of a group in type or a person in particular. They are trying to depict that Postmodernists believe the notion of truth is a deception and an illusion misused by people. In this case truth and false illusion are taken as synonymous - the postmodernists claims, are too wide to be determined in one thing or one type of writing. Change is an inevitable fact. Change can be in any form from personal to societal. Fluctuation is an erratic part of the whole construction of post modernism. What is true today can be outdated tomorrow and tomorrow is also unpredictable.

According to the critics, Shobha De has all the elements of a postmodern novelist. In her novels, she has beautifully intermingled traditional and modernity into a unique
representation of the changing ideas and ideology of the modernist society. Postmodernists speak out against the constraints of religious morals and material longings. The narrative of the novel symbolically draws the picture of a typical modern society in which there is no place for morality. People consider it outdated to cling to old values just for the sake of modernity. For the postmodernist writers, morality is a personal code of conduct. Believing strongly that ethics is a relatively outdated principle of living, postmodernists’ subject morality to personal opinion. They define morality as each person’s private code of ethics without the need to follow traditional values and rules. Mostly these characters are embodiment of rebellious nature and showcases round characters as they exhibit growth throughout the novel.

Shobha De develops her story and her woman in the form of a circle. At the beginning her characters are independent and alert looking for a meaning and success in life. Then these character move places get into relationships and experience failure and abuse. Finally these characters grow tremendously when they break the constraints and walk out into life with new vigor and life.

Shobha De’s seventh novel Second Thoughts published in the year 1996 carries forward the novelist legacy of presenting dreamy woman, fiery decisions and redefining phenomena of living. It deals with estranged marital agony which leaves Maya, the heroine, imagining herself as a caged bird struggling to free herself. At one front it makes an effort to highlight the hollowness of Indian Marriages and on the other it presents a mature debate on the role and duties of the spouses. It’s a juxtaposition of the age old
male ego and the changing emotions and expectation of modern woman amidst the overbearing interference of the people around, the over-protective mother-in-law, the social pretense and public facades in *Second Thoughts.*

Maya, the central character of the novel, *Second Thoughts* is wedded to Ranjan, a bank officer from Mumbai. Maya hails from the city of culture and tradition, the city of the greatest tides of romances and imaginations, the golden city of poetry, Kolkatta while Ranjan was born and bred in the city known for commercialism and materialism, Mumbai. Characteristically, there is an acute difference in the very set up of these two cities. Not only the geographical location, have the cities fallen widely apart in the cultural and social beliefs and existence. Mumbai is seen to be culturally advanced as compared to the other cities in India, thanks to the cinematic Bollywood. The most substantial influence is on the way people think, be it in the selection of life partners or getting in or out of relationships. But even today it is seen that people especially woman coming from cities like Kolkatta are more reserved with regards to marriages and relationships. The most crucial societal issue that Shobha De portrays around the tapestry of the different cultural colors of these cities is the dishonesty in the institution of marriage. When a woman is wedged in the vows and bondage of marriage, a very colorful picture immerges but in many cases it gradually faints. Every effort that a woman makes to re-assert her identity ends in a futile try, mostly leading to shame and desperation.
4.1.2 Arranged Marriage a Symbol of Age Old Tradition or a Modern Tool to Control a Woman:

Indian society is known world-wide for its cultural heredity and traditions. One of the oldest and most sacred relationships which are worshipped by one and all throughout is marriage. It is one such worldly relationship into which one enters and dedicates complete self to make it a success. India is known for its largest number of arranged marriages. But the change in the outlook of man and woman and the inside stories of the many couples entering matrimony via arranged marriage is revealing a very dramatic picture. Arranged marriage is also seen as a threat by many and many conclude that it is a clutch which holds captive a person for lifetime. Its fine with the ones who are committed to one another but the ones who crave for a change are the ones who end up into infidelity and corruption in this relationship. In most of the marriages a woman turns into a silent sufferer and a man a dominant force.

Shobha De takes up the element of mismatching and the aftermath of an arranged marriage. This type of relationship always leads to differences and despair in family life. Generally, a woman gives her consent for an arranged marriage as she is expected to do so readily. Even today, a woman is expected to limit herself in her decisions and depend completely on the people around her to take decisions for her marriage. A woman enters into the wed-lock apprehending all her dreams about love and pleasures with her partner. She miscarries a false image of marital bliss, she starts revolving herself around the life of her partner. But within a few days or so she realizes that her dream fantasies are turning into fake illusions leading to a marital detachment with her partner. It leads to displacement and shift in their relations. Maya too is a representative of such a kind of
broken dreams. Hers and Ranjan’s marital life is littered all along by matrimonial indifferences. Maya contemplates that little husband does her comprehends of her aspirations. She succumbs to the growing loneliness and stumbles to maintain balance in between fantasy and reality. She is sexually exasperated and slowly she gets alienated from her husband.

4.1.3 Second Thought: A Clash of Life and Liveliness:

As discussed earlier Maya the protagonists who represents the middle class is a Bengali young girl from Kolkatta. She accepts to marry Ranjan as he belonged to the fast moving Bombay city. She wanted to move to Bombay to escape her dull life. But soon she realizes that her whole life has come to a stand-still. Ranjan is seen to nurture very conservative and outdated ideology about marriage and wife. He expects Maya to take on the role of the traditional wife and settle down to be a part of his house and not his life. Loneliness and desperate sexual desires leads Maya towards moving into an infatuation. She gets acquainted with a young and charming college boy Nikhil. Maya, neglected and criticized by her husband and exploited and deceived by her lover, remained a passive sufferer. She was unable to find happiness and satisfaction within marriage and her extra-marital relation also made her utterly frustrated. The novel demonstrates the novelist’s perception about society and human nature. It represents psychic-cum-social complications and clashes of opinion and confictions of middle class society.

4.1.4 Maya’s Journey from Kolkata to Mumbai: From Modern to Post-Modern:

Maya, a textile designer with a fantasy of becoming a journalist travels to Bombay to meet Ranjan Malik with a prospective of a proposal to marry. Maya was a striking and
confident young girl with glowing and rich golden brown skin quality, gleaming jet black hair and large dark eyes. Maya was completely smitten by the thought of coming to Mumbai. She was in fascination about Bombay. When she met Ranjan, more than settling in marital relation, Maya idolized the thought of living in Mumbai, marrying Ranjan would make her a part of it immediately. Ranjan was a workholic, completely obsessed with his work and commitments. Gifted with bright and charming personality, he had deep and obsessed eyes, full dark hair, large strong chest and muscular shoulders. He was educated from the US and with the well grooming and exposure held a good post in a bank. Despite his western exposure, he retained his traditional and orthodox upbringing. He feels that it is a woman’s duty to run a good home. Mrs.Malik, his mother did not approve of working women. Maya’s uncle did not contradict and viewed that in an Indian family, the husband’s comforts always come first and everything else follows. Maya also belonged to an out-of-date family where a girl has substandard status and her education, vocation, instances, drives, longings and imaginings are of secondary importance. She is not expected to be free to take any decision of her life. Before her marriage, it was her family which took decisions on her behalf and after marriage all her immediate perspective, whether she has to pursue education, take a job or be a homemaker is totally decided by her husband. Maya was under the illusion that marrying Ranjan is like marrying modernity. Maya believed that she was the luckiest girl to get a foreign educated, Bombay based bridegroom. But to her dismay she received a very cold reception from her life partner and dull honeymoon and a failed unexciting first night. Soon Maya understood that Ranjan was a physically impotent man without any sexual libido. As he failed to win over Maya physically with sexual love he tried to exert his
manhood in different ways. After initial soft approaches from Maya towards the awkward reaction of Ranjan, Maya stresses upon him to give an explanation for his lack of interest in married life. But instead of being kind and gentle on her Ranjan is strong and harsh, he wants to control Maya. Maya resists his strong hostility by her dashing and striking personality and she proves herself to be a smart woman. But slowly she comes across the trivialities of her husband. She realizes the fact that her husband is an obedient son and he follows each and every word of his mother. But Maya on the other hand, does not stop before her husband's trivialities and without caring the morality associated with the wifely devotion, breaks the moral code and establishes post-marital relation with Nikhil. Commenting on the conflict between modernity and morality L. Sonia Ningthoujam writes:

Shobha De's women do not care for any moral or traditional values. Again, in Second Thoughts, Maya, a young and ambitious Kolkatta girl, marries a rich Mumbai businessman Ranjan and finds her relationship with her husband dry and mechanical. (Ningthoujam, Sonia L.: 2006: 40)

Ranjan is the representation of passiveness and his parched nature does not bring contentment in his married life. He fails to fulfill the physical and sensitive wants of his wife. His profoundness with his mother further spoils their married life. It is unbearable for Maya to love and long for Ranjan and his aristocratic mother, who never misses an opportunity to let her down. Ranjan’s mother harnesses prejudices with regard to Maya’s roots. She publically abuses Maya before her husband and Ranjan does not voice even a single word in approval of his wife.
4.1.5 Voicing the Differences and Conflicts of Man and Wife: A Clash of Outlooks and Attitudes:

In *Second Thoughts*, there is a clatter between the attitudes and brashness of the man, Ranjan and the wife, Maya. Maya harbors fascination for modern life. She wants to explore and relish freedom. On the contrary, Ranjan does not allow her to work outside the house. He is an orthodox husband who believes in complete control on his wife and even restricts his wife to move here and there and meet people. But in the fast changing modern age, these things are intolerable for a modern girl like Maya. Maya is bored by the dull life and passive attitude of her husband. Her ambition and expectations in Bombay have been shattered by the cold and passive response of her husband. Her desire for glamorous life in Bombay has not been realized into reality. Maya says:

> I wanted the city to seep into me slowly. I wanted to absorb it, digest it, and make it a part of my system. I wanted desperately to become a Bombay-wali. I wanted to belong. (De, Shobha :1996: 1930)

On the other hand Ranjan's attitude towards his wife is quite traditional. He does not want to give desired freedom and liberty to Maya. In spite of living in Bombay and studying in the US, he has not showcased a hint of modernity. He skirmishes in his mind about the old and new. He touts at Maya:

> Sometimes you talk like such a kid. Life is not a picnic, you know. And you are not in Bombay on a holiday. As a married woman, you have to learn to deal with responsibilities. (29)
Maya challenges the outdated and ethical values by establishing an illegitimate sexual liaison with Nikhil, a boy from the neighborhood. Maya relishes in the company of Nikhil. Her rapport with Nikhil climaxes and she wants to move out of the roof of her mother-in-law who is unassuming and her husband who is reflexive. But such relations that have no good, proper social sanction do not live for a longer period. The affiliation between Maya and Nikhil has enormously based on charm and sexual characteristics and there is no question of dedication, compliance and mutual understanding, etc. Her dazzling life with Nikhil does not last forever. The indifference and unacceptability and the inconvenience in such relationship lead to make Maya realize that there is hollowness everywhere.

4.1.6 The Age-Old Traditions of Lifestyle: A Painful Burden or Dramatized Thread of Ties:

The need to carry forward the traditions and culture or to label them as outdated and move forward without the need to give value or consideration to the age old traditions is the biggest question in front of the postmodernist. The biggest drawback of today’s time or we may look from the point of view of the postmodernist is that there is a sudden urge for freedom, freedom from all sort of short comings. As observed in the earlier Indian writings a woman’s sacrifice and her settlement with her circumstances was considered as her principal strength but in the postmodern writing we come across instances when she fights back and try to lead her life on her own principles, challenging the long-standing traditions and institutions of moral sanctions. One such institution of sacred sanctity in question today is the tradition of marriage which was once idealized and
worshipped, is under the biggest threat of extinction. Shobha De’s novels depict a serious failure of the moral and spiritual principles on which the entire society is based.

Marital liaisons are looked upon as a cessation of modern society. There is no faith in the marriage system and marital relations. Most couples look upon marriage not as a companionship but as a trap. They want to keep themselves aloof from this institution as they feel that most of the time they are mistreated and abused by their partners and most of the time they feel that they have a competitor and not a companion. The wedding which once gave social and psychological dependency now is offering total threat to the one who enters this bond.

4.1.7 Second Thought: Rethinking on Maintaining Marital Chords within Dis-Chords, the Problem of Postmodern Life:

*Second Thoughts* is a realistic representation of the psyche of the traditional Indian men and women. Although they claim to be the proved products of the twenty-first century, but deep down they still cherish and nourish the age-old norms and traditions. In that much acquainted form, the status of men and women has barely undergone any change. (Saxena, Alka: 2000: 261)

In her novel *Second Thoughts*, Shobha De has stunningly presented the changing bond between husband and wife and the clashes that occur after marriage in Indian traditional society. *Second Thoughts* is a fine and genuine representation of the sensibility of traditional Indian men and women. The central character of the novel Maya is wedded to Ranjan. Maya comes from Kolkatta, a more traditional city and Ranjan belongs to
Bombay, a more progressive city in terms of relations and fashions. Ranjan is the son of rich lady Mrs. Malik and Maya is a daughter of a highborn lady Chitra. In the relationship between Maya and Ranjan, there is an extreme role of their parents especially Mrs. Malik, who displays an influential role and hinders the smooth-going life of Maya. Since Maya belongs to Kolkatta, it is beyond Mrs. Malik's cognizance that why her son has chosen a Bengali girl from Kolkatta and a Bengali girl not from Bombay. Mrs. Malik says in contemptuous mood:

Oh no, no. These Bombay Bengalis are different; they have lost their cultural identity. Their origins are not in our tradition. My mother would not have been intelligent to alter to someone like that. (128)

Maya and Ranjan present two different cultures. Even though they are married through arranged marriage, there is no sagacity of charisma and attraction in their relationship. Ranjan is genuinely devoted to his mother. He enjoys hurting the emotions of his wife in order to please his ma and satisfy her self-esteem. Maya has everything, has every comfort of plush life-style but she suffers from dissatisfaction in love and dissatisfaction in life. She is the target of her mother-in-law's strange obsessions. Her mother-in-law does not like her at all. Maya also agonizes from a vexed sexual relationship with Ranjan. Her sensual desires have been disregarded by Ranjan and that is why she comes in the support of Nikhil, a fresher for sexual pleasure. Her relationship with Nikhil intensifies her pleasures and sexual fulfillments. But as every illicit relationship this too is beyond the morality of a married woman who goes out of the way to be involved with the second man for sexual fulfillment. But her relationship with Nikhil aids her to dazzle her despair,
loneliness and emptiness. Her extra-sexual act proves to be the final shock to the marital bond with Ranjan in her quest of freedom.

In the relationship between Ranjan and Maya, there is no true love and fondness, mutual understanding and companionship, self-respect and they are contrary poles not made for each other. Maya tries to preserve her self-determination which is not possible in the same house of Ranjan. Ranjan restricts her from mixing up with other women of Bombay. She discontinued her job as Ranjan desired. There is neither sexual pleasure in their relationship nor an emotional bonding, which is regarded as one of the most important facets in the continuation of husband wife relationship. Aasha Khare rightly remarks about the failure of the relationship between Ranjan and Maya in these words:

The story depicts over-bearing female characters and weak male characters.

It exposes the male ego, social pretences, and public facades. … Sexual overtones, the chief characteristic of Shobha De's works are over-riding throughout the novel. (Khare, Asha: 1997: 283)

Thus, in the staging of husband-wife relationship in her books, Shobha De has stressed on the role of sex, love, affection, money, extra-marital relations, etc. from both sides. She is mindful of the fact that women specially as the wives are no more the silent sufferers like the old-fashioned wives as presented in R.K. Narayan's novels. Mates like Aparna, Swati, Maya, Aasha Rani, Karuna, Reema, Rashmi, Mikki, Alisha and Anjali are certainly the yields of new generations who are in favour of equal treatments, equal rights and equal account for woman.
They do not agonize wordlessly or they do not believe in silent renunciation before their husband's male ego. They go outside the old-fashioned means and popular values in order to preserve their freedom, individuality and societal status as human beings. They do not endure the tradition of Savitri, Sita, Draupadi, Gauri, etc., whose stories of sacrifice and devotion are mentioned in epics like The *Ramayana* and The *Mahabharata*. Shobha De presents that marriage is on the threshold of change in the new era of modernity in which every social and cultural value is bound to be reviewed in new modern perspectives.

In *Second Thoughts*, Shobha De seems to return to the basics of Indian culture by portraying Maya, a classic Bengali girl in very inconsistent situation. Shobha De, along with from portraying the relationship amongst the husband and the wife in the form of Ranjan and Maya, she is also concerned about portraying the relationship between Maya and Nikhil which seems more imaginative and fantasized and realistic and less natural. “I wanted my insides to perform a wild dance while a mangy camel sauntered down the beach carrying me atop.” (82) Nikhil Verma encourages her to act impulsive in her life. He fills her emptiness. He takes her to wander on the beach of Bombay which is symbolic of freedom for Maya who is restricted from free-life and spontaneity. Maya's affiliation to Nikhil is out of the frustration she is into due to the lack of belongingness. She has undergone trauma and relapses as a dejected wife, such a wife who has a very indolent husband who is indifferent about his wife’s emotional fulfillment. In the beginning, Maya does not long for sexual desire with Nikhil. She likes having Nikhil around her. Her loneliness has been eradicated by Nikhil's presence in her life. Nikhil inspires her to get something new in life. Nikhil wins the confidence of Maya and takes
her to the beach and shows a new way of life: “It was a kiss that involved Nikhil's entire being. A kiss so focused, so complete.” (37)

She unburdens her heart before Nikhil. She says to Nikhil that she is married to Ranjan through an arranged marriage because of the wish of her mother. She explains her views before Nikhil:

Now here we were locked, together in a relationship that did not satisfy either of us. He obviously longed to be on his own, leading the life he had become so accustomed to as a student and then as a promising bank executive living by himself. And I longed for the perfect romantic companion-if such a creature existed at all outside my imagination. (252)

Nikhil is the emblematic representative of refined culture. He seizes the prospect by forming physical relationship with Maya. On the other hand, Maya contemplates that her dreams are fulfilled in her relation with Nikhil. But fortune plays the overbearing role in her life when she realizes that Nikhil has illegitimate relationship with many women and she is one of his prey. Nikhil takes the advantage of restrictions and softness of such women who leads a boring married life but aspires to be free and independent.

Maya's dreams are shattered time and again; first it was her boring marriage with Ranjan, the sour relationship with her mother-in-law and finally her misuse by Nikhil. She breaks up with Nikhil because she was not looking for simple lustful fulfillment. She was eying for a fulfillment of her romance. She is not a woman of low character. She was not a taken for granted type of women. She was in quest of real companionship for herself. But she has remained trapped in the cobweb of extra-marital relation which is bound to fail.
She desired for a substitute for her husband in Nikhil, but Nikhil is an out and out womanizer who not only exploits woman physically but also emotionally.

In the presentation of human relationships in her novels, Shobha De has ended up making an effort to study the human behavior in the context of fast-growing and fast-changing Indian society. In India, social relations such as lover-beloved relationships, husband-wife relationships, woman to woman relationships and man to man relationships are considered pious and obligatory. There is a more role of commitment, affection, respect, mutual understanding, and love for each other and less role of materialism in the formation of these relationships. But, Shobha De has described the different perspectives by screening the role of morality and social norms. She maintained that these obligatory relations are changing every day and everywhere. Her characters like Karuna, Meenakshi, Amrita, Mikki, Alisha, Maya, Swati, Aparna, Reema, Rashmi, Surekha, Noor, Nisha, Ritu, etc., and on the other hand Prem, Ravi, Navin, Ranbir, Balbir, Nawaz, Yashwantbhai, Ranjan, Nikhil, Binny, etc. are not able to fulfillment in human relationships. They fail to relate reality and imagination. Further, Shobha De has deliberated a number of untouched issues or matters that are less discussed or talked about. She highlights the role of new women in comparison to old woman, the existence of new women and her final survival, freedom of women and the level to which they can enjoy it and above all, women in her 'new' society by depicting her differently in different kinds of human relationship.

While experimenting with her themes in the novels, she gives equal weightage to the various social and cultural issues. The first on agenda is the exploitation of women trapped in the cobweb of marital dowry system, Shobha De deviates herself from the
traditional thematic patterns in order to challenge few of the orthodox beliefs of Indian society which are now only giving bondage to relations. She wants to break the long traditions. She is regarded as an object of beauty by many and they take her as an embodiment of physical pleasure. Shobha De takes woman beyond these limited outlooks. She is not fascinated in writing about the women who puts everyone before her wishes and desires. Her women are neither traditional nor moral and are totally free from cultural, ethical and social expectations. She breaks the mold of the 'marginalized' women in her writing by portraying her as an independent individual who displays a strong desire for identity. Shobha De paints women with passion for life and livelihood. She contradicts the feminist image which an Indian woman was draped by her contemporaries Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya who described women as a silent sufferer in the hands of man. In Shobha De’s novels women is the master of her life and exhibit a strong sense of superiority despite all odds and challenges. The changing times has also changed the conditions in which women lived. At present a number of women have broken the four walls of confinement and walked out of it to assert their identity. As popular writer and a strong feminist K. Mirabai observes that modern women are much captivated to challenge the traditional ways of living and traditional ways of feeling. She wants to be more than physical objects. K. Meera Bai rightly supports the portrayal of modern writers:

Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and code and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men and reactions to familial frictions are certainly traditionalist. Those who defy traditions and opt for modernity are non-conformists. Conformity to a pattern does
not mean dumb acceptance of all that is thrust on them. It takes for granted a certain degree of willingness and whole-hearted acceptance. Conformists hold on to the set of traditional values; sometimes, even at the cost of individual happiness. A tradition-abiding woman even sacrifices her happiness for the well being of the family, but at the same time retains her individuality. (K. Meera Bai: 1991:35)

Shobha De, a revolutionary novelist and an out rebel, despises double standards in describing the roles and responsibilities for men and women. She believes that both men and women are equal by birth. She never trapped herself in the role of a potential traditional woman herself and she gives a similar image to her heroines. She also brings in a number of other characters and does not limit herself only to the depiction of modern and educated woman. Her novels are a kind of tapestry and she draws images of women representing different strata of life and living. She attempts to describe the various external conditions which integrate a woman’s personality and make her what she is in the present. If her women are bold and disregards virginity or chastity as a measuring rod of goodness then it’s because like men they too believe in making choices and enjoying life as they wish to enjoy. It’s not a matter of proving the right or the wrong, it’s just a matter of fulfillment and feeling complete.

De has a strong hold on the urban women’s lifestyle, her dreams and aspirations and her shortcomings. She masters an understanding of the women’s psyche and her mental standard. De herself says:
I did write with a great deal of empathy toward women, without waving
the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman’s situation. (The
Hindustan Times’ Magazine, 03)

Shobha De retains her basic style of writing even in this novel, Second Thoughts. She
frames the relationship of husband and wife in the same mold of the traditional shell but
gives a strong crack into the shell by showcasing Maya the wife looking for fulfillment
outside her marriage boundaries. It’s a conflict between tradition and modernity in the
shape of husband-wife relationship and wife-lover relationship. It is a unique novel in
many senses as the fundamental expectations of marriage are redefined. In the midst of
love and betrayal there is a adequate outlook of the burning issues of today mainly the
woman’s interest in individual ambition, her outspoken passion of carnal love, alteration
in the threshold of traditional relationships and the conflicting roles of man and woman in
the modern age. One major concept of Shobha De’s writing is very clear, her woman are
not subjected to the age old tyranny. They are supernatural women gifted with the strong
power to endure challenges and conflicts. Her true colours are not in adapting and
sacrificing, her true victory is in compelling the social order to change the code of
morality are not only abhorred but also rewritten according to need and time.

4.1.8 Second Thought: A Saga of Rethinking about Trust (Marriage) and Betrayal
(Infidelity):
The institution of marriage has been kept with high sanctity and position around the
world. In India the relationship of husband and wife is idealized and marital relation is
worshipped as a heavenly embodiment. Marriage is just not, in the worldly sense, a
sexual relationship sanctioned for biological need. It is the union of souls and families, a
bond which is made permanent by the society and social law. This relationship also receives the sanction of law and religion. Marriage is indispensable for the well being of human society. In India, marriage is regarded as major part of the sanskaras (sacraments) which is a lasting commitment of wife and husband. The Indian society and the laws of Hinduism regard marriage as a union between a male and a female with commitment to be together in life as well as death. It’s a union not of one birth, but a union of eternity and will last forever. It is a door which opens up all the pleasures of earthly life, evolution, success and foster future generation. It is one such relationship which influences all the other relationships in the society. The institution of marriage is of unparalleled importance. Both man and woman enter into wedlock as the word indicates a lock which holds two different personalities as one. But as the age old tradition goes a woman enjoys a secondary position in the society and the influence can be seen in the institution of marriage too. A woman as a wife is rarely treated as a partner. From centuries, she is subjected to inferior and manual position and this is a major reason for the differences and problems that have vexed this beautiful relationship. In the olden times, it was considered a heavenly union and women took all type of behavior bestowed onto her as a part of destiny. But the changing times and changing perspectives has left its impact even on marriage. Today, marriage is no longer supposed to be made in heaven.

The crumbling institution is an outcome of post-modern dilemma. Shobha De’s novels expose breakdown of modern society’s marriage system and marital relations due to the declining moral and spiritual values. Before long an unhappy marriage was a result of a man’s infidelity. It is a known fact that men cheated upon their wives and expected
fidelity from her until death. When a woman is frustrated in her conjugal relationship, she was expected to retain her calm and continues to suffer silently and painfully.

But in today’s time in many cases it is observed that woman is ready to breakout from the system. If not with the sanction of the society she is ready to go against the social system too. She falls into a parallel and illegal relationship with another man. She tries to fulfill the vacuum by substituting a lover in place of her husband and starts looking at her husband as ‘other’ person who is a non-reactive partner in the wedlock. This is seen as one reason Maya moves outside the boundaries of her marital knot.

Maya waits for Ranjan to understand her needs, both sensuous and psychological. She wants him to relate to her thoughts and respond to her advances, her biotic needs and her claims. When he does not fulfill her stimulating whims, despite his rudeness and aloofness Maya continues to lure Ranjan into carrying their relationship ahead, but Ranjan always gives her a cold response. She is broken down on all fronts as she understands very clearly that she is commodified by her husband and family. On one front she is fighting the indifference of her husband and on the other hand she is at war of personalities with her mother in law. She is not spared by both. In a fit of discontentment and stress Maya looks for space and finds it outside her home.

In an extreme state of unhappiness and frustration, she realizes the pressure of her emotional cravings. Her sensuousness starts flipping out of her control she gets vulnerable to outward attractions. She wants a companion and her search takes her towards Nikhil, a playboy in her neighborhood, Nikhil is everything she desired for. He is a friend, a fantasy, a man to realize her womanhood. With time she is totally carried away
into this new found relationship, there is no need for her for any social or religious sanction. She moves on with Nikhil as a husband substitute to the extent that she deems Ranjan as other person whom she crosses accidentally as she travels the road of time. In the heart of the heart, she believes that she is being misled but she blames her husband for her dearth of sexual interest. Hence, she takes retreat in the company of Nikhil.

Shobha De to justify the act of Maya, she does not want her reader to enjoy the novel as a sensual description of the tale of love and betrayal. She wants the reader to understand that betrayal was not the first choice of Maya. Maya deserted and condemned and disowned by her husband and misused and betrayed by her lover, remained a silent sufferer. She was weakened by her internal desires and turned powerless to find happiness and satisfaction within marriage and her extra-marital relation also made her completely frustrated. The novel represents psychic-cum-social complexities of a close knitted society.

Maya represents that section of women who are gifted with the brilliance of progressive and advance outlook towards life. She is like an unguarded bush which spreads far and wide if the gardener does not restrict its growth via fences. But as in the case of a thick bush which loses its growth due to strong fencing Maya too is trapped and her growth is redefined. She is expected to shape according to the demands of her in laws. She is like a trapped cocoon full of aspirations and desires. But when she is restricted she rebels. The novel reveals the fact that the desires of a woman should be fulfilled in the wedlock. Because the moment she realizes that the wedlock deters her hopes, she breaks and she tries to escape from it. The image which she creates of her husband is replaced by a substitute which assures her of her realizations. In the upper class families of the urban
society, the woman has little patience to bear the passive and cold attitude of her husband. Hence, she takes the resort of second thoughts to satisfy urges of her inner self. In the case of Maya, she soothes her inner self under the canopy of Nikhil’s presence. Unfortunately, she feels Nikhil as her true lover. In the pursuit of searching for the husband substitute, she loses her husband, Ranjan to some extent. In the end, she is forced to confront reality when her dreams are cracked up. As a result, she also foregoes Nikhil who is an opportunist to exploit her situation.

In reality, the word ‘Maya’ means ‘fantasy’ or ‘a realm of imagination’. Her name, Maya is well justified in this novel because she always wishes to travel in the world of fantasy. She tries to fulfill her aspirations in the dream world of her own. But she fails to realize the fact that dreams never come true. However, she is compelled by circumstances to accept her loneliness as her only companion. Still, women are victims to bridal interviews where her interests and echoes are rejected. It is on a sultry May evening in Bombay, that Maya meets Ranjan, her future husband. She arrives from Calcutta earlier in the day to meet her in-laws-to-be. Her first impressions about Bombay are far from favorable because it smells of desperation and deceit. Her mother and uncle urges that they have decided to come to Bombay and meet Ranjan Malik and his mother for marriage proposal. When she protests about an arranged marriage, her mother argues: “Ranjan is quite a catch. Who knows, by the time we get to Bombay, some other lucky girl might have grabbed him”.Then Maya replies that it is not as if he were the last bachelor on earth. Maya likes her skin, a warm, rich golden brown, like sunlight dancing on the Hooghly that offset her gleaming black hair and large and dark eyes to advantage. Maya never sees her mother more excited.
Section-II

4.2 STRANGE OBSESSIONS

4.2.1 A Realistic Narration of Woman’s Obsession for Identity:

*Strange Obsession* is a masterpiece by Shobha De. It depicts the subject of women’s fight to emphasize her presence and her individual identity in this male-dominated society. Indian society is a patriarchal society. In every relationship and position a man is the controller and dominant power of the relationship and a woman is expected to exist as a non-entity in the strong patriarchal setup. The society not only underestimates the accomplishments of a woman but also undervalues them. A woman is subdued and expected to undervalue herself and to follow the dictates of man. Her desire is non-existing and her needs are irrelevant all together she is there to compliment the man of the society.

4.2.2 Projection of Modern Human Relation:

Shobha De has won the undisputed title of being India’s most rebellious novelist with her novel, *Strange Obsession*. Once again she shows her boisterous nature in penning the prejudiced age-old outlook of human relationships. She exposes the fact that, there is no thoughtful presence of glimpses of devoutness in man-woman relationship. She is a staunch advocate of change and strongly believes that the modern age human relationships are on the verge of transformation. Man is no more the dominant figure in man-woman relationship in modern society, it has been realized that women play an effective role in man-woman relationship. Few decades back, women were in the side of
'marginalization', but now they occupy the central position and guide and misguide their relations with man. As in *Starry Nights*, the relationship between Aasha Rani and Linda has been projected in full modern sense in which woman herself substituted man, Shobha De takes *Strange Obsession* beyond the traditional setup of Indian society and brings into open the darker side of the society. By presenting the lighter side of lesbian relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita, Shobha De has categorically challenged the acceptance of the changing outlook of human relationships. In the present time a man and woman are looking for experimenting with sexual relationships in which there are several alternatives. Shobha De is of view that there is no harm in the union of two women sexually.

4.2.3 De’s Challenge to the Male-domination:

*Strange Obsession*, as its title suggests, is a typical novel in which the male-domination has been challenged by providing many alternatives to the man-woman relationships. Since, it is the era of strong individuality and identity; women are no more in position to endure the rough and cruel behavior of man especially in the establishment of sexual relationships.

4.2.4 Commentary on Lesbian Relationship:

The traditional Indian society does not believe in homosexuality or lesbian relationship. Our preachers, saints, gurus and reformers consider it as a crime. But the 'West-wind' appears to sweep our traditional values by providing 'alternative' to the man-woman relationships. Women now ponder the desire for more freedom, more autonomy and more directness in their lives. In the West, we come across many occurrences of lesbianism,
but in India it is obscure. But currently the number of lesbian relationships is increasing in numerous ways. Modern women do not hinge on men for their sexual accomplishment. They find more comfort, more pleasure and more fascination in establishing relationship with other women. Nevertheless there is a demand for the constitutional endorsement of such relationships; still, such cases are very few in number.

Moreover, in snubbing to the ideal form of behaviour, the lesbian shuns the machinery, the leading cog of which is esteem for patriarchal prescriptions of ownership, thereby threatening to loom the system by usurping male privilege. In order to curb such behaviour, the lesbian is relegated, denounced and condemned.

4.2.5 Electra-complex Presented in Strange Obsession:

Meenakshi is a rich girl of an affluent father, her father's own inferences make Meenakshi a archetypal tenacious and babied. When she grows young, she wants to turn into the substitute of her mother in supplementing physical pleasure to her father. It is beyond human history especially Indian tradition that a daughter turns into sexual object and substitute of her mother in providing physical pleasure to her father. But in modern period such cases occur regularly and in profusion. Shobha De seems to defend Meenakshi in the novel by putting her in the conflict between traditional and modernity and moral values.

4.2.6 Homosexuality in Strange Obsession:

Meenakshi’s relationship with Amrita is absolutely against the age-old tradition. In India sexual relationship between woman and woman has not been justified. But Meenakshi
develops an eccentric kind of obsession with Amrita going beyond the traditional and moral values. She founds lesbian relationship with Amrita in order to satisfy her sexual desire. In *Strange Obsession*, Meenakshi begins to love Amrita as a beloved loves a lover. She follows the path of Amrita. She boosts Amrita to involve with her sexually. In start, Amrita shows her rejection but slowly she easily deigns before Meenakshi’s demand. Meenakshi says to Amrita:

> Why? Why does it make you sick? Why should it? Because, I belong to the same sex? Is that my only fault? You find it sickening to accept my love but what about that animal Rover's love? That's O.K. You enjoy that. How come? And don't tell 'because they are men and its normal.' Bullshit! There is nothing abnormal about my feelings for you. (De, Shobha: 1992:44)

Women like Meenakshi and Amrita seem to be the typical products of elite class where women do not care man and do not give importance in the formation of relationships. They do not follow the footprints of traditional women who worship their husbands like lords and gods. These modern women are not slaves of male-dominated morality. They drink and appear at late night parties and they shun abiding by the rules and regulations imposed on them by men. They have no any sense of respect towards traditional and moral values. That is why in *Strange Obsession*, Amrita is easily trapped by Meenakshi's unnatural fascination. Even after Amrita's marriage with Rakesh, Meenakshi does not want to break her relationship with her in spite of involving herself in "heterosexual activity with man, she likes to establish and maintain a lesbian relationship with Amrita. Meenakshi carries forward this unreal relation between two women. She not only takes it seriously but carries it forward. Her heart is actually broken when Amrita leaves her.
Such sympathetic relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita are termed as peculiar, unconventional, eccentric and corrupt to those who believe in holding on the social, moral and traditional values. This also is a huge number. The ones who can share empathy are the modernists who are harbingers of change and are more often seen as advocates of breaking every traditional rules and laws. It is a unique kind of growing in the name of modernity. Shobha De portrays this inclination of drastic change in the traditional Indian society and finds it comfortable to showcase her approval through her novels. In this context, the comments of L. Sonia Ningthoujam are fairly appropriate:

The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging reality of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender. …legitimate sexual relationship among persons of opposite sex. (38)

4.2.7 Relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita – A Source of Criticism:

The relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita is the major source of criticism in the gallery of literature. In India where literature is considered as the faithful manifestation of the happenings in the society, Shobha De’s portrayal of such kind of relationship has become the source of debate and condemnation. When she openly presents sympathy and wants to generate empathy among the reader related to this condemnable act, her presentation of lesbianism cannot be ignored easily. Lesbianism has encroached in conservative Indian society and rich classes. It is the reality and according to the activists it is inevitable because if woman has to become a free spirit, woman need not the assistance of man politically, economically, emotionally and even sexually. According to
our mentors this may be against the natural law and flow of life but it is also a reality of modern age.

4.2.8 Changing Picture of the Sexual Encounter:

In *Strange Obsession*, Shobha De has drawn a changing picture of the emerging sexual encounter in the postmodern society especially in metropolitan cities. The relation between woman to woman has become a authenticity. Women opened themselves to settle into such kind of relationships which have been put in the group of lesbianism. In *Strange Obsession*, the attachment between Meenakshi and Amrita may be put in this category. In the presentation of the relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita, Shobha De has convoluted herself in the dialogue of this burning issue - the existence and appositeness of such relations. This novel deals with the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita-two women belonging to the high profile aristocratic society. Meenakshi’s obsession is hypothetical regarded as a mania. She has developed sensations that a woman cannot need a man for sexual gratification. Her rapport with her father makes her outrageous and fills hatred in her mind against man. She would like to fulfill her father emotionally, mentally and above all sexually. As a child who lacks proper mental development and psychic growth, she thinks that it is her moral duty to do each and everything for her father. She gets intolerable experiences from her father because there is an immoral consequence in her relationship with her father. These horrible experiences create fear as well as outrage in her mind. She thus becomes a sexual competitor of her own mother. That is a great revolution in her mind which questions the morality itself which is the backbone of Indian culture and society.
4.2.9 Feelings of Meenakshi for Amrita:

Having been discontented in love and displeased in life, Meenakshi advances into a relationship with Amrita who is a model. She wishes to see Amrita on the topmost position in modeling because she see her as her better half, a fulfillment of her soul. Amrita for her is not an ordinary woman she is a lover and man substitute to her. She doesn’t consider her as a friend; she is a life partner for her. Amrita only and only Amrita is her soul-mate, day by day she gets possessive about her as an insecure lover and broods when she is not around. Her passion grows into a strange obsession and the reader finds her on the verge of psychological break down in order to assure that Amrita reaches the zenith of her career. In the midst of her craze she gets blinded and for Amrita’s comfort, progress and happiness, she decides to murder Lola—a competitor of Amrita in the field of modeling. Meenakshi wants to get deeply close with Amrita. In order to please her and win her love, she resolves to get rid of her breasts as she feels that they are a sign of her feminism, a symbol of womanliness. She takes a radical decision that she will get her breast remove through a surgery so that any outward impression of her womanliness is completely eradicated.

No sweet heart. Nobody hurt me. Maybe I hurt myself. I thought it would make you happy. It's a tits job. Well, most women go to this surgeon for cosmetic surgery to enhance their breasts-boy! I could give you a few names—but I actually asked him to reduce mine. You know, slice them off.

(93)
4.2.10 Meenakshi’s Hatred for Male Counterpart:

Meenakshi imagines herself to be the man in Amrita’s life. She wants to be both her protector and provider. In return she expects Amrita to fulfill her urges both emotional and physical. She wants to do with Amrita what man could do with her. She has a rare kind of hatred in her mind for men. She tells Amrita: “Don't ask me why, but I got the feeling you did not like them—that their huge size put you off. I didn't like them either.” (93)

It is a clear indication that Meenakshi's detestation for male entity and horror for man was increasing day by day. According to critics, Meenakshi's negativity and extreme hate was the result of her strained relations with her father. She gets a very distorted treatment from her father. In any society, the head of the family is given the title not just for being elder or bread winner but also he has the responsibility of being the head or roof of the home which shelters the family. But for Meenakshi, her father is a symbol of degraded shadow of horror and threat, and if Meenakshi hates men then it is because the first picture of a man which she has drawn in her mental map is the picture of her immoral and indecent father, can we still consider her at fault? In order to contest the age-old tradition of human behaviour, Shobha De manifests the novel *Strange Obsessions* of both Meenakshi and Amrita graphically. Shobha De has dedicated many pages to give stimulating descriptions of their sex and love. For instance, she writes:

Amrita had stared at the sight of Minx with her shirt off and those uneven red scars on her chest were making her feel sick. … Two weeks ago I decided to chop them off.(135)
4.2.11 Tactics of Meenakshi to win Amrita:

Meenakshi’s mechanisms are unique in her own way to win the heart of Amrita. She goes through deep pain and distress in order to win the favour of Amrita. On the other hand, Amrita gradually comes in the clasp of Meenkshi’s trap. Minx's obsession for Amrita's body is so fanatic that she could do everything for her. Meenakshi tells Amrita:

Believe me, baby, it wasn't easy. I was scared. I could tell no one, consult noone. But each time I was nervous and tense about the step I was going to take, I thought of you and the expression in your eyes. And then I knew I had to do it. And I knew you'd like what I'd done and like me also. (135)

Amrita's empathy for Meenakshi intensifies and she starts involving herself with Meenakshi in order to get sensual experiences. Shobha De has realistically described the erogenous involvement of Meenakshi and Amrita in these words:

Minx had taken each one of her toes into her mouth and was massaging them with her tongue, while her hands reached between Amrita's legs and touched her with rhythmic stabs. ... After what must have been two hours, they fell into a light sleep with Amrita's head cradled in the crook of Minx's arms, their legs entangled". (94)

Amrita began to retort to Meenakshi's early moves seriously and more rapidly. The only thing which bothers her is this sensuous relationship will never fruit in a child. As these types of sexual encounters fulfill sensual pleasures but as mentioned earlier it’s only a substitution of carnal pleasure and not eternal and magical to ever impregnate a woman.
After sometime there is a total agreement and understanding in their relationship. Amrita feels very close in the company of Minx because Minx fulfils her every yearning with additional enthusiasm. Amrita gets everything— a good flat, luxurious life, much money, etc. She feels cheated in only one fulfillment, only one thing—a child. It contemplates that if she was able to give birth to a child from her relationship with Meenakshi, she would consider this relationship more complete than a heterosexist one.

4.2.12 Traditional Record of Sex and Security:

According to the research on the age old traditional recordings of sex and sexuality, lesbianism has been mentioned in *Kama Sutra* and other rhetorical renditions. This kind of sensual partnership between woman and woman and man and man cannot be simply discarded as acts of adultery or creepy-crawlies or unlawful. Of course looking at the expected sexual relationship and the profound mating of a woman and man, it is abnormal and against the accepted human relationship but it has nothing abnormal regarding human values. There can be vigorous relationship between woman and woman. If woman fulfils her sexual needs by involving herself with sexual happenstances with other women—is there any harm in it. Amrita has natural disposition but Meenakshi has obsessive inclination. According to most of the critics, Meenakshi’s lesbianism is the result of her psychological breakdown, cold manner in her mother’s behavior towards her, disheveled attitude of her father which put strong hatred in her mind for the male dominated society. Minx’s mother accepts her ignorant attitude and acknowledges her own fault in the making of Meenakshi’s personality:
My daughter is the severely disturbed child of a disturbed mother. She suffers from delusions, she tells lies, she makes up stories, the number of schools she has been expelled from, have their own tales to tell. (203)

4.2.13 De’s Conclusion of Relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita:

Shobha De, by presenting the relationship between Meenakshi and Amrita, raises question about sex. She does not talk about types of sex, but from a broad and a deep psychological point of facts she presents a moving and sad image of the changing perspectives of sex and relationship. It’s not a seed of her mind outgrown into a distasteful fruit, but it’s one of the most disturbing under the cover fact which the society is sometimes making failed efforts to hide or sometimes to ignore. One must remember that it did existed in the past is existing in the present and has drastically encroached on the future. It has no restrictions as it happens in the case of Meenakshi and Amrita. There is no guilt, no discomfort and no attitude of remorse in the mind of Meenakshi in her relationship with Amrita. Meenakshi herself says:

Why does it make you sick? Why should it? Because, I belong to the same sex? Is that my only sin? There is nothing abnormal about my feeling for you. (62)

It is a very strange desire a very ‘strange obsessions’.
Section-III

4.3 SNAPSHOTS

4.3.1 Bright and Faded Images of Truth and Falsehood:

Shobha De's popular and praised novel Snapshots is a beautiful representation of human relationships. The highlight of the novel is the six characters namely Aparna, Rashmi, Reema, Noor, Swati and Surekha and their different and varied experiences of life. All the six woman are in their mature ages not very young not too old, and have been involved in a variety of relationships. Each one’s life is colored differently and the multi-shades give the background to the Snapshot of the novel. Apart from the common images and happenings of the relationship between husband and wife, Shobha De, also adds the extra spices these character’s rendezvous with extra-marital relationships which has emerged as a key feature of modern society. In this novel, six women get together to share intimate experiences. It’s in the form of personal narration of their lives tales. When the six women meet they leave behind everything. Time, relations, fears and apprehensions, doubts and expectations and once again bars all barriers dissolving into the mold of friendship and outpours themselves as liquecent reminding the readers of the value of intimacy and friendship. It’s like sharing ones reflection with the image of the other. As they speak out their hearts there remains no secrets. it turns as if it is an open heart to heart talk, where one wants to confess the acts and guilt. Each one unfurles her experiences and experiments as flower which exposes its shades by unfurling each petal. We come across a wide and wild talk of sex, love, romance, sensuality, sensationalism and confessions.
4.3.2 Challenge to the Patriarchal Mentality:

A lot of criticism has been made about the novelist, Shobha De, it is very lucidly clear that she abhors the orthodox preeminence apportioned to the male folks. The husband, typically believes that his wife know nothing of the world; he assigns her the role of an ignorant and expects her to depend in total entity on him for looking at the world. She will see what he saw and if he saw nothing, she was expected to see nothing. But this type of stereotypical mentality is now being challenged. The new woman has her own vision of life and things. Today, if a woman is not only in total control of her life but also exerting reversal of roles. She wants to be the holder of the light now. She is ready to direct the man and if she shows nothing a man is supposed to see nothing.

4.3.3 Pre-marital and Post-marital Expectations of a Woman:

The novel contains of fourteen chapters and one by one the chapter discloses the lifestyles of these six women with different men and their vivid experiences and encounters. The whole novel has been portrayed in fascinating and descriptive manner. She gives an elaborative fact about the husband and wife relationship between Aparna and Prem, Reema and Ravi. A beautiful transcription of the pre-marriage and post-marriage expectations of women is entailed and described in details. The manner, in which Shobha De writes about the inner conflicts, doubts and hopes givers her novel the much needed boost. One of the most impressive and realistic character is of Apama. She is married to Prem. She has respectable life and her relationship with her husband Prem is also shown to be fine. But as she tells her friends she always felt incompleteness. Before her marriage she was involved with a boy Rohit and due to circumstances she is
not able to get married to him. She confesses that she failed to break the image of Rohit as her life partner and replace it with Prem’s. Even as she was getting married to a second person and after her marriage also, she was not able to convince herself and break her links with Rohit which was morally and ethically wrong. Her past memories always taunted and gave her too much pain. These past memories come to her mind one by one chronologically, as she shares her pain and pleasures. Urbashi Barat remarks on the relationship between Aparna and Rohit in these words:

Her thoughts and memories swing back and forth without regard to chronology. This is of course typical of the way in which the human mind works (as Virginia Woolf pointed out in “Modem Fiction”) but it is also characteristic of De’s technique here, to enable her to indicate that the individual can never free herself from her past, and that there is in fact no dividing line between past, present and future. (Barat, Urbashi: 2000: 120)

As Aparna fails in her duties of a wife; a wife’s duty is total surrenderence to her husband and only husband; her marriage ends in a divorce. When her husband Prem comes to know about her past and her links with Rohit, he leaves her. Her failure to get out of her past relationship costs her the present relationship. Whether she relents it or not, readers will get to know at the end.

4.3.4 Reflection of Mental Anguish:

Trapped in a similar mental anguish is Reema, Reema too is married. She is illegitimately involved with her brother-in-law. She adores him as a lover and is more comfortable in the company of brother-in-law. She is not able to relate herself to her lawful husband and
feels completely lost in his company. She is more excited about the secret relationship she is enjoying with her brother-in-law as it gives her instance pleasure. She is not bothered about what is right and what is wrong.

Away from the triangles of love and lost, Rashmi has had very different experiences and difficult life. She is the mistress in the business of sex, the relationship between Rashmi and her customers is more important for her and to her customers are everything… She is a part of high-profile prostitution in which there is more play of the game of lust, lust for money and lust for man. There is no presence of emotions and scope for any human sentiments. She too wants to possess unlimited control in the society and the easy way she found to do the same is by earning limitless money in the flesh trade. She wishes to show the world that she is no substandard in the world of glamour in terms of physical response.

Swati, another very bold and carefree woman is too divorced from her husband, and presently she has taken refuge in an unlawful commitment. She is more involved in illicit relations with other people. She is a self-made woman for whom, lust and desirability is more important than her human sentiments and feelings. She was fast in her relationship with Nawaz before continues even after her marriage with Balbir. But her involvement with Nawaz was never for love and satisfaction. It never gave her any kind of relaxation or emotional fulfillment. She is also aware that it is unaccepted in the social as well as moral terms. She reveals her mind her mind thus,
Do you think I don't know how much all of you despise me? But you know what? I think you are jealous. You, with your bleak little mediocre lives. Playing safe and yet cheating. (De, Shobha:1995:290)

4.3.5 Swati as a Victim of Anguish and Anxiety:

After getting separated from the lawful relationship with her husband Balbir, she eyes for physical fulfillment in Nawaz. The arrangement was very fine with her as she loved to play with life and it was happening as she wished but slowly the charm of this immoral relation starts fading and she becomes a victim of moral deprivation, anguish and anxiety. Shobha De aims to highlight that no social relationship continues in this world without the presence of emotions, dedication, understanding, sacrifice and respect. In the presentation of human relationships in Snapshots, Shobha De has raised many burning issues regarding the existence, identity and role of women in the wake of post-colonialism in India. Since, India is the representative of post-colonial era, any issue regarding the existence and identity of woman is more important. In India, the traditional concept of woman is being institutionalized because here each and every woman has been seen in terms of her role in the formation of various relationships. Woman as a daughter, woman as a wife, woman as a mother and woman as a beloved are related everywhere, but woman as a separate human being is conceived nowhere. Ignorance of woman as a separate human being compels her to raise question of power control. Woman cannot agonize by relating herself in terms of numerous kinds of human relationships every time. Shobha De, being a proponent observer, rightly discerns:
Eventually every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level. Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries, Women's destinies have been determined largely in that context alone. It is time they were made aware of their potential and power.

(Pathak, R.S.:1999: 149)

4.3.6 Human Relationship Presented in Snapshot:

In Snapshots, the six girls Swati, Apama, Surekha, Reema, Rashmi and Noor are portrayed in terms of their relationships with several male as well as female characters. Shobha De In this novel, best part the formation of relationships in brothels, the character of Rashmi. In India, people look upon brothels as the symbol of sin as well as immoral act but paradoxically moral people takes delight in brothels and they cannot stop themselves to visit brothels. Rashmi and Swati rightly remarks:“We rejoice in our sexuality, we do not suppress it, we don't dismiss it. Sex does not threaten us.” (165)

Like her another novels-Starry Nights and Strange Obsession, in Snapshots also, Shobha De has presented the angle of woman-woman relationship for many unknown reasons. For instance, Surekha does not find herself easy and usual in her relationship with men. She finds more pleasure and is more comfortable and derives more satisfaction with other women. Shobha De's description of woman to woman relationship shows how modern society is opening up in getting into and accepting the taboo relationships. . Woman like Surekha follows the trails of Meenakshi and Amrita by involving herself with other woman bodily, passionately and psychologically.
4.3.7 Importance of Money and Sex in Human Relationship:

In *Snapshots*, the importance of money and sex are highlighted as extremely relevant because human beings always desire to possess these two things. Money and sex seems to be the immortal and important agents in human relationship. Each and every character in *Snapshots* wants liberation-economic, moral, social and above all sexual liberation. All six women characters-Swati, Aparna, Surekha, Rashmi, Reema and Noor seem not to be serious in their relations to different people because they are the emblematic products of modernity and they are bound to live in horror of sex and money. They play unexpected and risky and bold games for the sake of freedom, for them Freedom come by risking the moral framework of society. Freedom and liberation according to them is necessary for the free spirit and they go to any extent to get it. In the tales of this woman De also emphasizes the fact that liberation is essential but it should not hamper the moral order in the society. Shobha De is pretty aware of this fact. In this novel, she makes these six women more authoritative, more self-assured, more attractive, more captivating, and more ambitious in comparison to their male counterparts. On the other hand, Shobha De is also aware of the pointlessness of the nature of their liaison with their male counterparts which are subjected to be failed. Madhu Malti Adhikari rightly remarks the lack of morality and ethical code and conduct in *Snapshots*:

> The equation of control is heavily loaded in favour of the female characters in *Snapshots*. Their game is dangerous and unethical but who cares? Overflowing with self-confidence, they often debase themselves very low to surmount but that is the picture that Shobha De is profoundly project. (Adhikari, Madhumalati: 2000: 257)
4.3.8 *Snapshots* as a Symbolic Novel:

According to many critics, *Snapshots* is the symbolic novel of Shobha De in which her suffragette feminist standpoint is vocal especially in the interpretation of human-relationship in which these six women are involved. The novel dares to defy the male supremacy by introducing change and breaking of the traditional image of Indian female behaviour. Shobha De is of view that the rejoinder of women against the male dominance is the explanation of their problems. Can it be? Rendering key importance myself, any kind of achievement and fulfillment cannot be the true and long lasting, if it has no moral and ethical fabric. Freedom is essential for everyone without favoring the gender, but Shobha De steps further by presenting the reactionary attitude of women as solution to their problems. Modhu Malti Adhikari remarks once again about the conflict between tradition and modernity in the formation of human relationship in the novel:

In *Snapshots*, the six friends disregard male power totally by negating the norms of traditional female behaviour prescribed by patriarchy In fact, they establish that the things men can do, women can do better. Being strong physically and intellectually, they hold the reins of power firmly in their hands. Shobha De very rarely allows her female protagonists to become powerless creatures. In her novels, it becomes increasingly evident that man's power-status is fragile and his position can be destabilized consciously. His loss of power is undeniably visible through his incapability to dwarf, maim or victimize women for his personal gains. The females of *Snapshots* create their own moulds and music. (Ibid: 285)
4.3.9 Presentation of a New Indian Woman:

In Snapshots, Shobha De has presented a clear picture of new emerging Indian women for whom culture and tradition have minute importance. They are the representative products of urban cult. They involve more in sex and less in morality. For them marriage and motherhood have no significance in their lives. They do not believe in the fact that motherhood is equivalent with mother earth. Woman as a mother is the symbol of sacrifice. Mother is the symbol of such a strength in which her duty towards society is extremely important. But on the other hand, modem women projected in Snapshots are not devoted and they do not believe in the sublimity which associated with the concept of motherhood. They have become modem for the sake of modernity. They are unaware of the fact that Indian women have been projected in our great tradition, full of power, full of strength and full of wisdom. Of course, they battle for supremacy, but their sense of supremacy differs from the sublime nature of womanhood. They believe in pump and show. They use their charming bodies to get attention of the people and they don't hesitate to sell their chastity for the sake of earning money. They want to live in the world of charm and fascination as projected in the various films from time to time. All these happen only for the sake of freedom and giving same power and status to women. Madhu Malti Adhikari writes:

Shobha De's Snapshots projects on urban society where men stand on the periphery and women battle for power and supremacy. The power-hungry female characters of the novel fly at each other's throat, invent schemes to control and dominate over the weaknesses of their so-called friends. (Ibid: 284)
Through the album of their life, Shobha De projects the elaborated or expanded challenges, predicaments and values of these actors, often shocking and disgusting. The novel emblematizes woman-power at its worst.

4.3.10 Changing Nature of Marriage and Motherhood:

In the modern age, two great cultural bondages – marriage and motherhood are on the verge of deterioration. Marriage and motherhood have been presented in distorted form in this novel. One of the characters Rashmi challenges the institution of marriage and the sublime nature of motherhood by begetting a child having not been married. Swati and Aparna also divorce their husbands for the very simple reasons because they do not want to accommodate themselves in married lives. Reema finds more comfort and pleasure in the arms of her brother-in-law and always cheat her husband. Surekha does not want to involve herself with man; rather she finds more pleasure and comfort in the company of women. It seems that for them sexual pleasure and material prosperity have much importance and morality and traditional values have no meaning at all.

Shobha De recommends a mature attitude to sex. It is not like baby food. Rashmi is addicted to sex like a narcotic substance. She says: “I love sex like I love food. It’s the same sort of hunger.” (De, Shobha: 1995:134) She also says that ‘nympho’ should be regarded as her ‘middle name.’ The novelist is all the more critical of mechanical, loveless, routine sex. The chemistry of bodies has its own relevance in De’s novels. Sex should have no other axe to grind. Rashmi and many others like her would care for sex without strings attached to it. The plight of the neglected wife is a favourite theme with De. In all her novels we come across “neglected wives of men too busy making money to
bother with making love to beautiful women with cold bodies they’d abandoned back at home” (57)

Reema’s husband Ravi, for example,

Was indifferent to his wife’s disappointments and longings most of the time. It was when they impinged on his life and made him miserable that he felt drawn into her world. (65)

On account of his unwavering routine, we are told, “he’s so tired at night that he finishes his dinner in ten minutes and goes to sleep” (166) There is utter lack of warmth and excitement in his “Mechanical, Predictable love making,” (105) which would leave Reema “completely cold, physically and emotionally.” (106) the married life of Surekha is not much different from Reema’s. Her husband does demand his conjugal rights periodically but “Surekha hated having sex with him – detested every coupling.” (158) she continues to sleep with him only to keep the marriage going. She would often say:

What is there? It doesn’t cost me anything. I open my legs mechanically and stare at the clock on the wall across the bed. It’s all over in about six to eight minutes (158)

In her desperation she continues her lesbian relation with Dolly:

Their lives had become inextricably intertwined. 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)
The lot of mother’s like Noor’s is also a “cold, unfriendly bed” (57) while the Nawab is busy elsewhere trying to share beautiful women this “distant, cold woman, entirely shut off from her family and, perhaps, the world” continues to live in her “private sealed-off” world. (51) She would “ostracize the others if they dared disobey her edict” (57) and the children would see her only when she is ready to meet them. But she would have no hesitation in “weeping prettily in the arms of a man she’d never seen before” (53)

This “sexless existence” (108) or “unfulfilling relationship” (109) is bound to leave a scar on the psyche of a sensitive woman. One of the outcomes is a widespread “restless feeling” (214) and an inherent awkward feeling of loss and dissatisfaction, which culminates in identity crisis – the crisis of growing up and deciding as to what one is and is going to be. Identity crisis, as Betty Friedan points out, has often been thought to be man’s problem only and his exclusive prerogative to search for his identity, women having been told that: “Truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence and the opportunities” (Friedan, 13)

What is expected of woman, told a friend to Shobha De is to be “a passive, obliging receptacle for their semen as and when they feel the urge to discharge in her body.” (De, Shobha:1993: 4) Under such circumstances, the marital bed is hardly different from “a cold battle field with two unhappy people lying stiffly side by side, year after, dreaming different dreams and yearning for a closeness, comfort and satisfaction that eludes them completely” (3)

It is noteworthy to see that in Snapshots Shobha De makes use the imagery of battle field and conquest pertinently. After making love to Reema, Raju “raised himself over her body like a conqueror”(93)and the manifestation in his discernments continues to haunt her. “Everyman behaved similarly, Reema had concluded:
Her husband was no better. And these days their love – making had to be squeezed in between her watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* and his business calls. During the cricket season, she recalled at least three sexual encounters accomplished to the drone of Test Match commentary with her husband pausing mid-thrust to applaud a stylish sixer. (93)

Her experience with Randhir has also not been much different. He took her in the lift: “A few swift thrusts and he’d been through. He’d stepped back from her with a triumphant smile.” (117) Aparna’s husband, Rohit, who appears to belong to a different kind, is not much different from other in this respect “Boasting like a bloody school boy,” he tries to impress the gorgeous, pathetic and sexy Swati, with “his conquests – “body counts” as he calls them.” (207) Even Swati, who has been described in a different context as “a wild, out of control cat,” (197) finds herself subjugated by Juan, with whom she is “like a captive animal-part of his zoo” and despite her reckless mood, begins “to feel kike a snow leopard or something” (201) placed in such a situation a woman is bound to behave irrationally and resort to abnormal relations such as lesbianism, masochism, air-born and water-borne sex and so on.

4.3.11 Immorality of Male Counterparts:

The archetypal Indian male Shobha De’s novel has been painted in the murkiest colours. Her dialogues revealed that “Indian men make the world’s stupidest lovers, and that they are high on ego low on performance.” (4) Their conduct shows their real nature, and they are poles apart from animals. Malini, in *Starry Nights*, opines that “Men are all the animals, and we women such fools” (50) Men in *Snapshots* are no exceptions. Rashmi is
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convinced from her own experience that most Men lead “Petty, self-obsessed lives.” (49) As for their worth, she asks.

But was any man (worth a woman’s love) she hadn’t met on she genuinely felt like sharing her life with…. They preferred flirts and flatterers Even manipulators. (49)

When Pip leaves her suddenly, she takes it positively and keeps moving in her style. This is imitated in the case of Younes also. She tells her son that all men leave, baby. That is the way they do. These words may sound simple words but reading between the words one finds an endless saga of male callousness. Men, she feels, are “Intrinsically, instinctively dishonest” so she asks “So bloody what? Was being man less such a shame?” (49) Men may come and men may go. “Float in and out of her life like wispy cotton balls on a summer day,” (50) but she can go on forever with her independence and way of life.

According to most of the critics, Snapshots is a accurate and exact picture of the advent of 'new women' living in modern society. But the question is such women happy? We can look into the life and conditions of Rashmi. In spite of her limitless string of relationships, she is not able to get fulfillment and retreat for which she aspires all the time. Not only Rashmi but Apama, Swati, Noor, Reema and Surekha suffer from the same consequences and outcomes They defy the traditional norms and disobey cultural and moral values for their betterments and progress in their lives. But in the end they find themselves in darkness, duality and anarchy. They lost everything only for the sake of meaningless freedom and liberty. In spite of getting freedom and liberty in their lives
they freely provide their own body for physical pleasure to other people. Here we find a
great loss of cultural sense in modern life.

4.3.12 Conclusion:

The institution of marriage has been kept with high sanctity and position around the
world. In India the relationship of husband and wife is idealized and marital relation is
worshipped as a heavenly embodiment. Marriage is just not, in the worldly sense, is a
sexual relationship sanctioned for biological need. It is the union of souls and families, a
bond which is made permanent by the society and social law. This relationship also
receives the sanction of law and religion. Marriage is indispensable for the wellbeing of
human society. In India, marriage is regarded as major part of the sanskaras (sacraments)
which is a lasting commitment of wife and husband. The Indian society and the laws of
Hinduism regard marriage as a union between a male and a female with commitment to
be together in life as well as death. It’s a union not of one birth, but a union of eternity
and will last forever. It is a door which opens up all the pleasures of earthly life,
evervation, success and foster future generation. It is one such relationship which
influences all the other relationships in the society. The institution of marriage is of
unparalleled importance. Both man and woman enter into wedlock as the word indicates
a lock which holds two different personalities as one. But as the age old tradition goes a
woman enjoys a secondary position in the society and the influence can be seen in the
institution of marriage too. A woman as a wife is rarely treated as a partner. From
centuries, she is subjected to inferior and manual position and this is a major reason for
the differences and problems that have vexed this beautiful relationship. In the olden
times it was considered a heavenly union and women took all type of behavior bestowed onto her as a part of destiny. But the changing time and changing perspectives has left its impact even on marriage. Today, marriage is no longer supposed to be made in heaven. Shobha De’s novels expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society’s marriage system and marital relations.
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